



# UPDATES PHILIPPINES

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## EDITORIAL

### Of sugar barons, retrograde agriculture and Marcos II foul-ups

Barely two months in office, the government of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr hit a snag with the 'sugar importation fiasco'. On 5 August, the Sugar Regulatory Administration issued Sugar Order No. 4 allowing the importation of 300,000 metric tons of sugar. An uproar from domestic sugarcane landlords forced Marcos Jr to extricate himself from the mess, put the blame on his subordinates and declared the importation "illegal". A few days later, however, he backtracked and allowed the importation of 150,000 MT, ostensibly to address the increasing demand for industrial sugar supply and skyrocketing retail prices.

The 'elephant in the room' in this foul-up is the glaring incompetence of Marcos Jr, the Chief Executive, Commander-in-Chief, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and concurrently Chairman of the Sugar Regulatory Administration. Notwithstanding the incompetence, the ongoing 'sugar importation fiasco' lays bare the myriad and long-standing crises plaguing the domestic sugar industry and the entire country in general.

Domestic sugarcane is produced in 19 provinces covering an estimated 422,000 hectares. It is the fifth largest crop after rice, banana, corn and coconut, employing more than 700,000 plantation and mill workers, and producing more than 2.2 million metric tons of raw sugar per year.

Ever since the introduction of the sugar industry in the 1800s during Spanish colonialism, sugarcane production has been founded on monopoly land ownership of the hacenderos, monopoly of sugar milling operations and colonial trade. As the industry flourished, the parasitic and privileged classes of hacenderos and compradors developed as the social base of Spanish colonialism, then American colonialism, and eventually of US neo-colonialism.

The sugar barons indulged in building mansions, acquiring expensive consumer goods and foreign travels. As the powerful 'sugar bloc', they extend their clout from the plantations and mills to control local and national political power. All the while, amidst the abundance of wealth and power, plantation and mill workers wallow in poverty and hunger.

The minimum wage for agricultural workers, as mandated by the Manila government, amount to PhP410 (US\$7.30) per day. This amount is less than half of the living wage. Even so, hacenderos and mill owners never even pay this minimum! Workers receive from PhP150 – PhP250 per day. Add to this the inhuman working conditions and precarious work contracts. And when the workers organize themselves to assert their economic and political rights, they are brutally suppressed by the armed goons of the sugar barons and state security forces.

The series of land reform programs from Marcos Sr up to Marcos Jr is a hoax. Despite legal documents proclaiming land distribution to the tillers, control of sugarcane plantations remain a monopoly of the hacenderos and their agribusinesses. And despite humanity's progress in the 21st century, Philippine sugar production lies stagnant in the 19th century – pre-industrial, decrepit, feudal, hampered by comprador profiteering and plagued by bureaucratic corruption.

The impoverished and oppressed plantation and mill workers, and the Filipino people, are clamoring, not so much about the increase or decrease of sugar importations, but an increase of wages and improvement of working conditions. They clamor for genuine land reform and the modernization of agriculture. They clamor for the pursuit of national industrialization and liberation from imperialist impositions and intervention. **UP**

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*Thank you!*



*RMP file photo.*

## Rural Missionaries of the Philippines charged with 'terrorism funding'

Prosecutors of the Marcos II government announced on 15 August the filing of criminal charges against 16 individuals for allegedly conspiring to divert money from foreign sources to fund the New People's Army. The 16 individuals, including five Roman Catholic nuns and a lawyer, are part of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, a 53-year-old voluntary association of priests,

nuns and lay missionaries that provide support for rural communities of peasants, agricultural workers, fisherfolk and indigenous peoples.

In their announcement, Department of Justice prosecutors "found probable cause" to indict Sr. Emma Teresita Cupin, Sr. Susan Dejolde, Sr. Ma. Fatima Napoles Somogod, Sr. Augustina Juntilla, Sr. Maryjane Caspillo, Atty. Czarina Golda Selim Musni, Melissa Comiso, Maridel Solomon Fano, Jhona Ignilan Stokes, Hanelyn Caibigan Cespedes, Angelie Magdua, Emilio Gabales, Mary Louise Dumas, Aileen Villarosa, Evelyn Naguio and Aldeem Yañez for "making available funds to the Communist Party of the Philippines and NPA."

The DOJ prosecutors, however, did not confirm whether the accused received subpoenas or were allowed to participate in the DOJ preliminary investigation.

RMP Spokesperson Sr. Rebecca D. Pacete, MMS, denied the allegations, declaring that all their projects are reported and accounted for. The RMP, she said, "complied with requirements in securing funds for projects, including audits."

Sr. Pacete also decried the demonization of their work which, she said, "has negatively affected various ministries in sustainable agriculture, rural schools, disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation, health services, defense of human rights and organic farming."

