



ANG

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Editorial

Remove all obstacles to the peace negotiations

Four months after taking power, the Aquino regime was at last able to form a panel to conduct peace talks with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP). Among those appointed by Aquino were personalities known to be genuinely interested in the peace process.

This is the first positive step taken towards the resumption of the talks that have long been at an impasse. The NDFP, on the other hand, had declared months ago its readiness to face the Aquino regime in the peace talks once the GRP demonstrates its seriousness on this matter.

The talks are expected to resume by the start of 2011.

But there are more daunting challenges in the peace talks. Many things have to be put in order for the talks to be set on the proper course. Foremost among this is the need for the GRP to do away with the obstacles it had put up that block the way to the formal talks' resumption.

Far beyond appointing his emissaries, Aquino must manifest his seriousness about the talks by showing respect for previously signed agreements between the NDFP and

GRP. He must do away with all the steps taken by the previous regime that were detrimental to the peace talks.

The Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) which provides protection to consultants and staff of the parties engaged in the negotiations must be respected and strictly adhered to. The Arroyo regime had repeatedly shown its contempt for the JASIG by attacking the NDFP's consultants and staff.

Justice must be meted for the abductions of Leo Velasco, Prudencio Calubid, Rogelio Calubad and other NDFP personnel. Six other NDFP personnel who are in prison must be released immediately. The

arrest warrants issued for NDFP negotiating panel chair Ka Luis Jalandoni, NDFP chief political consultant Ka Jose Ma. Sison and others who have been slapped with

trumped-up charges prevent them

from freely participating in

the peace talks. So long

as the GRP does not

issue a categorical

statement on its

adherence to

the JASIG,

Jalandoni's

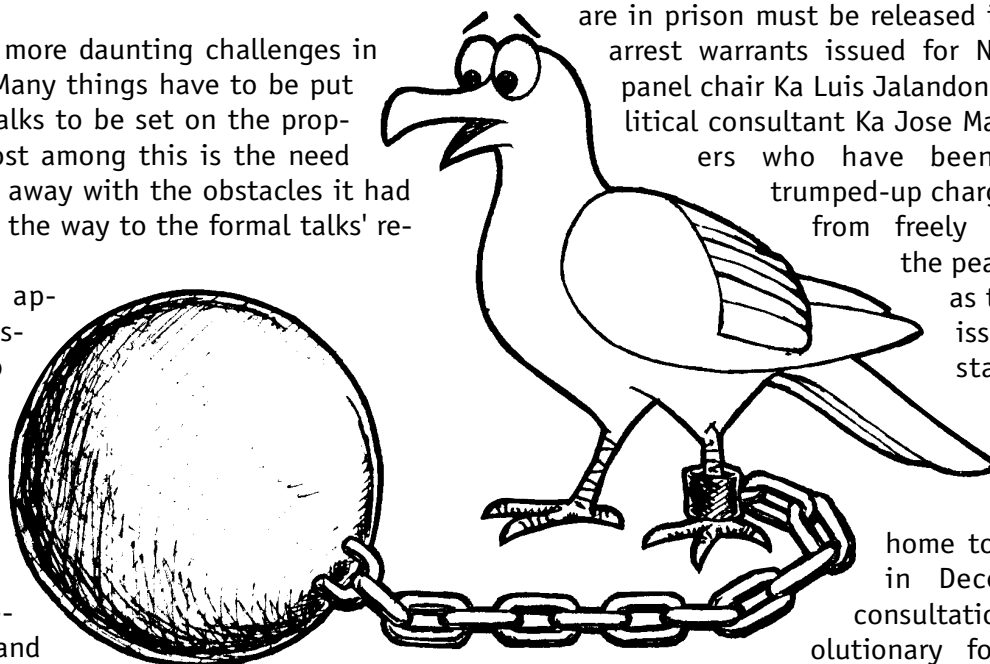
plans to come

home to the Philippines

in December to hold

consultations with the

revolutionary forces and other



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sectors remain suspended.

The Arroyo regime had several times reneged on agreements to release all the other political prisoners. The Aquino regime must rectify this by releasing the Morong 43 and more than 300 other political prisoners languishing in jails and military camps across the country. The importance of such a move becomes even more striking in the face of Aquino's orders to free almost 400 jailed military rebels, in addition to the fact that he has condemned the 15-year incarceration by the military dictatorship in Myanmar of its foremost critic Aung San Suu Kyi.

The work of the Joint Monitoring Committee which checks violations to the first substantive agreement—the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL)—must be enhanced. The GRP's armed forces have been committing widespread violations of this agreement. Aquino has so far not shown any indication of seriously observing human rights. There has been no let-up in the bloody military terrorist campaigns against the people.

Proposed 10-point agreement

- 1 ESTABLISH a clean and honest coalition government for genuine national freedom and democracy against imperialist domination and control.
- 2 RESPECT the democratic rights of the toiling masses and provide for their sufficient representation in a coalition government.
- 3 CARRY OUT national industrialization and land reform and oppose imperialist plunder and corruption in the military and bureaucracy.
- 4 CANCEL foreign debt and reduce budget allocations for the military and other armed organizations of the GRP.
- 5 UPHOLD a patriotic, scientific and pro-people culture.
- 6 RESPECT the right to self-determination of the national minorities.
- 7 INVESTIGATE and prosecute government officials with cases of treason, corruption and human rights violations.
- 8 IMPLEMENT a genuinely independent foreign policy.
- 9 MAINTAIN trade and diplomatic relations with other ASEAN countries, China, South and North Korea, Japan and Russia.
- 10 IMPLEMENT a ceasefire between the armed forces of the GRP and the NDFP.

