



# Forest Peoples Programme

1c Fosseway Business Centre, Stratford Road, Moreton-in-Marsh GL56 9NQ, UK  
tel: +44 (0)1608 652893 fax: +44 (0)1608 652878 info@forestpeoples.org www.forestpeoples.org

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

13<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Dear Governor and Vice Governor of Palawan,

Forest Peoples Programme is an international human rights organization with consultative status at the United Nations (ECOSOC). We are also active members of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil and thus seek to ensure that all palm oil developments comply with RSPO standards and in particular respect the law, protect human rights and core labour standards, recognize indigenous peoples' and local communities' rights to their lands and uphold their right to give or withhold their free, prior and informed consent to any developments planned on their lands. We note that, compared to most other countries in South East Asia, the Philippines has a progressive Constitution and other laws which, if effectively upheld, should protect these rights.

We have been following with great attention and considerable concern recent controversies related to the rapid expansion of oil palm plantations in Palawan. We have been extremely worried to learn that oil palm companies are now planning to convert an area between 15,000 to 20,000 hectares in the Palawan Man & Biosphere Reserve into oil palm monocultures. We are informed that about 6,000 ha. have already been cleared for this purpose, endangering biodiversity, water resources, topsoil quality and the livelihood of farmers and indigenous peoples, while exacerbating rural poverty. Local civil society organizations in Palawan have expressed concerns that if oil palm expansion is allowed to continue, the environmental and ecological sustainability of the province and people's food security will be severely compromised.

We are aware that on 29<sup>th</sup> September, one of you, Hon. Dennis Socrates met a delegation of farmers and indigenous peoples being represented by the recently established Coalition against Land Grabbing (CALG). CALG's members, accompanied by Bishop Pedro Arrigo from the Apostolic Vicariate of Palawan, delivered a petition signed by almost 4,300 individuals belonging to oil palm-impacted communities who are asking you to issue a moratorium on the expansion of oil palm plantations.

We support the farmers', cooperatives' and indigenous peoples' call for a moratorium. We also fully endorse other key demands being raised by the petitioners themselves such as:

- a) Impose 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 infringing other existing laws;

- b) Stop 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. And thus proceeding to the eradication of existing oil palms in such locations, as well as to the rehabilitation of deforested areas through the replanting of endemic tree species;
- c) Amend and revise 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) Ensure that Agumil, Philippines Inc. and other agribusiness enterprises, comply with labour laws, in order to improve the condition of plantation workers, while providing them with benefits and adequate forms of insurance;
- e) Request the LandBank 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.

The commitment of Philippine's government to resolve food security, improve farmers' economies and safeguard indigenous peoples' ancestral domains, is not compatible with the ongoing attempt to convert precious land into oil palm plantations without respect for the rights of local communities or sound environmental protections. Therefore, we kindly request your government to respond quickly and responsibly to the recent petition of indigenous peoples and farmers, before the adverse and socio-ecological impacts of oil palm expansion become irreversible.

Your sincerely



Dr Marcus Colchester  
Senior Policy Advisor

Copy Furnished:

H.E. Benigno C. Aquino III, President of the Republic  
 Dr. Marlea Pinor Munez, Executive Director, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP)  
 Mr. Ruben S. Bastero, Regional Director RIV (NCIP)  
 Dionisia Banua, Commissioner (NCIP)  
 Hon. Ramon Jesus Paje, Secretary Department of Environment and Natural Resources  
 Hon. Proceso J. Alcala, Secretary Department of Agriculture (DA)  
 Hon. Euclides G. Forbes and Mr. Carlos B. Carpio (Philippine Coconut Authority - PCA)  
 Executive Director: Mr. Nelson P. Devanadera  
 Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD)  
 Mrs. Mearl Hilario, PCSD Committee on Tribal Affairs  
 Mrs. Gilda E. Pico, President and CEO, Land Bank of the Philippines