



# Center for Development Programs in the Cordillera Inc.

## PEOPLES DEVELOPMENT AND THE OCCUPY WALL STREET MOVEMENT

*Greetings on this timely Northern Luzon peoples conference – AMIANAN SALAKNIBAN, to defend and develop our resources for the people.*

### **A. Northern Luzon Situation**

The day to day concerns in any Northern Luzon community today highlights the plunder of our land and resources, mainly by mining and energy projects like dams and geothermal. These adversely affect all, but specially peasants and indigenous peoples. Thus, land – livelihood - and – resources issues have always been at the core of the people’s movement, particularly in the Cordillera Region, with its earlier experience in the plunder of natural resources. Unfortunately for all of us now, this is the current common experience all over Northern Luzon.

Where mining used to be a reality or dreaded monster only in interior Cordillera villages, it is now a plague along our shore lines extending from Pangasinan - Ilocos – and to the northern shores of Cagayan. Dams are anathema in the highland villages of the Cordillera that are submerged, and in the lowland plains of Pangasinan and Central Luzon that are flooded. Ridge to reef environmental issues (from the mountains to the shores), like Lepanto mining pollution of the Abra river, are life and death concerns binding highland and lowland peoples. These plunder of natural resources issues, and the fact that the Cordillera highlands is our common watershed show our environmental integration; and highlights our oneness as Northern Luzon, not only in geography.

### **B. The Peoples Movement and Peoples Development**

For decades, the militant people’s movement and advocates have persevered in articulating these issues on land and livelihood, social justice and human rights, which are basic national democracy issues. From direct basic people’s organization or community level action, interest and involvement have been generated at the municipal to provincial levels. These should be strengthened and pursued at regional levels(Ilocos-Pangasian, Cordillera, Cagayan Valley) and Northern Luzon -wide. It should also be noted, that a consistent concern parallel to these basic people’s issues is human rights. In practice these issues are systematically accompanied by militarization and human rights violations.

Decades of peoples development pursued by the progressive peoples movement is always a response to the situation, for direct benefits and for long term goals of self determined prosperous communities. Peoples development is anchored on principles of social justice and human rights, self reliance and sustainable development, peoples participation and empowerment. The objective situation of communities, of neglect and general government incapacity to provide basic services, always point to the need for socio –economic projects and services. But the more basic concern of people’s development is always on consciousness raising and organizing.

The decades of response by the progressive peoples movement, as people's organizations (POs) or NGOs, has developed a practice of alternative or activist development work. This is marked by pro people principles and methods. And the results are empowered communities who are informed, with basic education and training, organized, and who act on their local issues. Their education includes understanding the local situation, with context in the wider regional to national and even the international arena. The long term objective of people's development is to have prosperous, self reliant and self determining peoples. Thus dole out as officially practiced by the present Aquino government with billions of allocation for Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) is ardently criticized. And it is ironic and a betrayal of people's development principles, that the present Secretary of Social Welfare, who came from NGO ranks should lead and implement this dole out CCT program.

### **C. Pyramid Structured Society Context of People's Development**

The national context is a major framework in people's development work. This requires grasp of the basic contradiction in Philippine society; wherein the Philippines is rich but Filipinos are poor. This is rooted in our pyramid structure, where the ruling elite at the tip of the pyramid, control economic and political power; to the detriment of the masses at the base of the pyramid. Unless this structure is democratized, the basic goal of social justice cannot be achieved. Development programs of government will just be palliatives. And alternative people's development pursued by the progressive people's movement will continue to be a difficult uphill climb, like at present with obstacles inherent in an unjust pyramid structured society.

Foremost obstacle is the resistance to genuine social change by those at the tip of the pyramid. Government laws, policies, the military and the entire state machinery generally operate for the status quo which upholds the pyramid structure. And so, yes indeed, we have a systemic rich >< poor contradiction, resulting in a deeply divided Philippine society. From this has emerged the militant progressive peoples movement that tries to respond both to immediate socio economic needs, as well as contribute to eventual social transformation of the pyramid structure, through education-organizing-advocacy –campaigns.

