

Statement

Justice for Wilfredo Cornea! Land and Justice for Blood-drenched Negros Sugarlands!

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Reference: Belinda Formanes, PARRDS Executive Director

And the killing spree continues. On June 26, 2006, farmer-leader and CARP beneficiary Wilfredo Cornea was shot in the head and chest by two armed men covered in ski masks. The incident occurred in the victim's own backyard at around 8:30pm in Sagay City, Negros Occidental.

Cornea, who is the Vice President of Task Force Mapalad (TFM), was the 8th peasant leader to be killed this year, increasing the number total to 36 since 1998.

According to his colleagues from TFM, prior to his assassination, Cornea and his fellow peasants experienced harassments from local landlord Antonio Lopez. These were brought about by the farmers' claim to Lopez's 212-hectare properties named Haciendas Mulawin and Lanatan which were previously awarded by the Department of Agrarian Reform to Cornea and his group in 2000.

He was also the last person to be interviewed during the June 3-5 Visayas leg of the International Fact-Finding Mission (IFFM) which was undertaken by peasant and human rights NGOs from the Philippines and abroad in the agrarian reform "hotspots" of the country. In the said interview, Cornea stated the imminent threat to his life.

For this reason, the Partnership for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Services (PARRDS) and the IFFM conveners Foodfirst Information Action Network (FIAN) - Philippines and the Philippine Ecumenical Action for Community Empowerment (PEACE Foundation) condemn this barbaric deed and call on the government to initiate an independent, impartial and thorough investigation on the Cornea murder and immediately apprehend the perpetrators. We also support the demand of TFM and other peasant organizations to stop the killing of peasant and activist leaders, and that those responsible should be identified and placed before the bar of justice.

Moreover, we challenge the government to dismantle all armed groups and death squads in Negros and in all agrarian reform "hotspots" so as to ensure the safety of peasant leaders and guarantee the success of land redistribution.

The resolution of the Cornea case is imperative. For the pursuit for agrarian reform and rural development cannot possibly flourish in an atmosphere of terror and anxiety. And the dream of social justice cannot be achieved if the basic rights of those who promote it are violated on a daily basis. -END-