



National Alliance for Filipino Concerns

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For Immediate Release

October 8, 2016

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NAFCON On Philippine President Duterte's First 100 Days

The overwhelming victory for the Philippine Presidency of Rodrigo Roa Duterte, who promised to break from traditional corrupt politics and eradicate criminality in the nation, is an indication of the Filipino people's deep desire for change. NAFCON's [Agenda for Empowerment, Sustainability, and Peace](#) outlined the concrete demands that Filipinos in the United States wanted to see from the Duterte administration as meaningful changes for the Filipino people. This assessment of Duterte's first 100 days in office pertains to two of NAFCON's major campaigns: Environmental Justice for the Philippines and Dignity and Justice for Filipino Im/migrants.

Economic sovereignty, independent foreign policy are keys to environmental justice

NAFCON launched its Environmental Justice for the Philippines (EJforPH) campaign in 2014 shortly after Typhoon Haiyan ravaged the central Philippines. In addition to a timely response during a strong typhoon or disaster, this campaign allows community members to be proactive in protecting communities against further destruction of natural resources and fighting for greater access to sustainable livelihood and agriculture in the Philippines. As such, our concrete demand was for Duterte to stand against the incursion of multinational mining corporations and foreign ownership of national industries.

The Duterte administration has shown political will in stopping the destruction of the environment by mining companies and US militarization. We especially commend the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for its mining audit that upheld the suspension of at least 10 big mining companies known for their violations of environmental, land, and human rights policies. We also laud President Duterte for taking a stand against foreign militarism, which has time and again destroyed the Philippine environment as in the cases of the damage of the Tubbataha Reef and hazardous waste dumps in former US bases in Clark and Subic. In his first 100 days, Duterte has consistently pronounced his plans to end Philippine-US military exercises and review the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) that essentially turns the countryside into military bases and war zones at risk of environmental degradation.

However, we express alarm and demand justice for the killings of 5 environmental defenders during Duterte's first 100 days. We also disapprove of two mining companies that passed the DENR audit -- Philex mining, which caused one of the worst mine spills in Philippine history but did not adequately compensate affected communities, and Taganito Mining, notorious for massive environmental degradation and grave human rights violations in Surigao del Norte. These companies must be held accountable and the affected peasant and indigenous communities sufficiently rehabilitated.

Local livelihood and self-reliant economy will end forced migration, drug menace

As a staunch advocate of Filipino migrants' rights and welfare, NAFCON called on President Duterte to institute reforms in several government agencies mandated to serve and defend our overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) but

failed to do so due to corruption and neglect by previous regimes. His administration positively responded by moving to exempt returning OFWs from the overseas employment certificate (OEC) requirement as directed by the new Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA). Just recently, he ordered the repatriation of more than 100 OFWs who were victims of massive layoffs and were stranded for many years in the economically depressed Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He warmly welcomed and promised them immediate relief as family reintegration and livelihood programs commenced. As someone who pledged to make OFW concerns a top priority, Duterte still has a long way to go in terms of permanently abolishing exorbitant fees charged from OFWs, completely eradicating corruption in the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), POEA, and other government institutions, as well as fully and effectively reaching out to millions of OFWs experiencing economic trouble, discrimination, and exploitation in foreign land, but he is definitely off to a very good start.

But we also remember Mary Jane Veloso -- a mother and OFW who was framed for carrying drugs in her desperation to provide her family a better future by seeking opportunities abroad. Related to this is President Duterte's fierce anti-drug war, which has gained the attention of the international community over the past months due to reported fatal police encounters, vigilante killings, and other unexplained violence that have already claimed over 3,000 lives. When a country's economics is dominated by local elite and foreign interests, the impoverished people suffer and are driven to look for relief elsewhere, be it in drugs or jobs overseas. While NAFCON supports campaigns against forces that drive Filipinos into further poverty and destitution such as illegal drug trade and the governing narcopolitics, we also stand against state-sponsored violence and impunity, and we do not find the two advocacies conflicting. In fact, we believe that only in upholding the rule of law or can we reclaim the country from grave crimes and abuses, the same way that only in upholding social justice can we free Mary Jane from the threats of death row. We call on Duterte to truly unite with the people and respect due process, while addressing the deep causes of drug abuse in the Philippines and fulfilling his promises to end contractualization, bring forth the creation of national industries to sustain local jobs, and consequently end the government's labor export program.

The fight for environmental justice and to end forced migration is a fight for just and lasting peace

In his first 100 days, the Duterte administration's strong political will and sincerity in resuming the peace talks with the revolutionary movement represented by the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) is worthy of commendation. Currently in the second round of peace talks in Oslo, both parties are discussing the Comprehensive Agreement on Socio-Economic Reforms (CASER), which addresses the issue of both jobs and the environment.

Article 4, Section 17 of the CASER calls for "economic growth within the framework of sustainable development," proposing "equitable access to the development and use of the country's natural resources, not only for the present generation but for the future generation as well." It becomes evident that the peace talks between the Philippine government and the NDF are at the center of resolving many of the problems that Filipinos face. NAFCON believes that foreign militarism, environmental plunder and the trafficking and exploitation of Filipinos abroad are all results of lopsided foreign policies characteristic of previous administrations, the same policies that left the country with a backward, import-dependent, export-oriented agrarian economy with no thriving local industries to sustain homegrown jobs for the people. Fortunately, these are the same crises that CASER aims to resolve. We find no more worthwhile advocacy to pursue than resolving the problem of environmental degradation and forced migration while pushing for just and lasting peace where environmental and economic sustainability is possible.

NAFCON's migrants' agenda aim to promote the rights and welfare of the Filipino people, both at home and overseas. After Duterte's 100 days in office, we reaffirm our support for his policies and actions that advance the migrants' agenda and benefit the Filipino people. At the same time, we continue to offer constructive solutions to his administration's shortcomings. We believe that it is through both support and critical accountability that the best interests of the Filipino people will be upheld, sharpened, and won. We reiterate our challenge to President Duterte after his 100th day in office: Listen to the Filipino people! Heed their aspirations for an independent, democratic, just and peaceful Philippines, where every Filipino migrant will truly aspire to return home.

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NAFCON is a national multi-issue alliance of Filipino organizations and individuals in the United States serving to protect the rights and welfare of Filipinos by fighting for social, economic, and racial justice and equality. At present, NAFCON members encompass over 23 cities in the United States