



RESPONSE TO THE 09 JUNE 2021 STATEMENT OF DR. MAXIMILIAN LARENA AND PROF. MATTIAS JAKOBSSON ON THE CONDUCT OF THEIR GENOMIC STUDY ON THE FILIPINO PAST

The Statement of Dr. Maximilian Larena and Prof. Mattias Jakobsson asserts that the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples ([NCIP](#)) and the Philippine Health Ethics Research Board ([PHREB](#)) have been accusing them of the unethical conduct of their genomic research even if their *“collaborative work was made possible through the involvement of indigenous partners and affiliates from various local universities, non-governmental, and governmental organizations.”*

Likewise, the Statement contends that the accusations were also previously raised to them by *“the head of the scientific advisory committee of the Philippine Genome Center’s Program on Forensics and Ethnicity through a report that contains patently false statements, authored by a member of a local Philippine ethics committee and the head of the said program who is pursuing similar genetic research in the Philippines”*. It further claims that the *“baseless accusations...aim to discredit good research”*.

Since the Philippine Genome Center is mentioned and we have received numerous queries from colleagues in the country and the region, we are compelled to issue this Statement to address the following:

- the possible inference (from the way the Statement is written) that the head of the Philippine Genome Center’s (PGC) Program on Forensics and Ethnicity connived with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples ([NCIP](#)) and Philippine Health Ethics Research Board ([PHREB](#)) against Dr. Larena and Prof. Jakobsson’s research or is responsible for their actions; and
- the imputation that the ethical issues raised by these agencies and PGC aim to discredit “good research” because the head of PGC’s Program on Forensics and Ethnicity is pursuing similar genetic research.

The ethical issues related to the research of Dr. Larena and Prof. Jakobsson have been raised and discussed among the NCIP, PHREB, the Philippines’ Department of Science and Technology, PGC and other agencies. PGC and these agencies happen to share a common position given the prevailing process of obtaining ethical clearance for research in the Philippines. PGC neither controls nor supervises the NCIP and PHREB. The NCIP is the primary government agency that promotes and protects the rights and well-being of indigenous peoples (Republic Act No. 8371, sec.32). On the other hand, the PHREB is tasked with ensuring the protection of human participants in health research (Republic Act No. 10532, sec. 12). It is PGC’s position that NCIP’s and PHREB’s actions should be considered in view of their respective mandates.

Dr. Larena and Prof. Jakobsson’s Statement implies that the ethical issues raised against their research are now rendered moot by several investigators who have concluded that their conduct of research has complied with ethical standards. It should be noted, however, that these investigators are entities located outside the Philippines. They do not appear to know Philippine laws and procedures on



the ethical conduct of research. They did not provide the institutions who had complained about the study the opportunity to explain their positions. They did not consult the NCIP and the PHREB--the very institutions mandated by Philippine law to protect indigenous peoples' rights and ensure the conduct of ethical research.

It should be noted further that NCIP and PHREB had been raising the ethical and research concerns in relation to Dr. Larena's and Prof. Jakobsson's study since 2015. Neither Dr. Larena nor Prof. Jakobsson communicated directly with NCIP and PHREB to address these concerns. It is quite ironic, therefore, that they are now accusing the NCIP and PHREB of unethical conduct.

As a research unit of the University of the Philippines, the PGC adheres to the same standards of honor and excellence that the University stands for in all its undertakings. It does not and will not condone unethical research.