

# Philippines: Speech at the First General Assembly of Laban ng Masa

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**BAKIT KAILANGAN NG BAYAN ANG LABAN NG MASA** S Walden Bello,

Mga kasama, invited guests, dear friends:

When I invited a Dean at a prominent university to this assembly he said that he remembered the first Laban ng Masa as the biggest alliance of progressive forces that had come together since the 1986 People Power Revolution. Many of you here today were part of that first Laban ng Masa. [The Chairman of that First Laban ng Masa is here today, Ka Dodong Nemenzo, the person who is most associated with the socialist tradition in our country. Let us give Ka Dodong a big hand. He will be giving us a message later this morning.]

*Naririto ngayong ang Pangulo ng unang Laban ng Masa, si Ka Dodong Nemenzo, isang taong kilala ng lahat bilang primerong tagataguyod ng tradisyon sosyalista sa ating bansa. Bigyan natin si Ka Dodong ng isang masigabong pagbabati. Magbibigay siya ng isang mensahe sa atin mamaya ng kaunti.*

[In our decision to found the second Laban ng Masa, we confront conditions that may be different from the circumstances of 2005 and 2006, but we face them in the same way, as progressives who seek to change the social structure that condemns millions of our compatriots to poverty, inequality, and powerlessness.]

*Noong nagdesisyon tayo na itayo ulit ang Laban ng Masa, alam natin na iba ang mga kondisyon na hinaharap ng bansa ngayon sa mga kondisyon na umiiral noong 2005 at 2006. Ngunit hinaharap natin ang mga bagong kondisyon na hawak ang parehong pananaw—ibig sabihin, bilang mga progesibong nagtatankang palitan ang isang rehimeng sosyal na nagkokondena ng milyung-milyun ng ating mga kapwa Pilipino sa kahirapan, sa di-pagkapantaypantay, at sa kawalan ng kapangyarihan.*

Today, our country is ruled by a man whose brainchild, the so-called War of Drugs, has taken over 13,000 lives in less than a year and a half. Placed in a Southeast Asian context, the number of those killed makes the Duterte's war against the poor the third most deadly in the region's recent history, after the Khmer Rouge genocide of 1975-78,, which took some 3-4 million lives, and the massacre of Communists and Communist sympathizers in Indonesia in 1965, whose victims ranged from 500,000 to 2 million.

[If you remember, Duterte said in October of 2016, when the number of those slain was "just" around 3000, that 20,000 to 30,000 more Filipinos might need to be murdered for his campaign to meet its objectives. Many people then said he was joking or he was engaging in hyperbole. A year later, no one is laughing any more.]

*Naala siguro niyo, sinabi ni Duterte noong Oktubre nang 2016, noong mga tres mil pa lang ang napaslang niya, na baka kailangan pa raw mamatay ang 20 hanggang 30 mil na Pilipino bago*

*makamit ng War on Drugs ang layunin niya. Maraming nagsabi noon na nagbibiro lang siya or gumagawa raw siya ng hyperbole. Matapos ang isang taon, wala nang tumatawa.*

President Duterte is what I call a fascist. But he is a fascist original. The usual textbook model of how fascism comes about is that of “creeping fascism,” like that of Marcos, where the first phase is marked by violations of political and civil rights, followed by the grab for absolute power, then by massive, indiscriminate repression. Duterte’s brand of fascism is what we might call “blitzkrieg fascism,” wherein the order is reversed: first indiscriminate murder in the form of thousands of extra-judicial executions of poor people, then with all sectors thoroughly intimidated, followed by the grab for absolute power and the abolition of democratic institution and political and civil rights.

There may be differences among us as to whether we should call the current regime fascist, authoritarian, or de facto dictatorial rule, but there can be no doubt that the direction is towards the consolidation of absolute power, whether this comes in the form of martial law, the de facto subjugation of all the other branches of government to the president, a so-called revolutionary government, or charter change along the lines of “federalism.”

