

Philippines: A Memorandum to PNOY - “A year after your election, our deplorable situation hasn’t gotten better”

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Kampanya para sa Makataong Pamumuhay (KAMP) is a broad, multi-sectoral, inclusive network that promotes social justice through transformative social protection. Our immediate demands are the deprivatisation and decommodification of essential services so that people will enjoy guaranteed jobs and livelihood; universal access to food, housing, health, and other vital services such as water and electricity; universal pensions for the elderly; and agricultural and unemployment insurance.

Kampanya para sa Makataong Pamumuhay (KAMP)

MEMORANDUM FOR PNOY

FROM : Your boss, the Filipino people

SUBJECT : Your job evaluation and our recommendation

DATE : 30 June 2011

It’s been a year since you’ve taken the job. We — the vulnerable, powerless and voiceless — chose you. Our choice was a choice for hope.

But you must see our still deplorable situation hasn’t gotten better: 60 million are poor, 22 million go hungry, at least 12 million are without jobs, and at least 2.5 million are homeless in Metro Manila (and more, as one major community here is demolished every month on average). These staggering statistics are more than numbers. These are men, women, children, families. This is us, your bosses. This is us, in misery. Something must be done.

While we appreciate your efforts to address poverty, we must point out it cannot alone be solved by the expanded conditional cash transfer, which benefits only 2.3 million families. Don’t be surprised by the survey which shows how we have become poorer and hungrier. Our experience and United Nations’ studies have shown that programs that target the poor are ineffective, expensive and unsustainable. Ineffective, because so many hover just above the poverty line and cross that line all the time. Expensive because the money spent targeting, overseeing and monitoring the program can feed more. Unsustainable, because it is financed mostly by loans from the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank which will be repaid as debts.

Let us listen to the voices of the poor. We want a social policy that helps all of us live a life of dignity:

guaranteed and decent work, guaranteed and humane housing, healthy and sufficient food, subsidized water and electricity, and accessible, affordable, and quality education and health services. We strongly advocate for a universal, state-funded and rights-based social protection policy. We know that you are well aware of these but we would like to level off with you and our policymakers.

Universal means everyone is covered; this is particularly meaningful here where 70 percent of us are not employed formally and are therefore not covered by any social security program;

State-funded means it cannot be entrusted to private corporations which are motivated by profit; it means the government must take full responsibility for its people, not pass the buck to public-private partnerships. We pin our hope on the elected who are accountable to us. PPP policies weaken the government; we don't want our government to be weaker, we want our government to do right by us; and

Rights-based means everyone is intrinsically entitled. Concretely, it provides geographical and financial access to essential services (such as water and sanitation, adequate nutrition, health and education, housing, life- and asset-saving information, and other services) and essential social transfers (in cash and in kind, paid to the poor and vulnerable to provide a minimum income and health security).

Social reform policy such as this is not enough. It should be accompanied by land reform and progressive taxation (so that social justice is served and some equity is achieved), cancellation of fraudulent debt (so that the money automatically paid many times over to the rich bankers can be used to fund the social protection programs), and reversal of trade liberalization and deregulation to prioritize domestic production and consumption rather than export-led development (so that we can develop a self-reliant economy that will sufficiently produce and provide for our needs), etc..

Let us learn from others' experience. The ILO (International Labor Organization) and the WHO (World Health Organization) have cited the amazing effects of variations and combinations of social protection programs in Argentina, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Ghana, Kerala (India), Mauritius, Mexico, Mozambique, South Africa, Thailand — mostly developing countries like the Philippines.

Let us listen to the experts. Even the experts agree with us. The UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development) has said that it takes less than 6 percent of the GDP to provide all these.

Let us learn from your own past. Your firm position on reproductive health is admirable. The lesson is that political will more than matches up against strong opposition from powerful interests. Our recommendations are not easy. You will meet with mighty resistance. But together, we will counter them with the strength of our conviction and the correctness of our direction.

Mr. President, start the ball rolling!

- Approve the DILG (Department of Interior and Local Government) proposal, which was done in consultation with us, on demolition moratorium and on-site/in-city urban poor housing, recognizing that we, the poor alike, have the right to the city;

- Provide universal quality health care. This means automatic enrollment of citizens in PhilHealth and free access to public health facilities for all, including hospitals, but initially for this year, for the poor lowest two quintiles of the population. You promised to allocate 5 percent of GDP to health so that quality health care becomes accessible for all Filipinos. Jump-start the process by ensuring

these steps are included and supported in the national government budget for 2012;

- Give decent jobs for all, and ensure workers' security of tenure and the right to organize. Instruct DoLE (Department of Labor and Employment) to study and come up within six months with a proposal on guaranteed jobs and unemployment insurance;
- Ensure healthy food for all, but initially for all public school children. Instruct the DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development), DoH (Department of Health) and the DepEd (Department of Education) to study how to provide healthy food for all public school children throughout the school year, but for the coming year, provide at least one meal a day in public school;
- Ensure universal access to water and electricity to enable people to live well. For every poor household, the state must provide at least 9 cu.m. of water per month for drinking, sanitation, and hygiene and 50 kwh basic electricity for lighting, ventilation, and information purposes; and
- Expand further the pension program for all the elderly (65 years old and older). Old people in the informal sector who are not enrolled in any social security systems are especially vulnerable in their old age.

We believe that this is the best legacy you can leave us. This may seem like shooting for the stars, but we have a right to dream and with the correct use of your position's power, see that dream come true - in our lifetime, under your watch.

Thank you, Mr. President, and more power to us!

The Filipino people
