

BORNEO RESEARCH COUNCIL

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Most Honorable Jose Chaves Alvarez, Governor of Palawan
Honorable Dennis Socrates, Vice-Governor of Palawan

Dear Governor and Vice Governor of Palawan,

On behalf of the Borneo Research Council, I am writing to express our great concern at the recent widespread expansion of oil palm plantations in Palawan. The Borneo Research Council has as part of its mission the protection of indigenous cultures, their rights to ancestral lands, and the sustainable management of critical ecosystems. Therefore, we are extremely dismayed by the proposed conversion of 15,000 – 20,000 hectares of the Palawan Man & Biosphere Reserve to oil palm monoculture – a region that has been recognized internationally by UNESCO for its important qualities. To clear such a large area of this reserve would cause irreparable damage to regional biodiversity, water quality, and topsoil integrity, and poses a significant threat to indigenous farmers and their communities. It would greatly harm the sustainability of the entire province, the food security of local peoples, and the stability of the local rural economy.

On 29 September, Hon. Dennis Socrates met with a delegation of farmers and indigenous peoples being represented by the Coalition Against Land Grabbing (CALG). CALG's members delivered a petition seeking a moratorium on the expansion of oil palm plantations, which was signed by nearly 4,300 individuals residing in communities that will be impacted. We fully support their request for a moratorium, along with the following demands raised by the petitioners themselves:

- a) Imposing penalties on Agumil Philippines, Inc. and other oil palm companies for violating the Strategic Environmental Plan (R.A. 7611), the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (Republic Act no. 8371), Executive Order no. 23 (banning the cutting of trees in natural and residual forest, nationwide) and for infringement of other existing laws;
- b) Stopping the planting and tending of oil palms in areas that have already been proven to be part of timberland, of indigenous peoples' ancestral land domain, etc., followed by the eradication of existing oil palms in such locations, and the rehabilitation of deforested areas through the replanting of endemic tree species;
- c) Amending and revising the terms and conditions of Production Technical Market Agreements (PTMA) and Management Services Agreements (MSAs) which are solely in favor of Agumil Philippines, Inc and at the disadvantage of farmers' cooperatives;
- d) Ensuring that Agumil, Philippines Inc. and other agribusiness enterprises will comply with labor laws in order to improve the condition of plantation workers, while providing them with benefits and adequate forms of insurance;
- e) Requesting the Land Bank of the Philippines to create and implement mechanism to assess and monitor the adverse social, environmental and economic impact of the oil palm projects that it finances.

In conclusion, we believe that the commitment of the government of the Philippines to safeguard food supplies, to improve the economy of rural farmers, and to protect indigenous peoples' ancestral domains is not compatible with ongoing attempts to convert precious land into oil palm plantations. We earnestly request that your government respond with swift action to the CALG petition in order to halt the irreversible socio-ecological damage that will be the result of oil palm expansion.

Sincerely,



George N. Appell, Ph.D.
President, Borneo Research Council