

CBCP Pastoral Statement on Agrarian Reform

# **The Dignity of the Rural Poor — A Gospel Concern**

Wednesday 31 January 2007, by [CBCP \(Philippines\)](#), [PARRDS](#) (Date first published: 30 January 2007).

*Friends and fellow Agrarian Reform and Human Rights Advocates,*

Please find update concerning our engagement with the CBCP and towards the holding of a National Rural Congress.

**Partnership for Agrarian Reform  
and Rural Development Services, Inc. [PARRDS]**

January 30, 2007

Dear Fellow Agrarian Reform and Human Rights Advocates,

Shalom!

Please find attached the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) pastoral statement entitled "THE DIGNITY OF THE RURAL POOR -A GOSPEL CONCERN." The pastoral statement was issued by the CBCP's plenary assembly last 28 January 2007. Undoubtedly, the pastoral statement will reinforce our overall advocacy for Agrarian Reform, Human Rights and strengthening church-peasant solidarity.

The statement is an outcome of our persistent work with the CBCP. It is a tribute to our agrarian reform martyrs such as Ka Eric Cabanit, Hernando Baria, Edwin Vender and Rico Adeva, whose deaths and contributions to agrarian reform struggles have greatly stirred our dear archbishops and bishops to finally come out with this pastoral statement.

We thank all those who have participated and contributed to these serious undertaking, specially the leaders of UNORKA and PEACE Foundation, Fr. Archie Casey, SX and the local victim evacuees of Iloilo. We also thank PDI, PKSK, PKMM Pakisama, KAR, Akbayan and Sister Arnold Ma. Noel.

We call on the general AR-HR publics to march with us towards the CBCP's convening of the 40<sup>th</sup> year of the National Rural Congress--- towards agrarian reform, social justice, peace and sustainable rural development.

Maraming salamat po.

Sincerely,

(Signed)

BELINDA L. FORMANES

## **THE DIGNITY OF THE RURAL POOR---A GOSPEL CONCERN**

### **(A Pastoral Statement)**

Dear People of God in the Philippines,

In response to the Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is love), we declared 2006 the Year of Social Concerns (CBCP Pastoral Exhortation, May 11, 2006). For the God who is love bids us to be love too. In our Pastoral Exhortation naming 2006 the Year of Social Concerns, we expressed the hope that we would be able to educate ourselves more intensively in what the social teaching of the Church is all about. For that teaching in the end comes to only one thing: love of neighbor because of God's love for us.

The over-riding social concern of the Church of the Philippines has been all these years centered on the inequitable distribution of the nation's wealth and the endemic social injustices that underpin that evil. We would like in this statement to focus our attention on the greatest victim of our unjust economic order, the rural poor, and the diminishment of their dignity as people and as citizens. We cannot put it too strongly, but this diminishment is a negation of Christian love---and hence of the God who is love. (Cf. *Jubilee of the Agricultural World Address of John Paul II*, Nov. 11, 2000) also, *Land and Agrarian Reform, Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Economy*, no. 54, CBCP, 1998).

### **Our Situation**

The greater number of our poor are in the rural areas. The poor abound in our cities too, and we must be as concerned for them as for our rural poor. But if the urban poor are growing in numbers, it is largely because of rural folk crowding into our cities to escape the debilitating poverty of the countryside. It seems obvious then that to attend to the first problem (rural poverty) would be to help lessen the second (urban poverty).

The one big effort of the government at alleviating rural poverty has been its on-going land reform program, the CARP (the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program). The law instituting it was passed years ago but its full implementation is still far off in the future---if ever. The law was defective in the first place, emasculated in the very beginning in a landlord dominated Congress, further watered down in its implementation. At this stage, a year before the scheduled end of the program, there is much that has not yet been done and the general situation of our farmers is still as bleak as ever.

The lack of vigor and determination shown by the government in its poor implementation of the law mirrors the still over-powering opposition of the landed classes, the traditional political and economic elite of our country. What this means simply is that selfish class interests outweigh concern for the common good---the main target of the Church's social teaching. And that selfish unconcern in turn translates into sheer neglect of the poor, an utter disregard of the dignity of a whole class merely because of their bad economic plight.

