

# **Updates on the Hacienda Luisita struggle**

Prepared by the KMU International Department

***"They can tear our bodies apart with bullets, but they will never be able to massacre the resolve of a people united."*** - Rene Galang, president of the United Luisita Workers Union (ULWU).

Two days after the massacre, the striking workers of Hacienda Luisita Inc. led by the United Luisita Workers Union (ULWU) and the Central Azucarera de Tarlac Labor Union (CATLU) joined by supporters from nearby communities and from various sectors, restored the picketlines in front of the main gate of Central Azucarera de Tarlac (CAT). It was in the picketlines where the wake of the seven (7) victims was held for several days until they were buried. It became the scene of nightly solidarity programs to pay tribute to the determination and bravery of the sugar workers.

On Nov. 21, the remains of the three (3) victims were laid to rest. Around 10,000 people joined the funeral march, traversing by foot a 6-km distance from the Hacienda Luisita gates to the public cemetery. The scorching heat of the sun all the more fueled the emotions of the people who continuously echoed "Justice for the victims of the Hacienda Luisita massacre!", "Cojuangco-Aquino, Executioners!" and "Land Reform, Not Stock Distribution!", among many other calls. The remaining four victims were buried on Nov. 23.

Up to now, an average of 2,000 workers and supporters stay at the picketline daily. It has been a never-ending exchange of experiences and lessons for both the workers and their supporters.

## **Management and Government Response**

The Hacienda Luisita massacre has become the showcase of an intensifying state repression against the workers and the people. Since Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's ascent in power on Jan. 21, 2001, the human rights organization KARAPATAN has recorded 3,488 cases of human rights violations, with 193,871 victims and affecting 18,942 families, 106 communities and 608 households. Killings attribute to 241 cases of these violations.

The massive outcry for condemnation of the Hacienda Luisita massacre and justice for the victims further exposed Pres. Arroyo's anti-people policies and put the government in a defensive position. Unfortunately, the government's answer to the massive outcry was a simple plea for sobriety and prayers to the victims. It is the same response given by former Pres. Corazon Aquino, whose family owns the sprawling 6,000-has Hacienda Luisita. In the light of public scrutiny,

the government unleashed its war and propaganda machinery, spinning web of lies along the lines of its anti-terrorism campaign. This is evident in their imbecile claims and pronouncement that the massacre was a product of a long-term plan of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA) to goad the sugar workers to stir up trouble, to rise and fight against the Cojuangco family. This is the same line being peddled by the Cojuangco-Aquino family, thru Tarlac Representative Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, the son of former President Aquino.

Showing no remorse for the crime, the Cojuangco family slapped criminal cases of malicious mischief, resisting persons in authority and physical assault on the strikers. The 133 arrested strikers and supporters during the massacre were released on recognizance to Tarlac Mayor Genaro Mendoza.

### **In Aid of Legislation**

In aid of legislation, the Committee on Human Rights as the lead committee, together with the Committee on Labor and the Committee on Agrarian Reform, initiated a Congressional inquiry to investigate the recent spate of violence in Hacienda Luisita. The inquiry had its sessions last Nov. 25 and 30, 2004. On its next hearing on Dec. 13, 2004, KMU Chairperson Elmer C. Labog will present the KMU's position on the issue. The Congressional investigation materialized thru the zealous drive of progressive party list representatives in the Congress, primarily Bayan Muna, Anakpawis and Gabriela Party List, pushing the Lower House to hear the plight of the sugar workers, particularly their working conditions, land reform and Stock Distribution Option (SDO).

On the other hand, the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Development and the Senate Labor Committee, also initiated a parallel inquiry. It had its sessions last Nov. 24 and Dec.1, 2004. In both hearings, the culpability of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the military and police were exposed, putting them further in a defensive position. On the Nov. 24th hearing, ULWU President Rene Galang delivered a lengthy speech on the issues of the Hacienda Luisita workers. KARAPATAN also presented partial results of a fact-finding mission they spearheaded in Hacienda Luisita. Sto. Tomas was hit for her police deputization order and was strongly reminded that it is only the country's President who has the sole authority on this matter. Upon her admission of police deputization, Senate Minority Floor Leader Aquilino Pimentel immediately asked Sto. Tomas to resign on *delicadeza* (sense of propriety).