Aquino can show goodwill for the talks by ordering a stop to the bru-

tal military operations, extrajudicial killings, abductions, torture and harassment of activists and the masses perpetrated by the GRP's military and security forces.

A CARHRIHL provision requiring the indemnification of victims of human rights violations under the Marcos dictatorship has likewise not been implemented.

Aquino must also take decisive measures to reverse the results of a collusion between US imperialism and the Arroyo regime to include the Communist Party of the Philippines, New People's Army and the NDFP chief political consultant in the "terrorist listings" maintained by the US, European Union and other imperialist countries. The GRP entered into an agreement in 2004 to undertake political, diplo-



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matic and other initiatives to undo this but has so far not done anything to this effect.

Aquino must also comply with The Hague Joint Declaration of 1992 that laid down the guiding principles, agenda and conduct of the peace talks. The Aquino regime's withdrawal of its previous demand for an immediate ceasefire as a precondition for the talks' resumption is a positive development. Such preconditions are violative of The Hague Joint Declaration.

There should be decisive steps

taken to pave the way for negotiations on the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (CASER) which constitutes the second substantive agenda in the talks. After CASER, the next agenda involves the drafting of an agreement on political and constitutional reforms. Only then can talks begin on ceasefire and the disposition of the armed forces of both parties.

The pacing of the talks can be accelerated if the Aquino regime signs the Concise Agreement to

End the Civil War and Achieve Just Peace proposed by the NDFP National Council in 2005. (*see proposed 10-point agreement in sidebar*)

These are but some of the issues that the GRP and NDFP could take up in their preliminary talks. The objective is to lay down the best possible conditions for the talks to continue smoothly and for the peace process to become a relevant means of resolving the roots of the civil war now raging in the country. **AB**

Collusion between Akbayan and the US-Aquino regime

There is flagrant collusion between the reformist Akbayan and the US-Aquino regime. In exchange for billions of pesos worth of funds to be put under its control, Akbayan has brazenly allowed itself to be used as an instrument to rally support within and outside of Congress for the Aquino regime's Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program.

As recently as September, Akbayan criticized the ₱21.9 billion fund for the CCT program. Akbayan Rep. Walden Bello said in a privilege speech before Congress that there is no hard evidence that the CCT has brought people out of poverty and was merely "a coordinated strategy of pressure by ... the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank (WB)" to keep the country in a state of indebtedness.

But on October 12, Akbayan backtracked on its criticism of the CCT and joined the camp of those in favor of it in Congress. It sponsored a resolution, no less, stating its support for the CCT as a "viable and effective tool to reach the poorest of the poor provided that it is properly enforced." It merely called for the formation of a special oversight committee to moni-

tor the program and ensure that corrective measures are undertaken in implementing it.

Three days later, the House Committee on Appropriations allotted ₱4.05 billion for Akbayan from the Department of Public Works and Highways budget of ₱110.6 billion. A few hours before this, Akbayan Rep. Arlene "Kaka" Bag-ao was seen going around Congress asking other congresspersons to sign its pro-CCT resolution.

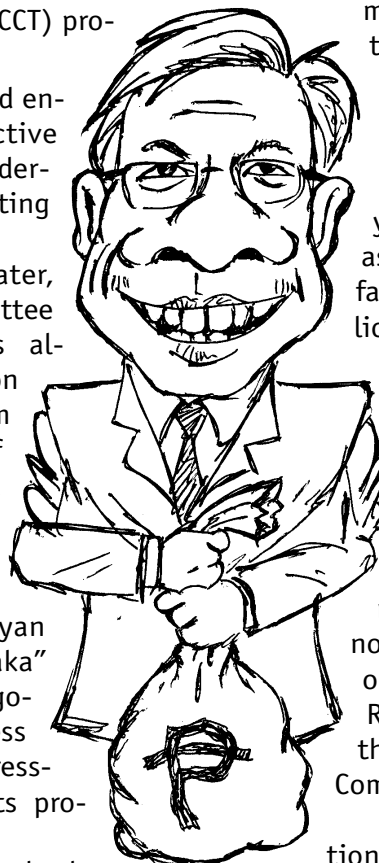
Bag-ao justified the move, saying that the amount allo-

cated to Akbayan would be going to "agrarian reform communities" (ARC) and used for services, infrastructure, credit and investment funds for farmer-beneficiaries of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms (CARPER). Akbayan has been touting CARPER as an improvement over CARP, although the former is actually no different from the earlier version of the pro-landlord law.

The progressive youth group Anakbayan assailed Akbayan's about-face to the tune of ₱4 billion in pork barrel funds.

The youth group said Akbayan's support for the CCT was also payback for the appointment of its representatives to government positions—namely Loretta Ann Rosales who now chairs the Commission on Human Rights and Joel Rocamora who now heads the National Anti-Poverty Commission.

Progressive organizations lambasted Akbayan's opportunism, saying that the



much-vaunted ARC that would supposedly be the recipients of Akbayan's P4 billion pork are so few in number and account for a very small sector. The anti-peasant government would have the public believe that such tokenism actually represents the triumph of the old CARP or the newer CARPER.



