

A letter to Bread for the World on CPP-NDF-NPA “taxation” policy in Negros

Tuesday 20 February 2007, by [Alter Trade](#), [LOPEZ Edwin](#) (Date first published: 27 November 2006).

MS. HANNELORE MOLL

International Program Director

Brot-fuer-die-Welt

Stafflenbergstrabe 76

D-70184 Stuttgart, Germany

27 November 2006

Dear Hannelore,

Greetings of Peace from Negros!

I received a copy of the letter of Mr. Jalandoni of the NDFP to Bread For the World on the issue of the Alter Trade Truck-Burning in Tovoso, Negros Occidental. The letter was sent by email by Ms. Susanne Dollmann, perhaps to update us on the NDFP's stand on the issue.

Reading from Mr. Jalandoni's letter, I can only deduce that the Netherlands-based NDFP is not on top of the situation of their organization here in the Philippines. They simply rely on reports that are fed to them, without any effort to validate the veracity of the said reports.

First is their conclusion that it was not the NPA, but the “RPA-ABB or another splinter group” who burned our truck on August 13, 2006. It is unfortunate that the CPP-NPA-NDF who brandish their “scientific viewpoint”, failed to conduct an honest-to-goodness investigation on this serious matter. Mr. Jalandoni is already contented with the hearsay account from an unknown ‘friend of a friend’ who happened to visit a town next to Tovoso, at an undetermined period.

The Aug. 13 truck-burning did not happen like a ‘bolt from the blue.’ Weeks before the incident, we received a taxation letter signed by the Regional Secretary of the CPP-NPA in Negros, handed over by a well-known leader of a political organization linked by authorities to the CPP-NPA. The letter was followed by phone calls by a certain “Ka. Daniel” who identified himself as an NPA and referred to the delivered taxation letter. He threatened that untoward events may befall us if we ignore the letter. Then, the truck-burning happened even before we could hold a Board Meeting to discuss the delicate matter. Two days after the Toboso incident, “Ka. Daniel” followed through with a call, and stated that more things will happen if we keep ignoring the letter. Thus, we clearly answered that we will not give in.

The actual truck-burning in broad daylight was witnessed by farmers in the locality and by the farmers who were aboard the Alter Trade truck when the NPAs seized it. They are residents of the

area and they know who the NPAs are from the RPAs. Some of them have executed affidavits at the police station, on the very same day, which confirmed that NPA elements were involved in the truck-burning.

Should these facts be simply ignored, just to accommodate Mr. Jalandoni's lame excuse that a 'friend of his friend' said, "it was not the NPA"?

Second is the August 30 statement of Mr. Daning Ramos of Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP). The statement attempted to vilify Alter Trade with unfounded accusations that we engage in usury by charging "exorbitant interest rates" on the farmers, and that we "exploit" farmers by buying their products at "very low prices". This statement of Mr. Ramos never saw print, but it was restated when he guested on a TV talk-show of Mr. Dong Puno on ABS-CBN in the evening of September 4, 2006. Finding the accusations as baseless and malicious, I sent a letter to Mr. Dong Puno dated September 6 to answer the undue claims of Mr. Ramos. The letter was fully quoted by Mr. Dong Puno in his column at The Philippine Star, a national daily broadsheet, on September 7. I am enclosing a copy of my published letter.

Mr. Jalandoni may not be aware that Bread for the World is a funding partner of Alter Trade for more than ten years. As such, Bread for the World fully knows the activities and practices of ATFI in its credit program, in facilitating sustainable farming technologies among agrarian reform beneficiaries, in conducting capability building workshops to develop farmers' capacity in managing their farms, their organizations and communities. In fact it was the external evaluation funded by Bread for the World in 2004 that concluded that our credit fund is not sustainable because we maintained an interest rate of 10% per annum.

Whether Mr. Ramos admits it or not, his attacks on Alter Trade sought to justify the taxation letter of the NPA on Alter Trade and also the Toboso truck-burning incident. His organization, KMP, is a well-known sympathizer of the NDF. They may be advocating legitimate demands of farmers as an organization, but in this case Mr. Ramos was clearly peddling lies. This KMP statement was quoted by Mr. Jalandoni to draw a negative profile of Alter Trade as a "usurer" and "exploiter." On the other hand, Bread for the World knows the whole truth about Alter Trade, better than a Daning Ramos who merely snatched his "facts" from thin air.

Granting that the ATC truck was burned by RPAs, there is twisted logic in Mr. Jalandoni's letter. Why would an organization like KMP, an NDF sympathizer, justify a 'criminal act' of the RPAs? Any person knowledgeable in Philippine Left politics will find this utterly incongruous.

It could also be noted in the NDFP letter that Mr. Jalandoni, immediately shifted the topic on the issue of the stalled meetings of the Joint Monitoring Committee of the GRP-NDFP and the activities on the issue of 'extra-judicial political killings' that he used as an excuse for not giving prompt attention to the Toboso incident. Is the NDFP "skirting" the Toboso truck-burning issue because it is indefensible?

The Toboso Truck-Burning Incident was a clear violation of the principles and certain specific provisions of Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) between the Philippine Government (GRP) and the NDFP. This was the biggest reason for the NDFP and the NPA to deny their culpability behind that incident. We have cited this violation in our media statements right after the incident and in our filed complaint before the Joint Monitoring Committee of the GRP-NDFP.

We pinned our hopes that the leadership of the CPP-NPA-NDF could rectify the misconduct and abuses of their troops and cadres in the field. But, alas, we were mistaken.

Alter Trade is a business organization for social development. We maintain our dedication to the empowerment of marginal producers to allow more rural communities to rise from poverty. We are vulnerable to armed harassments and threats from all kinds of armed political groups from the left and the right. We accept this as a part of the whole social reality wherein we are intervening. We can only ask these armed groups to understand our service-oriented work for the marginal farmers, and to allow us our own space in order to realize our vision for sustainable people's development. Should this our plea fall on deaf ears, we are ready to risk our lives and limbs. We have our own social mission to accomplish and a better world to build.

Sincerely,

Edwin Marthine O. Lopez