

Debt-Reduction, Not Aid; Independence, Not Mendicancy

Representatives of 19 countries and 14 multilateral institutions recently met in Tokyo for the so-called initial "pledging session" for the Philippine Assistance Program/Multilateral Aid Initiative or PAP/MAI.

Advertised by the Aquino Government as the vehicle that will "transform the Philippine economy and elevate it to the ranks of the newly-industrialized countries by the end of this century", the program aims to solicit additional foreign assistance beyond what is regularly committed every year by donor governments like Japan and the United States.

The truth of the matter is that the so-called pledging session in Tokyo was nothing but a regular, though expanded, meeting of the Consultative Group of countries that have been giving assistance to the Philippines. This group, chaired by the World Bank, meets every year.

Majority of the represented countries came to this meeting without any intention of pledging anything beyond what their respective countries had already previously committed as part of their regular official development assistance to the Philippines.

In an obvious attempt to impress the Filipino people at home, the Aquino government's representatives pathetically sought to repackage pre-existing commitment and treat these as components of a new "mini-Marshall Plan" for the Philippines.

The Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) decries these desperate public relations gimmicks of the Aquino Government, and more importantly, condemns the government's disconcerting mendicant posture, its uncritical attitude towards conventional forms of foreign assistance, and its blind and utter disregard for the real problems that presently beset the Philippine economy.

Specifically, the Coalition calls attention to the following points:

1. The Aquino Government has congratulated itself for raising \$3.5 billion in this year's pledging sessions. Even assuming that this is all real development assistance, the amount only roughly corresponds to the debt service that the Philippines pays to its foreign creditors every year. What we need is relief from onerous and immoral debts, not alms. We demand justice, not charity.

2. The Europeans and the Japanese have openly expressed grave reservations about US moves to tie-up the PAP to regional security questions, obviously a euphemism for the Clark and Subic factor. The Aquino Government desperately maintains the fiction that there is no connection between the PAP and the Bases. No one knows what other pledges were made by the Philippine side in exchange for the \$3.5 billion. The Filipino people are entitled to know what we have surrendered for money.

3. The PAP Coordinating Council boldly has declared that the principal role in this program is being assigned to the private sector. Despite the abundant rhetoric concerning NGO participation, this declaration practically makes the program a plaything of big business, given the type of people that Villanueva, Fernandez and Jayme move around with and the composition of the PAP Council itself. It is fair to assume that if big business is attracted to a project only after foreign assistance has been committed, that project has really no solid

future. If it had any real future, that project would not have been passed up by big business in the first instance. Foreign assistance will enrich a few people, but it will never improve the quality of life of the vast majority.

4. In response to the oft-repeated criticism that the Philippines has been unable to absorb all previous foreign aid pledges, the Aquino government has created a super-body, the Committee on Development Assistance or CODA, to oversee the programming, monitoring and evaluation of all foreign assistance. These functions used to be the prerogative of the NEDA, which had tried to ensure, perhaps vainly, that all offers of Development Assistance passed through strict criteria reflecting the Medium-Term Philippine development plan. There is every reason to suspect that this process will now be short-circuited to satisfy the impatience of aid-givers and aid-applicants alike.

5. The strange impatience of aid-givers over the agonizing slowness in the country's aid-processing system, instead of driving us to a frenzied effort to marginalize our own economic planning officials, should in fact alert us to the limitless tricks to which foreign assistance everywhere lends itself. The unspoken principle behind foreign aid is that the recipient must be allowed to determine in what form the assistance should come. Numerous studies of foreign aid, however, have demonstrated how this principle is honored more in the breach than in the observance. Teresa Hayter was not imagining things when she wrote the book entitled *Aid as Imperialism*.

6. In its mad effort to attract charity and sympathy from the rich countries, and in total disregard for whatever national self-worth might have been recovered at EDSA, the Aquino Government blindly follows the World Bank's prescriptions. Mrs. Aquino and her technocrats forget that no amount of capital infusion will save the Philippine economy and bring enduring relief to the Filipino poor unless basic changes are made in the rules of the present world capitalist order - in trade, in the transnational conglomerates, etc. Moreover, no amount of "poverty alleviating" and "employment-generating" projects can rescue the vast masses of Filipinos from the degrading existence into which they have been forced unless meaningful changes are made in the very property system of Philippine society.

We repeat: what we need is debt-reduction, not foreign alms. What we demand is justice, not charity. We stand for dignity and independence, not mendicancy and subservience.

FREEDOM FROM DEBT COALITION

July 7, 1989

ON THE TINAMBAC INCIDENT: Beyond Condemnation and Condolences

Initial investigation shows that on May 31, 1989, in Mananao, Tinambac, Camarines Sur, an NPA unit set up a checkpoint and from several passenger jeepneys, took away fireman Demetrio Acero, CAFGU Alex Oballes and Army Cpl. Eduardo Renomeron. Several days later, their corpses were found bearing signs of torture or mutilation, including a cut-off head, tongue and ear and a bashed skull.

