

MARAMING SALAMAT PO!

IN behalf of the officials and personnel of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), I would like to extend our sincerest thanks to all who, in one way or another, made the passage of the CARP Extension with Reform Law possible. This is another major victory especially for our small farmers for it ushers in a new chapter in the country's agrarian reform program, and enables the DAR to finish the unfinished business - the distribution of the remaining 1.056 million of mostly privately owned agricultural lands. Only in distributing all the remaining CARP-covered lands up to the last hectare can the DAR proudly say that it has accomplished one of its major mandates.

Besides, CARP does not end in land distribution alone. Being an all-encompassing rural development program, it provides the basic foundation through its support services component, constructing farm-to-market roads, bridges, post-harvest and irrigation facilities, among others, and prepares farmer-beneficiaries to become effective partners in nation-building by providing them the latest know-how in farming to make farms more productive, increase their income and spur rural development.

The DAR can only thank Madame President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo no end for resolutely pushing for CARP's extension, and rightly so, for it serves as the anchor in her administration's anti-poverty and food security program. And what's more? It is a legacy that she fittingly has to pursue with more resolve, her father, the late President Diosdado Macapagal, being the forerunner of the said program, for which he was christened the father of agrarian reform. No wonder, she had certified as urgent the bill, calling for the extension of the program in the Congress.

DAR also commends the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), which made its presence felt practically in all fronts, be it in the Senate, in the House of Representatives and even elsewhere, steadfastly calling the attention of all lawmakers and pleading to them to get this vital legislation passed into law. To the CBCP leadership, we salute you for joining us in this call, fighting all the way for the less privileged small farmers.

The DAR is also grateful to various civil society groups, whether they are for or against the program, for coming up in hordes to the streets and not giving up even up to the last minute to get the attention of our lawmakers and constantly reminding them of CARP's value, it being a social justice program aimed at advancing the cause of the less privileged farmers on whose shoulders lies the future of the country's agriculture industry, which remains as one of the pillars of our economy.

All those pronouncement and courses of actions would not have been heard across the nation if not to our ever-vigilant media, which has been religiously monitoring and reporting all events leading to the extension of CARP. Their thankless job of informing the public of latest developments in the agrarian reform sector has stirred the public to actively participate in the discussion and offer unsolicited but intelligent suggestions and comments about the future of the program.

And last but not the least, our sincerest thanks to our lawmakers from both the Senate and the House of Representatives for finally seeing the wisdom of having a vital program such as CARP, a key component of the Arroyo administration's sustainable rural development program. After all, implementing an agrarian reform program is a constitutional mandate all government officials should uphold at all times.

To all others, who have joined the call for the program's extension, we can't ask for more.

Mabuhay po tayong lahat.

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