

Press Release
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CSOs meet with UN Special Rapporteur, express frustration over lack of gov't food policy

Representatives of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) headed by FIAN Philippines, Focus on the Global South, LILAK, Alyansa Tigil Mina, Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) and the Office of Rep. Walden Bello held a meeting on Feb. 20, with Dr. Hilal Elver, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, at the offices of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM).

The conference was the first of the many activities in the itinerary of the Special Rapporteur during her visit to the Philippines, her first official mission since her appointment in June 2014.

In their meeting with the Special Rapporteur, the CSO representatives expressed frustration and disappointment over the lack of a clear cut government policy on the right to adequate food that is perpetuating hunger among Filipinos.

According to the Focus on the Global South, over the past 15 years – from 1999 to 2014 – the number of Filipino families who rated themselves as hungry rose from 8.3% to 18.3%, based on the data gathered from the Social Weather Stations' self-rated hunger surveys. In the last quarter of 2014, an estimated 3.8 million Filipino families went hungry.

“The figures show clear violations of the right to adequate food of the Filipino citizenry. This is clearly a concern the government must address,” said Mary Anne Manahan, research associate for the Focus of The Global South. *“The government’s lack of rights-based national food strategies that could have helped eradicate this dire situation should stop,”* she added.

“Dr. Elver’s visit is a milestone in the discussion of the Right to Adequate Food issues in the country,” said Aurea Micalat-Teves, President of FIAN Philippines and one of the convenors of the National Food Coalition.

“Civil Society Organizations advocating for the establishment of a National Food Policy to eradicate hunger in the Philippines were provided with the opportunity to present the hunger and food situation in the country,” Teves added.

Elver’s visit will focus on assessing the country’s legal framework with regard to the right to adequate food. She will also look into the impact of extreme weather events and socio-economic conditions vis-à-vis food security and malnutrition.

There will be an assessment of the protection program for smallholders, indigenous peoples, and urban poor – with a focus on women peasants – in achieving and implementing the right to food. Food security will also be discussed, as well as the normative content of the RTAF – adequacy, availability and accessibility issues vis-à-vis the realization or violations of the right to adequate food in the country.

The UN Rapporteur's visit will be an opportunity for the CSOs to stress the links of land rights, access to and control of productive resources to the right to adequate food. It will also be an occasion to highlight policies and impacts of external actors on the right to adequate food and food security and to underscore the issue of poverty, inequality and the right to adequate food of the poor and vulnerable groups, especially women, children and indigenous peoples.

The CSOs also raised other human rights issues such as extra judicial killings, activities that affect the food producers of the country, with emphasis on the impact on the land by such activities as mining, and the country's various agrarian reform programs, which the groups claimed have failed to secure the people's right to food.

Just last year, Philippines was cited by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for its outstanding progress in fighting hunger ahead of the 2015 deadline. This, however, is not enough according to the CSOs. Despite the unprecedented growth rates in the past few years, poverty, hunger and inequality have remained high.

"Targets are mere figures," Teves said. "The 3.8 million Filipino families whose hunger affects their everyday lives is the real measurement of the government's poor adherence to this basic right to adequate food," she said.

Hilal is also expected to visit Tacloban on February 21 to meet with CSOs and POs in the area. The UN Special Rapporteur also plans to visit Mindanao and Nueva Ecija during her current trip to the country.

From February 23-28, the National Food Coalition set up a photo exhibit in Congress with the theme: "Enforce the RTAF. End Hunger. The Special rapporteur will address Congress on February 25, 2015. (Please see some photos in the exhibit).

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