In fact, said the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), big foreign agribusiness corporations, compradors and landlords have been using the ARC for contract growing, mainly for biofuel, agro-industrial or export crops; and for schemes such as the stock distribution option, joint ventures, corporate farming and leasehold arrangements.

Two branches of the Cojuangco family, for instance, have taken full advantage of this by implementing these schemes in a number of "agrarian reform communities." The Aquino-Cojuangco family has used the stock distribution option in Hacienda Luisita in Tarlac while Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco has done the same in a dozen other haciendas and landholdings controlled by his family in Isabela, Negros and various parts of Mindanao.

KMP deputy secretary-general Willy Marbella added that Akbayan's P4 billion pork is also payment for its support for Aquino during his presidential campaign and for serving as the "fourth communications group of Malacañang" in Congress. AB

CCT is part of COIN

Akayan also continues to serve as an instrument of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in the government's counter-insurgency program. In accordance with Oplan Bantay Laya's design, targeted activists and mass leaders are first branded as members of front organizations of the Communist Party of the Philippines and New People's Army to justify their being subject to killings, arrests, intimidation and other forms of persecution.

Akayan is among the entities that have been Red-baiting progressive organizations, their leaders and members and partners with the AFP's in crusading against them. It will be remembered that Loretta Ann Rosales was also at the forefront of the campaign to accuse the revolutionary movement of extortion in Akayan areas.

The CCT is framed within the US' counterinsurgency program. The World Bank provides funds for the CCT which in turn is used as an adjunct of Oplan Bantay Laya. The AFP is its confederate in enforcing the CCT through the Kalayaan Barangay Program (KBP) that the military has been implementing since 2005. Aquino has announced that a new COIN program will be launched next year, with an even more expanded version of the CCT as a component.

Akayan outrightly exposes its reformism and its riding on the coattails of the reactionary ruling state as it justifies its support for the CCT. It has described the pro-imperialist and pro-landlord Aquino regime as a "reform coalition" to make the people pin their hopes on the regime's promises and distance them from the path of revolutionary struggle. AB

Akbayan and the US-Arroyo regime

Even during the Arroyo regime, Akbayan was among those that benefited the most from huge pork barrel funds, while representatives of progressive parties were severely deprived. Gloria Arroyo paid back Akbayan with generous heapings of pork for slandering her rival Fernando Poe Jr. in the 2004 elections.

The Arroyo regime gave former Akbayan representative Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel a P25 million pork barrel in the form of the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) and an additional P10 million allocation from the DPWH budget. Baraquel again received P10 million in pork barrel funds in 2005. All in all, Akbayan received up to P200 million from Arroyo from 2004 to 2005.

Akbayan also profited immensely in campaigning for Aquino in the last presidential elections. It has the dubious distinction of being one of the leading partylist groups whose expenses exceeded the legal limit, having spent up to P52 million for its radio, television and print advertisements. AB



Doleouts are not the solution to poverty

A study by Ibon Foundation reveals that Kapit-bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (Kalahi-CIDSS) received up to \$59.1 million in funds, while the Kalayaan Barangay Program (KBP) received ₱3.4 billion. The government boasts that Kalahi-CIDSS was able to help more than 1.1 million beneficiaries while KBP targeted projects in Mindanao, particularly Compostela Valley and Davao del Norte for so-called "peace and development."

Ibon Foundation contends that the project was able to reach only a very small sector. It also counters the World Bank's claims that the CCT is an effective instrument in providing employment to impoverished youth. In fact, the CCT can only provide support for students up to the Sixth Grade. Ibon argues that with 44% of 4.6 million unemployed youth being of high school level and 43% of college level, those with only a Grade 6 education will have an even more difficult time finding employment.

Moreover, a huge chunk of CCT funds will not end up with those who are genuinely poor but with the well-to-do, while a significant portion of those who are really impoverished are beyond the program's reach. Among them are people without permanent addresses—because they do not have stable jobs or livelihoods or because they are displaced squatters or are poor elderly couples without children. A significant amount will also be spent on enumerators and supporting the bureaucracy needed to implement the program, in addition to the amount that will be lost to corruption.

The CCT does not solve the real roots of poverty. It is merely a doleout program and does nothing to improve the lot of its targeted poorest of the poor. Instead, it keeps them poor, in bondage and oppressed.

The CCT likewise contributes to the country's burgeoning external debt. The CCT now accounts for ₱35 billion of the country's foreign loans, with this amount possibly growing bigger until 2016.

AB

NPA trounces 41st IB in Abra



The New People's Army in Ilocos-Cordillera Region (ICR) has dealt another heavy blow on the fascist enemy. Seven soldiers from Alpha Coy of the Philippine Army 41st IB were killed and five others were wounded in two back to back ambushes by Red fighters of the Agustin Bernalen Command (ABC-NPA) in the morning of October 30 in Abra. There were no casualties on the NPA side.

Seized from the reactionary troops were an M60 machine gun and two M16 rifles, ammunition and military documents.

The first ambush occurred in Barangay Lenneng, Bay-Licuan at 5:20 a.m. Four soldiers were killed on the spot in this ambush. After 30 minutes, three more soldiers were killed when Red fighters ambushed enemy reinforcements in Barangay Barbarit in the nearby town of Lagangilang. The scene of the fighting is only a few minutes away from the 503rd Brigade headquarters in Barbarit, two patrol bases and the advance command post of the 41st IB.

