

MAUNLAD PERO GUTOM | Amid soaring economy, UN exec urges PH to address widespread hunger

By: **InterAksyon.com** with reports from **Cristina Lazo, News5**

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InterAksyon.com/Bernard Testa file photo of Tondo residents Rosalinda Garcia and daughter Jennifer, who are among Metro Manila's thousands of poor informal settlers.

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The online news portal of TV5

MANILA, Philippines – The economic growth being enjoyed by the Philippines isn't inclusive and has in fact failed to solve widespread hunger among millions of Filipinos.

This is the observation made by Hilal Elver, the United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food, who's on a seven-day visit to the Philippines from February 20 to 27 to assess the status of the country's efforts toward addressing hunger. "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 said in her report, citing the poor families and the famished children she met during her visit to poor rural areas in Luzon and in Yolanda-hit Tacloban City.

"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 added.

Elver recommended that the Philippines immediately pass the Right to Adequate Food Bill that targets zero hunger in 10 years.

She said having a law that would uphold the Filipinos' right to adequate food and nutrition "would be a good legacy" for President Benigno Aquino III.

"(I)t would be a good-faith, symbolic ending to his career," Elver told reporters.

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Philippine economy continues to soar under the Aquino administration consistently beating market expectations and the government's own target, making it among Asia's best performing economies.

In 2012, the country's gross domestic product growth reached 6.6 percent and further expanded with a 7.2 percent-GDP growth in 2013.

During the 4th quarter of 2014, the economy rebounded more strongly than expected as it posted a GDP growth of 6.9 percent.

However, studies show that the Philippines is finding it difficult to address hunger incidence despite the country's outstanding economic performance.

In his February 2015 [study](#) titled *Rice Price, Job Misery, Hunger Incidence: Need to Track Few More Statistical Indicators for the Poor*, Professor Dennis S. Mapa of the University of the Philippines School of Statistics said, "Reducing hunger incidence in the country is still the major policy challenge confronting our leaders today."

According to Mapa, "statistics on hunger produced by both government and private institutions show a very slow reduction in hunger incidence over the last five years."

He said that based on official data from Philippines Statistics Authority, the percentage of Filipinos experiencing extreme poverty (hunger) decreased only

slightly from 10.9 percent of the population in 2009 to 10.4 percent in 2012 and increasing marginally to 10.7 percent during the 1st semester of 2013.

He also cited the results of the 8th National Nutrition Survey of 2013 by the Food Nutrition and Research Institute (showing the same small reduction in the proportion of children aged 0-5 who are underweight (indirect measure of hunger) from 20.7 percent in 2008 to 19.8 percent in 2013.

Moreover, Mapa said self-rated hunger incidence data from the Social Weather Stations “reveal a similar bleak picture” where hunger incidence in households averaging at 19.5 percent in 2013 from 19.1 percent in 2009, slowing down slightly to an average of 18.3 percent in 2014.

“This slow reduction in hunger incidence is a puzzle considering the country’s respectable economic growth performance, with Real Gross Domestic Product growing at an annual average of 6.3 percent during the period 2010-2014,” said Mapa.

Meanwhile, according to the [2014 global nutrition report by the International Food Policy Research Institute](#), the Philippines was not likely to meet the following nutrition targets of the World Health Assembly: reducing child stunting by 40 percent; reducing anemia in women of reproductive age by 50 percent; reducing low birth weight by 30 percent; preventing an increase in child overweight; increasing exclusive breastfeeding of infants up to at least 50 percent; and reducing and maintaining child wasting to less than 5 percent.

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

By Ryan Chua, ABS-CBN News

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<http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/focus/02/27/15/un-official-right-adequate-food-law-can-be-pnoys-legacy>

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.