

**In observance of the 28th World Foodless Day
16 October 2009**

Strengthen Peoples' Unity Amidst Hunger and Climate Disaster

Most indigenous and poor communities in the Cordillera region continue to battle with hunger and poverty contrary to claims of economic improvement by the Arroyo government. Currently, rural indigenous women, peasants and daily wage earners are only able to earn from P50-250 a day which is way below the P843.00 (USD17.7) that government indicated as the daily family living wage in the Cordillera. Even before the global economic crisis in 2008, economic crisis had long been present in most indigenous peasant families who were only producing 2-8 months of rice supply. The hunger situation is exacerbated by extreme weather events brought about by the climate crisis. The latest that hit the region was tropical storm Pepeng (Parma) which ravaged almost P700 million worth of properties, infrastructures and agricultural farms and produce. Affected families are placed at 44,698 with 219,447 persons directly hit with injuries or damage to their homes (RDCC). The death toll reached 251 (RDCC) and this is expected to rise as search operations continue in washed-out and severely damaged communities.

Affected communities especially in Mankayan and Tublay, Benguet; Kayan, Mountain Province; Abra interior municipalities and Conner in Apayao remain isolated and inaccessible with massive road cuts and mud slides making the rescue and relief operations more difficult. Notably, the areas where major land slides, property and livelihood damages, and loss of lives occurred are former corporate mine areas like Sto. Nino in Tublay and Itogon and in Mankayan where the Lepanto Mining Corporation is actively operating. The water released by the San Roque Dam during and after Pepeng caused extensive flooding in Pangasinan and adjacent lowland provinces. All warnings by progressive people's organizations on the hazards of mining and dam projects cannot be ignored now with this concrete experience.

Indeed this is a time for various sectors, communities, groups, organizations, NGOs and institutions to forge and strengthen our unity and cooperation as we pool together whatever available means and resources to respond to the situation. Hence the revival of the Serve the People Brigade which is a mobilization of various groups and sectors, organizations and institutions. In the spirit of *innabuyog*, *ubbo*, *baddang* and *mabtad*, the Serve the People Brigade generates and shares human, material and moral support during disasters and in saving lives. The Serve the People Brigade and the Cordillera Disaster Response Network along with networks of the Center for Development Programs (CDPC) and the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) of which the Cordillera Women's Education Action Research Center (CWEARC) and Innabuyog are part, are actively involved in delivering much needed food, medicines, clearing materials, clothings as basic assistance to the most vulnerable groups and communities in Baguio, Benguet including the washed out community of Kayan, Mountain Province. The relief and rehabilitation services will extend to affected provinces once roads are cleared.

As we slowly rise up from this tragedy, let us prepare ourselves for more extreme weather events now that the whole world is confronted with real impacts of climate crisis. At this era of improved technology, we are yet a country which does not have the effective technology for weather forecasts. We are a country where 85% of its population have high vulnerability to calamities and crisis. While we are known of our resilience, our coping is made more difficult by widespread hunger and poverty that is compounded by poor or absence of social services. The GMA government remains ill-prepared during disasters, prioritizes debt payment than social welfare and development, and continues to promote the business of foreign corporations and governments like corporate mining, dams and commercial agricultural production which contribute hugely to deforestation, at the expense of peoples' lives, livelihood and resources.

Our mobilization for food supplies and delivery of these to the most stricken sectors, is our contribution in today's observance of World Foodless Day, when food is even more scarce and dear. As we move on, we will continue to call and work for genuine people's economic development that will ensure people's food sovereignty, sustain the environment and natural resources for the common use and defend these

from the plunder of local and foreign capitalist industries. We can only be secured of food if we have control over our land and natural resources and not by a state which bestow these resources to greedy and profit-making corporations. We can only be spared of more Pepengs if we continue to resist a disastrous government that is pursuing economic programs and packages which include liberalization and sell-out of our remaining natural resources which contribute to climate crisis, to the great disadvantage of indigenous peasant and poor women.###

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