

Condemnations and demands for justice for the brutal murder of Sumilao farmer-leader Ka Rene Peñas

Sunday 14 June 2009, by [Akbayan](#), [AR Now!](#), [Go Organic Mindanao](#), [MASP](#), [Pakisama](#) (Date first published: 11 June 2009).

Dear Friends,

It's been two years, since we first join in the cry for help of the landless farmers of San Vicente, Sumilao Bukidnon. The Walk for Sumilao Land, Walk for Justice was also launched gaining international support from various quarters. The Justice for Sumilao campaign is still indeed a long tedious battle for their claim of land ownership and possession.

Akbayan condemn and demand justice for the brutal murder of Sumilao farmer-leader Ka Rene Peñas which took place on June 05, 2009. We sincerely express our solidarity to the Akbayan Peasant Caucus and to the Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA), in which Ka Rene was a national leader.

Below are condemnation statements on the assassination of comrade RENE, the gentle giant of agrarian reform who together with the other Sumilao farmers walked from Bukidnon to Manila for their significant involvement in pushing for the passage of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms (CARPER) Bill.

Thank you for your solidarity and prayers.

In solidarity,

Akbayan's International Committee

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AKBAYAN's statement on the murder of Ka Rene Penas, gentle giant of agrarian reform

We in AKBAYAN condemn the murder of Ka Rene Peñas, leader of the Sumilao farmers, who was gunned down last June 5, 2009 while he was on his way to his farm in San Vicente, Sumilao by two unknown assailants.

His assassination is the basest form of cowardice. Ka Rene stood tall in his passion for the rights of farmers, and he has never resorted to violence in his quest for justice. When the Sumilao farmers were reclaiming their land, he joined his fellow farmers in a hunger strike and, a decade later, endured and led a long walk from Sumilao to Manila to demand justice from the government. After the victory of the Sumilao farmers, he led another group of farmers from Banasi, Camarines Sur, in yet another walk by farmers searching for agrarian justice.

Ka Rene's commitment to agrarian justice is greater than that of many lawmakers. The last time he spoke in public, after the screening of Lupang Hinarang, a documentary video on the plight of the Sumilao farmers and the Negros farmers, Ka Rene said that it is ironic that it is the farmers themselves who have to walk all the way to Manila to remind the government about the law.

Indeed, Ka Rene is the gentle giant of agrarian justice. We are moved by his life, and his murder only inspires us to pursue the fight for agrarian reform with more vigor. He will constantly remind us that the fight is indeed not yet over.

AKBAYAN will file a resolution for a congressional inquiry on Ka Rene's assassination. As we reach the final stretch of a long and arduous campaign to enact a bill extending and reforming CARP, we dedicate our work to his memory and his life. We shall walk this journey to its rightful end.

PAKISAMA Statement on the Assassination of Renato Penas, National Vice-President

Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka

June 6, 2009

PAKISAMA condemns in strongest possible terms the dastardly and cowardly assassination of our leader, Renato Penas (51) last night, around 11 P.M., while on his motorcycle with two companions to his farm in San Vicente, Sumilao, Bukidnon.

While his companions survived, the assassins made sure Ka Rene would not. Crawling after the first volley of fire, he was shot again, and three shotgun bullets fatally pierced his chest and back.

Who could have caused the death of a man whose life was dedicated to serving the landless farmers?

A participant in a 1997 28-day hunger strike for land and a practitioner of active non-violence, Ka Rene rose to be one of the most prominent PAKISAMA leaders over the past two years. As a trained community organizer-paralegal, he led in 2007, the unprecedented but successful 1,700-kilometer walk of 55 farmers from Sumilao to Malacanang to make their claim over a 144-hectare ancestral

land covered by the CARP. He figured in 2008 as the organizer-trainer of the successful 444-kilometer Banasi farmers walk from Bula to Malacanang, which reversed earlier adverse decision of Malacanang. During the past two months, Ka Rene was leading farmer groups coming from different persuasions, in a coalition campaign to push Congress to enact the extension and reform of CARP (CARPER).

On May 30, he went home and was jubilant to learn that CARPER was finally passed by both houses of Congress and would soon be passed into law. But he was not given the opportunity by his assailants to see the fruit of his work.

We demand a speedy and objective investigation of this case. We ask the Arroyo government to demonstrate dispatch and professionalism in solving this crime.

We mourn with the widow and four orphans of Ka Rene and demand an end to the culture of impunity pervading in our society. We pray that Ka Rene would be the last among our leaders to be assassinated. We hope his case would not suffer the fate of two of our colleagues. On November 22, 2009, two hooded men gunned down our former Vice-President for Mindanao Vic Paglinawan in Davao City. On March 9, 2009, Boy Billames, Secretary-General of SAMATIKU, a member-farmer federation in South Cotabato was also gunned down by a hooded assassin. Until now, no suspects have been identified and caught in both crimes.