*Siguro may mga pagkakaiba ng opinyon ang ilan sa atin tungkol as katangian ng rehimeng Duterte—pasista ba ito, o awtoryanismo, o isang de paktong diktadura? Pero walang duda na ang takbo ng pamahalaan ay patungong konsolidasyon ng kapangyarihang total sa pamamagita ng iba-ibang anyo, sa porma man ng martial law o sa de paktong pagsisira ng mga ibang sangay ng gobyerno o sa porma ng tintatawag na rebolusyonaryong gobyerno o sa pagpapalit ng saligang batas sa sistemang pederalista daw.*

The only response that we can make to this swift movement towards absolute rule is resistance. However, it cannot be resistance in the name of restoring what I have called the EDSA system of elite democracy, for one of the chief reasons why Duterte is in power is because of the failure of that 30-year-old system to deliver on its promise of bringing about genuine democracy and the redistribution of wealth. Instead, what it gave us was a system dominated by traditional political elites, the continuing concentration of economic power in an oligarchy, and neoliberal economic policies that have resulted in some 25 per cent of our population living in poverty and in a gini coefficient of 50, which represents the worst inequality ever in the distribution of wealth and income in our history.

[We cannot go back to the past.]

*Hindi tayong maaring bumalik sa nakaraan.*

Despite his populist rhetoric, Duterte has, in fact, shown that he belongs to the past. He has shown his true colors when it comes to economic reform. Instead of outlawing contractualization, he has made it legal. He has made no effort to promote agrarian reform. He has not given coconut farmers the coco levy funds, as he promised during the campaign. He allowed the big mining lobby to oust Gina Lopez when a phone call to his allies in the Commission on Appointments could have save her. He has become the BFF of big capitalists like Ramon Ang and Manny Pangilinan. Nearly a year after he assumed office, nearly all fractions of the ruling class stand solidly behind him, and he stands solidly behind them. The only difference of substance from past regimes is that his main base within the elite are the warlords and clans that control local politics throughout the country.

[We are at the moment at a dangerous juncture. ]

*Ang bayan ngayon ay nasa isang puntong mapanganib.*

The popularity and credibility of the administration have declined. The vast majority of the people do

not believe the police's explanation that most of those killed in the anti-drug war resisted arrest. The killing of teenagers Kian de los Santos, Reynado de Guzman, and Carl Angelo Arnaiz brought many people to their senses. Trust in the police, the main agency of the war on drugs, is lower than its already low level before Duterte. It is surely a sign of changing times when Duterte's allies in the Senate are angry that they were not signatories of a resolution condemning the killing of young people by the police, undoubtedly because these opportunists feel the wind is shifting. [With distrust and disappointment building, Duterte has seen a drop of 18 percentage points in his net satisfaction rating. The public mood is changing. Fearful of losing his momentum, Duterte may panic and move forward quickly to dictatorial rule.]

*Pataas ang bilang ng mga walang tiwala kay Duterte o mga nabigo yung mga pagasa nila sa kanya. Napapakita ito sa pagbagsak na labing walong porsyento sa tinatawag na net satisfaction rating niya. Nagpapalit ang ihip ng hangin. Nababagabag sa pagkawala ng momentum, baka masindak si Duterte at sumulong na mabilis upang magtayo ng diktadura.*

The country today is looking for a force that will rescue it from the mess it is in. People will not, however, trust those who say they are against dictatorship but have until very recently been part of the regime they are now denouncing. It is certainly positive that these forces have ceased being part of a bloody regime, but for them to claim leadership of the resistance is not something the people will buy. You cannot fool the people.

Neither will our people at this point accept an alternative that looks back to the past, to forces associated with the elite democracy and neoliberal politics that destroyed the promise of the EDSA People Power Revolution. Yellow has become a term of contempt among our people, because it has come to represent a system that is democratic in rhetoric but oligarchic in substance.

The people will only trust those forces who are neither compromised with the present nor the past. The people will only trust those who have condemned the anti-people policies of this administration from the very beginning and have been consistent in their opposition. The people will only trust people like you who are assembled here today—people untainted by opportunism or association with a discredited past and a menacing present.

*Ang mamamayan ay magtitiwala lang sa mga puwersang hindi nasangkot sa kasalukuyang or nakaraang rehimen. And bayan ay magtitiwala lang sa mga puwersang nagkondena na sa mga laban sa bayan na mga polisiya ng administrasyon noong pasimula pa lang niya at pirme sa kanilang oposisyon. Ang bayan ay magtitiwala lang sa mga taong kagaya niyo na nagpupulong ngayon ditto, mga taong di markado ng oportunismo o ng pagkakasangkot sa nakaraang bulok at sa kasalukuyang mapanganib.*

The need for a genuine and credible opposition to authoritarian rule is one reason we have come together in Laban ng Masa. But there is another reason. That other reason is that we offer the only alternative that our people can take to break from the repression, poverty, and inequality that engulf them. That alternative is system change. This is change oriented in a socialist direction.

