URGENT APPEAL FOR THE IMMEDIATE AND UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE OF DETAINED FARMERS IN KIDAPAWAN, NORTH COTABATO

HON. EMMANUEL L. CAPARAS
Acting Secretary
Department of Justice, Manila

HON. CAPARAS,
Greetings!

The Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA), the national center of unions, federations and organizations of agricultural workers in the country and its member-organizations namely the Alyansa ng mga Manggagawang Bukid sa Asyenda Luisita (AMBALA) of Hacienda Luisita, Tarlac, the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) based in Negros Island, and Organisasyon sa Yanong Obrero nga Nagkahiusa (OGYON) in Bukidnon have all expressed our condemnation of the bloody dispersal by Philippine National Police (PNP) elements of hungry farmers demanding El Nino calamity aid in Kidapawan City, North Cotabato on April 1, 2016, which resulted in the death of at least 2 persons and the wounding of many others.

Even before this incident, the thousands of farmers who massed up in Kidapawan City have experienced intimidation, red-tagging and demonization by the local government and state forces who wish to undermine and downplay their just demands and simply disperse the human barricade. But even after widespread public outrage over the Kidapawan Massacre, “Martial Law” – era hamletting, food and medicine blockade were reportedly implemented in Kidapawan. Harassment and intimidation of protesters and advocates in the aftermath of this carnage continue up to this day.

At least 78 persons, majority are farmers from North Cotabato, were arrested. According to Karapatan, 45 men, 29 women, and four minors were rounded up by police. While the minors have been reportedly released, among those still detained there are three (3) pregnant women and six (6) senior citizens. There are also two (2) health workers arrested for helping the victims. At least seven (7) victims of frustrated killing, those who sustained gunshot wounds and other serious injuries, were held under hospital arrest and are now also slapped with spurious charges of direct assault upon persons of authority and frustrated homicide. The farmers are required to post bail in the amount of at least Php 12,000 each for temporary liberty. As calamity victims, these farmers cannot even buy rice to feed their families.

We thus call for the immediate and unconditional release of Kidapawan farmers who were illegally arrested and detained after demanding from the provincial government of North Cotabato in Mindanao the release of rice supply as aid to farmers in drought-stricken communities. We urge the Department of Justice to take immediate action as farmers seek justice for their dead and wounded kin.

Sincerely,

DANILO RAMOS
Secretary General
UMA