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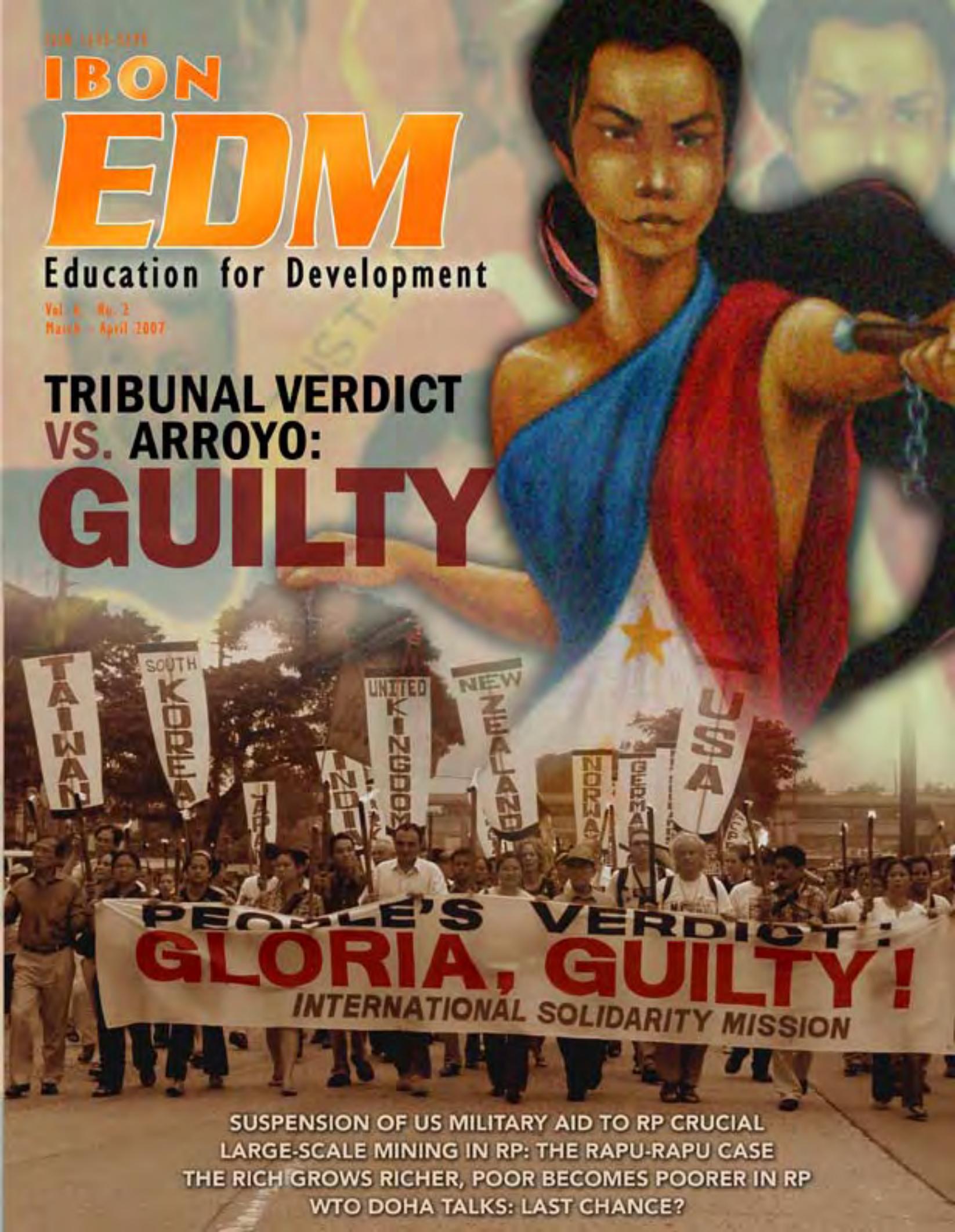
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TRIBUNAL VERDICT VS. ARROYO: **GUilty**



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International Dept., IBON Foundation
IBON Center
114 Timog Avenue
Quezon City 1103 Philippines
E-mail Address: ibon.international@ibon.org
Tel. Nos. +632 927 7060 to 62
Local 202
Fax +632 425 1387

Antonio Tujan, Jr.
Director, International Department

Maria Theresa Nera-Lauron
Head, International Department

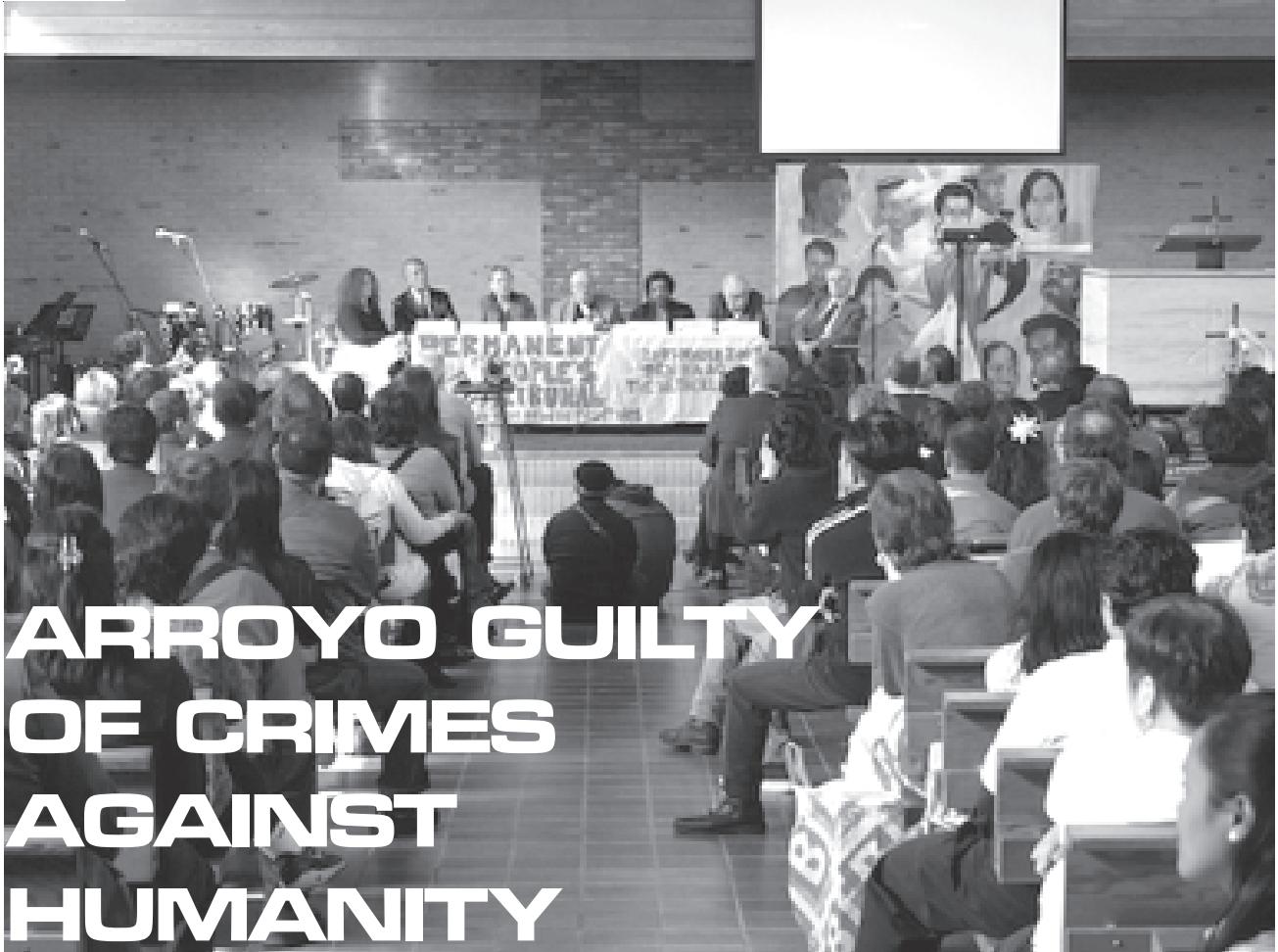
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Flor Bambao

Cover Artist
Jenny Padilla

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Brian Long
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ARROYO GUILTY OF CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

Tribunal Verdict to be transmitted to the UN, ICJ and European Parliament

International Coordinating Secretariat - Permanent Peoples' Tribunal

THE HAGUE, Netherlands— In a 13-page verdict read before about 300 people inside a church in this city March 25, the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) found both Philippine President Gloria M. Arroyo and US President George W. Bush, Jr. and their respective governments as responsible for gross and systematic violations of human rights, economic plunder and transgression of the Filipino people's sovereignty.



The verdict, read at the conclusion of the five-day second session on the Philippines by François Houtart, Session President, described the extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, massacres, torture and other atrocities allegedly committed by the Arroyo government as "crimes against humanity". Such violations which the PPT said were in no way justified as "necessary measures against terrorism", must be stopped immediately.

In a cultural program held right after the verdict was read, Senator Jamby Madrigal said the Tribunal's judgment will dispel the claims of the Arroyo government that there is democracy in the Philippines. The senator, who spoke as a resource person during the tribunal proceedings, said that the country is now ruled by a military junta with Mrs. Arroyo acting only as a figurehead.

The concluding part of the Tribunal took place at the Pax Christikerk in The Hague. The Hague is the

Netherlands' seat of government and the world's center of international law. It hosts the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the new International Criminal Court (ICC) of the Rome Statute of 1998, and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTFY) that tried Milosevic, the deposed president of Yugoslavia, for war crimes.

The Tribunal, composed of six internationally-eminent persons, also named the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), as having "a central role" in the atrocities, adding that the military is "a structural component and instrument of the policy of the 'war on terror' in the Philippines" declared by both Arroyo and Bush, Jr.

The verdict was rendered after three continuous session days that heard the testimonies of witnesses of political killings and abductions, expert testimonies and boxes of documents, and other evidences to support three major charges against the two governments. The charges were on: violations of the Filipino people's civil and political rights; economic, political, and

cultural rights; and violations of the people's rights to national self-determination and national liberation.

The number of victims of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines has reached 839 this week. Hundreds of others were victims of frustrated murders and abductions, widely believed to be perpetrated by government security forces. This report has been confirmed by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, involuntary or summary executions, and by the government-created Melo Commission.

In the Tribunal, several testimonies of eyewitnesses, experts and resource persons were heard live through tele-video conference with Manila, with questions tossed by members of the Tribunal's jury.

Those who gave depositions and testimonies either in person or through video hook-up included Marie Hilao-Enriquez, secretary general of human rights alliance Karapatan; Dr. Constancio "Chandu" Claver, victim of frustrated murder; Dr. June P. Lopez, an expert in handling torture and trauma victims; Navy Capt. (ret.) Danilo Vizmanos; UP Faculty Regent Prof. Roland Simbulan; Bishop Elmer Bolocon of the UCCP and Ecumenical Bishops Forum (EBF); Elmer Labog, chair of Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU); and Danilo Ramos of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP).

Senator Madrigal also appeared before the PPT as resource person on the environment.

'Unacceptable'

The Tribunal jurors also denounced as "unacceptable" the inclusion of the Arroyo government in the UN

Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The Philippine membership, the jurors said, undermines the credibility of the United Nations particularly in human rights, and is "an intolerable offense" to the victims.

Aside from Houtart, who is from Belgium and Director of the Centre Tricontinental (Cetri), the PPT jurors included Oda Makoto (Japan), well-known novelist and social activist; Ties Prakken (The Netherlands), professor in criminal law at the Maastricht University; Oystein Tveter (Norway), lawyer and former Director of the Karibu Foundation and former foreign ministry official in South Africa and Zambia; Irene Fernandez (Malaysia), lawyer, social development expert and head of Tenaganita; and Lilia Solano (Colombia), 2005 Right Livelihood Awardee (alternative Nobel) and Director of Project for Life and Peace.

Richard Falk (USA), professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University and Hans Köchler (Austria), president of the International Progress Organizations could not make it due to academic commitments.

Houtart and Makoto were also members of the jury during the first session on the Philippines in 1980

held in Antwerp, Belgium, which found the Marcos dictatorship guilty for gross and systematic violations of human rights, among others. That verdict became a

it is nevertheless "morally binding". The judgment will be transmitted to the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, the European Parliament and



PHOTO: JAN BEENTJES

major factor in the international isolation of the Marcos dictatorship that eventually led to its ouster six years later.

PPT General Secretary Gianni Tognoni served as moderator of the proceedings.

Houtart said that although the verdict may be legally non-binding,

various foreign governments. Tognoni said that the transmittal to these bodies will be a major step toward focusing world attention on the human rights crisis in the Philippines. World opinion, the PPT general secretary said, will add more pressure to the US-supported Arroyo government to stop the killings.

PHOTO: JAN BEENTJES



PHOTO: JAN BEENTJES



INT'L TRIBUNAL VERDICT: POLITICAL KILLINGS STEM FROM OPPOSITION TO ARROYO'S ECONOMIC POLICIES



Antonio Tujan Jr.

Political killings persist precisely because the government attempts to stop people's opposition to policies and systems that violate their economic rights.

The recent verdict of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) found Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo guilty of violating Filipinos' political and civil rights, as well as their economic rights and right to self-determination. It is important to emphasize the relationship of these violations because it will explain why political killings persist in the country.

Under the Arroyo government, domestic production and agriculture remained in depression while joblessness and poverty worsened as it aggressively implements neoliberal reforms.

What the verdict of the 7-member jury indicates is this: the current rash of political killings stems from the regime's attempts to silence opposition to her policies and the resulting economic crisis.

For instance, according to the PPT proceedings, in its struggle against extreme poverty, Filipino farmers have organized themselves to claim their rights through the democratic process. But their resistance is met with state repression by increasing military presence in the countryside. Statistics show that almost 60% of the victims of extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances are farmer leaders, and that

these killings are not isolated but planned and systematic.

Not surprisingly, the main target of extrajudicial killings (and disappearances, massacres, tortures, etc.) is the legal left. For years, it has steadily represented the people's voice in the national and international arenas in calling for an end to policies and systems that violate economic, social, and cultural rights of Filipinos. Rights groups have recorded more than 800 victims of political killings under the Arroyo administration since 2001.



