



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

July 25, 2011

Statement on PNoy's Second SONA: Persist in Our Challenges to the Aquino II Regime!

'Failure' aptly describes Pres. Benigno Aquino III's first year of presidency, with the absence of substantial reform on urgent issues confronting the Filipino people. His promises of hope and change at the start of his term amounted to nothing, as he merely continued many of the past regime's policies and programs that violate people's rights. To date, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has not been tried for the cases of corruption and human rights violations during her 9-year term. The economic hardship worsened, plunging the majority of the Filipino people into deeper poverty and hunger. In his inaugural speech last year, PNoy said the Filipino people can dream again—but he did nothing to make the people's dreams come true.

The Economy and Respect for Human Rights a Year After

Under PNoy, the prices of food, fuel and transportation soared and continues to do so, while wages remain nailed at meager amounts. The minimum daily wage in the National Capital Region of P426 is a far cry from the P1,000 needed daily for a family of 6 to survive. The rate of employment and underemployment is continually rising, such that employment rate was at 7.2% in April 2011 from 8% in April 2010, while underemployment rose to 19.4% in April 2011 to 17.8% in 2010—this translates to about 827,000 Filipinos not earning enough from their jobs. The economic policies PNOY adopted are essentially the same ones causing low growth, joblessness, falling incomes and increasing poverty.

According to IBON Foundation, economic growth has slowed down, with government data itself saying that GDP is now at 4.9% in the first quarter of 2011, compared to 8.4% in the same period last year. Debt service and public debt stock continued to rise, with government paying P634 billion in debt servicing between July 2010 and April 2011, and P4,706 billion public debt stock in March 2011. The Aquino administration has actually cut back on social services to prioritize debt servicing. Budgets for health and education were also reduced by P1.4 B and P364 B, respectively. IBON further notes that the Aquino administration is the 'second worst performer in terms of land distribution in the post-Marcos era of five administrations'—which is not at all surprising for a president who comes from a well-landed clan. Landlessness therefore, remains widespread, but so does land grabbing big businesses and foreign companies.

In the human rights front—PNoy failed to render justice to the victims of human rights violations under the GMA regime. He actually tolerated rights violations in his first year by not trying and punishing GMA, and for unleashing Oplan Bayanihan. KARAPATAN has documented 48 cases of extrajudicial killings and 5 cases of enforced disappearance from July 2010 to July 2011 alone, including 29 torture cases, 151 illegal arrests and 3,010 victims of forcible evacuation from rural villages, as a result of massive and intense militarization.

Worsened National Oppression of Indigenous Peoples

At the start of the PNoy administration, indigenous peoples all over the country made clear what they wanted and needed. These were articulated in the Indigenous Peoples Agenda, duly submitted and officially received by Malacañang by various indigenous peoples' organizations and networks. Among the highlights of the Agenda include: plunder and exploitation of ancestral lands by large mining and other destructive projects; militarization and human rights violations, legislation (Mining Act of 1995 and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act), advancement of the peace talks and the implementation of international agreements of which the Philippines is a signatory, recognizing indigenous peoples rights.

PNoy has not responded to any of these and has done nothing to uplift the situation of indigenous peoples. Development aggression continues unabated, with militarization and destructive projects swarming indigenous communities and resulting in various human rights violations. The mining industry was further liberalized under PNoy, with mining investments having increased by 65% in 2010 alone. Since March 2011, approved mining agreements at a nationwide scale now reach 785, while mining concessions increased to cover 1,042,531 hectares compared to 782 hectares in 2009.

The Cordillera region remained a haven for plunder and exploitation. 247 applications were endorsed and approved under PNoy, and five of the 23 priority mining projects across the country is in the Cordillera. Of the Cordillera's total land area of 1.8 million hectares, close to a million is covered by mining tenements. Apart from mining are projects to tap the Cordillera's energy resources. Five geothermal projects are in the offing: the Acupan and Daclan projects in Benguet, the Buguias-Tinoc project in Benguet and Ifugao, the Mainit-Sadanga project in the Mountain Province and the Kalinga project. The last is the biggest – involving substantial portions of the municipalities of Tinglayan, Pasil, and Lubuagan. It is being undertaken by the global energy giant Chevron, which has a clear track record violating indigenous peoples' rights in the Amazon. These developments pose serious threat to the Cordillera region, which is the watershed cradle of Northern Luzon.

The Cordillera was one of the priority areas of Oplan Bantay Laya I and II under the GMA regime. With PNOY's Oplan Bayanihan, intense militarization continues in the region, with operations of the 501st, 502nd and 503rd Brigades, all under the 5th Infantry Division. Reports from the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance (CHRA) state that Oplan Bayanihan has licensed intensified military operations in the Cordillera, resulting in destruction of properties, bombings, shelling, sexual abuse, illegal search and seizure; threats, harassment and intimidation; illegal arrest and detention, and encampment.

PNoy also made the same mistake of recognizing the Cordillera Peoples Liberation Army (CPLA) and giving the thumbs up to its supposed conversion into a socio-economic group. This same paramilitary group is the one accountable for the extrajudicial killing of CPA leaders and organizers like Ama Daniel Ngayaan and Romy Gardo—and yet, PNoy's mother, former Pres. Cory Aquino, integrated the CPLA into the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) during her term.

Persist in our Challenges to the Aquino II Regime

It is true that one year is not enough for any president to resolve the social and economic woes of the country—but one year is enough to create building blocks for genuine reform and set strategic directions for the interest of the Filipino people. PNoy has simply failed to do this, and many were blinded with hype and rhetoric. What is clear a year after the PNoy presidency is an administration that tolerates and licenses corruption, human rights violations and further marginalizes the majority of the Filipino people. PNoy is no different from GMA.

Thus, the Filipino people must persist in challenging the PNoy administration to live up to its promises and genuinely put the people first before his own interests. We will continue to demand for justice for victims of rights violations, for economic relief from the ever-worsening national economic crisis, and for the respect and recognition of indigenous peoples' ancestral lands and right to self determination. We will not be deceived. #

Karapatan ng mamamayan, ipaglaban!

Ilantad at labanan ang papet, pahirap at inutil na rehimeng US-Aquino!

Isulong ang pakikibaka para sa kalayaan, karapatan, katarungan at pagbabago!