

## **STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD RURAL WOMEN'S DAY AND WORLD "FOODLESS" DAY**

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On the occasion of World Rural Women's Day and World Food Day, peasants, indigenous peoples and food producers in the Cordillera unite with peasants, indigenous peoples and food producers of the country and of the world in asserting our rights to land and food.

World Rural Women's Day resulted from the UN Conference for Women in Beijing in September 1995 to obtain recognition and support for rural women's multiple roles as farmers and food producers. Rural women comprise more than a quarter of the world's population. World Food Day was proclaimed in 1979 by the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organizations (FAO), aimed at heightening public awareness of the world food problem and strengthen solidarity in the struggle against hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

Where are we now on the 11<sup>th</sup> year of World Rural Women's Day and on the twenty seventh years after the declaration of World Food Day?

Experts on the world food situation say that there are 854 million hungry people on our planet or 1 out of six people is hungry. Around 500 million of hungry people are found in Asia. In the Philippines, one of every 5 Filipinos is hungry at least in a day while more than half rank themselves poor (SWS 2005). More than half of these figures are women and girls.

For more than 27 years, we were made as experimental grounds for development programs and technology which have been developed purportedly to eradicate hunger and poverty. The reality is that these programs only worsened the hunger and poverty situation as these are mainly designed for profit. These programs are packaged to advance the intent of Green Revolution where genetically engineered crops, high-value crops and genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) have been developed, promoted and proliferated by national governments with support from the governments of the US, European Union, Japan along with the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and agro-chemical transnational companies. Instead of solving world hunger and poverty, these programs have capitalized on our remaining resources.. Commercial agriculture has made us dependent to agricultural inputs and production systems of agro-chemical transnational companies.

What is there to celebrate when land and food resources are taken away from rural woman and the peasants?

In the Cordillera, we will assert RICE over MINES and FOOD over GOLD. The country's main staple-- rice, faces threat from cheap rice imports as a result of the national government's commitment to the WTO. Rice and agricultural production is left to the peasants with little or no support at all from government. The intensification of commercial agriculture that is promoted by GMA's Agricultural Modernization Program has worsened the existing feudal and semi-feudal exploitation of peasants where land rent, high interest rates and prices of agricultural inputs continue to soar while prices of agricultural products, wages of farm workers and livelihood conditions continue to dip.

Rice production in the Cordillera in 2004 as reported by the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics is 108% rice sufficient. The rice production for the region was 355,755 metric tons which was more than enough to feed a 1.6 million population. But, rice imports has reached even the province of Kalinga, the Cordillera's rice granary. Data from the National Food Authority (NFA) revealed that the share of the Cordillera from rice imports for year 2005 is 402,00 cavans and 200,00 cavans has already been distributed. Rice importation is expected to increase with the full implementation of WTO this year adding further misery to the already burdened rice farmers. The price of rice continue to increase even with the influx of cheap imported rice:

	1994	2004
NFA rice	P8.44/kg	P16.00/kg
Ordinary rice	P8.86/kg	P17-18/kg
Special rice	P9.50/kg	P20-28/kg

Peasants engaged in vegetable production continue to loss their protection from unrelenting dumping of cheap vegetable imports.

The GMA government has exchanged rice and our agriculture to the mines by selling out more than 60% of the Cordillera land to mining companies. GMA has prioritized gold for mining companies more than food for the communities.

We decry these conditions which made us even hungrier and poorer. Yet, when we cry over our hunger and poverty, when we defend our land, food and natural resources, we face the terror of the state. We have become targets of GMA's Operation Bantay Laya which to this day resulted to the murder of hundreds of peasants, rural women and indigenous peoples all over the country since GMA assumed power in 2001. Thousands have been widowed, orphaned and left grieving over a loss of a relative, friend, village mate and leader. This is GMA's cruel action when we assert our right to land and food.

As we worked for the survival of generations of human race, we will not allow ourselves to be defeated by state terrorism and never will we bow down to the capitalist greed on our land and food resources.

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