PHOTO: PINOY WEEKLY

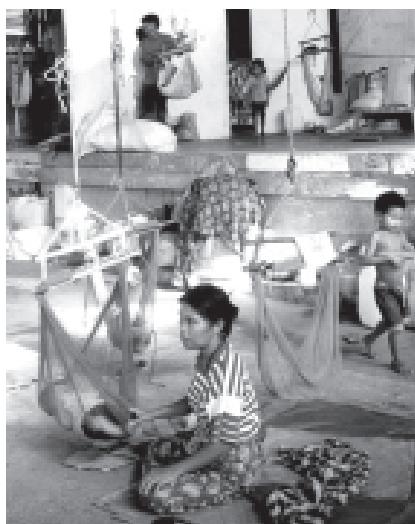
PHOTO: ILANG-ILANG QUJANO

PHOTO: KARAPATAN



The legal left has been the target in the regime's campaign to suppress opposition, using the communist bogey and the US-led war on terror as context. Targeting progressive party-lists, people's organizations, and civil society groups also sends a signal to anti-Arroyo forces without providing the push that would strengthen and incite the opposition further.

But as history has shown, amid intense poverty, hunger, unemployment, and landlessness, the efforts of the administration to suppress people's movements do not decisively weaken opposition ranks but only fuel further social unrest. **IBON Features**



Tribunal verdict can be used as guide in choosing candidates for upcoming polls

As the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) announced its verdict, independent think-tank IBON, one of the initiators to the complaint filed before the international opinion tribunal, said that voters could use the verdict as a guide in supporting candidates who genuinely uphold Filipinos' economic, social and cultural rights.

In its verdict finding that the Arroyo administration had violated Filipinos' rights, the PPT once again denounced the unequal character of the Philippine economic system, which it said resulted in shockingly inequitable income gaps in which the richest 10% of the country's families had average incomes six times as much as those of the poorest ten percent.

The PPT noted that because of neoliberal policies, which were aggressively implemented in the last decade, wealth has been further concentrated in the hands of a relative few: the country's top 1,000 corporations have increased their annual net income by 325% between 2001 and 2005. Meanwhile, in the countryside, seven out of 10 farmers are landless, while the prices of their products are lowered due to competition from cheap imported produce.

Prioritizing debt payments at the expense of public spending on

services has also resulted in worsening of child and maternal mortality. In the urban areas, 54% of women delivered in a health facility while in rural communities, only 22% did so. 59% of women delivered their babies unassisted by medical personnel such as a doctor, nurse or even a midwife.

IBON research head Sonny Africa said that voters can choose senatorial and congressional candidates who would pass legislation to reverse such damaging neoliberal policies. Such legislation could include: rejecting free trade agreements such as those proposed with the US and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA); reversing the liberalization of the mining sector through the annulment of the Mining Act of 1995; a moratorium on debt payments and new borrowings, with the savings directed towards increased spending on services such as health and education; and increasing tariffs on agricultural and industrial products.

These are some of the most urgent policies that have to be implemented if Filipinos' welfare, jobs and livelihoods are to improve in the coming years, Africa said.

DESPITE 'IMPROVED' EMPLOYMENT FIGURES JOBLESSNESS STILL WORST UNDER ARROYO

The National Statistics Office's report of an improved employment situation, in which nine out of 10 in the labor force had jobs, cannot conceal the worst jobs crisis in the country's history, according to independent think-tank IBON Foundation.

According to the January Labor Force Survey, the employment rate rose to 92.2% from 91.9% in the same period last year, while unemployment fell to 7.8% from 8.1 percent. But IBON research head Sonny Africa said that underemployment still remains high at 21.5% or some 7.2 million

Filipinos still looking for additional work. Coupled with 2.8 million unemployed Filipinos, this means that 10 million workers, or close to a third of the labor force, were either jobless or if employed, still looking for more work.

Moreover, the actual joblessness situation was further obscured by a convenient change in the definition of unemployment (which was implemented April 2005) that reduces the actual number of unemployed by around 1 to 1.5 million and the unemployment rate by between two to three percentage points.

Africa said that the failure of the Arroyo administration to create regular and productive jobs was further highlighted by how the employment of people working as domestic household help increased to 5.6% in January 2007 from 4.9% in the same period last year while employment in the manufacturing sector fell to 9.1% from 9.3 percent.

These figures highlight the continuing gap between the Arroyo administration's economic hype and the harsh realities of life on the ground that millions of Filipinos continue to endure, Africa said.

Income Gap Widens: RP's Wealthiest Grew Richer Under Arroyo Term

The gap between the unimaginable wealth of the country's richest families and the poorest households highlights the yawning income inequalities that further widened under the Arroyo administration, according to independent think-tank IBON Foundation.

The richest 20% of the population account for 53% of the income pie while the bottom 20% get only 4.63.

The poorest 30% of the country's families, some 4.9 million, had a combined income of P177 billion, according to the 2003 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES). This was half of the total net worth of the Philippines' richest: Jaime Zobel and his family, Lucio Tan and Henry Sy.

According to Forbes magazine, as of Feb. 2007 the three had a total net worth of \$7.5 billion or P360 billion (at P48:\$1).

From 1985, the share of the poorest 60% of the population fell by 1.8 percentage points while the richest 20% were able to increase their share by another 1.2 percentage points.

"This is a vivid example of the skewed income distribution prevailing in the country, which has worsened since 1985," said IBON executive editor Rosario Bella Guzman. She added that the income of the richest 10% of the country's households is 21 times that of the poorest 10 percent.

Guzman said the reason for such inequality was the not the failure of

so-called economic growth to 'trickle down' to the poor, but the monopoly of ownership of the country's productive assets, such as land and capital, in the hands of a relative few families. This denies the poor the ability to improve their lot even as the rich continue to get richer.

This is illustrated by looking at the country's poorest sectors—marginal peasants, small fisherfolk, the urban poor—who all suffer from extreme marginalization and exclusion from economic resources and the common goods.

Unless there is more equitable access to economic assets, the poverty situation in the country will not improve, and indeed, can only get worse, Guzman said.

Political killings and Satur's arrest: ARROYO BECOMING MORE ISOLATED INTERNATIONALLY; SUSPENSION OF U.S. MILITARY AID CRUCIAL

The more crucial question is if the militarist Bush administration heeds the growing demand to stop its military aid to one of its most loyal and trusted allies in the 'war against terrorism'.

Arnold Padilla

BON Features—The isolation of the Arroyo regime in the international community over the unresolved and unabated extrajudicial killings of political activists and journalists is worsening with the recent investigation on the issue of the US Senate. Meanwhile, the arrest of Bayan Muna party-list Representative Satur Ocampo further attracted global attention to the worsening human rights situation in the country. These developments emerged less than a month after United Nations (UN) special rapporteur Philip Alston released his initial report claiming military involvement in the political killings.

The Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT) verdict of Arroyo, including on charges of grave human rights atrocities, can only but bolster the growing isolation of Arroyo who is increasingly perceived in the international community as another Marcos who can no longer govern democratically and has to resort to state repression and fascism to stay in power.

Compounding the woes of the Arroyo regime is the growing demand internationally to stop the flow of American military assistance to the country until the political killings have been credibly resolved and the perpetrators are brought to justice.

The statements of Senator Barbara Boxer, chairperson of the US Senate subcommittee on foreign relations on East Asian and Pacific Affairs that conducted the investigation, and Amnesty International (AI) are the recent additions to the growing list of national and international personalities and institutions questioning US military aid to the Philippines should increase the pressure on President Gloria Arroyo to stop the political killings.

PHOTO: BAYAN USA



Marie Hilao-Enriquez, Secretary General of KARAPATAN, and Bishop Elizer M. Pascua, General Secretary of United Church of Christ in the Philippines, testify before the U.S. Senate sub-committee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs last March 14. Senator Barbara Boxer, at right, listens.



PHOTO: BAYAN USA

But while these statements heightened the pressure on Arroyo, the more crucial question is: will the militarist Bush administration heed the growing demand to stop its military aid to one of its most loyal and trusted allies in the 'war against terrorism'?

That Bush remains confident in her regime in spite of its appalling human rights record is Arroyo's biggest asset. Thus for Arroyo, there is a need more than ever to protect this advantage by continuously assuring Washington that it remains faithful to US geopolitical and economic agenda.

A military-dependent regime

As early as 2001 when she became president through EDSA II, Arroyo already realized that the survival of her regime would rest a lot on a strong and loyal military establishment. Thus Arroyo sold the Strong Republic vision where a modernized AFP plays a central role. After the controversial 2004 elections and the legitimacy crisis that ensued, Arroyo's dependence on the AFP deepened. It is in this context that Arroyo needs to ensure resources for the military establishment.

Arroyo quickly capitalized on 9/11 and the subsequent war on terrorism to draw in precious foreign aid particularly from the US. As a direct result of Arroyo's unconditional support to the US-led war on terrorism, the Philippines has received the most dramatic

increases in American military aid in the East Asia-Pacific region. For instance, Foreign Military Financing (FMF) from the US was only \$2.3 million in 2001 but the amount ballooned to \$44 million in 2002 and to \$49.9 million in 2003.

FMF is the US government's program for financing through grants or loans the acquisition of US military articles, services, and training; supports US regional stability goals; and enables friends and allies to improve their defense

capabilities.^[1] In the Philippines, FMF sustains logistical and support functions, helps enhance counter-terrorism activities, and continues a multi-year effort to reform and modernize the AFP.



Table 1. US military aid and security-related aid to the Arroyo regime, by program, 2001-2005 (in \$ million)

Military aid programs	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Foreign Military Financing	2.3	44.0	49.9	19.9	29.8
International Military Education & Training	1.4	2.0	2.4	2.7	2.9
Military Assistance Program grants	0.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	10.0
Transfer of excess stock	6.7	3.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Peacekeeping Operations	0.0	0.0	0.0	30.0	0.0
Plus security- related aid programs					
Economic Support Fund	4.2	25.6	31.8	43.2	31.3
Non-proliferation, Anti-terrorism, De-mining & Related Programs	0.0	0.1	2.1	0.8	2.3
Department of Defense Security Assistance	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	1.3
Total	14.6	85.1	86.2	97.1	77.6

Source of basic data: US loans and grants (Greenbook)



Aside from FMF, the other major program

under US's military assistance in the Philippines is the International Military Education and Training (IMET). The IMET is a low-cost, key funding component of US military assistance that provides training on a grant basis to students from allied and friendly countries. It exposes students to the US professional military establishment and the "American way of life".[2]

In addition to these military aid programs that the country annually receives from the US, the Arroyo regime is also a beneficiary of other military assistance from the Bush administration. It includes the Military Assistance Program (MAP) grants, Peacekeeping

Arroyo knows that the flow of US military assistance depends heavily on how the regime will kowtow to American geopolitical interests.

Table 2. US military aid to the Philippines, annual average by program & administration (in \$ million)

Administration	Total	FMF	IMET	MAP	TES	Others*
Aquino (1987-1992)	126.-07	58.48	3.87	63.70	0.00	0.02
Ramos (1993-1998)	4.05	2.50	1.40	0.00	0.15	0.00
Estrada (1999-2000)	10.15	1.20	1.35	2.50	5.10	0.00
Arroyo (2001-2005)	36.23	24.32	1.90	3.33	1.68	5.00

* Others include MASF grants, Peacekeeping operations, FMF direct loan program account, & other military grants.

Operations, and the transfer of excess (military hardware) stock.

The US also provides funds to the Arroyo regime that are not counted as military aid but are military and security-related such as Non-Proliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR); Economic Support Fund (ESF); and US Department of Defense (DOD) Security Assistance. The NADR provides resources in support of a variety of security-related foreign policy objectives.[3] In the Philippines, the NADR program includes the Anti-Terrorism Assistance, Counter-Terrorism Finance, Terrorist Indication Program, and Export Control and Border Security.

Meanwhile, the ESF is meant to promote economic and political stability in strategically important regions where the US has special security interests. It primarily funds development programs and projects in Mindanao such as those that are related to the government's 1996 Peace Agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).[4]

Overall, from only \$14.6 million in military assistance and security-related aid from the US in 2001,

the figure jumped to an annual average of \$86.5 million from 2002 to 2005. (See Table 1)

In fact, among all post-Marcos administrations, the Arroyo regime is next only to the Aquino administration (1986-1992) in terms of dependence on US military aid, particularly the FMF. Under Arroyo (2001-2005), the country is receiving \$24.32 million in FMF every year. In comparison, the Ramos administration (1993-1998) was receiving only \$2.5 million in FMF while the short-lived Estrada administration (1999-2000) was getting only \$1.2 million. (See Table 2)

Stronger than ever

Many analysts have pointed out that the Philippines-US military relationship is stronger than at any time since the Senate revoked the country's Military Bases Agreement (MBA) with the US in 1991. One of the most telling indicators of this is the drastic increase in military aid from the US at the turn of the century after years of substantial decline last decade.

Arroyo knows that the flow of US military assistance depends heavily on how the regime will

kowtow to American geopolitical interests. Arroyo's military-dependent regime does not want a repeat of the 1990s when US military aid to the Philippines substantially fell as a direct consequence of the pullout of American military bases.

From a high of \$205.4 million in 1991, US military aid dropped to \$37.7 million in 1992 and further went down to \$17.5 million in 1993. From 1994 to 1998, US military aid to the Philippines averaged only \$1.36 million per year with FMF allocation for the country stopped during the said period, an all-time low in the history of Philippines-US military relations. It was only in 1999, the year the controversial Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) was passed, that the trend was reversed with US military assistance climbing to \$15.5 million. The trend was sustained following Arroyo's declaration of all-out support to the US' global war against terrorism in 2001.

With her hold to power further weakened by the Hello Garci scandal, Arroyo has become more

dependent on US patronage to strengthen the military and protect her failing regime.

Thus when the US threatened to suspend the Balikatan exercises and implied of less military aid if Lance Corporal Daniel Smith of the US Marines were not handed over to the US, Arroyo pulled all strings to transfer the convicted rapist from the Makati City jail to the American embassy undermining the judiciary and the country's sovereignty in the process. In a similar fashion, Arroyo mustered all efforts to railroad the anti-terrorism law to fulfill a long-standing US agenda and at the same time provide the legal framework for more repression of those who are critical of her rule.

Increase pressure on Bush

It is clear that the international campaign to stop the political killings in the Philippines needs to increase the pressure on the Bush administration to suspend its military aid to the country. Fortunately, this campaign has been boosted with the Democrats

regaining control of the US Congress. The ongoing Senate investigation, initiated by the Democrats, of Bush's war on terrorism campaign including the massive flows of military aid to its allies in this campaign like the Philippines should be maximized to expose and stop the state terrorism that the illegitimate Arroyo regime wreaks upon the Filipino people.

But the key in sustaining this international campaign still lies in an ever growing and strengthening local mass movement that opposes the atrocities of the Arroyo regime and the AFP. This means stepping up the local campaign to stop the political killings and make Arroyo and her generals accountable, to free Ocampo and Anakpawis party-list Representative Crispin Beltran, and to force the withdrawal of AFP troops deployed in urban poor communities in Metro Manila.

IBON Features

Arnold Padilla is IBON Foundation's senior researcher and advocacy specialist on aid .

