

Philippines: Solidarity Statement for the Farmers Who Marched for Land, Food and Justice

Sunday 24 April 2016, by [Focus on the Global South](#) (Date first published: 20 April 2016).

Solidarity Statement from Focus on the Global South for the Filipino Farmers Who Marched for Land, Food and Justice



AT SARIAYA, QUEZON. The March of the Farmers was launched at the municipality of Sariaya, Quezon. Walden Bello, known legislator and agrarian reform and rural development advocate, also one of the founders of Focus on the Global South and now a senatorial candidate in the Philippines, joined the farmers in their march. Photo by Galileo de Guzman Castillo. Municipality of Sariaya, Province of Quezon. 11 April 2016.

We salute the more than three hundred (300) farmers who marched from Sariaya, Quezon, to Manila, all one hundred thirty (130) kilometers under the scorching heat of the sun. We also salute the Movement for Agrarian Reform and Social Justice (KATARUNGAN) and all those who supported the Farmers' March, such as the Walden Bello for Senator Movement.

Sariaya is considered one of the Philippines' food baskets, one of the few municipalities in the country that can produce beyond what its own population needs; one of the few that can supply agricultural produce to its neighboring provinces and even to the national supply.

But the farmers here are slowly being 'killed' by landlords in conspiracy with the Aquino government. Their Certificates of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) are now being taken away from them.

We have witnessed the marchers' bravery just so they can file their petition with the Supreme Court on the cancellation of their CLOAs and on the coco levy fund that this government still refuses to grant the farmers. We listened to the stories of the farmers and the advocates; of how they have had to overcome the heat and the march so that they can make government listen to their pleas.



AT THE SUPREME COURT. The farmers filed a petition with the Supreme Court as they arrived in Manila from Quezon. Their calls: "Land for the farmers! Stop the cancellation of CLOAs! Recover the coco levy fund!" Photo by Joseph Purugganan. Padre Faura Street, Manila City. 19 April 2016.

Romeo Clavo, 40, president of the farmers' group UGNAYAN and who hails from Tumbaga II, Sariaya, Quezon, tells of how his land title has been reverted to the landlord and his land now declared 'non-agricultural' though it was already redistributed under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program with Extension and Reforms (CARPER).

Ellie Guzman, 49, from Cabuyao, Laguna, and member of the Union of Filipino Workers, talks of their fight against Land Use Conversion wherein big businesses build subdivisions, buildings, and factories in their communities — masked as "development projects" — but these have in fact taken away lands from their communities, lands that should have been for the farmers. He asks "Where is real development here, in this rotten system?"

Simplicio Manongsong, 75, one of the oldest marchers and also a member of UGNAYAN, living in Concepcion-Pinagbakuran, Sariaya, Quezon, received his parents CLOA as their heir, but the former landlord of his land now wants the title nullified. "Without us farmers, the country would not have food supply," he bemoans.

Young activist Elmer Yuri Aresgado, 26, member of the National Association of Nationalist Farmers (PKMM), calls for making the agricultural sector the top priority of the government. He laments the fact that only five (5) percent of the national budget goes to the agricultural sector. This is a very small budget allocation, especially in the face of El Niño and rising global temperature.



SOLIDARITY NIGHT. Focus on the Global South organized a night of music, poetry, and film in front of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR). The farmers prepared an improvised white screen and jeepney-battery-powered-projector-speaker set-up for the film showing because DAR did not want to share electricity. Photo by Judy Pasimio. DAR, Quezon Memorial Circle. 20 April 2016.

These are just some of the stories the farmers have shared, as they call for the following actions:

Continued and complete implementation of agrarian reform;

Complete stop to all CLOA reversals;

Continued land redistribution for the farmers; and

Full recovery of the coco levy fund for the benefit of the coconut farmers.

The government and all those who will be elected to government in the May elections should respond to these calls and be serious in enacting laws that will advance the interests of the farmers.

For,

As long as there are CLOA reversals and land grabbing, and the farmers' rights are being trampled upon;

As long as the injustice continues by not giving back to the 3.5 million coconut farmers the coco levy fund that is due them;

And as long as there are farmers dying from hunger and who are killed when they fight for what is rightfully theirs;

There can be no real justice and food sovereignty.

Focus on the Global South

[i] Focus on the Global South and Byanic Productions produced a documentary on the Farmers' March. The video may be viewed at this link: Lupa. Pagkain. Hustisya.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mT_IKBl53M8

Photos of the Farmers' March may also be seen here:

Quezon Lakbayan of Farmers

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/focussouth/sets/72157664777127223>

and Laguna Lakbayan of Farmers

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/focussouth/sets/72157664909877584>

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<http://focusweb.org/content/solidarity-statement-focus-global-south-filipino-farmers-who-marched-land-food-and-justice>