According to an NPA spokesman, Acero, Oballes, Renomeron and two others, 2Lt. Stephen Renon and CAFGU Felix Galang, were those taken away at the checkpoint. Later, at Sitio Banasi, Brgy. Buyo, Tinambac, the NPA unit with the five captives were confirmed killed in the crossfire while Acero was left behind by his fleeing captors.

The Tinambac incident, to say the least, merits further investigation. We strongly condemn this activity. We also condole with the families, friends and comrades of Acero, Oballes and Renomeron.

Beyond condemnation and condolences, something concrete must be done about the situation. Otherwise, the AFP and the NPA will merely take turns as the war goes on. HOPE presents the following opinions:

1. The NPA members responsible for the Tinambac Incident are, of course, subject to arrest and prosecution in accordance with existing laws. If they committed these excesses, and if the NPA is the disciplined people's army as it claims, then it must disarm, and after a fair trial, punish abusive units or members involved, and it must show the people convincing proof of atonement. The so-called revolutionary justice would really be revolutionary if the NPA does not protect its own abusive members.

2. It is high time, in fact, long overdue, that both the NPA and the AFP adhere to the rules of war-in word, in writing and in deed. The objective is to avoid infliction of unnecessary suffering, even on the enemy, and to spare non-combatants (including combatants "out of combat") from the effects of war. In fact, there are two basic principles of international humanitarian law regulating warfare:

a) The principle of military necessity or limitation - no unnecessary harm.

b) The principle of distinction or discrimination - between military and non-military targets, between combatants and non-combatants.

3. Very relevant to the Tinambac Incident is the Manila Declaration on Combat Conduct on minimum combatant duties and minimum people's rights. This resulted from the General Assembly of the World Veterans Federation and the International Conference on Conflict Resolution in the Philippines in December 1988. The minimum has to do with consensus on the following points:

a) No killing outside combat.

b) No torture.

c) Fair trial before punishment.

4. A HOPE member organization, the Concerned Attorneys for Meaningful Advocacy and Reforms in Society (CAMARINES), has been disseminating The Soldier's Rules and Fundamental Rules of International Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflicts, both formulated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). These are simplified summaries of International Humanitarian Law, including Protocol II and other rules of war. Some of these rules are:

-Treat all civilians and all enemies in your power with humanity.

-Prisoners of war are only bound to give information about their identity and must be treated humanely. No physical or mental torture of prisoners of war is permitted.

-Do not take hostages.

-Abstain from all acts of vengeance.

-Everyone shall be entitled to benefit from fundamental judicial guarantees. No one shall be held responsible for an act he has not committed.

5. June 13, 1989 was the first anniversary of the Caramoan Incident. Last year, HOPE issued an Open Letter addressed to the NPA and AFP proposing certain measures to stop these killings and challenging both to put them in a memorandum of agreement. Some of these measures are:

-Combatants shall avoid hitching rides on vehicles owned and being used by civilians or non-combatants.

-Combatants shall exercise extraordinary diligence in reconnaissance pursuant to their armed operations, including but not limited to the use of binoculars.

-No unnecessary firepower shall be employed. Precision shooting shall be preferred to spraying.

6. What do all these mean? If violent conflict cannot be avoided, then at the very least, violent behavior can be regulated to create an atmosphere more conducive perhaps to subsequent political negotiation, when a more opportune moment presents itself with better chances of success. The greater the degradation of the strife, the harder it is to bring about peace.

HOPE has consistently held that it is not enough to "humanize" the war. Human rights violations will always occur as long as there is a war going on. Thousands of lives have been lost. This increasing human cost should press us to search for viable alternatives to war, without weakening our commitment to address the fundamental issues at stake.

7. There is a growing clamor among Filipino people for a grassroots approach to peace in the light of the growing realization that a national and institutional approach is not yet possible, hence, the peace zone initiatives of communities like Naga and Sagada. There was also a proposal of local officials in Kalinga-Apayao and Cagayan to hold peace talks on the municipal level with communist guerrillas because it is easier to deal with the local rebel leadership. Indeed, as civilian officials, the choice is not necessarily whether to be for the military or for the insurgency. The choice can be whether to be instruments of peace or instruments of war.

Local peace initiatives will depend, of course, on the local people and their true leaders. Peace is far too important to be left to the adversaries on either side to work out. Peace is the concern of all the people. HOPE, for its part, will assist, if requested and within its limitations.

8. Short of peace or even a peace zone, there can be dialogue on a number of matters of common concern:

- adherence to the rules of war
- mechanics in case of ceasefires
- disposition of captives
- sparing of children
- sparing of development projects or social services
- cooperation in the dismantling of private armies
- cooperation in peace-keeping against criminality

Let us dialogue. If we try hard enough, we just might come up with something good.

No more Tinambacs and Tiananmens!

Turn a bad thing into a good thing!

HEARTS OF PEACE (HOPE)

Naga City , 10 June 1989