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PHOTO: IBON FOUNDATION



WOMEN RISE UP GLOBALLY AGAINST TOXIC INDUSTRIES

The report shows how solar power is literally making the difference between life and death in rural Mali.

Erin Mustain

Across the globe, according to the United Nations, 1.2 billion people lack access to clean water. An estimated 10 million die each year from diseases due to polluted water. The majority of victims are impoverished women and children.

This crisis is only growing as industrial pollutants, sewage, pesticides and fertilizers are dumped, both intentionally and unintentionally, into our oceans, streams, and lakes. With water already scarce for many of the world's people, a problem worsened by privatization, clean water has become an even more precious resource - and the need to prevent its destruction even more urgent.

What gets in the water?

Corporations are the major culprit in water pollution, with industrial farming producing 70 percent of river and stream contamination in the United States.

Agribusiness also adds excessive amounts of fertilizer, which nurtures algal blooms that take up oxygen ordinarily available for other plant and animal life. This process, known as eutrophication, is particularly alarming in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay, a vast economic and environmental treasure.

Also threatened are the US Great Lakes, which contain 21% of the Earth's fresh surface water. The lakes provide water for drinking, fishing, recreation,



PHOTO: A. SRIVASTAVA/INDIA RESOURCE CENTER

and the transportation of products from farms, mines, and factories. However, they have become heavily polluted by the industries that ring their shores.

War is another major cause of tainted water. Three conflicts - the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88, the 1991 Gulf War, and the ongoing U.S. invasion of Iraq - have filled northern gulf waters with sunken ships that still hold petroleum products, unexploded weaponry, and possibly rocket fuel, propellants, and toxic chemicals. Many of the ships are leaking.

Further, the vessels' fuel tanks are loaded with crude, bunker, and diesel-grade oil. These oils contain benzene, propane, acetylene, naphtha, and kerosene, all of which can injure health. Benzene, a carcinogen, causes dizziness, tremors, anemia, and leukemia.

In less developed countries, lack of sanitation, First World dumping, and unregulated industry lead to immense suffering and death. At the Ivory Coast city of Abidjan in August 2006, the scandalous dumping of 400-600 tons of petrochemical waste, probably European, sickened 50,000 people. The toxins have now spread to the city's lagoon and possibly into the drinking water and farm lands; the toll on long-term health is expected to be severe.

Unequal effects

Women suffer a wider variety of health problems linked to the fouling of the environment, and more serious ones, than do men. An unpublished study by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences indicates that the odds for cancer, endometriosis, fibroids, osteoporosis, and cardiovascular disease from exposure to heavy metals and other toxins rise due to women's greater percentage of body fat and use of oral contraceptives and estrogen replacement therapy.

Some water contaminants, such as heavy metals, are ingested by aquatic organisms that are then consumed by larger marine life. When these animals are eaten in turn by humans, even fetuses and newborns can be affected - fetuses through the placenta and newborns through breastfeeding. Mercury in fish can harm a fetus's neurological development.

In a village in China's Gansu province, discharges from a fertilizer factory have been connected to a high number of stillbirths and miscarriages. Water pollution in three Russian rivers is a factor in the doubling of bladder and kidney disorders in pregnant women.

Clearly, the right wing isn't the only enemy to reproductive rights: exposure to environmental contaminants may be subtly undermining the ability to bear children. According to a December 2005 report of the Center for Disease Control's National Survey on Family Growth, women under 25 are the fastest-growing segment of U.S. women with impaired reproductive ability.

And, in many parts of the world, women are responsible for the arduous work of fetching and carrying water from wells or streams. Pollution of these sources means longer hikes to obtain safe water, when it can be found at all, and increased daily exposure to unclean water while doing household chores.

Sister resisters vs. the mining industry

The mining industry is a major water polluter, contributing metals that commonly include cyanide. From Argentina to South Africa, however, women are fighting back.

The Choropampa Defense Front, a Peruvian organization led by Juana Martínez, rallied and demanded the cleanup of a disastrous mercury spill and filed a lawsuit against Newmont, the US-based corporation responsible.

Carrie Dann and her late sister Mary Dann of the Western Shoshone Nation have not only battled to save traditional territory from a federal land grab, but they have also taken on the mining giants. The US government handed over huge tracts of Shoshone land to mining companies including Newmont, Placer Dome, Barrick, and Kennecott.

Under the national mining law, these corporations don't pay a dime to the Shoshones or the US public for royalties or for mitigating the consequences of their destructive practices.

In Plachimada, India, indigenous women organized a sit-in outside the factory gates of Coca-Cola after the company heavily depleted the groundwater and then began contaminating the aquifers by pumping polluted water into boreholes designed for solid waste.

The sit-in attracted international solidarity and forced the local plant to close. And the struggle has spread to other areas of India where Coke and Pepsi are depleting and polluting the aquifers.

Defend Mother Earth!

The 1998 UN International Conference on Water and Sustainable Development predicted that by 2050, two-thirds of the world's people will not have clean water. This must not be allowed to come to pass! Fortunately, water users and workers around the globe are rising up. With women in front, they are fighting back, meeting the poisoners head on, and making connections between poverty, environmental injustice, neoliberalism, and the privatization of public resources.

Like Rachel Carson, whose *Silent Spring* illuminated pesticide dangers and inspired a generation of environmental activists and eco-feminists, the women defending the lifeblood of the planet will not be silenced. **Third World Network Features**

Erin Mustain is an environmental engineer, a water quality specialist, and a feminist activist who lives in California's Central Valley.

PHOTO: AMIT SRIVASTAVA



THE EU APPROACH TO FTA TALKS WITH ASEAN, INDIA, KOREA

Marc Maes

PHOTO: EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, 2007



EC Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson

On 6 December 2006, the EU Commission announced that it had finalized three draft mandates for negotiating bilateral free trade agreements with ASEAN, Korea and India, together with two mandates for negotiations with Central America and the Andean Community.

This announcement followed an earlier formal Communication called "Global Europe, Competing in the World" that was released on 4 October. In this paper, the Commission proposed a more aggressive EU trade strategy, including a new series of bilateral negotiations.

The drafts finalized by the Commission would still have to be discussed and approved by the EU Council (of Ministers of the 27 EU member states). These discussions may take weeks, especially for EU-ASEAN since the Commission is at the same time still discussing the structure of the EU-ASEAN FTA with the ASEAN countries. Nevertheless, Germany, which holds the EU Presidency, hopes that mandates can be adopted by the EU Council at its meeting of 5-6 March.

In the drafts, the Commission aims for the highest possible degree of trade liberalization, including far-reaching liberalization of services and investment; for a strong focus on the overall regulatory environment, with special emphasis on non-trade barriers; and for a number of new mechanisms for prior consultation and flexible mediation.

The drafts also have a heading on trade and sustainable development, proposing social and environmental clauses, the liberalization of environmental goods and services, along with the standard non-compelling sustainable impact assessments.

Putting trade in a broader context

Another striking feature is the strong links that the Commission wants to establish between the FTAs and existing or proposed cooperation and association agreements between the EU and the targeted countries.

In past cases like EU-Mexico, EU-Chile and EU-ACP, and also in the case of EU-Central America and EU-Andean Community, the EU first negotiates an overall Association Agreement containing provisions on political, economic and development cooperation along with the confirmation of a series of essential



Peter Mandelson meets a delegation of ASEAN ministers

principles (democracy, human rights, rule of law, non-proliferation, anti-terrorism, etc).

The FTA negotiations then come as part of the implementation of the overall agreement and are linked to the essential principles. This means that the non-execution of certain elements can have consequences for the implementation of other elements, i. e. the non-respect for human rights can lead to the suspension of political relations or development cooperation; or the non-implementation of trade commitments can be sanctioned with the suspension of aid, etc.

For the ASEAN, Korea and India, partial agreements on political and economic cooperation already exist or are being negotiated. The Commission therefore proposes not to negotiate new overall Association Agreements with these three partners but to go straight for FTA negotiations, while at the same time completing the set of political and cooperation agreements.

For EU-ASEAN, the EU has negotiations for "Partnership and Cooperation" agreements under

bring, but their exclusion seems to be inspired more by the need to find an elegant way around having to deal with the "human rights outlaw" Myanmar.

It is this configuration issue that the Commission is still discussing with ASEAN; the results of which will be handed over to the EU Council before the conclusion of its discussions on the draft negotiating mandate. The Commission still leaves open three options: an all-ASEAN-EU FTA; an EU-ASEAN minus 3 FTA; or seven bilateral FTAs.



Mandelson meets India's Nath Kamal

way with Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei and is about to start negotiations with Vietnam. It is with these seven countries that the Commission proposes to start FTA negotiations.

This means "EU-ASEAN minus three" negotiations instead of EU-ASEAN negotiations. The three countries left out are Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia which are the three LDCs of the region. In itself it is a good thing that the three LDCs will be spared the radical liberalizations that the FTA will

The content of the FTAs

The Commission does not only want to negotiate market access for trade in goods and services, based on GATT Art. 24 or GATS Art. 5. It is aiming for comprehensive agreements with all possible "trade-related" issues included. The description of the Commission's proposals below only highlights the most striking features.

The Commission is proposing to conclude the negotiations within two years. The transition period

GLOBALIZATION ISSUES

would be the standard 10 years, with extensions for the liberalization of sensitive products and services.

The Commission is prepared to allow for Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) in its FTAs with its Asian partners, but the approach is rather incoherent. For instance, the Commission proposes to take account of the different levels of development within the ASEAN region. This SDT would mainly come in the form of longer time periods.

In case of India however, no reference is made to the huge development gap between the EU and India or to the possibility of SDT in the EU-India FTA.

Also with regard to the "maximum frontloading" that the Commission is seeking for the tariff elimination, SDT is proposed for the ASEAN countries only, not for India. On the other hand, the Commission wants the maximum possible parity with other FTAs for ASEAN and Korea but not for India (parity with what these countries have offered in their FTAs with other parties than the EU).

India would also get some SDT with regard to the rules of origin, which is not mentioned with regard to Korea and ASEAN.

The draft mandates do not mention coverage (the percentage of goods or services to be covered in the

FTAs). They do not give an interpretation of what the notion "essentially all" as mentioned in GATT Art. 24 or GATS Art. 5 should mean. In this case, the standard EU interpretation of 90% of trade will no doubt apply.

More worrying is that the drafts also do not mention "asymmetry", which is a key word in the negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements between the EU and the ACP countries.

Asymmetry means that the EU will open its market more than the developing country partners to arrive at the 90% coverage as an average. For instance, if the EU would eliminate 95% of its tariffs, then the developing countries only need to eliminate tariffs on 85%.

The Commission therefore seems to strive for equal efforts for all

The Commission proposes negotiations to deal with both product specific and sector specific NTBs; flexible mechanisms to handle any NTB that would occur; and preventive measures (based on consultations) to avoid new NTBs.

The Commission makes special mention of export tariffs. It wants to see all export tariffs removed (so that the EU countries can acquire access to cheap raw materials and inputs) and proposes a negative list approach to deal with these.

Services and investment are two sides of the coin for the EU Commission. It therefore proposes to treat these two issues together and in the same fashion.

The Commission has in fact been working on a template chapter for what it calls "services,

PHOTO: OHANNES.COM

establishment and e-commerce". It is already using this template in its ongoing FTA negotiations and intends to apply it also to its new FTAs.

The template implies a GATS-type approach of liberalization per sector with

an emphasis on market access and national treatment. This approach has to do with the fact that the EU member states want to maintain the competence to negotiate their own bilateral investment protection agreements (BITs). The draft mandates therefore do not entail investment protection, expropriation and investor-to-state dispute



parties in its new FTAs, apart of course from longer time periods as mentioned above.

Non-tariff barriers are a priority for the Commission. It proposes that the future EU FTAs will forbid any ban, restriction or other non-tariff barrier to trade, which are not justified by the general exceptions of GATT Art. 21.

settlement; they do however include pre-establishment rights for EU investors. As for the coverage, the EU Commission proposes the prior exclusion of certain sectors, i.e. national maritime cabotage (handling of cargo in the ports); certain air services, audio-visual and cultural services. Health, education and water, however, are not listed for exclusion.

The draft mandate also does not mention labor services, or what is known as Mode 4 of the GATS (movement of natural persons). However, the template for a chapter on services, establishment and e-commerce does contain a paragraph saying that with regard to Mode 4, the EU will not go beyond its WTO commitments.

SDT in the field of services, investment and e-commerce is again only foreseen for the ASEAN countries, but no transition periods should be longer than 10 years. The

Commission also seeks parity in investment and services with the treatment granted in other FTAs.

Government procurement is another priority for the EU. The Commission wants a mandate to negotiate both transparency and the liberalization of government procurement, including for public utilities. SDT is again only mentioned with regard to ASEAN countries (but some of these countries have already indicated that they do not want to negotiate this issue at all).

The proposed approach for Intellectual Property Rights is in line with the EU's current practice in its FTAs. The EU will not so much introduce new commitments, but will instead demand that its partners adhere to a series of existing (far-reaching) IPR agreements. The EU does of course also want recognition of its geographical indications.

Finally, the drafts conclude with some institutional aspects, including the links with the cooperation agreements, "expedient problem solving and flexible mediation mechanism" and prior consultation with the private sector before introducing new regulations; procedures to avoid trade conflicts.

As earlier mentioned, in March the EU Council is scheduled to consider this Commission approach to the FTA negotiations with the selected Asian countries. However, an endorsement of this approach by the EU Council does not mean that the negotiations will start right away. The EU Commission prefers not to begin any bilateral negotiations while the current and maybe last "window of opportunity" for a re-launch of the WTO Doha Round is still open.
SUNS

Marc Maes is a trade analyst working with the Belgian non-government organization 11.11.11.



PHOTO: OHMNEWS.COM

RP IS ASIA'S TOP RICE IMPORTER

INCREASING RICE IMPORTS ENDANGERS FOOD SECURITY AND SUFFICIENCY

The Philippines is now Asia's largest rice importer as a result of agricultural trade liberalization coupled with state neglect, and this threatens the country's food security and sufficiency, according to independent think-tank IBON Foundation.