When we say we are socialist, we do not mean we champion the centralized bureaucratic systems that collapsed in Russia and Eastern Europe in 1989. Those regimes that disfigured the vision of socialism deserved to be banished to the dust bin of history, and the authoritarian left movements that continue to adhere to their failed ideology are doomed to permanent marginalization. Socialism for us means a system of genuine, participatory democracy dedicated to transforming the economic order in order to eliminate inequality among social groups.

*Para sa atin, ang ibig sabihin ng sosyalismo ay isan tunay na demokrasya kung saan nakikilahok ang*

*lahat sa pagdedesisyon, isang system na magwawakas as kasulukuyang rehimeng na nakabase sa dipagkapantaypantay ng mga mamamayan.*

When we say socialism, we mean a post-capitalist system where the means of production are owned and controlled by the majority for the welfare and interests of the majority.

We mean a system that recognizes that it is labor that creates wealth and promotes the self-organization of workers to determine the ways in which the wealth they create is used, whether for consumption, investment, or enabling democratic government.

We mean a government of the people, for the people, and by the people, with the emphasis on by the people, that is, direct, participatory democracy.

*Ang ibig natin sabihin ay isang gobyerno ng bayan, para sa bayan, at sa pamamagita ng bayan, na ang diin as nasa pamamagita na bayan—ibig sabihin, sa pamamagita ng isang demokrasya kung saan lumalahok ang lahat sa paggagawa ng mga desisyon, hindi yung nagpapanggap na kintawan nila ngunit sa katotohanan ay naghahari sa kanila.*

We mean a system of governance that will abolish inequalities based on class, race, ethnicity, and gender—one that will bring about real, substantive equality, not just formal equality before the law.

We mean a state that will safeguard our national sovereignty and fight imperialism in whatever shape it takes, whether this be US militarism or Chinese hegemony.

We mean a government that will provide the full range of social services for its citizens, from a guaranteed basic income to job security to all forms of social security.

Ang ibig natin sabihin ay isang gobyerno na magbibigay ng lahat ng serbisyo sosyal sa mga mamamayan, mula sa garantisadong sahod na basiko para sa lahat hanggang seguridad ng trabaho at lahat na klase na seguridad sosyal.

We mean a system of governance that will safeguard the environment and work with other governments to protect the planet and the country from global climate change.

We mean a state that recognizes the right of self-determination for all oppressed minority peoples.

We mean an economic and social system that will give ownership and control of the land to the people and communities that till the soil through thorough and comprehensive agrarian reform.

*Ang ibig natin sabihin ay isang sistemang ekonomiko at sosyal na magbibigay ng karapatan at kontrol sa lupa sa mga tao at komunidad na nagtrabaho sa lupa sa pamamagita ng isang ganap at komprehensibong reporma sa lupa.*

These are our demands. These are the Filipino people's demands. These are the demands of 99 per cent of people throughout the globe.

*Ito ang mga ating pinaglalaman. Ito ang mga pangangailangan ng Bayan Pilipino. Ito ang mga pangangailangan na ipinaglalaman ng siyamnaput siyam na porsyento ng buong mundo.*

Let me end by saying that we as a nation are at a crossroads. There are essentially three paths before us.

The Duterte regime and its fanatic supporters are herding us towards the dark destination of open dictatorship and fascist rule, to a frightening repeat of Marcos' "New Society."

Then there are those who speak the language of democracy but look back with nostalgia to the system of oligarchic rule masked by formal democracy that reigned for 30 miserable years.

Then there is us, ordinary citizens who look toward and are fighting for a future of participatory democracy and economic and social equality. It is such a vision that Proverbs 29:18 meant when it said, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

Laban ng Masa affirms that a future of democratic equality that goes beyond capitalism is possible and worth fighting for.

There is no guarantee that our vision will win, but we cannot win without putting all our sweat and, need be, our blood into making this future that we desire a reality.

*Idinidiin natin sa Laban ng Masa na isang sistema na demokratikong pagkapantaypantay na lalagpas at papalit sa kapitalismo ay maaaring malikha ng kolektibong trabaho natin. Walang garantiya na magtatagumpay tayo. Ngunit hindi tayo magtatagumpay kung hindi tayo magbubuhos nang todo todo ng atin pawis a, kung kailangan, ating dugo upang maging tunay ang ating mga pangarap.*

Mabuhay ang Laban ng Masa! Mabuhay ang sosyalismo!

**Walden Bello**, National Chairman, Laban ng Masa

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**P.S.**

• 29 OCTOBRE 2017:

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