On the Dec. 1st hearing, Labog presented a paper which directly called for the resignation of Labor Secretary Sto. Tomas. Once more, Labog stressed Sto. Tomas' accountability for the carnage arising from her deputization of the police and military at the picketline. Labog's speech also underscored the

indiscriminate issuance of Assumption of Jurisdiction and Return-to-Work orders by Labor Secretary Sto. Tomas. The indiscriminate issuance of these orders resulted to violent strike dispersals which caused injuries and death to the strikers and their supporters, not only to Hacienda Luisita but to most strikes as well. Labog also assailed Sec. Sto. Tomas' connivance with the management that is clearly evident in her pro-management decisions and the favors that she gets from companies. A particular case that he brought to light was Nestle Philippines' sponsoring a limousine and chauffeur services from Geneva to Milan and return for Sec. Sto. Tomas on June 15-16, 2002. The service amounted to 8,915 Swiss Francs and occurred in the midst of an on-going strike of Nestle-Cabuyao workers, which puts to doubt Sec. Sto. Tomas' decisions on the labor conflict.

In a direct question of "who are the killers?" thrown by Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, head of the Senate Committee on Labor, a poker-faced Sto. Tomas answered: "those who goaded people to commit illegal acts". With this, Sto. Tomas has clearly shown her anti-union position and expressed no remorse for the crime she has committed in the Hacienda Luisita massacre and other trade union rights violations.

A video footage taken by an amateur media outfit was likewise presented in both the Congress and Senate inquiry. The video documented *"the hours-long dispersal by police and military forces, where strikers, assaulted by excessive tear gas attacks, water cannons laced with chemicals and metal dust, and an Armed Personnel Carrier (APC) ramming through the gate, actively defended their control of Gate 1 by pelting stones back at gun-wielding, shield-protected dispersal teams. Video documentation of the incident captured the minutes when the military opened fire on the crowd, as well as the dying moments of several protestors."*

### **International Solidarity**

Almost 4,00 messages of support for the striking workers and condemnation letters for the massacre were received. Majority of the letters were generated from the LabourStart campaign, thru its campaign page <http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/solidarityforever/counter.pl>. The condemnation letters called for justice to the victims of the Hacienda Luisita carnage, an impartial investigation without whitewash, to bring to court those responsible for the killings, to resume negotiations for a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) and to reinstate illegally dismissed workers. Letters were addressed to Pres. Macapagal-Arroyo, Labor Sec. Sto. Tomas, Department of National Defense (DND), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Commission on Human Rights (CHR), Joint Monitoring Committees of the Government of the Republic of the

Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), the Senate and Congress, and the Cojuangco family.

In Japan, the Asia Wide Campaign (AWC) spearheaded a picket protest in front of the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo last November 30. They highlighted the case of Hacienda Luisita as well as other issues in the Philippines. Among those who joined the protest action was the Allied Labor Union of Independence (ALUI) as well as other labor unions, people's organization, citizen movements and student groups. According to a communiqué sent to KMU, the embassy was *"so rude that they closed the gate and rejected to accept our letter of protest. We were all outraged, and raised our calls in front of the gate to condemn the massacre as well as the rudeness of the embassy."* In the end, the Embassy finally promised to convey the letter to the Presidential office.

The Philippine Australia Union Links (PAUL) based in Sydney, Australia is also planning a picket protest and a delegation to the Philippine Consul-General this week. They are set to hold a candle light vigil at 5.30 pm in Melbourne on Dec. 9.

In New York City, radio program Building Bridges featured "The Hacienda Luisita Massacre, Landlordism and State Terrorism in the Philippines" in their Nov. 29 program aired on WBAI Radio. WBAI is the NYC Channel of a nation chain of five progressive radio stations and streams live on the internet at <http://www.2600.com/offthehook/hot2.ram>. Thru a live phone patch interview, the program anchors had a comprehensive and enlightening discussion with Roy Mahinay, president of the National Federation of Sugar Workers - KMU (NFSW-KMU) and Dabet Castaneda, staffwriter of Bulatlat, an on-line magazine based in the Philippines. NFSW helps in organizing the ranks of the sugar workers in the country, among them Hacienda Luisita.

Several individual and groups have also sent in their financial donations for the maintenance of the sugar workers' strike.

### **Workers' Response**

On Nov. 30, a nationwide protest activity was held to commemorate the natal day of Gat Andres Bonifacio, considered the working class hero of the 1896 Philippine Revolution against Spanish colonization. The case of Hacienda Luisita was highlighted as an example of the hundred-year struggle of the workers and people for wage, better working conditions, land and freedom from imperialist domination.