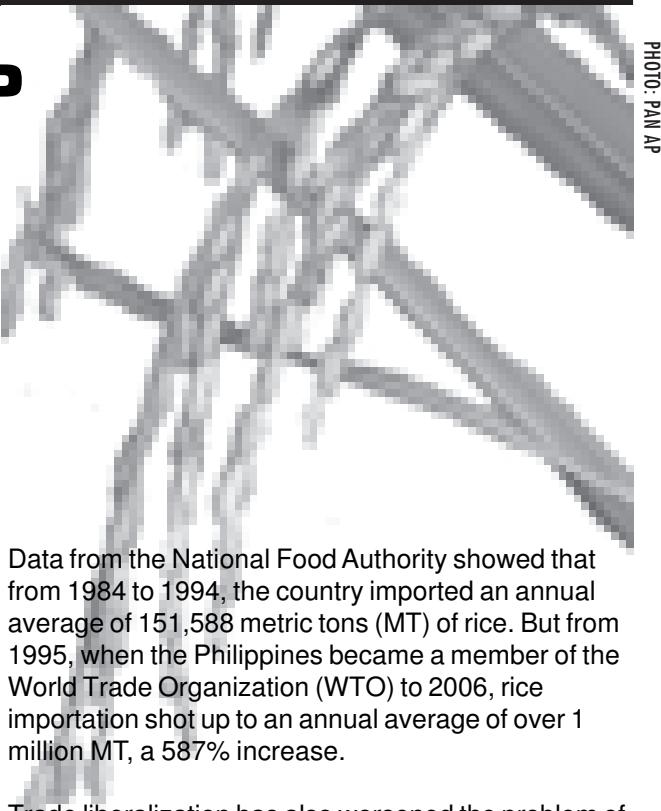


PHOTO: PAN AP

Data from the National Food Authority showed that from 1984 to 1994, the country imported an annual average of 151,588 metric tons (MT) of rice. But from 1995, when the Philippines became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to 2006, rice importation shot up to an annual average of over 1 million MT, a 587% increase.

Trade liberalization has also worsened the problem of small-scale rice farmers in the country, which government has failed to address. Rice farmers continue to be saddled with problems such as high production costs, low rice prices, inadequate irrigation and other facilities, and inaccessible credit. It is thus not surprising that rice production has not increased significantly over the past decade, IBON said.

The urgency of the problem requires collective action on the part of rice farmers and other concerned sectors in order to preserve Asian farmers' traditional rice culture.

Farmers' groups recently held the Week of Rice Action campaign organized by the Pesticide Action Network-Asia Pacific, which brought together farmers, local communities and other concerned groups to discuss and highlight the value of rice culture and ecological agriculture, as well as threats of landlessness and genetically modified rice.

As farmers underscored during the week-long campaign, rice is a staple food of Filipinos and the country should have the self-reliance to produce it. Instead of reactive and short-term feeding programs, the government should address the problems of farmers and other food producers in order to increase productivity and ensure the country's food security.



PHOTO: PAN AP

NANDIGRAM MASSACRE: Farmers killed fighting for their land

On March 14, 2007, a 4,000-member police force under the 'Operation Nandigram' allegedly opened fire on protesting villagers in the farming communities in Nandigram, East Midnapore District in West Bengal. Around 20 peasant farmers were killed—a number of them women—and more than 200 people injured in the massacre.

The police force was formed to suppress the growing protest of the Nandigram farming communities against the proposed establishment of the US\$ 4.2 billion mega-Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

The villagers had taken control of the disputed area—designated a 'forbidden zone' since January this year. During the incident police moved in to retake the area by encircling it from three sides: at Chandipur, Tekhali bridge and the Bhangabera bridge. The villagers gathered at several points to resist them, to which the police force responded with a shootout.

This is not the first time that violence erupted in Nandigram. In January, six people were killed by the police and goons.

Early this year, Nandigram farmers launched widespread protests against government attempts to take over their farm lands and prevented the entry of police forces in the area. On July 31, 2006 the West Bengal Government signed an agreement with Indonesia's Salim Group to implement developmental



PHOTO: RAJ GOURAV/987

projects. This includes a chemical industrial estate to be built on 10,000 acres in a 50:50 joint venture.

In the deal, the Government will acquire around 20,000 acres of rice farming land in Nandigram for the development of a chemical hub. The move is expected to displace some 300,000 farmers who were served eviction notices earlier this year.

The community is being offered meager compensation for their lands. But the villagers refused to sell their lands, and instead formed the campaign 'Save the Rice Farm Land Committee' to resist the move.

Struggle in Singur

Aside from Nandigram, social unrests among peasants are also taking place in Singur in Hooghly, another district in West Bengal where Tata

Corporation, a giant Indian motor company, plans to build its plant with the support of the West Bengal government.

More than 15,000 rice farmers have lost their livelihood in Singur when about 1,000 acres of multi-cropping fertile rice lands were handed over to Tata Corp. by the state government for the construction of a car manufacturing plant.

In September 2006, Tata destroyed the crops and fenced the area with the help of police forces. When the

Motivating Self-Employment (IMSE), "The struggle in Nandigram is similar to that of Singur where rice lands had also been forcibly taken away from the people."

He explained that Nandigram and Singur have been designated as part of the six SEZs that will be built in West Bengal. "This move would destroy the livelihood of thousands of rice farmers who do not have the skills to work in the industries as they only know how to cultivate the land," he said.

Moreover, he said those who took up employment in the factories will not have rights as the SEZs were subject to different regulations, and are effectively 'immune' from the laws of the country.

"The people are not supposed to get bullets but to cultivate their rice lands and feed themselves and their families in peace. We cannot stand alone anymore as the human rights violations continue. We will continue to highlight the people's struggles so their blood will not be in vain and that ultimately they will win the battle," said Biplab.

"It is now more crucial get a united voice all

PHOTO: RAJ_GOURAV1982



rice farmers protested, the government unleashed a series of brutal attacks on the people. Houses were burned down, and children and women were ruthlessly beaten up.

These are not isolated cases, as the state government has been aggressively promoting West Bengal as the new haven for foreign investors in the name of "development".

According to Biplab Halim, executive director of Institute for

PHOTO: RAJ_GOURAV1982



Police firing teargas at protesting farmers.

over the world to help the peasant farmers in both Singur and Nandigram, who are being forcibly evicted from their lands to be given to multinational corporations," he said.

PHOTO: HMPHF



Condemn the Massacre in Nandigram

We the members of the Task Force on Food Sovereignty and Ecological Agriculture of the Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) strongly condemn the West Bengal government led by the C.P.I. (M) for the massacre of more than 20 peasants from Nandigram, East Midnapore District in West Bengal.

The massacre was reportedly committed on 14 March 2007 by the 4,000-member police force under the "Operation Nandigram" which was formed to suppress the growing protest of the Nandigram farming communities who are fighting against the land acquisition for the proposed establishment of the US\$ 4.2 billion mega-Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

This is not an isolated case, as the state government has been aggressively promoting West Bengal as the new haven for foreign investors in the name of "development". This is the second instance of violence in Nandigram, the first being in January when six (6) people were killed by the police and goons by the ruling party. Aside from Nandigram, social unrests among peasants are also taking place in Singur in Hooghly (www.foodsov.org/html/takeaction.htm), another district in West Bengal where Tata Corporation, a giant Indian motor company, plans to build its plant with the support of the West Bengal government.

The West Bengal Left government, which ironically was put into power based on its "pro-people" platform, has been hell-



bent to hand over more than 20,000 acres of fertile agricultural land to Salim Group, an Indonesian company closely associated with the former Indonesian dictator Suharto who was responsible for the genocide of half a million Indonesian activists during his rule in the 1960s.

The proposed SEZs in Nandigram will displace approximately 300,000 people, mostly small and marginal farmers, sharecroppers and agricultural laborers who depend on their land for their survival. It will also bulldoze 142 temples, 45 mosques and 4 high schools to give way to chemical industries under the SEZs.

We condemn the fascist move by the state government to kill the dissent of the people and pressure them to give-up their only source of livelihood which is land.

The members of the 3rd Task Force Meeting of the Food Sovereignty and Ecological Agriculture demand the West Bengal government to:

1. Stop the killings in Nandigram!
2. Respect and uphold human rights, deliver justice and just compensation to the victims and families.
3. Stop any forced and violent eviction and respect the communities' decision to keep their land and their demand for a community-led agricultural development plan.
4. Immediately release the arrested peasants and withdraw the police cases against them.
5. Punish the guilty police, government officials and other actors responsible for this massacre.
6. Scrap SEZs in Nandigram and other parts of the state.
7. Constitute a judicial commission to make an immediate inquiry, with a sitting judge from the High Court/ Supreme Court as its Chair.

If the state government fails to comply with the above demands, then the government of India must come forward to take appropriate steps to protect the lives and livelihoods of the people.

Signed and endorsed by 15 Task Force members from 10 Asian countries

*Task Force on Food Sovereignty and Ecological Agriculture
Pesticide Action Network-Asia and the Pacific
P.O. Box 1170, Penang 10850, Malaysia*

ELECTIONS AND POVERTY

Will Arroyo Beat the Odds?

The Arroyo administration consistently asserts that voting for its candidates will mean an improvement in the economy. But will this election really put an end to poverty?

Joseph Yu

BON Features—“Wala rin mangyayari” (Nothing will change).

This was the reply of Bong, 30, a *pahinante* (helper) when IBON Features asked him if he thought the upcoming May national and local elections would improve the condition of poor people like him.

Bong had been voting since he reached 18 and is currently a registered voter in Mangahan, Pasig City. Still, he expressed support for an opposition senatorial candidate with a youthful image.

Poverty will undoubtedly be a major campaign issue in the elections. Administration “Team Unity” senatorial candidates said they are undertaking campaigns in



PHOTO: RON RYAN AVILES

barangays to present the Arroyo government's 10-point "Beat the Odds" anti-poverty agenda to local leaders and residents.

But as the past elections have shown, Bong's statement rings a sad truth: the elections will have no effect on the lives of the poor.

Poverty, Defined

The present administration's lack of understanding—or deliberate deceit—of the root causes of poverty, were highlighted yet again by its responses when confronted by the growing problem of involuntary hunger among Filipino families. First, the president ordered concerned government agencies to alleviate the hunger problem within six months. Then, it released P1 billion for "emergency hunger mitigation".

These are predictable responses for a government that views poverty in terms of manipulating figures to get desired results.

People should be considered poor if they have insufficient resources to maintain a decent standard of living and to develop to their fullest potential. But under the Arroyo government's poverty framework, people are poor if their incomes fail to come up to an unreasonably low poverty threshold (defined as the income an individual or family needs to meet their basic food and non-food needs and thus, be considered no longer poor).

According to 2007 poverty threshold figures from the National Statistical Coordination Board, a worker in Metro Manila who earns all of P1,612 a month or P53 a day already has enough to meet his or her basic food and non-food needs, and therefore government no longer considers them poor. For an average family with six members,

the poverty threshold would be P9,672 a month or P318 a day.

But these amounts are clearly just enough—at best—to maintain the barest physical existence. This is validated by the National Wages and Productivity Commission's own "living wage" figures, which show that, as of January 2007, a family of six needs at least P721 a day, or more than double government's poverty threshold, to meet its food and non-food needs. IBON estimates that 8 out of 10 Filipinos are poor.

Using the poverty threshold, the government claimed that it had reduced the number of poor Filipinos from 25 million in 2000 to 20 million at present. But poverty cannot be alleviated, much less addressed, by such numerical manipulation. Poverty in the Philippines is deep-rooted and results from the unequal character of the country's economic system, which is

structured for the benefit of the interests of local and foreign elite. This inequitable structure has resulted in weak agricultural and manufacturing sectors, lack of jobs and livelihoods for the people.

Such situation is further exacerbated by the implementation of neoliberal economic policies starting in the 1980s, which opened the country's markets to cheap imports, turned

over public services to profit-oriented private companies and opened to foreign investors sectors previously restricted to local entrepreneurs and the state. In the process these policies have also destroyed livelihoods, led to widespread closures and retrenchments of local firms and driven thousands of farmers off their lands.

Thus, it should not be surprising that poverty continues to be a lingering social problem that has only gotten worse under an administration that does not even appreciate its root causes. In fact, it makes the problem worse by continuing to implement such damaging economic policies instead of those that would bring about genuine national development.

Beating the Odds

This lack of understanding is reflected in the aforementioned 10-



PHOTO: KILUSANG MAYO UNG

point poverty alleviation strategy, which, instead of addressing the roots of poverty, hews to the foreign investment-driven strategy Arroyo has been pursing since she came into power.

Beat the Odds is an acronym that stands for: a balanced budget; education for all; automated elections; transport and digital infrastructure to link the country; terminating hostilities with the New People's Army and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front; healing the wounds of EDSA; electricity and water for all barangays; opportunities to create six to eight million jobs; decongest Metro Manila through the decentralization of government offices and new transport infrastructure systems; develop Subic and Clark as globally competitive logistic hubs in partnership with the private sector.

A closer examination of these strategies reveals that, devoid of a genuine national development strategy that addresses the country's lack of industrialization and agricultural backwardness, these will not alleviate poverty and will even worsen it.

Take, for example, the goal to achieve a balanced budget. Economic planners recently announced that, with the declining budget surpluses, government might reach its goal by next year. And indeed, the Arroyo government's budget surplus has fallen from a peak of P816.2 billion in 2005 to P62 billion last year.

But government achieved this by squeezing Filipinos through the double whammy of higher taxes and declining spending on social services. The most onerous of these taxes is the reformed value-added tax (RVAT), if only because of its sheer regressive nature. The

RVAT increased the VAT rate from 10% to 12% and removed exemptions on gas and electricity. As a result, the tax generated P77 billion in net revenues in 2006, mostly by increasing the prices of basic goods and services.

Meanwhile, even as government was busy counting tax revenues, it failed to deliver social payback to Filipinos in the form of increased basic services. Real spending per capita on education of P1,508 in 2006 is 22% lower than when Arroyo came into office in 2001, per capita health spending of P159 is 25% lower and on social security, welfare and employment of P532, 9% lower.

Thus, it should not be surprising that government is far from its stated goal of providing "education for all". Millions of Filipino children, in fact, are unable to obtain a decent education. Of every 100 children who enter Grade 1, only 66% will finish elementary school, 43% high school and 14% college. As a consequence, in 2006, some 2.5 million children aged 5 to 17 were working either to augment their family's incomes or to survive on their own.

Creating transport and digital infrastructure between the country's islands also sounds like a laudable goal. But given such problems as widespread poverty in the countryside, and overall low computer ownership in the country (only some 2 out of every 100 Filipinos owns a computer) such infrastructure development may be designed primarily attract foreign investors such as agri-business enterprises and business process outsourcers.

The government's stated goal of "opportunities" to create six to eight million jobs also seems doubtful, given the absence of a national

industrialization program or moves to address problems of peasants in the countryside. It seems clear that the Arroyo government will once again rely on foreign investors for job creation even if decades of foreign direct investments coming in have not contributed substantially to solving the employment crisis in the Philippines. In this context, it should not be surprising that the president has continuously reiterated her intention to pursue the removal of economic sovereignty provisions in the current constitution, even in the face of widespread public disapproval of such moves.

Clash of elite

When IBON Features asked Bong why he believed that elections would not bring about change, he wisely replied, "*Ganoon pa rin yung nakaupo*" (Those in power are still the same people)".