We call on the Filipino farmers to close ranks and transform to inspiration and courage the martyrdom of our leaders.

Let us continue the fight for agrarian reform and good governance and politics until every farmer owns the land s/he tills, until every citizen is not harmed while peacefully claiming his or her rights.

Justice to Ka Rene Penas!

Justice to all victims of extrajudicial killings!

Justice to all farmers and the Filipino People!

CONDEMNATION STATEMENT ON THE MURDER OF THE PEASANT LEADER KA RENE PEÑAS

Movement for the Advancement of Student Power (MASP) condemns, in the strongest possible terms the brutal murder of Sumilao farmer-leader Ka Rene Peñas that took place last night, June 05, 11:00 PM while he was on his way home to Sumilao, Bukidnon.

We join other agrarian reform groups and advocates, family members, friends and acquaintances in urging the local and national authorities to do immediate investigation and arrest the suspects in the killing of Ka Rene for justice to be served.

We express our support and solidarity to Akbayan Peasant Caucus and to the Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA), in which Ka Rene was a national leader.

We extend our prayers and condolences to his family—his wife, his children and his grandson—and

to everyone who is in deep mourning with Ka Rene's death.

Tatay Rene, a well-known and well-respected leader of the peasant movement who untiringly advocate and fought for agrarian reform, rural development and social justice will be forever remembered by the Filipino young students. We have seen and witnessed his passion, determination and will to win our land which is rightfully ours and not for the few - from being one of the pioneer of the Mapalad Hunger Strike in 1997, from bravely leading the Walk for Sumilao Land, Walk for Justice Campaign where 55 farmers walked from Bukidnon to Manila for two months up to his inspiring and significant involvement in pushing for the passage of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms (CARPER) Bill.

We echo the call on every advocates and supporters to be firm-enough in unwavering and committing to the cause of our struggle for agrarian reform and social justice. What happened is a clear manifestation of how coward the opponents are and will further strengthen our spirit in solidarity to pursue the battle.

Ka Rene's death will never be a death of him to the student movement for this is a heroine and dignified happening in history—our father farmer has struggled and lived life meaningfully. He's worthy-enough to be honor and admired by the Filipino young people and social movement.

Along with your memories, we will continue the march and will persistently struggle the battle for agrarian reform and social justice towards a just and humane society.

STATEMENT OF GO ORGANIC MINDANAO ON THE ASSASSINATION OF RENE PENAS

The Go Organic Mindanao strongly condemns the dastardly killing of Renato Penas, farmer-leader of the Sumilao Farmers in Bukidnon who was treacherously shot last June 5 at almost midnight while going home from the collective farm recently awarded them after more than a decade of struggle under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). He was ambushed and murdered by assassins who pumped at least eight bullets to his body.

Ka Rene as he is fondly called, led the struggle of farmers in Bukidnon against big landowners and became an immovable force in the campaign for CARP Extension with Reforms together with other farmers all over the country staging historical walks from Mindanao to Manila, momentous hunger strikes, rallies and campaigns, and all-round vigils to have the law passed by an impertinent Congress.

His death that happened hours after the House of Representatives voted to pass CARPER has only made the struggle for agrarian reform more meaningful and significant. His blood has made the soil more fertile and priceless for those who hunger for land and seek for justice.

We condole with his wife and four children who shared equally in his struggle and bear witness to the transformation of a modern hero of the masses. We are one with his community of farmers --- MAPALAD, PANAW-Sumilao and PAKISAMA who have lost a trusted leader, a beacon of hope and an endearing friend.

We demand that justice be served in the death of Ka Rene and countless other farmer-martyrs who met violent deaths fighting for their right to land and to life.

We commit ourselves to pursue further the cause that Ka Rene died for --- fighting for the rights of the dispossessed, marginalized and oppressed. We will remain undaunted and united in the face of threats from big landowners, corporate agriculture, and a government impervious to the plight of small farmers.

08 June 2009

Go Organic Mindanao is a coalition of organic agriculture practitioners and advocates from the ranks of farmers, non-government organizations, people's organizations and church-based groups in 14 provinces in Mindanao.

AR Now Statement on the Killing of Ka Rene Peñas

The People's Campaign for Agrarian Reform Network (AR Now!) expressed its condemnation in the strongest terms possible the brutal killing of one of its leading member, Ka Rene Peñas, who was brutally killed last night, June 5, on his way home in Sumilao, Bukidnon.