On Dec. 2, the sugar workers trooped to the DOLE regional office in San Fernando, Pampanga (Central Luzon) where the labor case is now docketed.

The workers, demanding a speedy resolution to the labor case, held a protest picket while a negotiation is going on between the two unions and the management (represented by its legal counsel). At present, the labor conflict remains to be in a stalemate. The management continues to reject the workers' demand to reinstate the remaining 73 of the 326 illegally dismissed sugar workers. The said 73 workers, all officers and active members of ULWU, did not accept payments in exchange of dismissal. In the case of CATLU, the management declared it is open to negotiation provided that the union agrees on the issue of illegal strike. The workers did not agree to this pre-condition as it would mean that their participation in the strike would be used as a ground to dismiss them from work once a CBA is concluded.

The management also obfuscates the issue by using the so-called intra-union conflict as a reason not to negotiate with the workers. It has the gall to say that the unions must first agree among themselves who should represent the workers. In truth, in the course of the labor conflict, the management connived with yellow union leaders and appointed Ronaldo Alcantaran and Jesus Fino as president of ULWU and CATLU respectively. With this, the management claimed that they will only negotiate with the "new" union officers since the striking union officials were already terminated and replaced. But in contrast to the appointment status of the "new" union officers, the striking legitimate union officials were elected by a large majority of the workers.

At the moment, there are various activities lined-up for Hacienda Luisita:

Dec. 6 marked the first month anniversary of the strike in Hacienda Luisita. Various cultural groups held a concert in the picketline to pay tribute to the struggle of the sugar workers.

On Dec. 7, in celebration of the urban poor week, the Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (KADAMAY; Confederation of Urban Poor) together with KMU led a nationally-coordinated protest activity to highlight the plight of the urban poor and its solidarity with the Hacienda Luisita workers. Carrying the general call "*Struggle for Justice and Livelihood of the Workers and Urban Poor*", KADAMAY and KMU illustrated that the massacre in Hacienda Luisita is no different from the demolition and other anti-poor programs of the government which is slowly killing the urban poor.

The nationally-coordinated protest activity featured picket protests in regional DOLE offices and protest marches in respective provinces and regions.

On Dec. 9, the Hacienda Luisita workers together with other sectors from Central Luzon (where Tarlac is located) will hold a vigil at the foot of Mendiola bridge

near the Malacanang Palace (Presidential Palace) to call on the President to act on the immediate demands of workers for jobs, livelihood and land.

On Dec. 10, the Hacienda Luisita case will be the highlight of a rally in Mendiola to commemorate the International Human Rights Day. Workers and other sectors from Southern Tagalog will also join the Dec. 10 mobilization in Manila to underscore the intense militarization happening in the Southern Tagalog region.

Aside from this, there will be a series of integration activities in the Hacienda Luisita picketlines. Various sectoral organizations from Manila and nearby provinces have been staying with the workers at the picketlines for a few days, holding programs and having discussions with them which has always been a great learning experience for everyone. These activities will continue to happen.

On Dec. 15, the multisectoral alliance Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) will sponsor a "Paskuhan sa Picketlayn" (Christmas at the Picketlines) in Hacienda Luisita.

### **What can be done?**

Right now, the striking workers are in ***dire need of financial resources*** for the medical expenses of those injured in the violent dispersal, to pay for the legal expenses of those who were slapped with criminal cases by the management and to help sustain the picketlines. While local organizations, communities and various groups of people continuously give support, there is still a big need for material and financial resources, especially to maintain the huge number of people at the picketlines. With this, we are humbly asking you to help out by sending financial donations and other resources at the picketlines.

1) If it's possible, it will be helpful if you can start a fund drive in your own organizations, sponsor photo and video exhibits of the Hacienda Luisita massacre, conduct forums, symposiums and other activities where donations can be given by people attending these actions.

Financial donations can be addressed to Bank Account Number: 0274-0768-52, Bank of Philippine Islands, Timog Branch. Please inform the KMU International Department of your donation and specify that it is intended for Hacienda Luisita strike.

