

# Boracay land reform beneficiaries face raps if titles sold

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This early, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) has warned future beneficiaries of the land reform program in Boracay of criminal liability if they sell the lands that will be awarded to them. The DAR said it has identified 80 Ati families as beneficiaries of the 25 hectares that can be immediately covered by land reform.

Section 73 (e) of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1988 prohibits “the sale, transfer, conveyance or change of the nature of lands outside of urban centers and city limits either in whole or in part.”

“Once the lands are awarded to the farmer-beneficiaries, they are given notices as to what are the dos and don’ts following land distribution. First is that they can’t immediately sell the lands. The lands can only be sold 10 years after these were awarded to them,” said DAR Undersecretary for policy, planning and research David Erro.

“(The land) will be taken away from the farmer-beneficiary and the latter can also be criminally liable,” he added. “That is why after every land distribution ceremony, the farmers are reminded to cultivate their lands and make it productive for their own benefit.”

The DAR said a total of 845 hectares of agricultural land on Boracay island will be under the land reform program. However, only 25 hectares can be covered immediately since removal of structures will still have to be facilitated in the remaining 820 hectares.

President Duterte said placing the entire Boracay Island under land reform would benefit local indigenous peoples as they could eventually sell the lands to big businessmen.

He said by the time the natives would want to do business and investors come in, they already have the land titles and can sell the lands.

Kalikasan People’s Network for the Environment slammed Duterte’s pronouncement, saying that it is contrary to his initial pronouncements of rehabilitating Boracay.

“The agrarian reform of Boracay, coupled with its closure and militarization, is only intended to pave the way for more environmentally destructive ‘development’ projects and land-grabs in the island,” said Clemente Bautista, spokesperson for Kalikasan.

“Since there is no support mechanism in place to prevent the peasant beneficiaries from selling their lands, the purported beneficiaries will only sell their lands to developers who would build more resorts, further exacerbating the environmental problems of the island,” he added.

For the National Democratic Front (NDF), Boracay can serve as a testing ground for the agreement on agrarian reform and rural development signed by the government and NDF as part of the peace talks.

Julie de Lima, chair of the NDF’s Reciprocal Working Committee on Social and Economic Reforms, said there are applicable provisions in the NDF’s Comprehensive Agreement on Socio Economic Reforms (CASER) draft that the government may find enlightening.

“After free land distribution, Boracay farmers should be given sufficient support services ranging from short- to long-term assistance to aid them in developing and making the land productive for the local and national economy,” she said.

“We challenge the government to fast-track the negotiations on CASER as we resume formal talks this month,” she added.

De Lima also noted that the Boracay case falls squarely within the ambit of agrarian reform and rural development because the government has classified a big bulk of lands either as agricultural or suitable for agriculture.

“A new and truly redistributive land reform program is necessary as it would pave the way for a truly just and equitable agrarian reform to benefit the most qualified beneficiaries in Boracay, those who are actually tilling the land or ready to till it, or to work the land in other productive ways such as agro-forestry, fishery, small-scale food processing and the like. The Ati community, including those that have been displaced but are willing to return, should be given priority,” she added. –