We join other agrarian reform advocates, farmers' groups, family members, friends and acquaintances in urging the local and national authorities to ensure immediate investigation and the arrest of the suspects in the killing of Ka Rene for justice to be served.

We call on farmers' groups, agrarian reform advocates and the people supportive of farmer's cause to be steadfast and vigilant in pursuing agrarian reform and social justice. Let us not be intimidated by such act of violence and brutality perpetrated by landed interests and their cohorts.

We express our solidarity to the leadership and membership of Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA) as they suffered another lost in less than a year in senseless killings of farmer-leaders who peacefully and non-violently asserts their rights to land yet met by such brutality and violence.

We extend our prayers and condolences to his family---his wife Evangeline, his children Noland, Wopsyjenn, Jerald and Realyne, and his grandson---and to everyone touched by the humble, brave and inspiring life of Ka Rene.

Nong Rene, as known to us, is a staunch advocate of agrarian reform and rural development who devoted his life helping fellow farmers in pursuit of social justice and land rights. He was one of the pioneers of the Mapalad Hunger Strike in 1997, walked for land and justice with the Sumilao, Banasi and Calatagan farmers and Nong Rene was actively involved in pushing for the enactment of CARP Extension with Reforms until the time of his death.

His life and struggles will always be remembered as we continuously pursue our advocacy for agrarian reform towards a just and humane society.

Tuloy ang laban! Katarungan para kay Ka Rene!

Mabuhay ang Hanay ng Magsasaka!

Sumilao farmer leader gunned down

06/06/2009 | 10:02 AM

MALAYBALAY CITY, Philippines - One of the farmer activists who walked all the way from Sumilao, Bukidnon in Mindanao to Manila in 2007 to seek justice was shot dead Friday midnight, police and his family said Saturday.

Rene Peñas, 51, and two others were riding a motorcycle on their way home when they were fired at by an unidentified assailant using a shotgun, said SPO4 Rey Vasquez, acting police chief of Sumilao town.

Peñas, a barangay councilman in San Vicente, died of a gunshot wound on his left chest, Vasquez said.

His two other companions, Eliezer Peñas and Samson Dollete, also suffered injuries but both were sent home after being treated at the Provincial Hospital in Bukidnon.

"The assailants were on the left side of the road. Peñas tried to crawl but he was again shot," Vasquez told GMANEWS.TV.

Noland Peñas, the victim's eldest child, said that the trio were shot when they were driving along the darkest stretch going to his father's farmhouse to drop off Eliezer, a relative and caretaker of the farmhouse.

Noland said that two men allegedly were seen running away after the shooting. Noland said the police has already conducted crime scene investigation.

When asked of the motive of the killing, Noland told GMANEWS.TV on a mobile telephone interview that his father's death was probably related to a land issue he currently handled.

"My father had recently been consulted by CLOA holder beneficiaries in another land claims here. Perhaps, this is a possible motive of his killing," Noland said without elaborating so as not to hamper the police's investigation.

A CLOA is a certificate of land ownership award given by the Department of Agrarian Reform to farmer beneficiaries of the government's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

Rene Peñas was one of the participants in the 1,770-kilometer "walk for land, walk for justice" of Sumilao farmers in October 2007 to prod the government to award the land long denied them due to the manipulations of a landlord.

He was also one of the pioneers of the Mapalad Hunger Strike in 1997, and one of the leaders of the community organizers of the 444-kilometer walk of Banassi farmers in Ula, Camarines Sur.

When the CARP Extension with Reform or Carper was passed in the lower house on Wednesday his son Noland said his father was already in Sumilao.

"He came home on May 30 and was so jubilant when the Carper has been passed on Wednesday and quoted his father saying "Nidaug na ta!" (We have won!).

Peñas was elected the national vice president of Pakisama, a farmers' organization in the country, in March this year.

Peñas' remains were brought to a funeral home in Impasug-ong town and later the wake will be held in his home in San Vicente in Sumilao town.

Lawyer Normi Batula, managing director of Balaod Mindanaw which is a non-government organization helping farmers on legal matters, said that Balaod Mindanaw is sending a team to investigate the death of Peñas.

"We condemn the death of Rene. It is so painful to lose a great farmer leader who aggressively push forward the Carper and the other land campaigns which he strongly advocated. We demand justice for his death, we are holding our own investigation to his death," Batula said.

Batula said she was surprised to hear Peñas' death since he was in Manila before he came home on May 30. "I only knew that he was back home when I heard the news that he was shot dead Friday midnight," Batula said.

Rene left behind his wife Evangeline, 55, Noland, 27, Wopsyjenn, 26, Jerald, 24, Reilynme 16 and his two-week old grandson. - GMANews.TV