ABC-NPA spokesperson Ka Diego Wadagan said that the ambush was a punitive measure for the target military unit's grave human rights violations against the Tingguian minorities. It was also punishment on the 41st IB for serving as protectors and security escorts of big mining companies. Currently conducting mining op-

erations in the area is the Cordillera Exploration Co. Inc., the local subsidiary of Anglo-American PLC, the biggest and most destructive mining company worldwide.

Soldiers under the Northern Luzon Command's 503rd Brigade have been relentlessly bombing and strafing civilian communities, perpetrating illegal arrests and detentions, torture and killings against the people of Abra, especially the Tingguian. The military has also been using day care centers, barangay halls and even the people's houses as barracks. The barrio folk are commonly accused of being supporters of the revolutionary movement and their movements limited. Such intense militarization has paralyzed production and small-scale mining activities.

Elements of the 41st IB are deployed to areas with approved and pending mining applications, among them the towns of Tineg, Lacub, Baay-Licuan, Sallapadan, Dagioman, Malibcong, Tubo and Bucloc. There are at present 36 mining applications pending at the Mines and Geosciences Board-Department of Environment and Natural Resources (MGB-DENR). Already granted permits are Rio Dorado, Olympus-Pacific, Sulfotara, Magdaleno/Miguel M. Peña, Abra Mining Industrial Company and Cordillera Exploration Company Inc.

The latest tactical offensive launched by the NPA in Abra indicates the Red fighters' heightened fighting will and capability and is a manifestation of the resolve of the revolutionary movement to fight along with the people of Abra against plunderers, landgrabbers, human rights violators and large-scale destroyers of the environment, added Ka Diego Wadagan. AB

Human rights violations in Rizal

There have been six civilian victims of extrajudicial killings in Rizal province since Benigno Aquino III became president. Not one of the elements of the 16th IB and SAF Maneuver Battalion-PNP who perpetrated these crimes has been punished. The 16th IB, in particular, has come to be known as the "butcher battalion" because it was trained by Gen. Jovito Palparan during his stint as chief of the 2nd Infantry Division in 2003.

The latest victims of extrajudicial killings in Rizal are Junior Asyong, a chainsaw operator and his helper known only as "Cocoy." Both are residents of Sitio Lucutan, San Isidro, Rodriguez. They were killed in September after a composite force of 16th IB and SAF Maneuver Battalion-PNP elements strafed a number of huts used as resting places by carabao loggers in Puray, Rodriguez. Asyong and his helper died on the spot while their four companions were able to flee. To cover up their crime, the perpetrators claimed that the victims were members of the New People's Army (NPA).

Prior to this, another civilian, Rene "Buhawi" Resurreccion was killed in Barrio Macabud, Rodriguez. He was shot in the head near

the 16th IB detachment.

Ang Bayan had earlier reported the killings of three Dumagat minorities who were members of the Katribu Party. Shot to death on July 19 by motorcycle-riding death squad elements in San Isidro, Rodriguez were Galman Navarete, Demilita Largo and Benita San Jose.

Meanwhile, the 16th IB illegally arrested two Dumagat minorities who were former NPA guerrillas. Picked up on October 13 were Alberto San Jose, 24 and Crisanto de la Calzada, 23, both temporary residents of Puray, Rodriguez. They have not been allowed to see their families and friends to date. The soldiers continue to keep them in custody without charges, and are forcing them to serve as guides in military operations. AB

CAFGU recruitment of minors rampant in Batangas

A minor suffered a nervous breakdown after being beaten by the military and is currently confined in a hospital in Metro Manila. His parents had earlier refused to allow soldiers to recruit him into the CAFGU.

Seventeen-year old "Joel" (not his real name), formerly from Sitio Calabasahan, Barangay Quipot, San Juan, Batangas was being forcibly recruited into the CAFGU by elements of the 740th Combat Group of the Philippine Air Force led by Lt. Col. Arnel Villareal in cahoots with the 59th Infantry Battalion of

the Philippine Army.

"Joel" was beaten up on August 28 during an outing by soldiers at the Laiya Beach Resort in San Juan. Some of the village youth were invited to this outing.

"Joel" was accused of sexual harassment when he accidentally entered a women's comfort room.

Three drunken soldiers who had seen him leave the comfort room dragged him to another rest room where they beat him up. The perpetrators were identified as Sergeants Areta, Casapao and Casanova of the 740th CG PAF which is currently encamped beside the elementary school in Sitio Calabasahan.

When he came home, "Joel" complained of pains in his abdomen and chest and could not hear from his right ear. He developed a fever after a few days. Two days after the incident, his parents found out about the beating after witnesses told them about their son's brutal experience. "Joel" was very scared when his parents confronted him about the beating, saying that the soldiers had threatened to kill him if his parents ever found out about the incident.

Several days after, "Joel" began

staring blankly. Then, he would suddenly shout and burst into tears. He eventually suffered a nervous breakdown.

Long before this, the military had already become physically and verbally abusive at "Joel" because of his parents' refusal to let him join the CAFGU.

Meanwhile, "Joel's" family suffered even more harassment after his case was published in a newspaper. Soldiers surrounded their house on September 13, compelling the family to transfer elsewhere.

