

Philippines: Are cities only for the rich? Can't the North Triangle residents have their homes in their own city?

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PRESS RELEASE

Kampanya para sa Makataong Pamumuhay

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In the face of an impending eviction:

North Triangle residents, other groups invoke right to the city

Are cities only for the rich? Can't the North Triangle residents have their homes in their own city?

Invoking the "right to the city" principle espoused by social movements worldwide, residents and supporters of the North Triangle community in Barangay San Roque, Quezon City, in a solidarity assembly held today at the Bantayog ng mga Bayani, declared that cities are not an exclusive domain for the urban rich and corporate people.

Attending the North Triangle solidarity assembly were urban poor groups under the Kilos Maralita, labor groups, human rights and social action groups, and known individuals from the academe and street parliamentarians.

The assembly urges the government to make the "right to the city" principle the fundamental guide to addressing the housing problems of the urban poor as well as other issues related to poverty and urban justice.

According to Teody Gacer, president of San Roque Community Council -North Triangle Alliance (SRCC-NTA) and spokesperson for Kilos Maralita, their community is anticipating another major clearing operation at the North Triangle area as the deadline to vacate the place issued to them by the National Housing Authority (NHA) expires by the end of this month.

It can be recalled that on September 23, 2010, an attempt to clear the area of informal settlers ended in violence when residents put up a spirited fight against the police and the demolition teams. The SRCC-NTA had been demanding that they be made part of the planned development of the site where they have resided for decades.

Residents had been pressing the government to consider their proposed on-site housing project as an important economic and social component of the joint venture project between the government and the Ayala land to develop the area into Quezon City's main business and commercial hub. Under

the proposal, a portion of the 37-hectare NT property shall be allocated for the building of medium rise buildings (MRB's) that would serve as an alternative to the much opposed relocation package being offered by the National Housing Authority (NHA).

The proposal, which was endorsed by the Technical Working Group (TWG) headed by the DILG to the President on March 15, 2011, also has a financial study which justifies the viability of the project. But more than that, it offers a significant departure from the usual evict and relocate approach to the urban poor housing problem. But up to now, the President has not responded to any one of the proposed recommendations.

Ana Maria Nemenzo, lead convenor of Kampanya para sa Makataong Pamumuhay (KAMP), said the government's relocation program is an "exclusionary policy" as it makes the poor personas non grata in the city.

"Before there were only "exclusive villages" or "exclusive subdivisions", now the whole city is becoming an exclusive enclave for those who can afford its commercial lifestyle," said Nemenzo.

After the solidarity assembly at Bantayog, the groups linked arms with some 1,000 North Triangle residents at Agham Road in a march to the National Housing Authority to press their demand for on-site housing.

Demolition in Paranaque

Meanwhile, while the assembly is happening in Quezon City, some 300 families lost their homes at Pastrack Compound in Moonwalk, Paranaque City.

According to Robert Labrador, spokesperson for the Alyansa ng Maralitang Pilipino (AMP), a demolition team backed swooped down the compound by early morning and tore down 138 structures shared by 300 families and renters. The residents were not able to hold their ground as the demolition team was backed by dozens of SWAT operatives.

The place was classified by the local government as danger zone but the demolition was carried out without the relocation plan for the affected residents.

Ironically, a resolution calling for a moratorium on demolitions and another for an on-site/in-city housing development have just been unanimously approved by National Sectoral Assembly of the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) held in Quezon City on October 17-19, 2011. ###

LETTER OF SOLIDARITY TO THE RESIDENTS OF NORTH TRIANGLE

The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) extends its support and warm solidarity to the residents of North Triangle in their struggle for adequate housing. COHRE advocates for the right to adequate adequate housing for everyone, everywhere, including preventing and remedying forced evictions.

Forced evictions are unjust and illegal under national and international law and evictions should never result in rendering individuals homeless. No resettlement shall be undertaken without adequate consultation with the communities regarding where they are to be relocated. When evicted families are unable to provide for themselves, the Government must ensure that adequate

alternative housing or resettlement is made available. This is a legal obligation under national and international law.

The Philippine Constitution states that the Government shall undertake a continuing program of urban land reform and housing which will make available at affordable cost, decent housing and basic services to under-privileged and homeless citizens in urban centres and resettlement areas, and that urban or rural poor dwellers shall not be evicted nor their dwelling demolished, except in accordance with law and in a just and humane manner. National law provides legislative protections against the arbitrary expropriation of property, which can only occur in the public interest and with prior provision of fair and just compensation. A court order must be obtained prior to evictions or demolitions.

COHRE objects to national and municipal Governments continuing to evict thousands of urban poor in the name of urban renewal, infrastructure and large-scale development projects across Metro Manila. COHRE believes that only consultation, negotiation and the provision of fair compensation and relocation can adequately resolve the land dispute in the North Triangle area of Quezon City whilst ensuring that urban development does not come at the expense of people's basic human rights.

COHRE believes that everyone has a right to the city. The demolition of homes in the North Triangle area should be stopped, or the communities provided adequate housing elsewhere in the city. Communities must not be forced to relocate to areas far from employment opportunities and other vital public services such as schools and medical facilities.

In Solidarity

Rolando Modina
COHRE Asia Director

To
Kilos Maralita (Movement of the Poor) and
Kampanya para sa Makataong Pamumuhay (KAMP)
Solidarity Assembly with North Triangle Residents on

Solidarity Message

21. October 2011

Dear friends at Kilos Maralita,
Dear friends at KAMP,

We warmly greet you and hope you have a successful solidarity assembly!

"A solidarity assembly for the on-site housing campaign of North Triangle residents" is an urgent issue. In times of injustice the cities become more and more fields of our struggles. The "Right to the City" is important, not only in Quezon City, but everywhere. People are victims of forced eviction and pushed out the city centres; they are relocated in faraway parts of the city or even in the country site. But the people are not only losing their neighbourhood, most of these people lose their homes, their livelihoods, their personal networks,

their sources of income. They suffer homelessness, hunger and worse medical conditions.

Since many years our organisations have been supporting social movements and travelling together on our common journey towards justice, peace and freedom. The philippinenbuero as an independent socio-political information and advocacy office for the German speaking countries, is committed to the plight of the people and social movements in the Philippines. We support your struggle and your work!

Therefore, we strongly condemn the neoliberal vision for cities, where only consumers are welcome. We also strongly condemn the neoliberal vision for cities, where only the rich are able to go, to live and to work. The struggle for the "Right to the City" for everyone is a struggle not only in the Global South, but everywhere. We need the exchange and the collaboration of advocates for social change from both the South and the North. Our lives are interconnected and hence we should understand each other as compatriots in our political and social struggles: The search and work for and on an economy and a way of living in which we can live together in solidarity and understanding globally.

Warm greetings of solidarity,

Michael Reckordt

Executive director, philippinenbuero
