

Hon. Jose C. Alvarez,
Governor of Palawan,
Puerto Princesa City,
Palawan, The Philippines

19 November, 2014, Bugnau (Switzerland)

Hon. Dennis Socrates,
Vice-Governor of Palawan,
Puerto Princesa City,
Palawan, The Philippines

Honorable Governor, Honorable Vice Governor of Palawan,

The ICCA Consortium is an international association under Swiss law uniting federations and organisations of indigenous peoples, local communities and NGOs concerned with the appropriate recognition of the territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities (ICCAs) throughout the world. We are a partner organisation of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP/GEF/SGP) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The ICCA Consortium's worldwide engagement is part of the global recognition of the importance of indigenous peoples' and local community conservation practices to achieving global conservation goals and targets. This recognition is enshrined in the Convention on Biological Diversity, which requires Parties, such as The Philippines, to "recognize the role of indigenous and local community conserved areas in biodiversity conservation and diversification of governance types" (COP 10/ X 31), a role fundamental to reaching Aichi Biodiversity Targets 11 and 18, among others. Various other international agreements – including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – lend support to the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities to manage and conserve their territories according to their own values, institutions and practices. Such agreements also recognize indigenous peoples' and community conservation as compatible with, and actually promoting, local sustainable livelihoods and poverty eradication efforts. Drawing lessons from numerous successful examples and the experience of problems around the world, the ICCA Consortium works to support understanding and appropriate practice in the integration of conservation, sustainable livelihoods and the respect of human and indigenous peoples' rights.

On 8 August 2013 we wrote to you communicating our deep concern about the encroachment of oil palm plantations on secondary and primary forest, most clearly evidenced in the Municipality of Quezon, Rizal and Bataraza. We also expressed concern about oil palm expansion encroaching on farmland used by indigenous peoples in Palawan, and the ensuing pollution of water sources. We requested that you listen to the voices of impacted communities and that you impede any further destructive expansion of oil palm in Palawan.

The ICCA Consortium has been following with great attention and considerable concern the recent controversies related to the massive expansion of oil palm plantations in your province, Palawan (the Philippines' 'Last Frontier'). Indeed, we are extremely worried that oil palm companies are planning to convert an area between 15,000 to 20,000 hectares in Palawan's 'Man & Biosphere Reserve', into oil palm monocultures. As we have learned, about 6,000 ha. have already been cleared for this purpose, endangering biodiversity, water resources, topsoil quality and the livelihood of farmers and indigenous peoples, while exacerbating rural poverty. If oil palm expansion is allowed to continue, the environmental and ecological sustainability of the province and people's food security will be severely compromised.

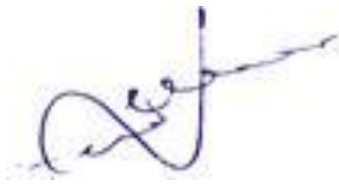
We are aware that on 29 September 2014, Hon. Dennis Socrates met a delegation of farmers and indigenous peoples being represented by the recently established Coalition against Land Grabbing (CALG). CALG's members, accompanied by Bishop Pedro Arrigo from the Apostolic Vicariate of Palawan, delivered a petition signed by almost 4,300 individuals belonging to oil palm impacted communities, asking for a moratorium to be passed on the expansion of oil palm plantations.

Not only do we support the farmers', cooperatives' and indigenous peoples' call for a moratorium, but we also fully endorse other key demands being made by the petitioners such as:

- a) Imposing penalties on Agumil Philippines, Inc. and other oil palm companies, for violating the Strategic Environmental Plan (R.A. 7611), the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (Republic Act no. 8371) and Executive Order no. 23 (banning the cutting of trees in natural and residual forest nationwide), and for infringing upon other existing laws;
- b) Stopping the planting and tending of oil palms in areas that have already been proven to be part of timberland, of indigenous peoples' ancestral land domain, etc. Proceeding to the eradication of existing oil palms in such locations, as well as to the rehabilitation of deforested areas through the replanting of endemic tree species;
- c) Amending and revising the terms and conditions of Production Technical Market Agreements (PTMA) and Management Services Agreements (MSAs) which are solely in favour of Agumil Philippines, Inc and to the disadvantage of farmers' cooperatives;
- d) Ensuring that Agumil Philippines, Inc. and other agribusiness enterprises, comply with labour laws in order to improve the condition of plantation workers, while providing them with benefits and adequate forms of insurance;
- e) Requesting the Land Bank to create and implement a mechanism to assess and monitor the adverse social, environmental and economic impacts of the oil palm projects that it finances.

Indeed we believe that the commitment of The Philippines Government to resolve food security, to improve the farming economy and to safeguard indigenous peoples' ancestral domains, is not compatible with the ongoing action of converting precious land into oil palm plantations. This practice impoverishes today's communities and creates a polluted and biodiversity-starved environment for the communities of tomorrow. Therefore, we respectfully request your government to use its mandate and respond quickly and responsibly to the recent petition of indigenous peoples and farmers, calling for a moratorium on the expansion of oil palm plantations and the rehabilitation of deforested areas, amongst other key demands enumerated above. This must happen before the adverse socio-ecological implications of oil palm expansion become irreversible.

With our most sincere hopes for a favourable outcome,



Dr. M. Taghi Farvar
President, ICCA Consortium
taghi@cenesta.org



Dr. Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend
Global Coordinator, ICCA Consortium
gbf@iccaconsortium.org

cc:

H.E. Benigno C. Aquino III, President of the Republic of The Philippines

Dr Marlea Pinor Munez, Executive Director, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP)

Mr Ruben S. Bastero, Regional Director RIV (NCIP)

Mrs Dionisia Banua, Commissioner (NCIP)

Hon. Ramon Jesus Paje, Secretary, Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Hon. Proceso J. Alcala, Secretary, Department of Agriculture (DA)

Mr Euclides G. Forbes and Mr. Carlos B. Carpio (Philippine Coconut Authority - PCA)

Mr Nelson P. Devanadera, Executive Director, Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD)

Mrs Mearl Hilario, PCSD Committee on Tribal Affairs

Mrs Gilda E. Pico, President and CEO, Land Bank of the Philippines