

# URGENT Action



0809UPHL

**Philippines:**

01.07.2008

***The right to food and life of 300 petitioning landless tenants are threatened in San Vicente, Bondoc Peninsula, Quezon Province***

Land is essential for peasants to feed themselves adequately. In San Vicente (municipality of San Narciso), the landholdings of the influential Uy family are yet to be covered under the national agrarian reform program and distributed to around 300 petitioning landless tenants located in 6 sub-villages. In 1996, soon after several Uy tenants filed petitions for land distribution, the harassment of the tenants by the Uy family began. On February 19, 2008, Deolito Empas, a peasant leader was abducted and later killed by armed men. He is the fifth person who has been murdered in the course of the peasants' struggle for land in San Narciso. Today, the right to food of these tenants is extremely threatened. Many are forced to hide due to the harassment and their access to land is denied.

## **Background**

Bondoc Peninsula is one of the poorest areas in the province Quezon. Most of the inhabitants work as share croppers on farmlands that are tightly controlled by a few landlord families such as the Uy family in San Vicente. Due to the Uy family's political influence, the Uy landholdings remain excluded from the national agrarian reform program, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) which became effective in 1988.

In mid 1996, several Uy tenants began petitioning for land distribution despite the political pressure and met with systematic harassment by armed men working for the Uy family. Allegedly, the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, is also threatening and harassing the peasants in order to prevent activities in favour of the implementation of the CARP in the area. The tenants were personally threatened, their houses burned, their harvests forcibly confiscated and they are suffering hunger. Four local peasant leaders were reportedly murdered until 2007. Deolito Empas who was the president of the Association of Peasants in Centro San Vicente (SMSC) is the fifth victim of murder in Bondoc Peninsula. Threats have been directed at the son and wife of Empas after they denounced the killing and made it public. Due to the threat, Empas' son Genard had to flee from San Vicente, while Empas' wife Roseminia is constantly transferring her residence but nevertheless tries to work the land left behind by her husband. The events in San Vicente in the last ten years manifest the lawlessness and the state's failure to intervene and protect rural landless citizens' human rights including the right to food. Many were already forced to flee their homes, or were forcibly evicted and are denied access to their fields by the armed goons.

In the past, the tenants have tried to attract the attention of the government to protect them from the harassment of the goons and to ensure their access to land. Several dialogues were held with the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) to reiterate their demands for protection from harassment, for peaceful possession of the land and immediate implementation of agrarian reform on the Uy property. However, no concrete governmental action has been taken yet, while the current food-crisis further impedes peasants' access to food. Instead, the implementation of the agrarian reform program is moving excruciatingly slowly and the government is using legal technicalities to block the tenants' attempts to include their land into CARP.

The last Urgent Action by FIAN for this case took place in 2006, but the situation of the local peasants remains unchanged. Renewed efforts are necessary in view of the food crisis and the bloody repression in the area: On February 19 Deolito Empas, the local peasant representative, was abducted by armed men in Sitio Centro, Barangay San Vicente. Three weeks later, on March 9, his dead body was found.

***FIAN – With human rights against hunger!***

**FIAN Mandate**

The Philippines is a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, thus duty-bound under international law to protect and fulfil the right to food of all of its citizens, including the tenants of the Uy landholdings. The government must immediately provide land to the Uy tenants in accordance with the CARP as well as protect the tenants from harassment by the private armed men employed by the Uy family and the NPA.

**Call to Action**

International support is urgently needed to support the landless tenants in their struggle for redistribution of land. Please write polite letters to the President of the Philippines, requesting her to take immediate action in order to fulfil these tenants' right to feed themselves.

**Addresses:**

**Her Excellency Mrs. Gloria  
Macapagal-Arroyo  
President  
Republic of the Philippines  
Malacanang Palace  
JP Laurel Street, San Miguel  
Manila 1005  
Philippines  
Fax: +63 2 736 1010**

**Copies to:**

**Hon. Reynato S. Puno  
Chief Justice  
Supreme Court  
Padre Faura, Manila  
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**Hon. Nasser C. Pangandaman  
Secretary  
Department of Agrarian  
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***Please inform FIAN  
International about any  
response you receive  
to your faxes and letters.***



**End of Action:**

**31 August,  
2008**

**FIAN International Secretariat**

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Her Excellency  
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President  
Republic of the Philippines  
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JP Laurel Street, San Miguel  
Manila 1005  
Philippines

Fax: +63 2 736 1010

Dear Mrs. President,

Recently, I was informed about the critical situation of the peasant community in the village of San Vicente, Municipality of San Narciso, Quezon Province. These peasants are tenants of the Uy family who owns the vast majority of plots in San Vicente.

Despite of the legislation of the CARP in 1988, the Uy landholdings remain still today excluded from the CARP. In mid 1996, several tenants began petitioning the Uy landholdings for CARP coverage. The latest petition was in March 2003. Since then, the tenants have been subject to eviction, criminalisation, confiscation of their property and systematic physical harassment by armed men employed by the landlord. It is also reported that the New Peoples Army threatens and harasses peasants in order to prevent activities in favour of the implementation of the CARP in the area. Due to the prevailing share-cropping scheme, all of the Uy tenants are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. In the light of the current food crisis, their situation is worsening. The tenants have repeatedly appealed to the government to protect them from harassment, but to no avail. On 19 February 2008, Deolito Empas, president of the Association of Peasants in Centro San Vicente (SMSC), was abducted by a group of armed men in Sitio Centro, Barangay San Vicente. His corpse was found on 9 March. Deolito is now the fifth person who has been murdered in the course of the peasant's struggle for their land in San Narciso.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Philippines is duty-bound under international law to protect the life of Uy tenants and fulfil their right to food. Therefore, I would like to ask you, Mrs. President, to:

- 1) Expedite the complete implementation of CARP in Bondoc Peninsula and improve the living conditions of the tenant families by providing equal access to landownership titles.
- 2) Break the culture of impunity in the light of the killings of peasant leaders in Bondoc Peninsula.
- 3) Ensure the cooperation of local authorities and a thorough investigation regarding the prosecution of the murder of Deolito Empas. The perpetrators must be brought to justice soon and witnesses as well as family members must be protected.

Please keep me updated on the measures you take in this regard.

Yours sincerely,