The forcible recruitment of minors into the CAFGU is now prevalent in Batangas. As the Arroyo regime ended and the Aquino administration began, seven battalions of composite forces from the Philippine Air Force and Philippine Army poured into the province and

set up camp within civilian communities. They used public facilities such as barangay halls, day-care centers, chapels and even schools, as what they did in "Joel's" village.

During their stay in these communities, the soldiers would entice the youth by inviting them to videoke and drinking sessions or to outings. Once the youth develop some closeness to the soldiers, they are used as errand boys or ordered to cook, draw water, give the soldiers massages and the like. They are then recruited into the CAFGU and eventually to the military, in exchange for all sorts of promises like bigger income or a chance to finish school. Those who refuse are subjected to insults and their families branded as supporters of the New People's Army. **AB**

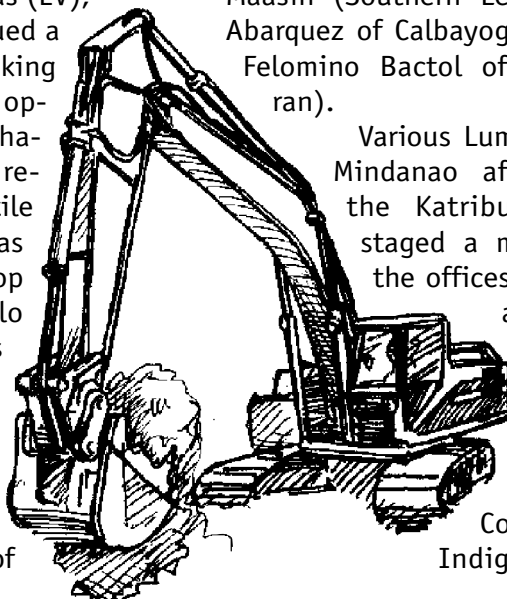
Mounting opposition to imperialist mining

There is mounting opposition to the Aquino regime's decision to open up more areas of the country to foreign mining operations. This is after the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines bared the arrival of 19 big foreign mining companies in the country next year.

In Eastern Visayas (EV), Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter seeking for a stop to mining operations and the rehabilitation of the region's formerly fertile lands. The letter was signed by Archbishop Jose Palma of Palo (Leyte) and Bishops Emmanuel Trance of Catarman (Northern Samar), Crispin Varguez of Borongan (Eastern Samar), Precioso Cantillas of

Maasin (Southern Leyte), Isabelo Abarquez of Calbayog (Samar) and Felomino Bactol of Naval (Biliran).

Various Lumad groups in Mindanao affiliated with the Katribu Party also staged a march-rally at the offices of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau, Commission on Human Rights and National Commission on Indigenous Peo-



ples in Davao City last October 29 to resist the incursion of imperialist mining companies in Davao City and the Davao provinces.

In Ilocos-Cordillera, Rep. Teodoro Baguilat expressed his strong opposition to mining operations in a meeting of the Advisory Committee of the Regional Development Council (RDC Ad Com) last October 27. He said opening up the region to big mining corporations runs counter to the RDC's priority of keeping Northern Luzon a "watershed cradle." The RDC aims to protect the environment to ensure that rivers and lakes used to generate electricity and supply irrigation in the plains will not dry up.

Baguilat said foreign mining corporations are coming in droves to the Philippines due to environmental restrictions in their countries.

Rep. Maximo Dalog of Mountain Province and Rep. Bernardo Verga-

ra of Baguio City also signified their opposition.

In Western Mindanao region, the Subanen tribe is maintaining its vigilance over the possible entry of mining equipment from the Geotechniques and Minerals Inc. (GAMI) for exploration activities in the Pinukis Mountain Range. They had earlier successfully fended off attempts of GAMI to bring in its drilling equipment by putting up a barricade in Barangay Sigapod last October 5 and in Barangay Guinabot last October 9.

GAMI's exploration activities were permitted by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau through a Mineral Production Sharing Agreement (MPSA). To date, 14 companies have pending mining applications in 31 of the 33 barangays of Midsalip covering 19,000 hectares of the town's total land area of 28,000 hectares. The chief targets are iron ore, gold and silver.

The Subanen are strongly opposed to mining operations because they fear the destruction of a critical watershed area that supplies irrigation to 1,200 hectares of rice-fields which are a source of up to P87 million in annual income for farmers in the locality. Mining operations will also destroy a reforestation project in five barrios of Midsalip that was begun as far back as the 1990s.

Meanwhile, the National Democratic Front in Eastern Visayas said the issue of destructive foreign mining operations underscores the fact that socio-economic reforms are necessary to address problems of poverty, foreign exploitation and environmental destruction. It said that the current solidarity of the Catholic Church and the people in Eastern Visayas against mining can further develop in pressing for socio-economic reforms, and in insisting on the peace talks as one of the essential means to do so. **AB**

Cojuangco-SMC pushes widespread cassava planting

Imperialist agrochemical and multinational corporations such as San Miguel Corporation (SMC) and its local merchant-usurer agents are pushing for the large-scale cultivation of hybrid cassava to replace hybrid corn in various parts of Isabela such as San Mariano, Ilagan, Cauayan, Echague and San Guillermo.

But they are undertaking such massive crop conversion not to help the farmers but to serve their greed. In fact, the farmers, especially those who are deeply in debt, have little choice but to plant hybrid cassava.