2) Conduct picket protests in front of your respective Philippine Embassies and Consulates. Help ventilate the following major issues and demands of the workers:

- a) Justice for the victims of the massacre and for the workers and peasants of Hacienda Luisita. No whitewash in investigation of the massacre. Punish those

- responsible of the carnage – the Cojuangco-Aquino family, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the Northern Luzon Command (NOLCOM), the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for her anti-union, anti-worker and anti-peasant policies.
- b) An end to militarization and to military and police intervention at the picketlines.
  - c) Repeal the Assumption of Jurisdiction (AJ), return to work order and other vicious attacks of the DOLE on workers' strikes.
  - d) Stop the criminalization of legitimate workers' struggles.
  - e) Stop the blatant and rampant violation of union and workers' rights.
  - f) Livelihood and humane and decent wages for the workers.
  - g) Repeal the Stock Distribution Option (SDO) and other schemes of the bogus land reform program. Implement genuine land reform.
  - h) Stop state terrorism against the workers and peasants.

3) Please continue to send letters of protest to Pres. Arroyo and specific government agencies and legislators. Also, continue to send solidarity letters to the unions and the striking workers. Your letters of solidarity are a great source of inspiration and further steel the workers' resolve to carry on with their struggle until justice is served and their demands are won. Your letters are being read and acknowledged during protest assemblies for Hacienda Luisita strikers. Meanwhile, protest letters help in putting pressure on the government and its cohort agencies to act on the issues of the sugar workers which will also impact on the conditions of other workers who are in similar situation.

**Send your letters to the ff. persons/agencies:**

Mr. Jose Cojuangco  
President/Manager  
Central Azucarera de Tarlac (CAT)  
Brgy. Central, Tarlac City

Her Excellency President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo  
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines  
New Executive Building, Malacañang Palace  
J.P. Laurel Street, San Miguel, Metro Manila  
Email: [opnet@ops.gov.ph](mailto:opnet@ops.gov.ph)

Hon. Chairperson Dr. Purificacion Quisumbing  
The Commission on Human Rights  
SAAC Building, Commonwealth Avenue  
U.P. Complex, Diliman, Quezon City  
Fax: +632 929-0102, Email: [drpvq@chr.gov.ph](mailto:drpvq@chr.gov.ph)

Hon. Sec. Avelino Cruz  
Department of National Defense  
Camp Aguinaldo, EDSA, 1110 Quezon City  
Email: [snd@dnd.gov.ph](mailto:snd@dnd.gov.ph)

Hon. Sec. Simeon Datumanong

Department of Justice, P. Faura, Ermita, Manila  
Fax: +632521-1614, Email: [sechbp@info.com.ph](mailto:sechbp@info.com.ph)

Hon. Sec. Teresita Deles  
Office of the Presidential Advisers on the Peace Process  
7F Agustin Building, Emerald Avenue  
Pasig City, Metro Manila  
Fax: 632 638 2216

Hon. Congressman Jose de Venecia  
Speaker of the House  
House of Representatives  
Batasan Hills, Q.C.

Hon. Senator Franklin Drilon  
Senate President  
Rm. 606, Senate of the Philippines  
Pasay City  
Fax Number: 551-2993  
Email: [sendrilon@senate.gov.ph](mailto:sendrilon@senate.gov.ph)

Hon. Senator Jinggoy Ejercito Estrada  
Head, Labor Committee  
Rm. 526, Senate of the Philippines  
Pasay City

The Secretariat, GRP-Human Rights Monitoring Committee  
Email: [info@grpmmc-jmc.org](mailto:info@grpmmc-jmc.org).

or

The Secretariat, NDFP-Human Rights Monitoring Committee  
E-mail: [ndfp\\_Jsection@yahoo.com](mailto:ndfp_Jsection@yahoo.com)  
6/F Immaculate Conception Multi-Purpose Building  
71 Lantana St., Cubao, Quezon City

Mr. Ricardo S. Ramos  
Union President  
Central Azucarrera de Tarlac Labor Union  
Brgy. Central, Tarlac City  
c/o email addresses: [catlu2004@yahoo.com](mailto:catlu2004@yahoo.com), [kmuid@tri-isys.com](mailto:kmuid@tri-isys.com)

Mr. Rene Galang  
Union President  
United Luisita Workers Union  
Brgy. Central, Tarlac City  
c/o email addresses: [ulwu2004@yahoo.com](mailto:ulwu2004@yahoo.com), [kmuid@tri-isys.com](mailto:kmuid@tri-isys.com)

Please also send letters to the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Geneva Convention calling their attention to the brutal carnage that occurred in Hacienda Luisita.

**Please furnish the KMU International Department copies of your letters and inform us of any action you will undertake. Thank you very much!**