

March 15, 2010

To:
Her Excellency
President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo
Republic of the Philippines
Malacanang Palace
JP Laurel Street, San Miguel
Manila NCR 1005
web email: <http://www.op.gov.ph/contact.asp>
Press Secretary and Presidential Spokesperson
ops_edp@ops.gov.ph

Re: Solidarity with the families and stop the evictions in Navotas City, Philippines

Dear Madam President,

I am writing to you on behalf of the International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI), an international network of social organizations (inhabitants' associations, tenants' unions, homeless and poorly sheltered people's committees, housing cooperatives and social centres, volunteers' and migrants' associations), which for many years has been committed to the defence of housing rights 'without frontiers'. Besides, I am member of the UN-Advisory Group on Forced Evictions.

I am writing to express our deep concern over the very disturbing information received by our organization from Philippine mass media and NGOs concerning the violent demolitions going on along R10 in Navotas City. The demolitions took place on January 18 to 20 and resumed on March 4. The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the city government have already demolished the houses of some 393 families. They are part of the 1,000 families the government wants removed to give way to its Road 10 widening project.

Many residents did not accept the financial offer of P21,000 for each affected family from the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and insisted on receiving relocation as mandated by Philippine law as that your Excellency promised on August 1, 2008. To break their resistance the government used baton-wielding and shield shoving policemen and water canon blasts by firemen. Many people were hurt. Most of them were women, including grandmothers. A number were arrested and later released. This is really sad, considering that March is supposed to be women's month.

Now many of them are living in lean-tos along R10 because they have nowhere else to go. Around 100 families are camping in front of the office of the DPWH in Port Area Manila to press their demand for relocation. Any time the government can evict them again violently.

We remind that Philippines has ratified on 7 June 1974 the International Covenant on Economic Social Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Under Article 11 (1) ICESCR, all authorities of the Philippines are therefore obliged to refrain and to prevent third parties from the practice of forced evictions. The relocation only be justified, as described in General Comments n. 4 and 7, under very exceptional circumstances, with the agreement and thorough meaningful consultation with all those affected and adequate compensation for the loss of homes and land.

To this purpose, we remind your government that on November 24, 2008 the UN Committee monitoring compliance of governments with the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, called on the Philippine government as a State Party to the said Covenant to stop illegal forced evictions and to provide adequate relocation to evicted families. (E/C.12/PHL/CO/4, paras. 29-30).

This turn of events is an evident violation of the legality and completely contrary to what the affected people had expected from your Government. They held on to the promise you made on August 1, 2008 when you met their leaders together with other leaders representing 11 urban poor communities affected by national government infrastructure projects, in Malacanang, the presidential palace. You agreed to their proposal that they would be relocated to Montalban/Rodriguez municipality. They say they like that place because it is relatively near their jobs and sources of income, has basic services like water, electricity, public transportation, clinics, hospitals, and schools. You also promised funds for house and lot development. They religiously attended meetings with various government agencies, local and national. The meetings dragged. The DPWH now offers only offer financial assistance, not relocation. The residents and their lawyers said this is contrary to Philippine law (RA 7279) and insisted that what you promised in Malacanang should be carried out.

Instead of the legacy of a decent house and chance for a better future for their children when you leave as president in a few months, what they have are sleepless nights, fears for their children and elders getting sick, their children not going to school, income earners unable to work, fear of more violent evictions, more hunger, pain and misery. The demolitions rendered them homeless and even vulnerable to violations of their other rights, including the right to vote.

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Understandably poor people's faith in you have been shaken.

Expressing our whole solidarity with the families, we therefore urge you to intervene in this matter and to ensure that no evictions take place, and instead peaceful negotiations.

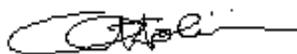
We therefore urge that your government do the following:

- Instruct relevant government agencies, namely, the DPWH, National Housing Authority, and Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council to relocate the R10 families to Montalban;
- Order a stop to further evictions and demolitions;
- Investigate those involved in the violent demolitions and punish those found guilty. The Commission on Human Rights should take the lead in the investigation.

We sincerely wish that in the waning days of your Presidency hope will be rekindled among the poor, especially the women of R10.

I look forward to your response.

Respectfully yours,



Cesare Ottolini
coordinator of International Alliance of Inhabitants

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