She likewise expressed concern for the safety of the accused, two among whom are already in prison on trumped-up charges. "Rabid and lethal red-tagging, weaponization of the law and impunity for human rights violations continue to be state policies that must be vigorously opposed," she said.

The case stems from complaints filed by the Anti-Money Laundering Council, based on testimonies of two alleged witnesses claiming to be former members of the NPA. The AMLC had earlier ordered the Bank of the Philippine Islands to freeze three RMP bank accounts for 20 days in December 2019. The freeze order was extended to six months in February 2020 by the Court of Appeals.

DOJ prosecutors "recommended no bail for the accused." If convicted, the accused face the maximum penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of not less than PhP500,000 (US\$9,000). **UP**



*NDFP peace consultant Pedro Codaste killed by AFP. Photo: peoplesdispatch.org*

## 5,843 human rights victims in Duterte's last 6 months – CPP Report

The Communist Party of the Philippines characterized the last six months of President Rodrigo Duterte's term as "drenched in the blood of the victims of his failed all-out war." In a [report published on 16 July](#), the CPP cited 137 cases involving 5,843 victims of human rights violations perpetrated by Duterte's security forces in the period of January to June 2022.

Of these, 40 were victims of extrajudicial killings and seven others survived murder attempts. 166 are victims of arbitrary arrests and detention. More than 91% of the victims, 5,342 persons, suffered forcible evacuation and displacement from their communities, as well as food and economic blockades.

"The multitude of victims," the CPP asserted, "are not mere numbers. Each mark on the tally of the regime's butchers belong to a name of a farmer, indigenous, worker and other oppressed classes."

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The report also cited the “savagery” of the Duterte regime’s security forces who do not abide by International Humanitarian Law. From January to June 2022, personnel of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police killed at least 15 NPA Red fighters and CPP leaders who were hors de combat.

The CPP cited the abduction of NDFP Consultant Pedro Codaste and an NPA Red fighter in Cagayan de Oro in January. The two were convalescing from various ailments when abducted. The AFP 4th Infantry Division released their visibly tortured bodies in the neighboring province of Bukidnon a couple of days later, claiming the two were killed in an armed encounter.

The CPP report also cited at least 44 cases of human rights violations directly related to the Presidential elections of May 2022. These include seven victims of extrajudicial killings and six forcible abductions. The report also cited 24 cases of threats, harassment and intimidation against organizers and supporters of opposition party alliance Makabayan.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Supreme Court granted a writ of amparo on 23 August for labor union organizers, Elizabeth Magbanua and Alipio Juat, who were reportedly abducted by state security forces on 3 May and have since been missing. The High Court sided with the families and colleagues of the victims that “their rights to life, liberty and security have been violated on account of their disappearance” and ordered AFP officials to reply to the writ within 72 hours.

The SC explained that the writ of amparo “is intended to address the pernicious problems of ‘extralegal killings’ and ‘enforced disappearances’ and serves both preventive and curative roles in addressing these issues.” **UP**



*File photo.*

## State terrorism push people to support armed revolution -- NDFP

The National Democratic Front of the Philippines chapter in Negros Island asserted on 13 August that the “all-out assault” of state security forces in central Negros to protect the interests of big business, landlords and compradors will pave “a clearer path for the people to support armed revolution.”

Bayani Obrero, NDFP-Negros Spokesperson, revealed that various units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police protect large-scale mining operations in the mountain ranges of Binalbagan and Himamaylan City in Negros Occidental province and Tayasan and La Libertad in Negros Oriental. These operations, he said, are detrimental to the lives and livelihood of the peasant and Maghat-Bukidnon indigenous communities. “Quarry operations along the Hilabangan river have also damaged ricefields and farmlots while endangering populations vulnerable to landslides and floods,” Obrero added.

“More than a month into the Marcos regime, mercenary troops of the AFP launched vicious strikes against the rural population of Guihulngan City, Canlaon City and Vallehermoso in Negros Oriental and Binalbagan, Isabela, La Castellana, Moises Padilla and Himamaylan City in Negros Occidental, in utter disregard for International Humanitarian Law,” Obrero said.

He added that AFP officials habitually claim “fake encounters” with the New People’s Army to cover-up their crimes against the people. “Army commanders siphon kickbacks from budgets for military operations and collect merits and promotions handed out after each ‘successful’ military operation – usually involving the brutal murders of unarmed civilians (including children) and hors de combat.”

The rural communities in Negros Island suffer from landlessness, widespread hunger, depressed wages and soaring prices. Dependent on the sugarcane industry, they additionally suffer joblessness during the off-milling season. Obrero asserted, “The AFP has only added insult to injury by intensifying their attacks despite the worsening socioeconomic crisis.”

Newly-installed AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Vicente Bacarro recently ordered his troops to step up its “operational tempo” against the NPA. Obrero affirmed that this all-out assault “... will pose many problems to Bacarro’s scheme as this will pave a clearer path for the people to support armed revolution.” **UP**