**“NO TO RICE LIBERALIZATION” MANIFESTO**

**November 18, 2019**

We, the farmers and major stakeholders in the rice industry, launch this nationwide protest to help the public understand the hardships that we are suffering at present and to express our disenchantment and frustration over government’s failure to address the crisis at hand.

Rice is the country’s most important staple crop. It accounts for around 20% of the gross value added (GVA) of Philippine agriculture. The rice industry employs 2.5 million households, broken down into 2.1 million farmers, 110,000 workers for post-farm activities and 320,000 for ancillary activities. (Food and Agriculture Organization). Local farmers supply 90% to 95% of the country’s rice requirements. The welfare of rice farmers and the rice industry as a whole is therefore crucial in ensuring the food security, economic well-being and political stability of the country.

In March 2019, quantitative limits on rice imports were removed and replaced by tariffs under the Rice Liberalization Law (RA 11203) or RLL. The law not only “tariffied” rice at a rate that unfairly caused huge losses in farmers’ incomes. It also unilaterally liberalized the rice industry by removing almost all major government controls over rice imports and domestic trade. Since January 2019, over 3 million tons of recorded imported rice entered the country, most of them following the enactment of the RLL. This is more than double the import requirements of the country and has made the Philippines the world’s top rice importer this year.

The flood of imports brought about the steep and continuous decline in *palay* prices, from Php 23 in September 2018 to only Php 15.50 in October 2019 (Philippine Statistics Authority). This represents a 33% drop in prices and farm incomes. Field reports indicate that the actual situation is much worse. Despite this, consumers continue to pay relatively high prices for rice.

With annual *palay* production at 19 million tons, every peso decline in *palay* prices means taking away Php 19 billion from the pockets of small farmers. We estimate that total losses of farmers for 2019 alone could reach Php 140 billion, or Php 30,000 per hectare. This is more than 10 times the damage wrought by Typhoon Yolanda to the agriculture sector in 2013, and it is all man-made.

The severe drop in *palay* prices and the losses incurred by millions of rice farmers have resulted in a brewing socio-economic and humanitarian crisis in the already poverty-stricken rural areas. Farmers will default on their debt payments and may fail to borrow again for the next season. They may have to stop their children’s schooling. They will find it difficult to feed their families or buy medicine for their sick children. Many of them may stop farming altogether. Ironically, farmers were better off when quantitative restrictions on imports were still in place. They are now barely surviving because of a law that was touted to be good for them.

The Rice Liberalization Law is clearly defective and poorly crafted. In its present form, it will continue to wreak havoc on the lives of rice farmers and other stakeholders in the rice industry. We therefore demand the immediate suspension of the RLL’s implementation and a comprehensive review of its effects on the rice industry. Based on this study, the law may then be amended or, if necessary, repealed and replaced with a better piece of legislation.

Meantime, we demand that government act immediately to compensate rice farmers and stakeholders for the losses they have incurred because of the law. In this regard, we denounce the clear unpreparedness and ineffectiveness of government in providing contingency assistance and compensatory measures to affected sectors, particularly small rice farmers.

We also condemn the Department of Agriculture’s indecisiveness in defending farmers’ interests by inexplicably terminating its own investigation on safeguard duties on rice imports and deferring to the decision of the economic managers and the Cabinet. It is obvious by now that the 35% tariff for ASEAN imports is too low to protect rice farmers from import surges and drastic price declines. Imposing safeguard duties on top of the 35% tariff will be the best way to control excessive importation and remove the glut of imported rice in the market. Recently, DA Secretary William Dar announced the reopening of the investigation with transparent stakeholder participation. We demand that the DA strictly follow the Safeguard Measures Act and impose rice safeguard duties based on factual data and analysis.

In addition, we call on government to strengthen state support and intervention in the rice trade and increase the procurement capacity, drying and storage facilities, and outreach of the National Food Authority (NFA). We demand that all affected rice farmers be adequately compensated for their actual and projected losses over successive cropping seasons, and be given subsidies to help them cope with higher prices of fertilizers and other farm inputs and services. We urge government to incentivize the formation and expansion of agricultural cooperatives and promote the transition of rice farmers to more profitable, efficient, integrated, diversified and sustainable farming systems.

We demand that Senator Cynthia Villar, main sponsor of the RLL, step down as Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Agriculture out of *delicadeza*, given that her family-owned real estate corporations are active in the conversion of rice lands into residential and commercial estates, which continue to undermine the country’s food security and contribute to our rice shortage.

We denounce recent attempts by the same Committee, chaired by Senator Villar, to stifle the voice of farmers and critics of the RLL by severely cutting the budget of the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF), which is the DA’s official platform for interaction with the private sector.

We express our deep concern over the stranglehold of the country’s economic managers, particularly Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez, Economic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia, and Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez, in determining agricultural policy in the country and their penchant for experimenting with farmers’ lives in order to test their economic liberalization theories on the sector. We likewise denounce their propensity to make promises and allegations based on faulty assumptions and deceptive data. We are appalled by their callousness and insensitivity to the plight of farmers by telling them to wait and suffer for one or two more years before considering any amendment of the RLL.

We call on our citizens to support Filipino rice farmers by buying local rice directly from them or through their associations or cooperatives.

We call on President Rodrigo Duterte to live up to his commitment to help uplift our people from poverty and defend the millions of rice farmers and farmworkers who derive their livelihood from the rice industry.

STOP Rice Importation Now!

STOP Killing the Rice Industry!

SAVE Our Rice Farmers!

We call on all rice farmers and fellow Filipinos to express their anger by joining us in our national day of protest on November 20, 2019!

1. Federation of Free Farmers (FFF)
2. Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP)
3. Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA)
4. Kilusan para sa Repormang Agraryo at Katarungang Panlipunan (KATARUNGAN)
5. Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan (PKKK)
6. National Movement for Food Sovereignty (NMFS)
7. Freedom from Debt Coaliton (FDC)
8. Bantay Bigas
9. Task Force Mapalad (TFM)
10. Integrated Rural Development Foundation (IRDF)
11. Alyansa Agrikultura
12. Centro Saka, Inc.
13. Aniban ng mga Magsasaka, Mangingisda at Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (AMMMA-K)
14. Aniban ng Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (AMA)
15. Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Samahan sa Kanayunan (PKSK)
16. PARAGOS Pilipinas
17. Pambansang Katipunan ng Makabayang Magbubukid (PKMM)
18. Rice Watch Action Network (R1)
19. Focus on the Global South
20. Save Agrarian Reform Alliance
21. National Food Coalition (NFC)
22. Alab Katipunan-BPMP
23. Laban ng Masa
24. Kilusang Maralita sa Kanayunan (KILOS KA)
25. Kilusan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP)
26. National Trade Union Center (NTUC)
27. Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE)
28. National Food Authority Employees Association (NFA-EA)
29. BUTIL Party-List
30. MAGSASAKA Party-List
31. SANLAKAS
32. Philippine Confederation of Grains Associations (PHILCONGRAINS)
33. Rural Poor Institute for Land and Human Rights (RIGHTS)
34. Center for Agrarian Reform Empowerment and Transformation (CARET)
35. People’s Development Institute (PDI)
36. Rural Poor Institute for Land and Human Rights
37. Episcopal Church in the Philippines
38. Christian-Muslim Democratic Movement of the Philippine
39. Peoples Food Movement
40. Greenpeace Philippines
41. Dr. Ted Mendoza