



October 23th, 2018

## **OPEN LETTER**

### **Re: Sagay 9 massacre**

The CCIC Asia Pacific Working Group (APWG) - Philippines, comprised of NGOs, faith-based organizations, unions, solidarity groups, and concerned citizens in Canada with relationships in the Philippines, were shocked to learn of the massacre of 9 farm workers, including 4 women and 2 minors, on October 20, 2018 in Hacienda Nene, Sagay City, Negros. In the past, we have expressed our deep concern about the severe deterioration in the human rights situation in the Philippines, in particular the prevailing context of impunity. We are deeply concerned that these killings are, yet another example of violence perpetrated against community members and leaders defending their right to access land and livelihood.

The victims were members of the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) who were participating in a land cultivation area activity, referred to as 'bungkalan'. When the lands are left idle after the sugarcane is harvested, members of the NFSW occupy the land and cultivate it to feed poor farming communities.

The land is owned by a large landlord who fears the campaign led by the NFSW calling for genuine agrarian reform and free land distribution. The land in question is currently under notice from the Department of Agrarian Reform for redistribution to peasant farmers as a component of the Philippine Government's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). After decades of waiting for CARP to provide them with a just solution to the landlessness, farmers have begun to exert their right to cultivate the land for their survival.

The sugar industry in Negros is responsible for 25 percent of the employment of local farm workers, who are among the poorest in the country. These farmers are landless workers who struggle to earn a decent wage and against hunger when the harvest is complete.

Sagay City police have identified the victims from different communities as:

- Eglicerio Villegas, 36
- Angelife Dumaguit Arsenal, 47
- Paterno Baron, 48
- Rene "Dodong" Laurencio Sr. 53
- Morena Mendoza, 48
- Marcelina "Neknek" Dumaguit 60
- Rommel "Bingbing" Bantigue, 41
- Joemarie Oghayon Jr., 1
- Marchtel Sumicad, 17

Farmers, along with indigenous peoples, have been the primary target of the military since the Duterte government escalated the counter-insurgency program following their cancellation of the Peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP). One hundred and fifty-seven farmers have already been killed under this government from July 2016 to September 2018.

We echo the call of human rights defenders in the Philippines for:

- An independent and thorough investigation by the Commission on Human Rights;
- Justice for the victims of extra judicial killings and an end to impunity;
- Resumption of the Peace Talks between the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines;
- Genuine land reform and redistribution;

We further request that the Canadian Government halt funding and cooperation with the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police and other organizations who have been linked to human rights violations.

Sincerely,



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