

Oral Statement

On the Occasion of the Review of the Philippines Combined 5th and 6th
Periodic Reports to the UN CESCR at the 59th Session

By

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The irony of growth without development is sadly seen in the Philippines. Despite being Asia's second fastest-growing economy, hunger and poverty persist in the country. Subsistence incidence among Filipinos was estimated at 12.1% in the first semester of 2015. One in three Filipino children suffer from stunted growth, an indicator of chronic malnutrition. As we all know, malnutrition and stunting undermines efforts to reduce poverty and stalls economic growth.

The previous Aquino Administration tried to reduce poverty and promote inclusive growth, but, to put it bluntly, it failed to make a substantial dent on the condition of majority of the people. Lack of compliance with the rule of law, inequality, massive impunity, lack of transparency and corruption continue. At the end of Aquino's six-year term last June, there was hardly any significant improvement in the lives of ordinary Filipinos. What we see is the continued scarcity of decent employment especially for many of our youth and women. Unemployment and underemployment are degrading the capacity of many Filipinos to meet their own needs in dignity and to enjoy their human rights, including their right to adequate food and nutrition.

Let me focus on the urgent issues that we in FIAN Philippines believe should be addressed to reduce hunger and poverty in the country.

1. One is the absence of a right to food and nutrition (RTFN) law, which is a specific measure that could compel the Philippine state to provide adequate food for all Filipinos at all times. This could also serve as a legal back-up to any economic and social program

on hunger and poverty. The RTFN is not explicitly recognized in the Philippine constitution. As a result, various laws pertaining to food are non-complementary, inadequately and improperly implemented, incoherent and sometimes in conflict with each other. Such a law will rationalize all these food-related measures.

2. Second is the inadequate implementation of the land reform program, the law on indigenous peoples' rights and the law to modernize agriculture and fisheries. More than a decade since their passage, these three measures that should have advanced social reform and uplift the lives of farmers and fisherfolks, who account for majority of the nation's labor force, but the reality is they have not. Indigenous peoples' rights are disrespected as big mining companies violate their ancestral domain, destroying their land and dislocating their communities. The government has forgotten the twin goals of achieving equity and productivity, leaving our marginalized sectors especially our indigenous peoples, farmers and fisherfolks, still hungry and impoverished. There is also increasing harassment and violent attacks, even extra-judicial killings, that target rights holders.
3. The third issue pertains to Filipinos whose poverty is exacerbated by disasters. This is often tragically dramatized by the slow flow of emergency aid to the poor who suffer the most from any disaster. In embarking on disaster risk reduction, the Philippine government should consider climate change mitigation from a more comprehensive RTFN perspective. In this manner, specific attention is given to the needs of the most marginalized sectors of the population, especially landless peasants and poor fisherfolks whenever calamity strikes.
4. Finally, there must be an assessment of the efficacy of the insurance-based systems on social protection. We favor instituting direct provision of social services.

The irony of poverty without development should not be the fate of a country like the Philippines which is rich in natural resources with a hardworking and innovative people. Leadership is key, but leadership without direction is just as bad as the absence of leadership.

As anti-hunger and anti-poverty advocates, we want to help the nation's leaders push the right policies regarding these problems. With your help, we can make our nation's political leaders grasp what should be the correct policies that focus on fighting hunger and combatting poverty.