

Protesters ask Bangkok Ambassador to Join Anti-Arroyo Movement

Thursday 2 March 2006, by [PURUGGANAN Joseph](#) (Date first published: 2 March 2006).

30 protestors, most of them Filipinos, entered the Philippine Embassy in Bangkok on Thursday, March 2, to demand the lifting of the State of National Emergency decree (Presidential Proclamation 1017).

In a meeting with Ambassador Antonio Rodriguez, the protesters also urged the Philippine envoy and Embassy staff "to join us in demanding that [Gloria Macapagal Arroyo] vacate the presidency as soon as possible." "We ask you and your staff," stated a letter they drafted and read to him, "to uphold the integrity of the foreign service and declare your loyalty to the Republic instead of a person who has usurped power through illegal means." In response, Rodriguez said that the State of National Emergency (SONE) was necessary to foil "destabilization by an alliance between elements of the left and elements of the right." He admitted initially, however, that "I do not know what the foundations are for the state of emergency," though towards the end of the session he retracted this statement.

Contradicting the envoy's claim that the army, the left, and the opposition were the source of destabilization, Dr. Walden Bello, professor at the University of the Philippines, said that "it is Arroyo's holding on to power illegally that is the principal source of the crisis."

Added Rex Varona, a migrant labor organizer, it is Arroyo's "illegitimate possession and wielding of arbitrary power that is eliciting acts of legitimate resistance in all parts of Philippine society, from Cory Aquino to the Church, military, business, labor, and the media."

Ed Legaspi of the Bangkok-based Forum Asia also disputed the ambassador's contention of a conspiracy afoot: "How can this be, when Crispin Beltran [a progressive congressman] is arrested on 20 year old charges and [former Senator] Gringo Honasan on a 1993 charge?" Varona emphasized that the arbitrary arrests, forced dispersal of rallies, and raiding of newspaper offices made many fear that "we are on the threshold of dictatorial rule-that we are about to see a tragic replay of Sept. 22, 1972."

After the exchange with the ambassador, Dottie Guerrero of Focus on the Global South asked him and the embassy staff to join hands with the protesters to recite a prayer for peace and stability in the Philippines in Pilipino. The key part of the prayer, which the ambassador recited along with the rest, went: "We pray for a just government under a legitimate leadership, unlike the Arroyo government, and for the lifting of Proclamation 1017 and respect for human rights." The ambassador later qualified that "I only joined part of the prayer."

After thanking the ambassador and the Embassy staff for listening to their demands, the protesters left the Embassy chanting "Long live the Philippines, out with Arroyo."

Among the Philippine and Bangkok-based organizations represented at the protest were Freedom from Debt Coalition, Alliance for Progressive Labor, Focus on the Global South, Akbayan, Laban ng Masa, Bukluran ng Manggawang Pilipino, Stop the New Round Coalition, Welga ng Kababaihan, Forum Asia, Filipino Domestic Helpers General Union, Asian Domestic Workers Union, and the

peasant organization PKSK.