

FIGHT FOR PEOPLES' RIGHTS

International Conference for Peoples' Rights in the Philippines

July 23-24, 2016

Davao City, Philippines

We, delegates of people's and social movements, faith-based organisations, the academe, and human rights organisations from different parts of the globe gathered for the International Conference for Peoples' Rights in the Philippines (ICPRP) held on July 23-24, 2016 in Davao City, Philippines to reassert our commitment to support and defend people's rights, justice and peace in the Philippines, and strengthen ties of solidarity and resistance between the Filipino people and peoples all over the world.

We commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on the Rights of the People adopted in Algiers and uphold its progressive principles and aspirations. We draw inspiration from the struggles of peoples and their movements to translate into reality and further enrich the message of Algiers.

We reaffirm the comprehensive and indivisible character of peoples' rights. They go beyond individual liberties and encompass rights held by the people in common, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

Peoples' rights are predicated on the all-round transformation of the material conditions and social relations to prevent one group from enjoying greater rights while dispossessing the vast majority. The oppressed and exploited classes, sectors, and marginalised communities have the right to a society that enables them to enjoy the fruits of their labour and collectively control and manage social wealth and resources, meaningfully participate in decision-making and governance, hold institutions accountable, and lead dignified lives.

Finally, peoples' rights cannot be realised as long as oppressed nations remain captive under imperialist or colonial subjugation. Peoples of colonial and semi-colonial nations have the right to independently chart their own future, assert their sovereignty and liberate themselves against foreign economic and political intervention and military occupation.

Today, peoples' rights are gravely threatened. The multiple crises besetting the world capitalist system did not lead to its demise but has opened opportunities for it to take on new and more violent forms.

Workers across the global labour divide face increasing competition and wage repression. A number of free trade agreements are geared to squeeze super profits from underdeveloped countries' cheap and docile labour force, while slashing the gains and advances made by the workers through wage cuts, outsourcing, and austerity measures. Mass poverty force people to leave their homeland and families to find employment abroad. Poor farmers and indigenous peoples are dispossessed and displaced as farmlands and ancestral territories are cleared for subdivisions, mining sites, industrial zones, and farmlands for cash crops.

Women are at a particularly disadvantaged situation with the worsening peoples and human rights violations in the country. In a context where workers receive mere pittance for their labour, the wage gap between men and women has become even more pronounced. Due to their domestic responsibilities, women take on ever lengthening work hours resulting in their poorer health situation. The rise of militarism and renewed US basing in the country intensifies various forms of violence against women and LGBTQ individuals.

To preserve its global dominance in the face of the re-emergence of powers such as Russia and China, the US has proceeded to engage in military intervention, war provocation, destabilization and wars of aggression in nearly all regions of the world. Thus the US stands as the most bellicose power, the number 1 purveyor of militarism and war, and the biggest threat to peoples' rights in the world today.

In this context, the Aquino regime played a crucial role in promoting US imperialist ambition in Asia-Pacific and the world. Aquino shamelessly parroted US' neoliberal and militarist agenda even as that entailed the surrender of the country's independence and sovereignty and the trampling of the Filipino peoples' rights.

II. The State of Filipino Peoples' Rights under Aquino's Neo-colonial and Fascist Rule

Aquino's 6-year rule reinforced the pro-foreign and backward nature of the country's economy, widened the gap between the ruling elite and the poor majority, perpetuated patronage politics, intensified violations of civil and political rights, and tightened US imperialist stranglehold over Philippine sovereignty.

Wages of millions of workers across industries remain low, while the net incomes of the top richest families and their corporations increased manifold times. Contractual work and other flexible labour arrangements have become rampant. The government's bogus agrarian reform program of the government has re-concentrated land ownership to the landlords through various manoeuvrings such as land reclassification and stock distribution options.

The largely discredited neoliberal policy of privatisation has been repackaged through Aquino's centrepiece program of public-private partnerships. PPPs have enabled corporations to pass on to the government and taxpayers financial burdens and risks in the form of penalty payments and sovereign guarantees.

Climate change caused by imperialist plunder of natural resources and pollution is affecting the Philippines through droughts, increased typhoons, rising tides and other impacts. The US is most responsible for climate change, yet refuses to stop polluting, causing further harm to the people. The Philippine government's corruption, negligence and incompetence put even more lives at risk.

Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) exposed Aquino's incompetency and insensitivity to the plight of the poor. Almost three years after the tragedy, tons of relief goods have gone undelivered and cash donations unaccounted for even as thousands of victims cried for aid. Rehabilitation of communities has not only remained incomplete; it has been transformed into a profit-making scheme for big business.

In compliance with Pres. Obama's "Pivot to Asia" strategy, he signed the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in 2014 to allow US military basing in the Philippines for unlimited periods of time.

Extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances were unabated under Aquino's *Oplan Bayanihan*. Harassment, intimidation and illegal detention of activists were blatant. Almost half of the current number of political prisoners were arrested and detained under Aquino's term.

The Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines have been subjected to militarisation of their communities and schools, harassment, and killings by military elements and security forces of foreign extractive companies. Thousands of Lumad and other Indigenous Peoples have become internal refugees.

The Aquino Regime sabotaged the peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP). It refused to recognise and honour previous agreements signed between the NDFP and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) with the illegal arrest and detention of NDFP peace consultants based on trumped-up charges and subversion cases filed by the military.

Meanwhile, the peace pact between the GPH and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) similarly faced an impasse, with the failure of the Congress to pass the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). BBL is expected to create the political entity for the Moro peoples' autonomous rule.

III. Defend and Uphold Peoples' Rights in the Philippines!

We are one with the Filipino people in their continuing struggle to defend and uphold their rights.

1. We affirm the Filipino peoples' inviolable right to exist, with their own sovereignty, territory, economy, social cohesion and culture. We also recognize their right to independence and their right to wage revolutionary struggles against colonial or neo-colonial subjugation by US and other imperialist powers.
2. We affirm the Filipino peoples' right to political self-determination. We join the Filipino peoples' struggle to abrogate all unequal treaties and international agreements with other nations particularly the RP-US Mutual Defense Pact, Mutual Logistic and Services Agreement, Visiting Forces Agreement, Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement and the Agricultural Commodities Agreement.
3. We affirm the economic rights of the Filipino people to be free from exploitation by foreign monopoly capitalism and by such local exploiting classes as the big compradors and landlords. We support the peoples' determination to develop their economy through national industrialization and land reform, and to ensure that everyone enjoys the right to secure means of livelihood, adequate income and ever expanding and improving social services.
4. We affirm the Filipino peoples' right to a national, scientific and pro-people system of culture and education. We support the immediate demand of all to enjoy ever expanding and ever improving free public education at all levels.

5. We affirm the Filipino peoples' right to their environment and the natural resources within their sovereign territory and their maritime rights as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and to use said resources for economic and social development. We support the peoples' struggles to conserve their natural resources and prevent plunder by the imperialists and the local exploiters.

6. We recognize that Indigenous Peoples, national minorities, and the Bangsamoro have the right to self-determination and to struggle against any national discrimination, oppression and exploitation by the state or any instrumentality of vested political and economic interests of the ruling elites and foreign private corporations.

We call on the new administration of President Rodrigo Duterte to step up to the challenge of effecting reforms for justice, peace and development. We welcome his openness to hold meaningful conversation with peoples' movements and organisations towards achieving real change. In particular we call on the new Duterte administration to immediately:

1. Resume the GPH peace negotiations on the basis of upholding and respecting previously signed agreements with the NDFP and complete the peace process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Moro National Liberation Front.
2. Release all political prisoners, drop trumped-up charges and end such policy against activists and community leaders to harass, intimidate and detain them.
3. Stop the militarisation of rural communities, including forced displacement of residents. Immediately pullout troops from militarised communities and dismantle all paramilitary groups. Allow the immediate and safe return of forced evacuees to their homes.
4. End extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearance, rape, torture, and other violations of human rights, including that of alleged drug and other criminal offenders, by police, military and other state or state-sponsored forces. Investigate, prosecute and arrest perpetrators of HRVs.
5. Ensure and protect peoples' economic and social rights by implementing genuine land reform to liberate the landless tillers, promote food sovereignty and rural development, and spur national industrialisation. Respect workers' right to unionise. Stop contractualisation and all other forms of labour flexibilisation. Expand and improve social services and social protection measures. Repudiate privatisation and commercialisation of public services and institutions. Stop the demolition of urban poor communities and forced relocation to remote areas.
6. Suspend large-scale mining operations including a moratorium on the issuance of mine permits. Rescind the Mining Act of 1995. Review all development projects including mega dams and reforestation programs that affect indigenous and other communities. Impose a moratorium on the construction and expansion of coal-fired power plants, especially those in Indigenous Peoples' communities and cancel previously approved coal power projects in the pipeline.
7. Defend Philippine sovereignty, national patrimony, and independence by rescinding the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement and prohibiting the US Military from accessing and using the Antonio Bautista air base in Palawan, Basa air base in Pampanga, Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, Lumbia airport in Cagayan de Oro, Mactan-Benito Ebuen air base in Mactan, and other facilities in the country.

8. Prosecute Benigno S. Aquino III and cohorts as well as Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for criminal liabilities and gross human rights violations.

We will continue to organise and mobilise to promote solidarity for the Filipino and the world's peoples to advance their democratic rights and welfare. We shall continue to support the struggles of communities and organizations in the Philippines by:

- conducting more research on current problems and threats to peoples' rights;
- contributing to relief efforts, health and education, psychosocial services, production inputs, paralegal support and human rights education;
- raising public awareness about the Filipino peoples struggles in our own countries;
- encouraging others to join solidarity missions and community exposure in the Philippines; and
- connecting local struggles in the Philippines to international campaigns and struggles of other oppressed and exploited peoples in other countries.

We shall continue to fight for people's rights here in the Philippines and beyond. As oppression and exploitation grow across borders, so too shall our resistance. Dare to struggle, dare to win!