Losses from Cargill

The cultivation of Monsanto Cargill hybrid corn by farmers in Isabela has been widespread since the introduction of high-yielding varieties. Their harvests have been bought by corporations that process the grain to make animal feed and use them as ingredients for various food products.

But the price of Monsanto Cargill corn has long been declining. On a global scale, there has been an overproduction of high-yielding varieties after imperialists pushed for their widespread cultivation. The excess produce has been dumped in backward countries like the Philippines where farmers have been suffering from low yields and huge losses.

The price of imported Cargill corn is much lower as it comes from countries with advanced agricultural technology and that enjoy state subsidies. Companies like SMC thus prefer to import corn, resulting in even more losses to farmers.

Even the provincial

government of Isabela and the Departments of Agriculture (DA) and Agrarian Reform have admitted these losses. The Arroyo regime even pretended to have taken steps to alleviate the farmers' plight with then DA secretary Arthur Yap making frequent visits to Isabela. For its part, the Isabela provincial government bought part of the Cargill corn harvests, prompting it to look for buyers in Vietnam and other countries.

Only the rich benefited

But it is the merchant-usurers who were able to take advantage of this government program. Before they could avail of such "assistance," farmer-applicants are required to present land-ownership papers. Only the businessmen and usurers were able to get through the crisis because they were practically the only ones who could comply with this requirement. Thus, most of the produce bought by the provincial government at higher prices came from merchant-usurers while the majority of farmers had to make do with the P3 per kilo price offered by warehouse owners who had provided them credit.

The merchant-usurers continued to defraud the farmers by manipulating the



weights, prices and classification of the peasants' produce. They imposed more stringent credit requirements and seized the lands of farmers who failed to pay off their debts.

Forcible planting of cassava

SMC and its collaborators began imposing widespread cassava cultivation in 2007. SMC processes cassava to produce flour, an ingredient in most SMC products. The local ruling classes have also been showing interest in biofuel gas production, with cassava as one of the possible sources, provided that it is cultivated on a wide scale.

Usurers are employing the same onerous system in forcing the shift from corn planting to cassava production. Traders like San Mariano, Isabela town councilor Deri Pascual would tell farmers, "Look, if you want to be able to pay your debts, you'd better plant cassava where you only need a small amount of capital." Pascual is president of the town's association of merchant-usurers and heads the Municipal Committee on Agriculture, a position he has used to the hilt to enforce SMC's order to propagate cassava planting.

Usurers like Pascual have tightened credit for the planting of Cargill corn, restricting even the farmers' access to fertilizers and pesticides needed for cultivating it. Many farmers who find themselves without access to corn seeds they could buy on credit have had no other choice but to plant cassava instead. "This is better than to lose our land," they reason out.

Exploitative system

Farmers buy on credit 100 to 150 bundles of cassava stems for planting worth ₱20 per bundle. But even if they had already bought the stems, they have to

give back half to the greedy usurers as interest after harvesting their produce ten months later. Thus, instead of becoming the farmers' property, each ₱10-bundle ends up with the usurers. Farmers are also compelled to sell the remaining stems for planting for ₱5 per bundle to the warehouses where they were bought. The farmers then buy these same stems at ₱20 per bundle for use in the next planting cycle.

The harvested cassava root crop must be cut up by the farmers. Because the roots are hard and can cause skin to itch when handled, farmers also have to shoulder the cost of having them threshed. Then they have to dry the produce out in the sun, put them in sacks and bring them to the warehouses. As with the usual exploitative arrangements, it is the farmers who shoulder the transport costs. Merchants buy the farmers' produce at ₱6 to ₱8 per kilo. Like the corn crops, a sale depends on whether the produce is classified as "dry," "good" or "reject."

In the process, farmers have incurred more losses as cassava planting is done only once a year, unlike corn which is bought at the same price but is planted twice a

year. The farmers could have earned more had they planted rice or vegetables.

More land grabbing

Shifting to cassava planting in accordance with multinational corporations' dictates and under the control of merchant-usurers will still redound to the loss of the farmers' lands. The losses incurred by farmers in planting cassava will bury them deep in debt, until they eventually give up the land they had worked on so hard. Titled or not, the land will benefit the rich, not the tillers.

Except for the scale and the particular schemes involved, there is actually little difference between SMC's cassava planting scheme and the previous Cassava Plantation Project it launched in 2002. SMC then planned to plant cassava in more than 150,000 hectares in different parts of Cagayan Valley.

Back then, SMC's main scheme was corporative farming or cooperative farming, where SMC and the farmers were supposed to be business partners. SMC would provide the farmers credit, the farmers pay back their loans; SMC takes over the land, controls and profits from it.

The people of Isabela strongly resisted the project, prompting Cojuangco to abandon it in 2005. The present cassava planting scheme is obviously an attempt to revive the project on a more massive scale.

The project is now being cunningly enforced by expanding the number of planters, conniving with merchant-usurers and deceiving farmers into believing that planting cassava will improve their livelihood. But as before, the people of Isabela will rise up again as one to resist it. AB



ILPS supports nationwide strike of French people

The International League of People's Struggle (ILPS) has expressed solidarity and support for millions of workers, youth and French people who launched a general strike from September 7 to October 19 against the exploitative and repressive French state and its ruling classes.