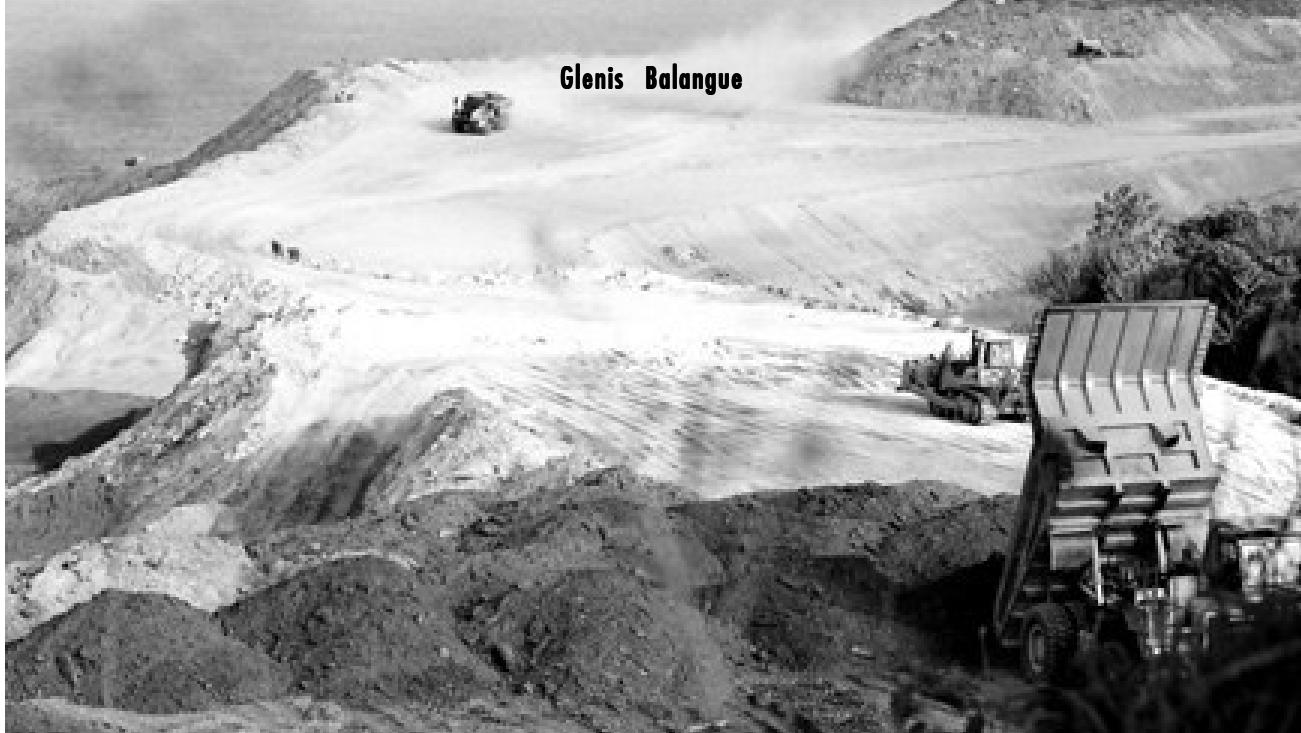
His reply showed a discerning grasp of what elections in the Philippines are all about, namely a clash of various elite factions. Whichever group wins, administration, opposition or even independent, it is still the interests of the local and foreign elite that will be promoted over those of the poor Filipinos who make up the majority of the population. Elections in the Philippines will not bring about the kind of fundamental economic and social changes that the country badly needs to truly progress.

That said, the upcoming polls are still viewed as a referendum on the performance of the Arroyo government. And with the consistent majority win of opposition bets predicted in various surveys, it seems that voters are set to reject Arroyo, if only because they see that her policies have only worsened their lives over the past six years. **IBON Features**

Large-Scale Mining and Rapu-Rapu ISLAND RESIDENTS FACE LOST LIVELIHOODS, DAMAGED ENVIRONMENT

PHOTO: KENNETH R. GUDA/PINNOY WEEKLY

Glenis Balangue



IBON Features - For the nearly 50,000 residents of Rapu-Rapu, Albay and the adjoining municipality of Prieto Diaz, Sorsogon, fishing has been the primary livelihood for generations. The fish that they catch from Lagonoy Gulf and Albay Gulf is not just their staple food supply, it is also a main source of income for the communities, no matter how modest. Twelve out of thirteen barangays on Rapu-Rapu are fishing communities, while Prieto Diaz's people survive on marine, aquaculture and industrial production. Rapu-Rapu and Prieto Diaz are also among the poorest municipalities in the country and government services are generally hard to come by.

But their simple lives were abruptly disrupted when Australian mining firm Lafayette NL started its Rapu-Rapu Polymetallic Mining Project in mid-2005. Mining and quarrying had not been alien to Rapu-Rapu as the community had already hosted several mining operations over seven decades starting in the 1930s, though they had never become major industries. But it

was the arrival of Lafayette that really brought to the fore the destructive effects of large-scale mining and showed how the Arroyo administration is eager to open the country's natural resources to exploitation by big mining transnational corporations.

A 'new, responsible' mining industry?

The Arroyo administration has been aggressively promoting mining as an area for foreign investments. Thus, the Rapu-Rapu Polymetallic Mining Project held much promise, for it represented for the government the flagship of a 'new, responsible' mining industry. Lafayette had been one of the first foreign mining companies to invest in the Philippines following a Supreme Court decision upholding a provision in the 1995 Mining Act allowing 100% foreign ownership of mining projects in the country. The Project is expected to yield some 50,000 ounces of gold, 60,000 ounces of silver, 10,000 metric tons of copper concentrate and 14,000 metric tons of zinc concentrate a year.

Lafayette's mining claim in the municipality of Rapu-Rapu is 42 square kilometers or roughly 80% of the island's total land area. The current operation is focused on mining the "Ungay Malobago" deposit located in Barangays Malobago, Pagcolbon and Binosawan using the open pit method. The gold-rich ore is treated in a cyanide-in-leach plant adjacent to the 18-hectare pit while the rest of the ore, which yields copper and zinc, is treated in a separate floatation plant.

But what lay behind this project was blackmail and deceit, as the project proponents allegedly resorted to questionable tactics in its implementation.

For example, the Office of the President issued Proclamation 625, which declared the mining area a special economic zone upon petition of Lafayette Philippines, Inc. Lafayette under this status was entitled to a six- to eight-year income tax holiday and exemption from paying value-added taxes because extracted metals are exported with minimal processing. However, it was later alleged that Lafayette country manager Roderick Watt, in a letter to President Arroyo, threatened to withhold \$55 million in capital investments from Lafayette Ltd. and the LG Group of Korea if they were not granted special economic zone status.

There were also irregularities in acquiring the consent of local communities to the project. According to residents, although community organizers had arranged meetings at the three barangays nearest the mining site, only the benefits of the mine to the community were discussed. Villagers said they were never informed of the environmental effects of mining an ecologically

sensitive island eco-system such as Rapu-Rapu. Tinopan residents even recall watching a film in which Lafayette organizers discussed "responsible" mining and promised them that the ores would not be processed on the island. A certain Engineer Palomaria also told the residents that their barangays could even become cities in the near future. To further bolster the acceptability of the project, residents were also promised free electricity and medical services which the national and local governments had failed to provide for them.

But the residents of Prieto Diaz were never consulted on the project despite being the nearest municipality from Rapu-Rapu and sharing a major fishing ground.

It was on Oct. 2005 when residents learned that there had been not one, but two, cyanide tailings spills from the mining site in Barangay Pagcolbon. Reports said that the first spill was due to a

failed pump at the mine, causing an overflow of cyanide-laden spills into nearby creeks. Three weeks later, a heavy six-hour rain resulted in the tailings pond overflowing into the nearby Ungay and Hollowstone creeks. Both incidents resulted in fish kills, although it was reported that these accounted for only a few kilograms.

Mining advocates such as the Philippine Chamber of Mines and the government Mines and Geosciences Bureau sought to downplay the spills, claiming that the amount of tailings released were relatively small and calling the incident "a drop in the ocean". But a government-convened Fact-Finding Commission on Rapu-Rapu assailed the gross negligence of Lafayette and even went so far as to call for a suspension of mining activities in the country, a call that President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo rejected.

'Sino ang Nakahuli'

Sixty percent of the households in both Rapu-Rapu and the neighboring Prieto Diaz depend on fishing as a primary livelihood. Majority of these families engage in artisanal, or small-scale and subsistence, fishing. After the tailings spills, many fishermen interviewed by IBON Features asserted that their catch declined. One resident even asserted that where before, fishermen would ask '*ilan ang nakahuli*' (how many were able to catch fish), now they ask '*sino ang nakahuli*' (Who was able to catch fish).

Fishermen from Barangay Binosawan asserted that before the mining operation, their boat of three to four crew members used to catch around 70 pieces of blue marlins a year. Last 2005 and 2006, they averaged 20 pieces. In

In stark contrast to the poverty of the affected communities, wherein 60% of families are forced to live on less than P100 (US\$2) a day, the Lafayette Group expects to earn US\$350 million a year...

neighboring Barangay Brillante, fishermen said a boat used to average four pieces of fish per trip. Now they consider themselves fortunate if they go home with two pieces. There are even times when they can go for a week without catching a single fish.

These fishermen are now reducing the number of days they go out to sea. From six or seven days a week, they now go out to fish for only three or four days. Their reasoning is that they would only waste money spent on fuel just to catch enough fish for a day's viand. Some fishermen have even opted to work as 'padyak' (pedicab) drivers, carpenters or to work other odd jobs just to make ends meet.

But even fish vendors found themselves indirectly affected by the tailings spills. A fish dealer from Barangay Tinopan said that her regular buyers in Legazpi started to become wary of buying fish caught near Rapu-Rapu, resulting in her buying price falling by as much as 60% while her selling price fell by half.

Even those engaged in the small-scale agriculture that accounts for the other major source of livelihood in the municipalities were not exempt from the negative effects of the spills. Farmers noted a marked decrease in water supply after Lafayette started its operations, resulting in a mini-water war in Barangay Poblacion. It should be noted that Rapu-Rapu is a small island with a limited supply of



freshwater, and this would be further diverted to support Lafayette's operations.

Water supply for domestic needs has also noticeably gone down. Malobago residents said they have difficulty sourcing water for drinking and washing. They are also afraid of drinking the water that comes from the taps, fearing cyanide contamination. A community leader remarked, 'ang cyanide ba o iyong ibang kemikal nadadaan sa kulo? (Can cyanide or other chemicals be removed by boiling?)

In Barangays Binosawan and Tinopan, coconut farmers said their trees have become stunted even if these were still young. The fruits have also become smaller and fewer, meaning decreased yields. The farmers averred that this was the first time that this

happened to their source of livelihood.

The farmers further told IBON that the blasting activities of Lafayette have loosened the foundations of their lands, making them vulnerable to landslides. When typhoon Reming (international name Durian) struck the Bicol region, landslides occurred in Barangays Malobago and Tinopan, killing eleven people. Residents averred that stronger typhoons had visited Rapu-Rapu but no landslides happened until last year.

'Mabuti pang masara na ang Lafayette'

In stark contrast to the poverty of the affected communities, wherein 60% of families are forced to live on less than P100 (US\$2) a day, the Lafayette Group expects to earn US\$350 million a year over the entire life of the mine. But the local government in 2005 received only P2.1 million (US\$42,857) in excise tax collections from Lafayette's gross revenues of P134.4 million. The national government also lost tax revenue from the many incentives the mining firm was granted, earning

Residents and various environmental groups demand that government step in now to prevent irreversible damage to Rapu-Rapu's fishing waters and the residents' livelihoods...



only US\$8.68 million from a possible US\$20.48 million.

Further, although Lafayette claimed to hire 900 residents as workers, in reality only some 300 were hired. Residents said that of this number, only 5% were regular workers (meaning that they would be employed for five years, although the projected life of the project is eight years) while the rest were hired on a contractual basis. There is no labor union and the workers are discouraged from negotiating for better pay and more benefits.

The aftermath of the spills has seen an increasing number of locals opposing Lafayette's operations. Thus, there has also been a militarization of the area as an increasing number of soldiers and policemen were deployed to the area, plus 150 militiamen in civilian clothes. Residents reported that these military forces roam the barangays in an apparent effort to intimidate them.

The basic services promised by the Australian mining firm to the

communities also did not materialize. Malobago, Tinopan and Binosawan do not have health facilities and personnel except for one or two barangay health workers. Malobago residents, however, have occasional access to the mining company's health clinic, but only in case of emergencies.

Stop the plunder

On February 8, 2006 the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) permanently lifted the cease-and-desist order it had earlier issued on Lafayette's operations on Rapu-Rapu in the wake of the spills. In doing so, it went against the wishes of the residents for a stop to mining operations on the island.

The needs of Rapu-Rapu's people are simple: they want the national and local governments to provide them with social and economic services. The local farmers want ample support for their livelihoods including genuine land reform and an efficient irrigation system.

But instead of granting them these simple wishes, the Arroyo government has instead abetted the plunder of Rapu-Rapu's natural resources by a rapacious foreign mining company. Although Lafayette has ostensibly been turned over to Filipinos to operate, it is clear that the company is expertly exploiting loopholes in the Mining Act and the Philippines' corporate laws in order to avoid being accountable to the people of Rapu-Rapu and Prieto Diaz.

Admittedly, mining can contribute much to the country's economic development. But mining activities should only be done in the context of other vital considerations such as people's welfare and the local environment. Rapu-Rapu is classified as an area with extremely high priority in terms of marine conservation. But the large-scale mining activities have damaged, perhaps mortally, its eco-system. The acid mine drainage that is formed as a by-product of mining activities may poison the island's soil and water resources in the long-term.

