

Philippines: Duterte orders DAR to give away all unused government land

Tuesday 9 March 2021, by [GOMEZ Herbie](#) (Date first published: 6 March 2021).

The President kicks off his anti-communist roadshow that will take him around the country with a promise in Cagayan de Oro to give out to the poor all idle government land

President Rodrigo Duterte on Friday, March 5, ordered the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) to start working to give away all idle government-owned lands to the needy before he steps down in 2022.

“Tanang yuta sa gobyerno ihatag na, mosugot mo o sa dili (Distribute all the the idle government land whether you like it or not),” he told a crowd at the University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines (USTP) here during a joint meeting of the National Task Force and Regional Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.

He said all public land that remained unused for at least 20 years should be distributed to the poor.

Duterte boasted about being the President who has given the most to people in terms of land distribution. *“Ako’y Presidente nga kinadaghanan og yuta nga gihatag. Ako ra puy Presidente nga dili pud gusto og publicity.”* (Of all the presidents, I have given the most in terms of land. I am the only President who dislikes publicity.)

But Duterte paused as he struggled with the figures, and asked Agrarian Reform Secretary John Castricones, who was seated with the crowd, to help him out.

“You have to come here because your mask is covered (sic),” he told Castricones.

The secretary stood up and then coached Duterte into saying that the DAR has already distributed some 160,000 hectares, and that supposedly, 450,000 hectares more would be given away. He also said DAR has given some 2,100 land ownership titles in Northern Mindanao yesterday alone.

Duterte told Castricones: “I hope you would be able to distribute it before my end terms (sic)... (That’s) something to leave behind... That’s not my land (anyway).”

He said the “hot beds” of insurgency should get priority, and that DAR should talk to the big landholders to “give it up or else, I would go there and distribute the lands myself.” He told Castricones: “Bungkaga!” (Destroy, drive them away!)

Duterte however cautioned against leaving land reform beneficiaries on their own after they have been awarded titles. The agriculture department and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda), he said, should see to it that the beneficiaries are provided with seedlings and fertilizers, and skills.

“He (beneficiary) does not have a shovel; he has no carabao; he is unable to till the land. What is he

supposed to do with his land? Dig his own grave?" Duterte asked rhetorically. "Give him the implements, the instruments."

Duterte promised to deliver. "*Hutdon ko ng kwarta sa gobyerno'g kawat. Bahala na basta matuman lang na.*" (I will steal all the money of the government just to make this happen.)

Farmers however blasted to distribute idle lands to the poor, saying this is mere "lip service" that contradicts data from DAR.

"It is all lip service as data from DAR itself showed that he has the lowest land distribution output since President Cory Aquino," said Task Force Mapalad spokesperson Lanie Factor.

Data from the DAR show that in 2020, the department was only able to distribute a total of 18,789 hectares of new agricultural landholdings nationwide, or nearly 40% short of its 30,154-hectare target for the year.

Visiting barangays before 2022 elections

The Cagayan de Oro event is the first of many regional visits Duterte will be making throughout the year that precedes the 2022 national elections.

The NTF-ELCAC's P16.4 billion fund for barangays has been flagged by critics as discretionary funds tantamount to "[pork barrel](#)" for generals in Duterte's Cabinet.

Lawmakers from progressive groups warn that the NTF-ELCAC is abusing its mandate by baselessly red-tagging critics of the government, yet another blow to freedom of expression under the Duterte presidency.

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