Depending on capacity of peoples organizations, as well as the nature and intensity of issues, there usually is alliance and lobby with local government officials; as well as national officials where possible. There is active cooperation with the Church and Academe, as well as with other professionals, and all other stakeholders for social change. There is also increasing but cautious, participation in bourgeoisie electoral politics, given its pitfalls.

The people's movement is engaged in a full range of reforms for immediate gains and empowerment towards transforming our pyramid structured society. In this undertaking, there is militant progressive reform that should result in genuine change. And there is deceptive reform that does not induce real change; but rather co opts the movement for change to further legitimize and entrench the unjust pyramid structured society.

### **D. The Insurgency and Peace Talks**

The revolutionary and sharpest response to the Philippine contradiction, waged by the longest running insurgency in Asia, aims to achieve social justice and sovereignty primarily through armed struggle. This is by the (NDFP) National Democratic Front of the Philippines, and allied member organizations including the(NPA) New Peoples Army, the (CPP)Communist Party of the Philippines, and chapters

like the(CPDF)-Cordillera Peoples Democratic Front. The on going peace talks between the NDFP and GPH (Government of the Republic of the Philippines) gives opportunity for public appraisal of the programs of contending parties, that both wish to win the hearts and minds of the Filipino people.

That the NDFP survived decades of counter insurgency, is able to occasionally launch headline catching military operations, and the fact that the GPH engage in Peace Talks with the NDFP; indicate that there is a portion of Philippine territory and a section of Philippine population that hosts and supports NDFP revolutionary governance. This reality also further indicates, that there must be something for the people, like elusive social justice, in the NDFP program.

But it is also a reality that after half a century, the revolutionary NDFP has yet to win. And the government keeps projecting the end of the insurgency. But such has no credibility, except to ensure huge annual budgetary allocations. And so civil war as manifestation of our divided society continues to be a reality.

With the Peace Talks, there is wider opportunity for the public to scrutinize the NDFP-GPH programs especially the second agenda on Comprehensive Agreement on Socio – Economic Reforms (CASER). We should study “The NDFP Perspective on the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms”, which call for genuine agrarian reform and national industrialization. It supposedly addresses social justice and people’s welfare towards decisive eradication of poverty.

We are already familiar with government socio economic development programs –in the variations of the Philippine Development Plans (PDP). These are export and resource extraction oriented. The PDPs are anchored on the UN Millennium development goals, whose context is imperialist globalization that pursues the policies of trade liberalization, privatization, and deregulation. As we know these have stunted and continue to undermine the development of our national economy. What economic growth there was, has been for trans nationals and the ruling elite; whereas deprivation and poverty for all others. A supposed emerging middle class is a fast disappearing breed with the recurrent economic crisis.

The people’s movement should support the unconditional continuance of the Peace Talks, and the public should be involved. The NDFP –GPH public consultation on the occasion of Cordillera Day in Lacub, Abra, last April 24, 2011 was much appreciated as it informed and involved people in the peace process. The NDFP needs to speak more to the public. It is in public fora, like the consultation in Abra, that provide such information.

## **E. Globalization Context of Development**

In the international arena, the present context of people’s development is neoliberal economics or imperialist globalization; with more entrenched global operations of the capitalist free market system. Starting in the ‘70s, the United Nations and related agencies including the World Bank and its affiliates, acting as instruments of imperialism, implemented policies of trade liberalization, privatization, and deregulation “to create a level playing field” or free, market – determined operations of the global economy. But such “level playing field” is a farce because capitalism is competition, and trans nationals will always carry the day compared to local enterprises. Thus local industries perish and wealth gets more concentrated in trans nationals.

Philippines governments have been sadly remarkable in their subservient compliance to the policies of imperialist globalization. This is embarrassingly consistent to their historical lapdog relations with the U.S. Such as, while our neighboring countries in the past delayed reduction of tariff, the Philippines proactively reduced tariff in compliance with trade liberalization. The indication is that our national enterprises suffered while those in neighboring countries relatively survived or even prospered.

With the built in recurrent crisis of capitalism, like the present U.S. recession and global implications specially in Europe, there is now refreshing debate on what are more socially just economic models. During the Cold War, the U.S.A and Europe stood as models of profit- oriented, free market capitalist economies; while the USSR and China were models of need- based oriented, centrally planned socialist economies. However along the way, socialism as a model social system was betrayed when the USSR and China became capitalist. Thus the world hegemony of capitalism or imperialist globalization .

