



# UPDATES PHILIPPINES

RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF THE PHILIPPINES

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## EDITORIAL Of Cartels and Onion Tears

On 16 January, Merlita Gallardo shared the plight of onion farmers in Bayambang, Pangasinan in Northern Luzon. Her husband took his own life in 2021 after an armyworm infestation destroyed their crops and left them buried in debt reaching into the millions. Gallardo continued planting onions as she had in the past, but a series of storms in 2022 destroyed her crops. After she had replanted onions, yet another challenge came – this time, it was man-made: the arrival of cheap onion imports that would drive farmgate prices down just as they were beginning their harvest season.

Gallardo's case is just one of many similar stories of onion farmers constantly driven to desperation as cheap imported agricultural imports destroy the local agricultural market.

Like in previous regimes, Maros Jr. as secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), resorted to importation as solution to the food crisis. At the start of the year, the DA allowed the importation of 21,060 metric tons of onion in response to prices soaring above the world average. Farmers pleaded to stop the importation, as it would hurt their incomes not even enough to break-even production costs as it is. But their pleas fell on deaf ears as Marcos Jr. set off his 8th trip abroad in under 7 months of his presidency while the rest of the toiling masses struggle with unbearably rising prices.

The move to import more onions into the market put into question the case of the disappearing 10,000 metric tons of onions supposedly in cold storage but were nowhere to be found, creating an artificial shortage that led to onion prices skyrocketing up to 1000% in January. These are clear indications of collusion happening between the Marcos Jr. government and agricultural cartels, manipulating the price of onions, and profiting off the misery of farmers and consumers.

These collusive price-fixing cartels distort the market price of agricultural produce to create artificial shortages which in turn allows them to raise prices. This results in millions of consumers unable to afford food and pushes more people into poverty while at the same time creating the conditions for cheap imports to come in as a means to curb the price inflation. As highly subsidized agricultural products enter the local market, domestic food producers, in this case onion farmers, become unable to compete with foreign goods.

This is on top of the price of sugar which remains very high, egg prices are rapidly on the rise while oil price hikes are relentless. Meanwhile, a recent report revealed that the country's nine richest individuals have more money than 55 million Filipinos making inequality more pronounced than ever. Fighting inflation, inequality, and food shortages require no less than genuine land reform, and government support for local food producers.

The excessively inflated price of onion and other basic goods are a heavy blow to consumers, even as onion farmers accrue debt due to their losses and drown in their own tears. **UP**

## ICC to resume investigation into Duterte's drug war



Image: Pinoy Weekly

On January 26, 2023, the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) granted Prosecutor Karim Khan's request to resume investigation into the drug-related killings in the Philippines. In its announcement, the ICC said is, "not satisfied that the Philippines is undertaking relevant investigations that would warrant a deferral of the Court's investigations on the basis of the complementarity principle."

In a statement, the ICC concluded that "the various domestic initiatives and proceedings, assessed collectively, do not amount to tangible, concrete and progressive investigative steps in a way that would sufficiently mirror the Court's investigation."

*[continued next page...]*

*[... continued]* The Pre-Trial Chamber of the ICC was investigating into then President Duterte's 'crimes against humanity' in relation to the drug war allegedly committed in the Philippines between 1 November 2011 and 16 March 2019. However, on 18 November 2021, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines requested that the investigation be deferred.

The resumption of the investigation was welcomed by human rights organizations. Cristina Palabay, Secretary General of the human rights organization, Karapatan welcomed the decision saying, "we hope that the ICC Pre-Trial Chamber pursues investigation until former President Rodrigo Duterte is convicted and punished for the deaths of thousands in his regime's bloody anti-drug war."

Palabay said the resumption of ICC's investigation, "should also serve as a warning to the current regime for essentially continuing Duterte's policies on the drug war."

Peter Murphy, Chairperson of the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP), stated, "We are extremely appreciative of the decision of the ICC. It offers a mechanism for victims to continue their pursuit of justice against the Duterte Regime's brutal war on drugs, on dissent and on the Moro and all Indigenous Peoples. Justice will still be served despite the Marcos administration's decision to keep the Philippines outside the jurisdiction of the ICC and cover-up the crimes against humanity committed by the police and the military under Duterte."

"ICHRP has full confidence in the impartiality of the ICC. We urge the ICC to vigorously pursue the full investigation of the previous Duterte administration for these crimes against humanity so that, finally, justice may be served, and impunity ended," Murphy said.