The ILPS condemned the state's proposed pension reforms which plan to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62. The reforms are among the austerity measures being mulled by the French government to pass on the burden of the economic crisis to the toiling masses and the people. The ILPS also denounced the Sarkozy government's repression of the strike and mass protests which decried the rising unemployment rate and the worsening working and living conditions in the country.

The ILPS hailed the coordinated actions of workers and the people that sought to expose the roots of the worsening crisis and the world capitalist system. It also saluted the French workers for their sterling tactics such as the setting up of blockades that made the general strike effective despite the cunning moves of the Sarkozy government to suppress it. The ILPS was pleased over the participation of all transport and union workers in France which made the nationwide strike even more potent.

The ILPS called on all its members and allied organizations in France to resolutely and militantly participate in the general strike and help in fortifying the struggle by joining hands with all the organizations that launched the strike.

France was practically paralyzed when air and land transportation and plant and industrial workers simultaneously went on

strike. Students from 300 high schools and other private and public sector workers also staged a related protest action. Most remarkable was the strike of workers from 12 oil refineries and two big depots in the country. Port workers also erected a blockade, barring hundreds of ships from docking in the city of Marseille. This resulted in a 40% cut in oil supply in 4,000 out of 12,000 gasoline stations in France.

Several schools and offices closed down while the transportation system was in disarray. Government estimates put losses at up to \$557 million daily due to the strike.

In a bid to quell the strike, riot police dispersed students' picket lines and workers' blockades in streets and resorted to mass arrests. In Lyon, Paris, students fought back, resulting in the burning of a police car.

Despite the hardships and the resulting chaos in the transportation system, majority of the people went on to support the nationwide strike. The latest survey showed Sarkozy's approval rating plummeting to below 30% especially after he began to use repressive measures against the protesters.

Prior to the nationwide strike, union workers had also launched one-day strikes in previous months. The strikes have been escalating as parliamentary deliberations on the proposed pension reforms draw near. **AB**

2,600 PAL workers laid off

UP to 2,600 Philippine Air Lines (PAL) will be losing their jobs after Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz affirmed an earlier decision which purportedly found the planned retrenchment legal. Most of those who will be laid off are workers in PAL's in-flight catering and airport services as well as its call center.

The Philippine Air Lines Employees Association (PALEA) denounced as illegal and a union-busting move Baldoz's decision as negotiations with management were still underway.

PALEA president Gerry Rivera said that the decision is tantamount to destroying security of tenure. Those who will take over the vacated jobs will no longer be union members but contractual workers who will be receiving lower salaries and reduced benefits. They will have no security of tenure and no union protection, Rivera added.

The Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) also denounced the DOLE decision. KMU Executive Vice President Lito Ustarez said it will only inflict suffering among thousands of PAL workers. It will also end up as another blemish on the Aquino regime if the latter fails to resolve the PAL issue the way it bungled the hostage-taking incident in Manila last August. KMU has held talks with PALEA about plans to launch a series of protest actions.

The DOLE claimed that the retrenched workers will not really be without employment since they will be absorbed by service providers such as SkyKitchen Phil. Inc. (catering), Skylogistics Phil (airport services) and ePLDT Ventus (call center). These service provid-

ers are all partly owned by Lucio Tan, PAL owner and one of the biggest contributors to Aquino's election campaign, PALEA said.

Meanwhile, PAL workers are set to file a petition before the Court of Appeals. They had earlier launched a protest action at DOLE's main office in Intramuros, Manila last November 1. A Congress investigation into the mass layoffs at PAL is also being pushed by the Anakpawis Party and Gabriela Women's Party.

Hacienda Luisita peasants form alliance

A broad alliance of farmers and farm workers in Hacienda Luisita was formed last October 30 to press the Aquino government and the Supreme Court to immediately distribute 6,000 hectares of the Cojuangco-Aquino family-owned estate. The Luisita Peasants and People's Alliance (LUPPA) was convened at De La Salle-College of St. Benilde in Manila.

Various church groups, artists, students and teachers and sectoral organizations attended the LUPPA founding. Among them were Fr. Gregorio Obejas, O.S.M; Tarlac City Councilor Emmie Ladera; Atty. Jobert Pahilga, executive director of Sentro para sa Tunay na Repormang Agraryo (Sentra); Rustum Casia, a visual artist; and the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines-National Secretariat for Social Action (CBCP-NASSA).

LUPPA aims to lend broad moral, legal and political support to workers who are up against one of the biggest landlord clans in the country, said Edna Velarde, national coordinator of Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA) and one of LUPPA's convenors.

Despite a decision by the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) junking the Stock Distribution Option (SDO) and ordering the immediate distribution of the hacienda lands to the farmer-beneficiaries, the Hacienda Luisita management has stubbornly refused to comply.

LUPPA will also gather further support from the people to help the Hacienda Luisita massacre victims in November 2004 find the justice that has so far been denied them.

The alliance also denounced the escalating militarization of nine of the hacienda's ten barangays. Aside from the Citizens Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU) which has reportedly put up detachments in the area, there are plans to hold the US-RP Balikatan Exercises in the hacienda.

What is the motive behind holding the exercises in the hacienda? Lito Bais, president of the United Luisita Worker's Union (ULWU) and also one of LUPPA's convenors threw this question at the HLI management and the Aquino administration. Bais said that since the hacienda is not a military camp, he suspects that the RP-US Balikatan Exercises are being pushed to intimidate the protesting farmers.

