

## Race on to remove Banaue terraces from heritage danger list

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The Philippines is racing to beat the 2009 deadline given by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's World Heritage Centre for the rescue of the "endangered" Banaue Rice Terraces in Ifugao province, often called "Eighth Wonder of the World".

Architect Ma. Joycelyn Bolhayon-Mananghaya, UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines' consultant for World Heritage Sites Conservation, said in a recent breakfast forum at

the Ristorante La Dolce Fontana in Greenhills, San Juan that the 2009 deadline was encouraging the multi-sector effort to speed up their activities despite the challenges in time, resources, and manpower.

Mananghaya shared that the Ifugao Heritage Conservation Council that was set up recently as the central agency that will pursue the preservation of the rice terraces is now busy laying down a timeframe to accomplish their task.

She said she has coordinated with Ifugao Gov. Teodoro Baguilat Jr., in coming up with a workable schedule.

Mananghaya said that Baguilat's help is also needed in one of the major undertakings of the conservation effort, which is to lay out a zoning and land use plan that will nurture the preservation of the rice terraces.

In 1995, the Ifugao Rice Terraces was declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, included in the list of about 180 other World Heritage Sites that should be preserved for enjoyment and appreciation of future generations.

But in 1999, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre included the Ifugao Rice Terraces in the list of World Heritage Sites in Danger due to the deterioration of the terrace clusters.

Carmen Padilla, UNACOM Culture Committee chairperson, said that the deterioration of the Ifugao Rice Terraces was mainly caused by socio-economic problems.

Among the reasons for the deterioration of the Ifugao Rice Terraces was the out-migration of the younger Ifugao population into surrounding lowlands seeking work with pay higher than the inadequate income provided by rice farming; and the apparent disinterest shown by the youth for continuing the traditional rice farming practiced by their elders and ancestors.

The lack of maintenance of a number of terraces throughout the network had caused damage to terrace walls and irrigation systems in recent years.

The lack of zoning and land use plan for the whole area also failed to prevent the construction of houses, consequently ruining the heritage landscape.

Vicky Garcia, executive director of the Revitalize Indigenous Cordilleran Entrepreneurs, Inc. (RICE) which is helping local farmers improve their farming methods and raise their income, said that their efforts had been bearing fruit each year with higher crop yields of organic rice and increasing exportation of the rice produce of the Ifugao farmers, which fetch higher prices.