The Philippines had been a State party to the Rome Statute since November 2011 until President Duterte withdrew the Philippines in 2018. **UP**

## CPP: 'Half-done coup, increased repression with Año appointment as NSA'

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in a statement issued 15 January 2023, revealed that the appointments of former Duterte military henchmen such as Gen. Eduardo Año to key defense and security agencies is halfway towards a coup-de-etat, coupled with increasing political repression and war of suppression.

Marco Valbuena, CPP Chief Information Officer, said that the replacement of Prof. Clarita Carlos as national security adviser by Gen. Año after just six months in office, following the anomalous re-appointment of Gen. Andres Centino as chief-of-staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and appointment of Gen. Carlito Galvez to the Department of National Defense (DND), completes their control of key defense agencies.



*Image: Revolution.nu*

Valbuena said, "Rumors of a Duterte coup have been going around. In fact, the coup is now half done. The shake down at the PNP is still to fully unravel. With Duterte's men in full control of the military, Marcos Jr is now held by one of his balls. He takes a political risk every time he leaves the country for his junkets."

According to Valbuena, the military control of the bureaucratic state follows the US doctrine of "anti-terrorism," and anti-communist counterinsurgency where the military define and dictate state policy and place civil agencies under its control. "To the military, everything is black and white. Anyone who does not bow is either a communist or a friend of the communists," he added.

"We can expect all the brutal tactics of martial law, political repression, and war of suppression. They will continue to unleash such brutal tactics as extrajudicial killings, abductions and disappearances, attacks against unions and organizations, armed raids on entire villages, aerial bombing and shelling of farmers' communities, fields, and forests, and so on."

On the NDFP-GRP peace negotiations, Valbuena said this "fascist triumvirate" are violently opposed to any resumption of the talks to settle the civil war by addressing the socioeconomic roots of the armed conflict. To them "there no other definition of peace, but the peace of the graveyard."

Valbuena argues "with the ruling clique busy in a tug of war for power, President Marcos is indifferent and incompetent in resolving the pressing problems of rising prices especially of food and agricultural commodities. Instead, the people continue to suffer brutal suppression.

Having learned their lessons during martial law, the people, however, know that they have no other option but to fight back militantly in order to attain their aspirations for a better life." **UP**

## Justice for OFW murdered in Kuwait, demanded

Relatives and friends of Jullebee Ranara continue to demand justice for her murder. Ranara, a domestic worker, was found dead in a Kuwait desert on January 22. It was believed that she was raped before her killing.

“We demand due process and immediate resolution of the murder of Ranara, and appropriate indemnification of her surviving family,” declared *MIGRANTE* (global alliance of grassroots migrants organizations of overseas Filipinos and their families). “Simultaneously, officials and personnel of the government of the Philippines in Kuwait should also be investigated for their apparent negligence of OFW (Overseas Filipino Workers) of the said country.”

Based on reports in Kuwait, the son of her employer raped Ranara before she was killed. Her body was burned and thrown in the desert. Autopsy results show her skull was crushed.

According to *MIGRANTE*, the semi-slave situation of hundreds of domestic workers in Kuwait is widespread. “In the past more than six years, the brutal killings of our compatriots has not stopped,” according to the group. “There is no change in their situation that is why the murder of Ranara ensued after the killing of domestic workers Joanna Demafelis, Jeanelyn Villavende and many more.”

Joanna Demafelis’ body was found in February 2018 inside a freezer with apparent signs of torture, in an apartment that had apparently been abandoned for at least a year. In 2019 based on an autopsy conducted, Jeanelyn Villavende was also raped and brutally beaten to death. On May 14, 2019 Constancia Lago Dayag died at the hands of her employer – black and blue and with a “cucumber” inside her private part.

At present, there are 400 abused Filipino migrants who can’t go home and are detained in facilities of the Philippine government in Kuwait.

*MIGRANTE* revealed that the Philippine State allows Filipinos to submit to the “kafala” system in Kuwait, where domestic workers are forced to work like slaves because they are tied to their “sponsor” or employer in their legal status and residence. They are prohibited from transferring work or leaving without the permission of the employer. Whoever violates this will be arrested or imprisoned.

The state’s priority is to squeeze maximum gains from remittances, according to the group. “The policy of deployment is deregulated, integrated in the service policy of the government is that domestic workers should suffer their condition,” it added.

Worse, it pressures migrants to compromise even with abusive employers. “Instead of helping, the Philippine state passes on the responsibility of service to migrants to the migrants themselves or to the agencies that deployed them,” *MIGRANTE* concluded. **UP**



Image: Migrant Philippines

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*Thank you!*



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