

Most Honorable Jose Chaves Alvarez, Governor of Palawan
Honorable Dennis Socrates, Vice-Governor of Palawan

Dear Governor and Vice Governor of Palawan,

We have been following with great attention and considerable concern the recent controversies related to the massive expansion of oil palm plantations in your province (the Philippines' 'Last Frontier'). We are extremely worried that oil palm companies are planning to convert an area between 15,000 to 20,000 hectares in the Palawan 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, calling for a moratorium 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 (R.A. 8371), Executive Order no. 23 (banning the cutting of trees in natural and residual forest nationwide) and for infringing 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 favor of Agumil Philippines, Inc and to the disadvantage of farmers' cooperatives;
- d) Ensuring that Agumil, Philippines Inc., and other agribusiness enterprises, comply with labor laws in order to improve the condition of plantation workers, while providing them with benefits and adequate forms of insurance;

- e) Requesting the LandBank to create and implement a mechanism to assess and monitor the adverse social, environmental and economic impact of the oil palm projects that it finances.

We believe that the commitment of the Government of the Philippines to ensuring food security, to improving farmers' businesses and to safeguarding indigenous peoples' ancestral domains, is not compatible with the ongoing conversion of precious land into oil palm plantations. Therefore, we kindly request your government to 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 listed above. This is vital before the adverse socio-ecological implications of oil palm expansion become irreversible.

Yours sincerely,

Copy furnished:

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)

Hon. 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