Scrap VFA, not just review it

TERMINATION and not a review of the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) is what the people strongly demand, said progressive House representatives in their resolution last October 26. The signatories were Bayan Muna Rep. Teddy Casiño, Anakpawis Rep. Rafael Mariano, ACT Teachers Rep. Antonio Tinio and Kabataan Partylist Rep. Raymond Palatino.

The Aquino government formed the Presidential Commission on the VFA last October 1 to review its provisions, particularly those regarding the custody of erring US soldiers. It is headed by Executive Sec. Paquito Ochoa Jr. and co-chaired by Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo and National Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin who are known to be pro-imperialist. US Ambassador Harry Thomas Jr. was said to have been pleased with its formation, and began rattling off VFA's purported advantages to the Philippines.

The lawmakers said that the one-sided agreement signed by the Philippine and US governments in 1999 must be put to an end. Deputy Speaker Lorenzo Tañada III also pressed for the termination of the VFA while Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago batted for the same in Senate Joint Resolution No. 3 which she authored. Sen. Francisco Pangilinan also said the agreement only favors the US which has not been paying for its special basing arrangements in the country.

Gabriela Women's Party Rep. Luz Ilagan belied Aquino's claim that he wants to prevent a repetition of a previous case involving US Lance Corporal Daniel Smith who was convicted by the Makati Regional Trial Court in December 2006 of raping a Filipina. He was, however, transferred to the US embassy instead of being detained in a local jail. The Supreme Court eventually acquitted him in April 2009.

Despite Aquino's review order, he stands partial to the continued stay of American troops in the country, said Ilagan. She said that after his first visit in the US, he had brought home with him an investment package worth \$2.8, including \$434 million from the Millennium Challenge Corp. An investment

package like this is not without conditions, Ilagan said.

Ratified on May 27, 1999, the VFA allows the entry of warships and military equipment and the construction of temporary military facilities in any part of the country. Last October 14-22, up to 4,000 American soldiers conducted military exercises in Central Luzon under the Cooperation Afloat and Readiness Training (CARAT). Meanwhile, around 700 American troops are presently stationed permanently inside Camp Navarro in Zamboanga City and join combat operations in Basilan, Sulu and other parts of Mindanao.

CEDAW gives justice to Karen Vertido case

AFTER 14 years of struggle, rape victim Karen Vertido has found justice at last. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) issued a resolution last July 16 recommending that the Philippine government pay her compensation commensurate to the extent to which her rights were violated.

CEDAW criticized a Davao City court for junking the rape case filed by Vertido against influential businessman Jose Custodio. Vertido was raped by Custodio in a motel on March 29, 1996. Custodio was then president of the Davao City Chamber of Commerce while Vertido served as its executive director. The businessman was jailed but released upon his acquittal in April 2005.

Vertido brought her case to CEDAW with the help of GABRIELA. CEDAW acts on cases when practically all remedies have been exhausted. Vertido's was the first case from the Asia-Pacific to be brought to CEDAW's attention.

Arroyo to receive biggest pork barrel

UP to P2.2 billion is in the bag for Pampanga Rep. Gloria Arroyo next year, the biggest pork barrel to be received so far by any congressman.

The fund intended for the second district of Pampanga is several times bigger than the P200 million budget of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) earmarked for the whole province. It comprises the equivalent in pesos of foreign loans obtained from the Japan Bank of International Cooperation and the Korean Development and Cooperation Fund to finance projects for the district. Arroyo had negotiated for these loans when she was still president. She will be receiving the amount on top of the regular P70 million pork barrel allotted for every congressman.

Several quarters have criticized Benigno Aquino III for allowing Arroyo to receive the biggest pork barrel. Malacañang said the allocation should not be regarded as a regular pork barrel since it was sourced from other countries in the form of loans. Aquino's spokespersons brushed aside claims that Arroyo had cornered the loans in preparation for landing a congressional seat.

Aquino's defense of Arroyo runs contrary to his earlier lambasting of his predecessor for her manipulation of the government's coffers, including millions of pesos in calamity funds which she poured into her own district. The fund was released only during the May 2010 elections, seven months after the country was heavily devastated by storms Pepeng and Ondoy.

Aquino's current kid-gloves handling of Arroyo still forms part of a US-brokered agreement during the election to reconcile the two opposing reactionary camps.

Wikileaks bares Iraq war documents

AROUND 400,000 classified documents were posted by *Wikileaks* on its website last October disclosing details about the US' war of aggression in Iraq.

The documents bared the killings of up to 109,000 people due to US attacks. The number included 66,000 civilians, bigger by 15,000 than previously reported.

Wikileaks had previously released around 700,000 classified documents exposing details about the US war in Afghanistan.

Among the documents posted by *Wikileaks* were reports on torture, killings and war crimes. The documents also revealed cases of rape, abuse, torture and killings perpetrated by the puppet police and soldiers against Iraqi civilians. The US has not bothered to investigate these incidents.

Meanwhile, Manfred Nowak, United Nations special rapporteur on torture has called for an investigation into the involvement of US military forces in human rights abuses in Iraq. He said that the *Wikileaks* documents clearly point to violations of the UN Convention Against Torture and the Obama administration is obliged to investigate them.