

# UN official: Right to adequate food law can be PNoy's legacy

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MANILA - A law that would uphold Filipinos' right to adequate food and nutrition can be President Aquino's legacy with a little over a year before his term ends, according to a United Nations (UN) official who went on a week-long trip to different parts of the country to observe efforts to combat hunger.

Among the top recommendations of Hilal Elver, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, is the swift passage of the Right to Adequate Food Bill, which targets "zero hunger in 10 years."

"It would be a good legacy for him and it would be a good-faith, symbolic ending to his career," Elver told journalists at a briefing on Monday.

Versions of the measure have been filed in both the Senate and House of Representatives. Among others, the bill seeks to create a Commission on the Right to Adequate Food, sets targets in reducing hunger and poverty, and makes access to adequate food "not a matter of charity, but a legal entitlement."

The bill has been languishing in Congress for a year now.

Elver, the first UN rapporteur who came to the Philippines to focus on food issues, visited urban and rural poor areas in Luzon and the typhoon-hit city of Tacloban.

In her preliminary report, she said that while the Philippines enjoys economic growth, it has not been inclusive.

While the country has been named one of the fastest growing economies in the world, poverty and hunger remain pressing problems. It ranks 29th in hunger incidence in the 2014 Human Development Index, for instance.

Some 3.8 million households experienced hunger at least once during the last quarter, according to the Social Weather Stations, and 7.36 million children are malnourished, based on the 8th National Nutrition Survey.

"I have observed significant disparities in Manila with many seemingly benefitting from all the comforts of modern life others are forced to live in extremely precarious conditions," Elver wrote in her report.

She cited the poor families and malnourished children she met during her investigation.

"Unable to produce their own food they are vulnerable to food price hikes, and any money they have spent on the little food they can afford, with nothing left over to cover other basic necessities such as access to healthcare, medication, or to cover the cost of basic school materials," she wrote.

Elver noted government efforts to address the problem, such as the conditional cash transfer program, its centerpiece anti-poverty measure.

She added, however, that government has to do more, particularly in terms of policies. Aside from passing the bill ensuring the right to adequate food, Elver called on government to enact laws on agrarian reform and land use to support farmers.

Elver will come up with final report that will be submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in 2016.