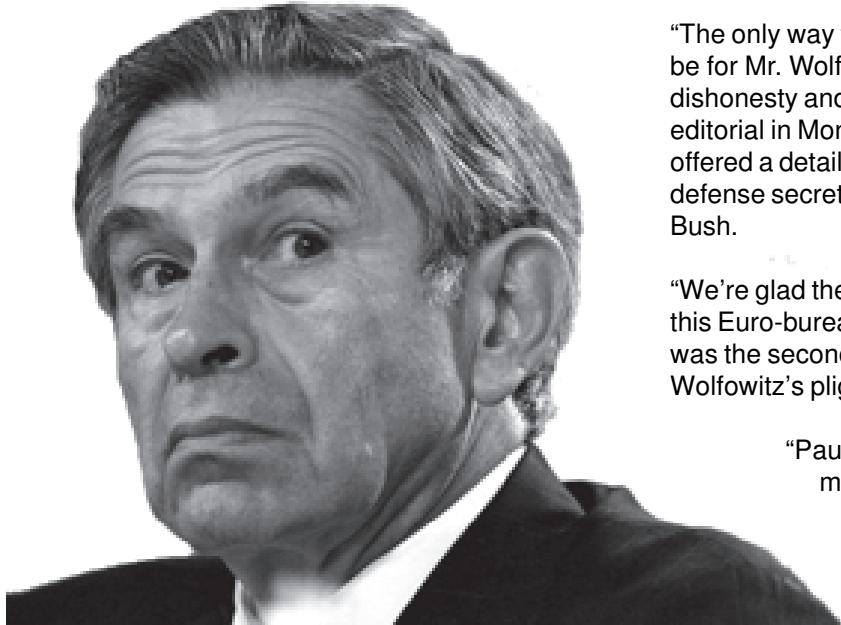
By 2013, Lafayette will have packed up and left after extracting all the minerals from Rapu-Rapu. All that will be left for the residents is a giant pit and a damaged eco-system, which can no longer provide for their needs. Residents and various environmental groups demand that government step in now to prevent irreversible damage to Rapu-Rapu's fishing waters and the residents' livelihoods, or be held to account for its sell-out of the national patrimony at the expense of its citizens' welfare.

*With reports from Joseph Yu.
IBON Features*

Defenders of World Bank's Wolfowitz Double Their Standards

Jim Lobe

PHOTO: TENGKU BAHR/AFP/GTET IMAGES



"The only way this fiasco could get any worse would be for Mr. Wolfowitz to resign in the teeth of so much dishonesty and cravenness," according to the lead editorial in Monday's Wall Street Journal, which offered a detailed justification for the former deputy defense secretary under US President George W. Bush.

"We're glad the Bush administration isn't falling for this Euro-bureaucracy-media putsch," it added in what was the second of two consecutive columns on Wolfowitz's plight.

"Paul Wolfowitz is my friend, and one of the most decent, upright people it has ever been my privilege to know," wrote FDD senior fellow and anti-terrorism

Washington— Some of the same neoconservative institutions that are defending World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz against charges that he unethically promoted the career and compensation of his romantic partner were among the most aggressive in attacking former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan for alleged nepotism on behalf of his son.

The editorial writers of the Wall Street Journal, contributors to the National Review, and a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defence of Democracies (FDD), a neoconservative group whose journalist-in-residence, Claudia Rosett, led the campaign against Annan and his son, Kojo, have all rallied behind the beleaguered Bank president, blaming his problems on an entrenched officialdom determined to resist his corruption-fighting reforms.

The neoconservative role in vigorously pressing the campaign to discredit Annan for his presumed nepotism and force his resignation stands in sharp contrast to its efforts to protect Wolfowitz from similar charges in connection with his role in personally arranging an exceptional promotion and salary increase for his girlfriend...

specialist Andrew McCarthy in the National Review Online (NRO).

"If it were up to me, there would be no World Bank. But if we're going to have one, we should be grateful that Paul Wolfowitz is running it, rooting out corruption and trying to change the culture so that helping the poor, rather than pushing loans out the door, is the criterion by which it is judged," McCarthy concluded.

The approach toward Wolfowitz's current difficulties by both the Journal and the FDD, as well as by NRO and Fox News, contrasts strongly with their attacks on the former UN chief and his son, who was first accused in an article by FDD's Rosett in the National Review three years ago of having working for a Swiss company, Cotecna, that was awarded a 10-million-dollar UN contract in 1998 to inspect "Oil-for-Food" imports into Iraq.

That was the first story of more than 30 published over the next two and a half years by the Review and the NRO on Kojo Annan's business deals and what it considered a case of blatant nepotism and conflict of interest on the UN chief's part—emblematic in the neoconservatives' view of the corruption of the world body itself.

The Review-FDD campaign was bolstered by Fox News and the Wall Street Journal, which itself published more than a dozen editorials and columns, including several by Rosett, citing Kojo in connection with alleged UN corruption and the

multi-billion-dollar oil-for-food scandal between 2004 and the end of Kofi Annan's term in office Dec. 31, 2006.

Indeed, when Rosett reported in another neoconservative publication, the New York Sun, in late November 2004, that Cotecna had continued paying Kojo Annan 2,500 dollars a month for four years after he left the company in early 2000—which Cotecna described as a standard non-compete deal—neo-conservatives stepped up their calls for the UN chief to resign.

"Annan should either resign, if he is honorable, or be removed, if he is not," wrote the National Review at the time, while the Journal featured an editorial page column

this widespread corruption had occurred in any legitimate organisation around the world, its CEO would have been ousted long ago, in disgrace."

In the event, the independent commission headed by former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker determined in its final report published in September 2005 that, while Annan should have been more aggressive about looking into his son's relationship with Cotecna once his ties were disclosed, he had not influenced the awarding of the contract to the company or known how Kojo had traded on his name to further his business interests.

The neoconservative role in vigorously pressing the campaign



PHOTO: DAVID GROSSMAN, POLITICO

entitled "Kofi Annan Must Go" by Republican Senator Norm Coleman who, noting Rosett's latest revelation, as well as other allegations of corruption in the oil-for-food scandal, declared that "(I)"

to discredit Annan for his presumed nepotism and force his resignation stands in sharp contrast to its efforts to protect Wolfowitz from similar charges in connection with his role in

personally arranging an exceptional promotion and salary increase for his girlfriend, Shaha Riza, a senior World Bank communications officer when Wolfowitz took over in June 2005, as part of a package by which she was seconded to the State Department.

According to the New York Times on Tuesday, Wolfowitz may also have played a role in getting her a short-term consultancy with a major defense contractor, Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), in 2003, when he was serving at the Pentagon.

In its two editorials, the Journal has argued at length that Wolfowitz had tried to reclude himself from any decision regarding her career when he was first hired, but that he was subsequently forced to make the secondment arrangements himself after the Bank's executive board and ethics committee allegedly instructed him to do so.

Consistent with a Fox News investigative report published online and aired over the weekend, the Journal wrote Monday that the ethics committee chairman, Ad Melkert, had effectively approved the secondment package and went on to suggest that Wolfowitz may have fallen into a trap set by the board to manoeuvre him into a conflict of interest.

Documents released Friday by the Bank make "us wonder if some bank officials weren't trying to ambush Mr. Wolfowitz from the start," it said, adding that "it's clear that his enemies—especially Europeans who want the bank presidency to go to one of their own—are now using this to force him out of the bank."

The Wallstreet Journal and other supporters also tried to downplay the significance of what Wolfowitz had done. The Journal called it a "mini-flap" involving "ethical minutiae", while Jonah Goldberg, a regular contributor to the NRO, referred favorably to a Los Angeles Times column by neo-conservative legal scholar Ruth Wedgwood, entitled "The Wolfowitz Non-Story".

Wolfowitz and Shaha, she argued, are victims of a "mob mentality", echoing charges by Victor Davis Hanson, yet another neoconservative at NRO, that Wolfowitz is "facing a lynch mob over perhaps a... one-time lapse of judgment in regard to compensation of a companion—nothing, however, ranking with the various scandals surrounding Kofi Annan, whose son profited by United Nations exemptions given through his family ties."

What the scandal is really about is "payback for Iraq", according to Hanson, whose views often reflect those of Vice President Dick Cheney, reportedly Wolfowitz's main supporter within the Bush administration.

Ironically, the same was said by Annan's supporters during the Kojo scandal. "The

reality is that the current calls for Annan's head are provoked by his opposition to America's pre-emptive war in Iraq," noted Ian Williams, the UN correspondent for The Nation weekly in late 2004 after Coleman called for Annan's resignation.

Indeed, as the neoconservative campaign against the secretary-general gathered steam in the fall of 2004, James Traub, in a Los Angeles Times article entitled "Lynch Mob's Real Target is the UN, Not Annan," wrote: "(W)hat conservatives cannot accept, at bottom, is the premise that an international body, even one over which the United States exercises enormous sway, should be allowed to pass on the legitimacy or legality of American actions."

InterPress Service



PHOTO: BRIAN LONIG

P125-WAGE HIKE AND ARROYO'S ECONOMIC BOOM

If Pres. Arroyo wants to talk about "social payback from the booming economy", the only acceptable and meaningful social payback that Filipino workers deserve today is a substantial wage increase complemented by price control reforms, tax reforms, and drastic increases in social services spending.

Arnold Padilla



PHOTO: KILUSANG MAYO UNO

Representatives passed House Bill (HB) No. 345 last December which proposes an increase of P125 in the daily minimum wage over a three-year period.

Pres. Arroyo's pitch of a booming economy amid renewed calls for a substantial wage hike has two implications. First, an increase in workers' pay at this time may undermine economic growth and second, there is no need for a wage hike since people are already reaping the gains of an economic boom.

But economics is not only about the creation of wealth but its distribution as well. Thus for 2007, Pres. Arroyo said government would focus on ensuring that the masses got the social payback by continuing to spread the wealth brought about by economic gains. But Pres. Arroyo, who was a long-time economics professor before she entered politics, seems too overlook that one of the most important ways to increase the share of workers to the pie of social wealth- that was in the first place created only through their labor power- is to increase their wages.

BON Features— In a televised forum on Edsa Dos's sixth anniversary, President Gloria Arroyo declared that Filipinos are experiencing the benefits of the country's economic boom but "they just don't know it yet."

The statement came after she proclaimed more than a week before that she would veto any legislation for a substantial wage hike after the House of

Meaningless 'growth'

Pres. Arroyo's recurrent and triumphant theme in the past few months has been how the country is supposedly on track to achieve First World status. The gross domestic product (GDP), by National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) reckoning, would hit 7.10% this year or three years ahead of the original program. Full-year GDP growth

from 2001 to 2005 at constant prices averaged a respectable 5.05% and posted 5.40% in three quarters of 2006.

Beneath this considerable economic growth, however, is the reality of widespread social discontent. In the October 2006 round of IBON's nationwide survey, 70.56% of the respondents considered themselves poor; 62.80% said that their income is not enough for their family's needs; and 51.65% said that their livelihood worsened compared with the previous year.

Obviously, the economic system has failed to equitably distribute the increasing social wealth that the economy has produced in the past years thus alienating the workers from the supposed economic growth and from the fruits of their own labor. The \$1,400 GDP per capita (i.e. the value of domestic production as equally divided among each Filipino) that Pres. Arroyo projected this year is meaningless because wealth is actually concentrated in a very small segment of society. According to the 2000 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) of the National Statistics Office (NSO) only 28.83% of the total number of families account for 65.24% of the total national income while 71.17% share the remaining 34.76 percent. The top two income classes, which represent only 13.23% of the total number of families, account for 44.45% of the total national income.

Poverty amid increased profits and productivity

Thus, only this small portion of the population felt whatever gains the economy has produced in recent years. In concrete terms, capitalist profits have been growing

tremendously while workers' pay has remained depressed. Between 2001 and 2005, for example, the net income of the biggest 1,000 corporations in the country expanded by 327.23% with an annual growth of 37.86% while their gross profit margin has steadily increased during the same period averaging 19.56% per year. Profits rose remarkably as labor productivity (or the average value created by each worker in a given period) went up by 34.64% in nominal terms and 10.23% in real terms between 2001 and 2005 based on figures from the National Wages and Productivity Commission (NWPC).

On the contrary, the minimum wage has barely moved since the Arroyo government took over. Data from the NWPC show that from 2001 to 2006, the minimum wage (including the cost of living allowance or COLA) in all regions of the country fell by 3.96% in real terms. In nominal terms, the minimum wage has increased by almost 23.66% during the same period but this was not enough to cope with the increase in cost of living. Using the family living wage of the NWPC as standard, the daily cost of living in all regions for each family has grown by 51.57% between 2001 and 2006.

This only means that while capitalists get richer from the sweat of labor, workers and their families become even poorer. In 2006, the average daily minimum wage (with COLA) for all regions was P229.35 which was short of P447.98 to meet the estimated daily cost of living (i.e. family living wage computed by NWPC) for all regions of P677.33. The gap between the minimum wage and the cost of living has widened by 72.27% between 2001 and 2006, increasing by 11.60% annually during this period.

Wrong economic policies

These statistics, culled from government agencies, strongly support the argument for a P125-wage hike. They show that going by the economic fundamentals, there is a reasonable basis for a substantial increase in workers' pay.

But more importantly, they also illustrate the moral urgency of a wage hike to give the direct producers of social wealth and their family some breathing space from seething poverty worsened by the relentless price hikes, tax increases, diminishing public spending for social services, etc.

If Pres. Arroyo wants to talk about "social payback from the booming economy", the only acceptable and meaningful social payback that Filipino workers deserve today is a substantial increase in what they take home to spend for the daily needs of their families.

They belie the doomsday scenario repeatedly raised by the business sector, and loyally echoed by Pres. Arroyo and her economic managers that a substantial wage increase would result in massive bankruptcy, widespread displacement, high inflation, and overall economic slowdown. This doomsday scenario is actually already a reality that Filipino workers are forced to face everyday, and Pres. Arroyo only has her own economic policies to blame.

Thousands of small local firms become bankrupt due to lack of government support and undue exposure to foreign competition. From January 2001 to June 2006, for instance, 3,540 firms closed shop or reduced their workforce because of competition, displacing 105,010 workers in the process; due to financial reasons: 3,902 affected firms with 91,345 displaced workers; and due to reorganization: 7,826 affected firms with 113,109 displaced workers.

In contrast, only 104 firms closed shop or reduced their workforce that displaced 1,793 workers due to minimum wage adjustments in the last six years.

Inflation rate, meanwhile, has been on the rise averaging 5.55% annually from 2001 to 2006 as utilities, for instance, are monopolized, privatized, and deregulated. During this period, Meralco rates for residential users have jumped by 51.82%; water

rates in Metro Manila have increased by 259.37% (Maynilad) to 333.54% (Manila Water); and diesel pump prices have soared by 150.36 percent.

Social payback

Pres. Arroyo must undo her economic mismanagement if she seriously wants to reverse the trend of bankruptcy, displacement, and spiraling prices and not further burden the poor workers by sabotaging HB No. 345 (and its Senate counterpart - Senate Bill 2030 that proposes a one-time P100-wage hike).

If Pres. Arroyo wants to talk about "social payback from the booming economy", the only acceptable and meaningful social payback that Filipino workers deserve today is a substantial increase in what they take home to spend for the daily needs of their families. And even this is not enough as current wage hike proposals would

still not enable many families to meet the decent living standard. Thus, it must be complemented with price control reforms, tax reforms (i.e. repeal the regressive VAT on socially sensitive products and services), and drastic increases in spending for education, health, housing, and other social services.