This disregard is horrendously displayed in the recent extra-judicial killings, perpetrated by groups from both the right and the left, of farmers whose only "crime" is their continuing struggle for

agrarian reform or their inability to pay the “revolutionary tax” demanded of them by the NPA. As a religious people---and it doesn’t matter whether we are Christians, Muslims or adherents of other religions---we must vehemently condemn the continuing murder of such rural folk.

We condemn too, just as vehemently, the un-abated killing of unarmed men and women on the mere charge or suspicion that they support or belong to leftist political groups.

## **Our Response**

Condemning evil is not enough. As we must have learned from our consideration of the Church’s social teaching this past year, we must try bringing an end to evils that harm people and their good.

As always, our first reaction to national problems is to call on government to do what it is supposed to do. We do so here. We ask that the CARP, defective as it is, be finally completed next year as it has been targeted. And if it is not sufficiently implemented by then, the program should be further extended and funded more seriously and generously. But we asked that the law itself must be reviewed and improved.

The government and the military’s response to the shameful “extra-judicial” killings of unarmed crusaders for justice and equality is most unsatisfactory, their protestations of concern not too convincing. The greater and more effective performance of their duties as guardians and protectors of our peace---this too we must demand as strongly as we can.

Putting the burden of action on people whose responsibility it is to act, however, is not enough. We must ask ourselves: What do we do as individuals, as families, as communities? What must we do? The responsibility to act is just as much ours as those who have the official responsibility.

For years now we have been pushing the development of BECs or BEC-type Church communities and organizations. And we do so because such communities are, or should be, fully participative communities. Problems, national or local, big or small, weighty or light---and the problem of the rural poor we are speaking of here now is probably our weightiest---all must be looked at and become community concerns for the solving of which their participation is needed. Involving themselves in meeting those problems, they must do so according to the social teaching of the Church which always looks to the achieving of the common good. This demands continuing discernment from all of us, both as individuals and as communities. The answers will be varied, but, we trust, all issuing from genuine Christian charity.

On our part, and in view of what we are asking you to do, we make a very specific proposal.

## **A Rural Congress**

The year 2007 is the fortieth anniversary of the National Rural Congress of 1967. It was at this Congress that the participants, most of them diocesan and parish social action workers, came to the crucial conclusion that the Church must go to the barrios. The reason was the heavy realization that the rural parts of the country were the most neglected by both the government’s development programs and the Church’s pastoral care.

To commemorate that crucial event in our life as a Church---and to make us meet in true Gospel fidelity our present social concerns---we propose that we revive the memory of that Congress by holding one again this year.

But this time our farmers must do that speaking by themselves, the discerning, the proposing of their own ideas, the planning of how we must as a people come together to work for the common good of the country and of ourselves. Doing so, they will be effectively asserting the dignity that for

so long has been denied them. And the rest of us, participating with them in their reflections and deliberations, we will be honoring their inborn dignity as children of the same Father in Heaven.

Possibly a small thing. But in the larger picture of the country's many ills, we see that it is in not honoring the dignity of the least of our brothers and sisters among the poor that we contribute not a little to the injustices and inequalities that have become deeply ingrained in our national life; and today the murders and killings, the corruption and thieving, the crimes that are being committed daily with impunity against our poor, these we see too are all rooted in the practical denial of the basic human dignity and rights of our very poor. Christ himself acknowledged and honored their dignity, identified himself with it: "If you did it for one of my least brothers or sisters, you did it for me" (Mt. 25, 40). Because he did, so must we.

Today we see only too clearly the need for the reform not only of our national institutions but of our very moral fiber as a people. We start meeting that need by acknowledging the God-given dignity of the least of Christ's---and our---brothers and sisters. And not only in word but in act. That in itself is reform.

The Lord who loves the poor be with us in this, our common task.

*For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines,*

ANGEL N. LAGDAMEO, D.D.

Archbishop of Jaro

President, CBCP

28 January 2007