



Press Statement

## Heroism in Small Doses?

The celebration of the 109<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Proclamation of Philippine Independence comes with the theme "Kalayaan 2007: Bayan, Bayani, Bayanihan." Thanks to the Department of Tourism.

In the attempt to showcase some great mighty and popular personalities as icons of the *bayani*, let us not lose sight of the innumerable and unnamed *bayani* of our country's history, in particular the many volunteers of the PPCRV and NAMFREL and the Teachers who despite odds, difficulties, obstacles, frustrations, and threats defended the sacredness of the ballots against those desecrating groups. In the midst of rampant and wholesale "buy and sale" of votes, there were still those who refused to be controlled by the dictatorship of money. Their small stories are worth noting down on "Kalayaan Day."

We are shamed and saddened by comments that our country ranks among those with most records of graft and corruption, unresolved cases of heinous crimes and mysterious disappearances and unabated extra-judicial killings. There is so much demand for restitution to helpless and voiceless victims. May we not consider the uncompensated victims also "*bayani ng bayan*"? Specially that their appeals are apparently falling on deaf ears!

On "Kalayaan Day" we join the clamor for the restoration or return of the victims of disappearances. Our prayer is that they will be allowed to return safe and sound to their grieving and anxious families, to enjoy basic freedom.

Both agents and victims, especially the victims of graft and corruption, are negative notes to the celebration of Kalayaan Day: that while we have been liberated from the control of foreign invaders, we are victims of the abuses and exploitation of fellow Filipinos.

In a few days, on June 10, two days before Independence Day, will be the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). It was a program to reduce rural poverty by giving freedom to rural folks through access to land. According to statistics, three-fourth of the poor in the country belongs to the

rural poor. Numbers alone make the program of agrarian reform still necessary and urgent. The land reform has both its encouraging and discouraging aspects, naturally its pros and cons. This is where discussion is needed. The campaign for agrarian reform is still relevant and must be made to succeed.

Because of the extent of rural poverty and the necessity of “freedom from bondage to land” through genuine legal agrarian reform and war against rural landlessness, the Church likewise joins the aspirations, hopes and dreams of the rural farmers. According to the Social Teachings of the Church: “An equitable distribution of land remains ever critical, especially in developing countries. . . . In rural areas, the possibility of acquiring land through opportunities opened by labor and credit market is a necessary condition for access to other goods and services” (*Compendium* No. 180). It means that the distribution of land, supported by law, must also be accompanied by other supports and services to make the reform truly meaningful and beneficial.

Again, the Social Teachings of the Church has it: “Agrarian reform (is) a moral obligation more than a political necessity, since the failure to enact such reform is hindrance in these countries to the benefits arising from the opening of markets and, generally, from the abundant growth opportunities offered by the current process of globalization” (*Compendium*, No. 300).

We need more than prayers and preaching. But these two, prayer and preaching, will help support the efforts of people working for agrarian reform. We encourage that on June 10, a Sunday, the Prayer of the Faithful shall include this aspiration for genuine agrarian reform and that the homilies will make mention of the same: that our rural people, the farmers who are bound to the land they till for life and support, may receive the true freedom envisioned by the principle of agrarian reform.

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