Of course, the ordinary Filipino worker knows too well that Pres. Arroyo and the capitalist class she protects and represents will not give the substantial wage hike demand on a silver platter. It took more than seven years since the P125 campaign was launched before Congress can even pass a bill on it. HB No. 345 is nonetheless an initial victory, even as it paves the way for more struggles- to consolidate and strengthen the rank of workers and further expose and weaken the rotten regime- that can only be won through uncompromising militancy. **IBON Features**



PHOTO: KILUSANG MAYO UNO

'LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA': Sympathy for the Enemy

Joseph S. Yu

PHOTO: IWOJIMATHEMOVIE.WARNERBROS.COM



Creating characters who are mere reflections of American attitudes and values only shows how victors rewrite history, albeit in the guise of speaking for the defeated enemy.

Winston Churchill said that "history is written by the victors", which is why most movies about World War II are told from the Americans' or Europeans' point of view. In fact, an internet search reveals only one major American movie that even attempts to tell WWII from the Japanese point of view: *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970) in which the attack at Pearl Harbor is seen from both the American and Japanese side.

Thus, it's ironic that a film that examines one of the pivotal battles of the war from the point of view of the so-called "enemy" was directed by an American actor-director best known for playing a particular American character: a cop who takes the law into his own hands. Even more ironic is that he got the idea to direct the film while doing *Flags of our Fathers*, which took a critical look at the images of heroism used by the US military to rekindle Americans' waning support for the war.

Letters from Iwo Jima, directed by Clint Eastwood, looks at the Battle of Iwo Jima from the perspective of two characters: a lowly foot soldier named Saigo and Lieutenant-General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, commander of the garrison on the island. From its opening shot of archaeologists digging in a cave on Iwo Jima, the movie evokes a tragic tone by draining nearly all the color from the film, with the exception of occasional flashes of red during the war scenes.

Almost from the beginning the men defending the island know that there is virtually no hope of them returning home alive, and no possibility of reinforcements from the Imperial Japanese Navy, whose forces have been virtually destroyed at the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Still, their mandate is to defend the island at all costs, in order to prevent it from falling into American hands and allowing the enemy access to the mainland. By the end of the battle, 20,000 of the 22,000 Japanese soldiers defending the island were killed and only 216 were taken prisoner.

The main achievement of 'Letters' is to humanize the Japanese soldiers, who in past American war films (including the companion film *Flags*) have been portrayed as faceless crazed aggressors. The foot soldiers are depicted the way American grunts would normally be: complaining about the hard menial work they have to perform, pining for their families and loved ones.

This underlines one of the themes that runs through the film: the universality of soldiers and their experiences, whether American or Japanese. This is further showcased in a scene in which Japanese soldiers read a letter written by a dead marine to his mother, and realize that Americans are not the barbarians they are portrayed to be.

Conversely, director Clint Eastwood admirably does not shirk in portraying American atrocities towards Japanese soldiers, implicitly casting them in roles traditionally portrayed by Germans or Japanese. Thus, near the end of the film, two American GIs shoot a pair of surrendered Japanese soldiers rather than endure the inconvenience of keeping watch over them. Of course, he also has to provide balance by showing Japanese torturing an American soldier.

Another theme is Eastwood's disdain for the Japanese military culture. He makes the most sympathetic characters those who reject Japanese militarism or have been heavily exposed to western values.

Thus, Saigo continuously gets in trouble because he does not subscribe to the fanatical mindset of the officers. He even refuses to commit ritual suicide when ordered to do so, choosing instead to live

in the hope that he would be reunited with his family. Kuribayashi, meanwhile, constantly reminisces about his stay in America. He even expresses some doubt about his duty, saying that he knows he must die for his country and his family, but that the more he thinks about them, the harder it is to do his duty.

Conversely, the officers who choose to commit suicide in the face of defeat rather than continue to fight on or make an honorable surrender are treated with near contempt, and the scenes in which they commit hara kiri by smashing grenades into their chests could almost qualify as black comedy, a mordant commentary on the futility of suicide.

The film also falters in detailing the progress of the Japanese defense. In the first act, the film holds the viewers' interest by showing Gen. Kuribayashi's innovative strategy of building tunnels in Mt. Suribachi rather than digging trenches on the beach. However, once the Americans land on Iwo Jima and force the Japanese to retreat to caves and tunnels in the mountain, the viewer never sees the development of the battle, only the increasing desperation of the officers. This causes the second act of the film to drag as the story loses its focus.

The film also descends into cliché in the third act, as a character believed to be a member of the feared kempetai (military police) reveals himself to be a wash-out who was sent to Iwo Jima because he was too soft-hearted to shoot a dog.

But the main weakness of 'Letters' is its failure to acknowledge that the Japanese had their own valid reasons for entering WWII, as a reaction to American imperialist moves in the region. In other words, it is alright to show the heroism of the Japanese soldier but only so long as he's rebelling against the militarist mindset. It's another to suggest that the Japanese reasons for being in the war may have been as legitimate as those of the Americans.

In this light, it may not have been too surprising that 'Letters from Iwo Jima' was met with almost universal critical acclaim in the US, netting several critics' awards for best picture and best director. More significantly, it was rewarded with nominations for best picture and best director by the Oscar awards, trumping the Americentric '*Flags*'.

The main sentiment constantly echoed by reviewers as to why they liked the film is that humanizing the Japanese soldiers allows American viewers to see in them a reflection of themselves. But creating characters who are mere reflections of American attitudes and values only validate Churchill's observation about how victors rewrite history, albeit in the guise of speaking for the defeated enemy.



PHOTO: IWojimathemovie.warnerbros.com

IRAQ: MEDICAL SYSTEM BECOMES OUT OF SHAPE

Dahr Jamail and Ali Al-Fadhlly

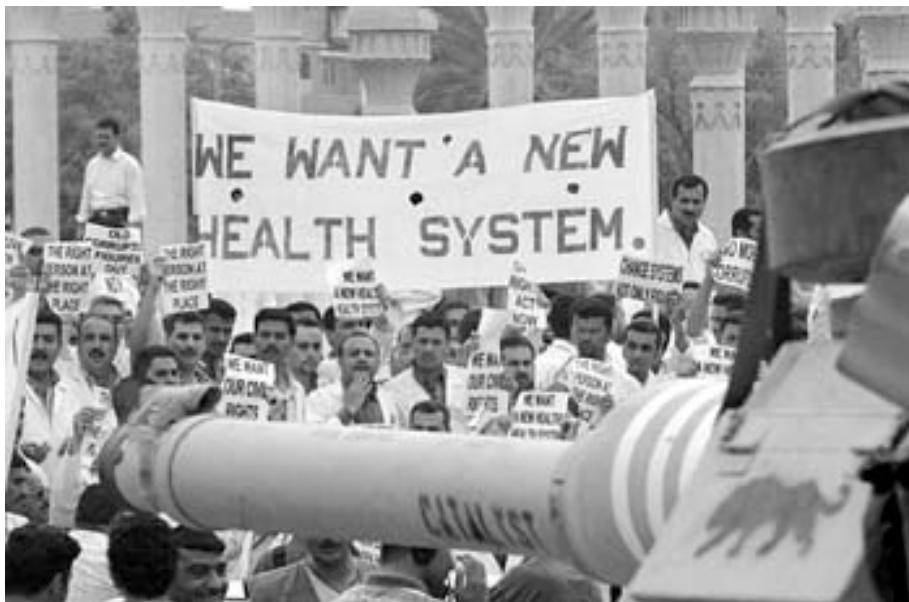


PHOTO: ALEXANDER ZEMLIANICHENKO

Some 400 Iraqi doctors and medical personnel stand in front of an U.S. Army checkpoint.

After three and a half years of occupation, Iraq's medical system has sunk to levels lower than seen during the economic sanctions imposed after the first Gulf war in 1990.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has said Iraqis are now extremely vulnerable in their health needs.

"Several wars and 13 years of economic sanctions left a heavy toll on the nutrition of the population, on the social structure, on the economy and on the health infrastructure and services," according to a statement on the WHO website.

"This is well depicted in the morbidity and mortality rates of the population of Iraq, particularly of infants, children and mothers. The majority of Iraqis completely depend on the food Public Distribution System for their nutritional requirements."

The health situation in Iraq has been in constant decline since the beginning of the US-backed UN-imposed sanctions in 1990. Iraqi doctors were reputed to be the best in the Middle East during the 1980's, but now they are short of medicines, medical equipment and funding to maintain the hospitals.

"We were angry with Saddam's government for the poor health situation in the country, but now we wish we could get that back," 55-year-old teacher Ahmed Zaydan from Sadr City in Baghdad told IPS. "There was not enough medical care, but there was something that one could live with and the private sector market was cheap. We were hoping for the change of regime to improve our lives, but the result is that we practically have no government healthcare."

Saddam Hussein's regime managed to keep basic medical services free of charge for most Iraqis until the US-led invasion in March 2003. There was a

PHOTO: ALAN CHIN



Dr. Omar al-Kubaisy stopped working at a hospital, then at his clinic and fled to France, leaving patients.

hospital in almost every town. Surgeries were carried out free of charge. Medicines were imported by the government and sold at affordable prices to those going to private clinics and hospitals.

The Ministry of Health is now controlled by Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's movement under a political agreement between the ruling parties. The sectarian influence on the ministry has greatly impeded healthcare.

"The ministry office in Baghdad is under the control of ignorant people who know nothing about medical science," a doctor told IPS. "The whole ministry is controlled by clerics who brought their militiamen along to divert the ministry into a death squad headquarters. Many of my colleagues resigned, were expelled or abducted by those who should have provided protection for them. Others quit and left the country."

The independent Iraq Medical Association (IMA) announced earlier this month that the healthcare system has continued to deteriorate and lacks adequate

qualified staff and equipment. The IMA estimates that 90% of the nearly 180 hospitals countrywide lack essential resources.

"Our hospitals look more like barns with lack of electric power, medicines, equipment and now doctors and surgeons because of the corrupt managers who care for nothing but filling their pockets with false contract money and conducting sectarian killings against doctors and patients," a doctor from a hospital in

Baghdad told IPS. "I personally have been able to stay with my job only because I am from the favoured sect and my cousin is a ruling party member."

The IMA announced this month that of 34,000 Iraqi physicians registered prior to 2003, over half have fled the country, and that at least 2,000 have been killed.

Two months ago the Iraqi Islamic Party announced that its candidate for deputy health minister was abducted from inside the minister's office. "Dr. Ali al-Mehdawi is still in

the hands of his kidnappers, and we are not certain of his safety," a senior Islamic Party member told IPS.

Despite more than a billion dollars claimed to have been spent by the U.S. on Iraq's healthcare system, health needs are one of the biggest problems for Iraqis under the occupation. There appears to be no quick solution to this worsening situation.

Apparent corruption has made the crisis worse. Earlier this year a 200 million dollar reconstruction project for building 142 primary care centres ran out of cash with just 20 on course for completion, a situation the WHO described as "shocking."

The Iraqi government estimates that 8 billion dollars is needed over the next four years to fund the ailing healthcare system.

The campaign group Medact has reported that in Iraq "easily treatable conditions such as diarrhea and respiratory illness caused 70% of all child deaths," and "of the 180 health clinics the US hoped to build by the end of 2005, only four have been completed—and none opened."

InterPress Service



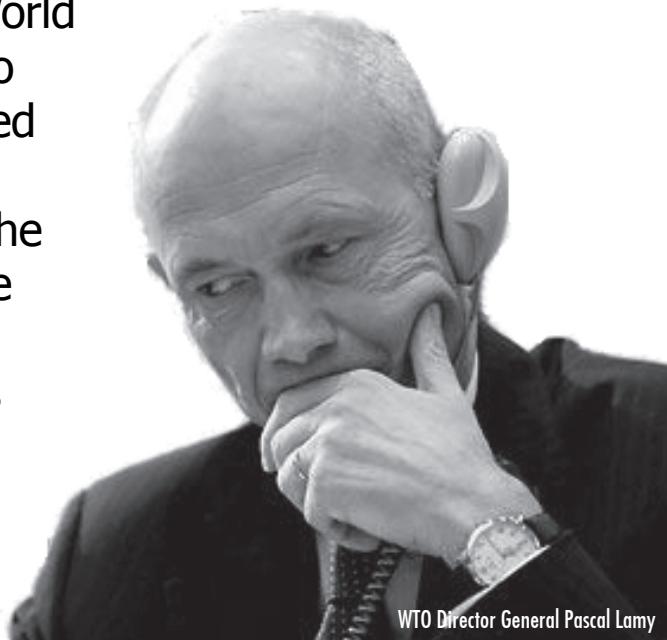
PHOTO: DAHRIA MAINIRAQ.COM

LAST CHANCE FOR WTO'S DOHA TALKS?

Trade negotiations under the World

Trade Organisation returned to Geneva this week and it is hoped that the Doha Round will be concluded by year end before the US elections in 2008. But the deadlock that plagued the negotiations is posing serious problems to the successful conclusion of the Round.

Martin Khor



WTO Director General Pascal Lamy

The World Trade Organization's (WTO) Doha negotiations have been going around in circles for many months.

Time is not on the WTO's side as in 2008 there will be the American Presidential elections and no one expects the United States to engage in negotiations then.

So the Doha Round must conclude by the end of this year. And that means that the most difficult part—agreeing on the 'modalities' or the formulae and degrees of cuts on tariffs- must be done by the end of July.

Yet no solution is in sight. That could be because the WTO's Director-General Pascal Lamy had decided to focus on the 'Group of 6' to come up with a deal among themselves. Then the rest of the 150 members could be persuaded to go along with it.

This has backfired. The G6 (comprising the U.S., the European Union, India, Brazil, Japan and Australia) could not agree in their Ministerial meetings last July

and the talks were suspended altogether at the suggestion of Lamy.

When the talks resumed again three months ago, again the focus was on these six members to get their act together.

At a meeting of their Trade Ministers in New Delhi a few weeks ago, the G6 came up with nothing except another deadline (end of 2007) and a promise to intensify their efforts.

The other countries have reached the end of their confidence that the G6 process will work. Worse, they feel left out and resent being asked to be 'rubber stamps', expected to endorse what the big players may agree to.

Thus, on 20 April, a strange decision was taken - that the WTO talks would shift back to the WTO in Geneva.

Yes, the G6 will continue to meet among themselves, and good luck to that. But serious negotiations

involving all WTO members will resume this week in Geneva itself.

It is an admission that the undemocratic practice of a few big players negotiating on behalf of everyone else has failed.

But that does not mean that the multilateral talks, open to all, will succeed either. As one diplomat put it, "If the G6 had problems, the same issues will crop up when the talks involve everyone, with the same logjam."

The difference is that at least all countries will have the opportunity to know what the problems are, and to take part in the discussions.

At the 20 April WTO meeting, many developing countries warned that the rush to meet the end-of-year deadline should not be at the expense of the content of the negotiations.

Development is supposed to be the goal, and this has to be adhered to and not sacrificed, they stressed.

