

**Statement of the National Food Coalition
On the First Congressional Committee Hearing on the Zero Hunger Bill**

Good morning everyone.

First of all, I would like to thank the honorable members of the House of Representatives for opening their doors to us, especially the House Committee on Human Rights, Hon. Karlo Alexei Nograles, Hon. Jericho Jonas Nograles, Hon. Harry Roque, Hon. Linabelle Ruth Villarica, Hon. Kaka Bag-ao and committee Chair Hon. Cheryl Deloso-Montalla.

We in the National Food Coalition are fully aware and deeply concerned that hunger persists in the country. Despite statistical reports that suggest incremental reduction in hunger, the number of Filipinos who are hungry is still shamefully high.

Gallup International Voice of the People ranked the Philippines as the fifth country in the world with the most number of hungry people, half of whom are women and children. That was in 2014. In the last quarter of that year, the Social Weather Stations Hunger Survey among Filipino families showed that 17.2 percent, or 3.8 million Filipino families, have experienced involuntary hunger at least once during the period. In December 2015, that figure dropped to 11.7 percent. In the latest SWS quarterly survey in December last year, the number of Filipinos who experienced involuntary hunger rose to nearly 14 percent (or 13.9 percent). This is lower than the 2014 figure but bigger than the 2015 percentage. Still it represents 3.1 Filipino families who have gone hungry. Multiply that by an average family size of 5 members, that is about 15.5 million Filipinos, or 15 percent of the entire nation, who went hungry in the last quarter of 2016.

As many of us know, the hunger problem has plagued our countrymen for decades, and everyone recognizes that this is due to widespread poverty across the land. The surveys showing the fluctuating figures for the number of hungry people in the Philippines over the years suggest to us that the root cause of hunger hasn't been truly addressed.

This hunger situation cannot continue. It is contrary to human dignity and a violation of human rights. We, in the National Food Coalition, along with our friends and supporters, believe that even for a developing country like the Philippines, hunger of this magnitude is unacceptable.

We applaud efforts by Congress members to alleviate the life of ordinary Filipinos who do not have the means to uplift their condition on their own. Now, we challenge our representatives to pass the House version of the Zero-Hunger Bill.

We recall that President Rodrigo Duterte made a commitment to fight hunger and poverty. The National Food Coalition, which is comprised of the basic social sectors, believes that the immediate passage of the Zero-Hunger Bill, or House Bill No. 61, is a concrete expression of that commitment.

This proposed legislation provides a legal framework within which zero-hunger may be achieved progressively. The bill also provides an explicit guarantee to the right to adequate food. It

encompasses food adequacy, availability, accessibility, cultural acceptability and freedom from adverse substances. More importantly, the proposed law will rationalize all existing policies, laws, decrees, executive and administrative orders, memorandum orders and circulars, as well as ordinances with regard to food in accordance with the right to adequate food.

The bill also enumerates the human rights principles upon which the proposed law is based, namely, participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and the rule of law.

This has been highlighted by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate food, Dr. Hilal Elver, during her official visit to the Philippines in February 2015 when she called on our Congress to pass the Zero-Hunger Bill. She applauded both houses of Congress for their commitment to developing a national food framework law to ensure the right to adequate food of all Filipinos and to fully meet Congress' human rights obligations. We earnestly hope our legislators will see the urgency of the bill and give it the priority that it deserves.

The National Food Coalition and its more than 10,000 members and supporters, composed of 75 federations and organizations all over the country, are ready to help the House craft this proposed zero-hunger measure. We should all be open to contributions, especially from sectors of our society who know hunger the most, who live hunger day-to-day, like the urban poor, the landless farmers, those belonging to indigenous communities and the fisher folks. Together, we can help address one major impact of impoverishment in our country by pushing the passage of the Zero-Hunger Bill.

As Dr. Hilal has said, every instance that a child or a family goes hungry is a violation of human rights to which the government must be accountable.

Maraming salamat po!

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