

## STATEMENT OF SUPPORT TO SARIAYA FARMERS

### **Philippine Supreme Court Denies Access to Land to Sariaya Peasants: Reversals of agrarian reform means peasants without land and violations of their right to land**

Access to and control over natural resources is a sine qua non for the realization of the right to food and nutrition for rural population in the Philippines. Under the spirit of “Land to the Tillers”, the 1986 Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) aimed to distribute agricultural land to landless, share croppers and farmworkers. By far, a total of 4.8 million hectares of land had been distributed to around 3 million agrarian reform beneficiaries. What is not on official record are those peasants who subsequently lost their reformed lands due to agrarian reform reversals.

The municipality of Sariaya located in Quezon Province is a first class agricultural municipality, covering a total land area of 24,631 hectares. According to the Department of Agrarian Reform, 6,263 hectares or more than 98% of land distribution target has been covered under CARP and distributed to 5,073 rural families.

The land redistribution in Sariaya was complemented by support services, among others, farm-to-market roads, warehouses, solar dryers for rice farmers, a trading post, and required trainings, which truly provided the basis for peasants to utilize their land and realize their right to food and nutrition.

Overtime, Sariaya successfully transformed into food basket, catering to the diversified and nutritious food requirements of millions of Filipinos that include not only the Quezon Province, but of southern Tagalog Provinces, Bicol region, and Metro Manila. Within 10 years of redistribution, poverty rate has drastically dropped, and Sariaya became a success story, giving hopes and encouraged many who continued to struggle for their access to land.

Notwithstanding, these reform gains are being reversed and continually threatened due to attempts to revoke land redistribution using an outdated zoning ordinance which reclassifies agricultural into non-agricultural land. Two cases of reversals, one as early as 2004 and another in 2013, have already affected close to 100 farming families, while in the latest case, the Supreme Court has denied a motion filed by 255 peasants to reconsider a lower court resolution of June 2018, which favors the former landowner to exempt already reformed land from the CARP.

The decision of the Supreme Court will gravely threaten the right to food and nutrition of 255 peasants and their families, as well as many others whose cases of CLOA (Certificate of Land Ownership Award) cancellation are currently pending at various levels of legal processes. To date, a total of 349 farming families cultivating a total of 680 hectares of land have been stripped of their titles through decisions exempting already reformed lands.

Katarungan and the undersigned organizations call the Government of the Philippines to ensure the right to food and nutrition of Sariaya peasants by guaranteeing the secure right

of peasants to the land they till and making their right to food and nutrition a government's priority.

Not only does the Supreme Court decision constitute a breach of the state obligation under international human rights law, the decision embodies a regressive measure, which jeopardizes the realization of Sariaya peasants' right to food and nutrition and the millions of Filipinos who benefit from Sariaya's agricultural production.

This decision is also ill-timed, considering that more than 5.2 million or 20.9 percent of Filipinos suffered starvation due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, the organizations call on the Government of the Philippines to respect the right to land which is recognized in Articles 5 and 17 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, particularly Article 17 (6) which reaffirms the importance of states to carry out agrarian reform to "facilitate broad and equitable access to land and other natural resources necessary to ensure that peasants and other people working in rural areas enjoy adequate living conditions, and to limit excessive concentration and control of land taking into account its social function."

Signed by:

1. Kilusan para sa Repormang Agraryo at Katarungang Panlipunan (KATARUNGAN)
2. Focus on the Global South
3. Food first Information and Actions Network (FIAN) International and its National Sections:
4. FIAN Sweden
5. FIAN Switzerland
6. FIAN Germany
7. FIAN Belgium
8. FIAN Portugal
9. FIAN Colombia
10. FIAN Ecuador
11. FIAN Indonesia
12. FIAN Sri Lanka
13. FIAN India
14. Das philippinenbüro, Germany
15. Quinoa, Belgium
16. Sri Lanka Nature Group
17. National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO), Sri Lanka
18. Food Security Network- KHANI, Bangladesh
19. Participatory Research Action Network- PRAN, Bangladesh
20. Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee, Pakistan
21. Why Hunger, USA
22. Prasant Paikray, Spoke Person, PPSS/ Anti-Jindal & Anti-POSCO Movement, Odisha, India
23. Right To Food West Bengal
24. AKPLOGAN DOSSA
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28. Como Asonal S.I. Antioquia - Colombia
29. Fresh Eyes, United Kingdom
30. A Planeta, Basque Country
31. La Asamblea Veracruzana de Iniciativas y Defensa Ambiental (LAVIDA), Mexico
32. TransNational Institute (TNI)
33. Justicia i Pau de Barcelona
34. Red de Abogadas y Abogados por la Soberanía Alimentaria (REDASA)
35. Friends of the Earth International (FoEI)
36. Friends of the Earth Asia Pacific (FoE APAC)