The need for development to be the test and center of the talks is however just not on the radar screens of the developed countries.

The US, EU and Japan want to continue to protect their agriculture through high subsidies. But they want to pry open the industrial, services and agricultural markets of the developing countries.

Even within the small G6 grouping, there could be no deal. The US has offered to put a maximum limit of US\$23 billion for domestic farm subsidies. But this is higher than the US\$19 billion it provided to farmers in 2005, so everyone is asking the US to do better than that.

The US has so far refused, insisting that others improve their offers. It wants food tariffs to be slashed in developing countries. India, Indonesia and another 43 developing countries insist, however, that they need sufficiently high tariffs to protect the jobs of their small farmers.

The US and EU meanwhile also insist on suppressing tariffs of industrial goods to a maximum of 15% in developing countries. Most of these countries say that if that happens, their

industries will be unable to compete with cheap imports and will close or will never take off.

It is clear the richer countries want their cake and eat it too - to protect their own vulnerable sectors, especially agriculture, while asking the poorer countries to open up everything. The developing countries are astonished at the audacity of the double standards, and are resisting.

This is at the heart of the WTO's deadlock. This week, the agriculture talks resume, with a new paper being issued to 'challenge' the members to make their intentions clearer.

There are fewer and fewer optimists around who expect any breakthrough anytime soon. For that to happen, the developed countries have to change tack by allowing more access to their markets while demanding less of developing countries.

That is not likely, given the history of the trading system. For a deal to complete soon, developing countries would then have to bow to the demands of the developed countries, and surrender their own development prospects.

That is also not likely, since the developing countries are now speaking up to defend their interests with more clarity than they used to.

The deadlock looks like it will remain locked, but anything may still happen in the next few weeks which provide the last chance for the WTO to get a deal done before the year ends. **Third World Network Features**

Martin Khor is the Director of the Third World Network.

PHOTO: PAN AP



GENETICALLY ENGINEERED RICE : A CURE FOR DIARRHEA?

There are moves to introduce the world's first genetically engineered rice containing human genes which its proponents claim will help save the lives of millions of children suffering from diarrhea. But critics beg to differ.

Chee Yoke Heong

PHOTO: ARKIBONGBAYAN.ORG



A US company has received approval to grow rice genetically engineered (GE) with human genes which it claimed could help save lives of millions of children. But concerned groups have questioned the need for such a rice, indicating that this might be a sheer marketing ploy in the name of saving lives.

The rice, which is produced by Ventria Bioscience, has been engineered to produce milk proteins which then can be extracted for use in food and drinks including for oral rehydration solutions to treat diarrhea.

This pharmaceutical (pharma) rice has received preliminary approval from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) for large scale planting in Kansas, USA even though the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has refused to approve Ventria's recombinant pharmaceutical as safe.

The rice is to be planted on up to 3,200 acres in Kansas and if Ventria's application is fully approved by the USDA, this will be the largest planting of a drug-producing food crop in the US and the first GM food crop containing human genes in the world.

The company plans to harvest the proteins from the rice and use them in drinks and foods to be given to save millions of children who suffer from diarrhea and the resulting dehydration. Diarrhea is responsible for over 2 millions death each year, the majority in the developing world. It is also a major cause of death among children, particularly those under five years old.

However, Friends of the Earth (FOE) has criticized this move saying that the GE rice is unnecessary because diarrhea is an illness that has well-known causes and that there exist proven and inexpensive solutions to address the illness.

It pointed out that the GE rice produced by Ventria is a distraction from existing solutions such as providing access to safe water and improved sanitation, to save children suffering from illness.

Also, children suffering from diarrhea lose a lot of water and what they need is rehydration. There are already cheap and accessible ways of fighting dehydration by simple oral rehydration therapy.

These proven and effective measures have already reduced the mortality rate of children suffering from diarrhea from 4.6 million deaths in 1980 to 1.5 to 2.5 million deaths today, and this is regarded as one of the greatest medical achievements of the 20th century.

In India, for centuries, diarrhea has been treated with home fluids for rehydration e.g. Rice kanji (rice fluid obtained by boiling rice), coconut water, butter milk and aniseed water, which are simple, low cost solutions and locally available and endorsed by international organizations such as

the UNICEF and World Health Organization.

According to Mira Shiva of the International Peoples Health Council and Vandana Shiva of Navdanya in India, the best rehydration for breast fed babies is the mother's milk. Ventria is using 'lacto ferrin' found in breast milk to produce the transgenic rice. Breast fed babies therefore can get lacto ferrin directly from their mothers instead of through the GE rice.

The pharma rice also raises health concerns. According to analysts, pharma crops such as Ventria's rice pose a threat to human food supply and public health as the proteins they contain are intended to be biologically active in humans, yet have not undergone adequate testing or received FDA approval as drugs, and thus may be harmful if eaten accidentally.

According to FOE, an experiment using this technology has already been conducted in Peru on 140 infants from 5 to 33 months in age in hospitals attended by the poorest sectors of the population.

...developing countries do not need the high risk and high tech GE rice to combat diarrhea, especially when low cost and simple and proven solutions exist.

Reports indicate that parents of the children were not adequately informed of the experimental nature of the treatment, and at least two mothers of infants in the clinical trial reported that their children suffered from allergic reactions, causing the Peruvian government to launch an enquiry into the experiment.

Concern has also been raised of the risk of contamination of pharma rice on other non-GE rice varieties especially if they are grown



CONSUMER ISSUES

outdoors. The contamination routes are numerous, including cross-pollination and seed mixing during commercial growing and seed production. The few cases of contamination in the US in recent times prove that such fears are not unfounded.

The latest incident involved the contamination of a popular non-GE long-grain rice in the US - Clearfield CL131 (CL131) - by the unapproved GE variety LLRICE604 developed by Bayer Cropscience. While the FDA concluded that the presence of the rice at low levels in food would pose no food or feed safety concerns, because LLRICE604 remains a regulated article, producers will not be able to plant any CL131 seed that currently remains on hold.

Another GM contamination involving the LLRICE 600 series

last year caused a major disruption in the US rice industry.

Last August, commercial US long grain rice was found to be contaminated with LLRICE601, an unapproved variety genetically engineered to be resistant to the herbicide glufosinate ammonium. Even though the variety won US approval in December, it continues to disrupt US rice exports as it remains unapproved in importing countries. As much as 47% of US rice exports are said to be affected.

The contamination sparked a series of reactions against Bayer CropScience the producer of the transgenic rice and the US rice export market. Major retailers removed US rice products from their shelves and some countries put restrictions on US rice imports thus resulting in an immediate impact on US farmers, who

retaliated with a flood of lawsuits against Bayer. The variety has also found its way into the food supply of other countries raising the scale of the contamination and the urgent need for international regulations of GE products.

Given the challenging objective of ensuring the safety and welfare of millions of its children, it is obvious that developing countries do not need the high risk and high tech GE rice to combat diarrhea, especially when low cost and simple and proven solutions exist.

As Shiva pointed out, there is no scientific basis for the GE rice to be introduced adding that it is merely an 'unadulterated marketing stunt' in the name of savings lives.

Third World Network Features

Chee Yoke Heong is a researcher with the Third World Network.

PHOTO: ARKIBONGBAYAN.ORG



PLASTIC BAGS: JUST SAY “NO”

The millions of plastic bags we use say a lot about our wasteful habits. We use these bags for a few minutes to carry our goods home, but these plastic bags can last for hundreds of years.

While it takes a long time to break down plastic, the amount of plastic bags being used continues to grow and this makes for a major environmental problem.

Plastic bag litter creates many problems. They end up as huge amounts of garbage filling our landfills, blocking drains, and trapping small animals like birds. When eaten they kill livestock.

In the marine environment, plastic bag litter is toxic, killing thousands of whales, turtles and other sea life every year.

Doing away with plastic bags is easier than we think. Many local government and town councils around the world have banned plastic check out. If some towns and supermarkets can live without plastic bags, then maybe your neighborhood can, too.

Why are Plastic Bags a Problem?

Plastic bags have long been a waste problem that harm the environment:

1. Every year 20 million Australians use around 5 billion plastic check-out bags. A plastic check-out bag is used only for minutes - i.e. the time it takes to get from the shops to our homes. Plastic bags however, can take between 15 and 1,000 years to break down in the environment.
2. A whale died on a Cairns beach in Australia after ingesting 6 square meters of plastic-including plastic bags. Such obstructions in animals can cause severe pain, distress and death. After an animal is killed by plastic bags, its body decomposes and the plastic is released back into the environment where it can kill again.
3. On land, plastic bag litter can block drains and trap birds. They also kill livestock. One farmer in Australia carried out an autopsy

on a dead calf and found 8 plastic bags in its stomach.

Towns Go “Plastic Bag Free”

Many town councils have gone “Plastic Bag Free”. For example, Planet Ark in Australia has worked with the communities in the states of Tasmania, NSW and Victoria to help them become Plastic Bag Free Towns.

Tips for Shoppers

Here are some tips to help you reduce your plastic bag usage:

1. Use reusable bags, boxes, shopping trolleys or a backpack for your shopping. Reusable bags hold 2-3 times more items than a plastic check-out bag - so you have less bags to carry. They last for years and won't split like a plastic bag.
2. Say “NO” to plastic bags at the check-out if you only have a few items.
3. Reuse plastic bags you have accumulated as garbage liners.
4. Open your eyes to how many plastic shopping bags you have at home. Keep count and try to reduce the number you take home.
5. Spread the word. Ask your local shops to stock plastic bag alternatives if they haven't already done so and encourage friends and family to also get involved.



PHOTO: MELBOURNE ZOO

Turtle with plastic bag

Makoto Oda's letter to his friends, April 2007

The enclosed document is the copy of 'the verdict' concerning the present dreadful situation in the Philippines issued by 'Permanent People's Tribunal' (PPT) in which I participated as one of the juries at The Hague in March. I enclose the copy of the verdict because too little is known about the present situation in the Philippines. 'PPT', an independent, a non-governmental international organization, is not known in Japan at all, however, it is very much known in Europe and 'the Third World'. I joined this Rome-based organization at the beginning of the process of establishment, in 1978.

The 'PPT', which inherits the concept of 'Bertrand Russell Tribunal' at the time of Vietnam War, is aimed to prosecute and judge a crime committed by a government from the 'people's' (ethnic groups', common people's) side, and to show the evidence of the partiality, injustice or oppression.

In 1978, when Mr. Basso came to Japan, I was asked to participate in the tribunal. I approved to his idea and said that I would take my part based on my common sense as one of the common people and my human wisdom as one of the human beings.

From then, I attended the inauguration ceremony at Bologna, Italy in 1979, and in the following year, I participated in the first session on the Philippines under the Marcos' regime as a jury at Antwerp, Belgium. As I was in the very first session on the Philippines' case, I thought I am responsible to attend at the second one which was in this March. So I decided to go to The Hague even I had a bad health condition which I write in the last part of this letter. In the session in March, it turned out that I did not know almost anything about the present situation in the Philippines. However, this should be the same to most of people in the world – so I decided to send this to you.

In the Philippines, now the Arroyo regime ,conspired and supported by United States which Bush administration leads with 'democracy' and 'freedom' by claiming '9.11', attempts to exterminate the opponents or protestants by means of numerous crimes of 'impunity' (to torture, suppress or kill illegally, disguising as if it is legal). This is why our verdict is addressed to U.S. President Bush and Filipino President Arroyo.

The session lasted for 5 days, and I heard testimonies by Filipinos from various positions. (The details of the testimonies are shown in the verdict.)

United States of America seems to wield its enormous power with this 'impunity' not only in the Philippines but also in Columbia. Just same as the Philippines, Columbia has been under the United States' control, and is very important for U.S. to expand its military control over the world. For this purpose, United States perpetrates 'impunity', while it claims democracy and freedom.

Attending the 5-days-'PPT' session, I reconsidered what is 'democracy and freedom', and also importance of Japanese philosophical and political importance to have the 'article 9' based on 'pacifism'. I shall stop here to write about the 'tribunal'.

Including myself, we know too little about these impending situation in the world. In the 'PPT' session, I said that I was ashamed of my ignorance. I said to the Filipino people that at least, I would like to organize an investigation group and go to the Philippines to find out the facts just like Hong Kong citizens did. Yet, it is no longer possible to do so in my health condition.

As I mentioned that I was not well at The Hague, the bad health condition did not change when I moved to travel around Turkey after that. When I had precise checkups at the hospital after that, it turned out that my bad health was because I had cancer at the terminal stage, or near terminal stage.



STEEPEST DROP IN GOVT SPENDING FOR HEALTH: FILIPINOS PAYING MORE FOR HEALTH SERVICES UNDER ARROYO

Health spending experienced possibly the steepest drop under the Arroyo administration and this has forced Filipinos to pay more for badly needed health services, according to independent think-tank IBON Foundation.

National and local government's share in total health expenditure was 40.6% in 2000 but fell by over 10 percentage points to just 30.3% by 2004. This forced Filipinos to make up the difference from private sources, particularly from out-of-pocket spending.

This observation was validated by the latest Philippine national health accounts, which showed that between 2000 and 2004, government spending on



health fell from 41% of total spending to 30%, while out-of-pocket spending grew from 41% to 47 percent.

Real government health spending per Filipino fell by 18.6% from 2001 (P212.66 per capita) to 2005 (P173). Although allocations for health had started to recover since then, health budgets are still not enough to provide a decent standard of health care for Filipinos, particularly for the poorest families.

Meanwhile, government is cutting allocations to state hospitals as part of a de facto privatization program while commercializing health services, further pushing health care out of the reach of the poorest Filipinos. Thus, it should not be surprising that one of every two Filipinos dies without ever receiving medical attention.

In English, there is a saying, 'his days are numbered'. This is just what I am, and I am thinking that if I could live 3 more months, 6 more months, 9 more months, hopefully 1 more year – (I will be 75 years old on the 2nd of June – if I were alive - I feel as if I came back around after the journey of life.)

I cannot walk in the demonstrations, nor talk in the assemblies anymore. However, even if I only have a short time, I can write. I would like to write as long as I could. From the beginning of May, I will start 'chemical treatment', but I will stay at home as much as possible. (I am writing this letter at home after I temporary got out of the hospital.)

It might be strange way to say, but let us stay well as long as we are alive.

April 21, 2007
"Makoto ODA"
(Translated into English by Nara ODA, on May 2, 2007)

(Oda Makoto is a novelist and social activist. He is one of Japan's most celebrated postwar authors, an activist against the U.S. war on Vietnam, an advocate for disaster victims neglected by the Japanese government, a voice for peace in the wake of 11 September 2001, an uncompromising critic of racial and ethnic discrimination. Oda served as juror in the 1st and 2nd Sessions on the Philippines of the Permanent People's Tribunal.)



(Lift)Off to Sea.

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