

STOP VICIOUS CYCLE OF FARMER POVERTY

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Agriculture paved the way for the civilization of the world, but without land tillers, it would be impossible to cultivate millions of hectares of lands to produce food and materials that sustain the world until today. Yet, no matter how essential lands are in producing and sustaining the necessities of the people, farmers are not given equal importance in order to enjoy their rights as land tillers, at least in the Philippines.

Seven out of 10 farmers still remain landless due to land monopoly by oligarchs and landlords. Lands tilled for agriculture are either in the form of haciendas owned and operated by landlords and politicians, or owned by foreign investors as plantations. Thus, farmers continue to be farmworkers, silently enduring the low wage from farming and high debt from usurers and their landlords.

Further, when farmers start to collectivize themselves and push for their right to land and just compensation, they end up being tagged as rebels or allies of the New People's Army, hence killing them is so easy.

A current study of human rights group Karapatan has documented 126 victims of extrajudicial killings as of December 2017; 110 of them were peasants and leaders. The majority of these killings happened in Mindanao. Various human rights violations were also filed such as illegal arrest, torture, forcible evacuation, threat, harassment, and intimidation. There are also cases of indiscriminate firing and forced/fake surrender of farmers as rebels. Indigenous communities are also affected due to militarization. The Armed Forces of the Philippines is the primary force of counterinsurgency in Mindanao, attacking peasant and indigenous communities under the guise of "Oplan Kapayapaan." All these violations are seen as the government's tack to secure lands for local and foreign investors and to pave the way for foreign loans from international financial institutions for President Duterte's "Build, build, build" infrastructure program. The infrastructure projects will require thousands of hectares of lands to be converted, thus displacing more farmers and indigenous peoples in Mindanao.

Using the rights-based approach, all these cases clearly violate human rights using its three principles—respect, protect, fulfill. As a duty-bearer, the government has the obligation to refrain and prevent others from interfering with the enjoyment of the rights of the people. The government also has to adopt appropriate measures toward the full realization of the people's rights. But with the present administration, the state vividly prevents the farmers to enjoy their rights. Economically, farmers are still deprived of their land, and their wages are still low. Socially, they cannot access basic services due to inadequate government services especially in rural places. Politically, they are silenced when they voice out their needs and demands to call out for adequate support. They are robbed of selfdetermination, human rights, and social justice.

The vicious cycle of a farmer's life must be stopped. A farmer's life is not a toy that can be played with by a powerful entity any time. A farmer's life is precious as it sustains the people of the world. If they die and cease to exist, who will feed us in the future?