

HON. SECRETARY NASSER C. PANGANDAMAN
2008 International Fund for Agricultural Development's (IFAD) –
Philippine Partners Knowledge and Learning Market (KLM)
-Astoria Plaza, Ortigas Business District, Pasig City
28-29 October 2008

CARP @ 20: TOWARDS FOOD SECURITY

Thank you very much for the kind introduction.

Department of Agriculture Honorable Secretary Arthur Yap, Department of Trade and Industry Undersecretary Zenaida Maglaya, IFAD Vice-President Kanayo Nwanze, members of the Diplomatic Corps, ANGOB Chairman Father Francis Lucas, members of the Farming Organizations, other officials, fellow workers, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning.

It is with great honor on my part to formally accept the invitation to speak before you this morning. It is indeed a pleasure to meet the people, who certainly work to help those who are less in life gain access to the nature's bounty and economic development.

This occasion is very timely because of the global clouds that are driving up the prices of prime commodities and endangering food security.

While this economic crunch is hitting every nation, we feel more deeply for the poorest members of the society, who suffer more from the setbacks and pains of the soaring prices of food.

The economic development initiatives were again confronted by another setback with the new global shocks in the world's financial system.

Yet, Filipinos are known for their resilience. Despite these challenges, we continue to remain unperturbed as we work on to address these difficulties.

Last two weeks ago, I was also invited during the opening of the International Food Festival in Milan, where I spoke on the nagging question of "Who will feed the planet?."

During my talk I reiterated the commitment of the Philippines to ensure food security as a priority and permanent policy of the government.

Consistent with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, I am happy to report to you that we are making significant upturns toward this end.

Translated into figures, this corresponds to a growth rate of 5.1% in our agriculture sector last year, which is significantly higher than the 2.04% growth rate in our population. Self-rated poverty likewise posted a 20-year low during the same period.

This also shows that compared to other countries, the Philippines has better leverage in implementing safety nets to ease the lives of our people.

This, I believe, has encouraged some 35.2 Million Filipinos to join the United Nation's call for the world to stand up and take action on global challenge to fight poverty, making the Philippines stood tall as the biggest participant from among the countries that joined the campaign all over the world.

But I can only say that the country's modest gains are truly hard-earned. For the last seven years, the government has made tough, even unpopular decisions to fine tune the economy. Reforms in the financial system, tax increases and even fiscal discipline helped us obtain new revenues to provide investments in food and even fuel.

The government also provides assistance to poor families from these revenues through the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program and the Accelerated Hunger-Mitigation Program, which allow the poor access to low-priced but quality commodities such as rice, vegetables, meat and medicines.

We also continue to resolve the vital issue of food security. The government has also introduced this year the program called F.I.E.L.D.S.: F for Fertilizer, I for Irrigation and Infrastructure, E for Extension and Education, L for Loans, D for Dryers and Post Harvest facilities, and S for Seeds. This summarizes the Arroyo Government's Agricultural Modernization Program.

With my friend and colleague, Secretary Art Yap joining us today, I am sure he will explain to you this program in a short while.

So let me proceed to what we are doing in the Department of Agrarian reform to protect the gains in the rural sector.

For the past 20 years, CARP, known as the centerpiece program to alleviate the economic condition of farmers in rural communities, was able to ensure the ownership of land of some 4.5 Million farmers, affording them full control of the 7.2 Million hectares of agricultural lands nationwide.

This record posted the highest number of land transfer in the history of Agrarian Reform all over the world.

Some 1,976 Agrarian Reform Communities were also developed into self-sufficient communities. ARC-development is a strategy adapted by the department to optimize the provision of development interventions from agrarian reform stakeholders, owing to the very limited budget allotted to agrarian reform.

A large chunk of the support services were also financed and assisted by our friends from the international organizations such as the IFAD, as well as the World Bank, FAO, JICA, ADB, and the UNDP, among others. All of them remained generous and active partners in pursuing our goals.

IFAD has been helping us for the past so many years in our development endeavors.

Two of these endeavors, which were already completed and have helped the beneficiaries tread the path towards a quiet yet productive revolution are the Western Mindanao Community Initiatives Project or WMCIP and the support for the Indigenous Cultural Communities and the MNLF in the zone of peace within the Agrarian Reform Communities, also called SPICC in ZPARC.

Under WMCIP, 16,000 farm and fisherfolk indigenous families as well as rebel returnees in Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur and Basilan were provided small enterprise and credit development assistance to increase subsistence in cash crop and fishery production.

In support of the DAR's Peace Initiative, IFAD has also granted US\$750,000 assistance through the SPICC in ZPARC to develop the areas covered by the special zone of peace and development by integrating ex-combatants belonging to the MNLF into these programs.

At present, we are implementing the Northern Mindanao Initiatives and Natural Resource Management Project, which aims to reduce poverty in the provinces of Misamis Oriental, Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur.

The project benefits 58,000 households of poor and disenfranchised families along the upland and coastal areas in 73 Agrarian Reform Communities. This project is ongoing until 2009.

On top of this assistance, the department has also granted some P222-B worth of loans to 4.1 Million small farmers and fisherfolks for their agricultural and agribusiness programs.

Credit programs amounting to P9.34-B was also provided to 934,939 Farmer-Beneficiaries and their organizations.

Equally important in achieving higher yield and farm income is the provision of infrastructure and extension services.

In Agrarian Reform Communities scattered all over the country, we have provided farm-to-market roads, irrigation and post-harvest facilities, organizational and human resource training and entrepreneurial and marketing skills training to farmer-beneficiaries.

Now, some of you might be asking what will happen now with the program about to expire this December.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I'd like to inform you that with the support of farmers organizations and civic oriented organizations, the President, Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has certified as Urgent the House Bill that seeks to extend the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program or CARP.

The DAR is constantly working with both the Legislative Houses to give the CARP a new lease on life.

This is to complete the distribution of the remaining 1.1 Million hectares of agricultural land to farmer-cultivators, who, up to now are still longing to own a piece of property, which they could cultivate to produce more agricultural products.

Along this line, the Senate Committee on Agrarian Reform has proposed to extend the program to another ten years with a corresponding budget of P147-Billion, 40% of which will be allocated for Support Services to make the awarded lands more productive and the new owners more entrepreneurial.

The House version of the bill, meanwhile, is proposing a five-year extension with a P100-Billion budget.

While awaiting the final conclusion of these bills, the DAR, meanwhile, has created a favorable policy environment in support of our food security initiatives.

To protect our prime agricultural lands and ensure steady production of rice, the President has approved the suspension of the conversion of all rice lands into non-agricultural uses for the next two years.

We also strictly monitor the implementation of our laws providing for the network of protected areas for agricultural and Agro-Industrial development.

Indeed, people all over the world are struggling at this time. I am glad that International Organizations such as IFAD are consistently helping the Philippines achieve its goal of securing food sufficiency for its people.

With your strong support and unwavering conviction, let me assure you that the DAR will continue to do its mandate of ensuring that every Filipino in every parts of the archipelago will have a decent meal on the table, now and in the years ahead.

Thank you and good morning.