But socialism is not dead, like in Cuba that has withstood relentless imperialist onslaught. And peoples movements for change generally look into variations of socialism where people's needs are the primary concern. This is ensured in societies that address social justice with active government intervention; as contrasted with capitalism where the elite few in society control resources and wealth over the impoverished majority. It is a free market system and the language is Profit, not Social Justice.

The open debate on socially just models of society is active in the Environment and Climate Change issues. Capitalism is the identified root cause of global warming; now adversely affecting climates, agriculture and livelihood, health, and sea levels. Imperialist globalization responds to climate change issues by market oriented approaches of carbon trading such as Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM) or Reduced Emissions from forest Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) strategies. Instead of enforcing reduction of carbon emissions by big business, which is the primary cause of global warming; these market approaches allow them to do "business as usual" and continue making profit while supposedly attending to issues of global warming and climate change.

Thus, there is rejection of capitalist system based market approaches in addressing climate issues. There is exploration of non capitalist models of development; where social justice is ensured, and the environment is nurtured and managed for the basic needs of society; and not plundered for profit which is the case in the rapacious nature of capitalism. There is an awakened interest in socialism as a model of society.

This is particularly intense for indigenous peoples and local communities with their rich traditional knowledge, and socio economic systems and values that have seeds of socialism; but which have been eroded by the overpowering onslaught of capitalism and its values . Indigenous people's societies are vibrant in their concern for the common good and collective processes, instead of individual interest and personal gain or glory. Values for example, of Cordillera indigenous peoples : nurture and develop land and resources "for present and future generations", access resources but "get only what you need", and selflessly share "let us not keep only to ourselves what is good ".

## **F. Our People's Movement Identifies with Occupy Wall Street**

Now at the global level, a recent and ongoing phenomena that seminally affects the capitalist dominated world order, and that complements our pursuit for genuine people's development, is the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. This historic event on Sept 17, 2011 was the spontaneous occupation by ordinary American citizens of Liberty Square in Manhattan's (New York) financial District- the seat of

imperialist globalization. Their sentiments and calls were against “greed and corruption” and the interest of the “99 % vs the 1%”. That people assemble at Liberty Square and raise calls or “do their thing”, is a usual event. But for people to point out the unspoken division and difference between America’s elite One percent (1%) who control the economy, and the Ninety Nine percent (99%) all other Americans, was earthshaking. Such calls are revolutionary for U.S. society that glosses over class differences; because they gain from the capitalist- dominated world economy. At this time, in September, 2011 these OWS calls hit home to an American public suffering from loss of livelihoods and benefits, due to collapse in the U.S. economy.

When the Obama government bailed affected U.S. big businesses like banks and the auto industry, OWS asserted that dollars should be given to the 99% (people at Main Street) to subsidize basic needs like jobs and insurances; instead of bailing the 1% ( elite at Wall Street), whose greed for profit is a factor in the recession. OWS maybe spontaneous and leaderless; but its powerful ideas reverberate and mobilize people to assert their rights. Its “99 %” vs “1%” is a clear image of sharply divided class line, which is the reality in many societies today.

Occupy Wall street amplifies our pyramid structure analysis of Philippine society where the elite at the tip of the pyramid controls the economy and politics. The basic issue is social justice because resources and power are concentrated in the tip of the pyramid, versus the deprived masses at the base. The contradiction is best captured in the OWS imagery of the 1% vav the 99 %.

The Philippines gave the world “people power “that inspired many other peoples to collectively and aggressively act towards changing oppressive regimes. And now Americans in the so called “belly of the beast”, suffering from the current U.S. recession, has given the world “Occupy Wall Street”. This movement directly challenges the capitalist system and seeks for other more socially just models . With recurrent and worsening global economic crisis, as well as political instability because there is no social justice; there will be people’s movements that pursue people’s development, for specific needs and for over all attainment of social justice.

Congratulations to all sponsors and participants in this timely Northern Luzon peoples conference- for us to build wider unity and stronger defense of our land and resources against plunder by foreign and local big business, and to reaffirm our resolve to manage and develop our resources for the people’s welfare. That would indeed be people’s development for us in Northern Luzon.

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