



Statement from the International Fact Finding Mission *San Mariano, Isabela*

From 30 May to 3 June 2011, the People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS), IBON International, Asian Peasant Coalition (APC), Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) and Danggayang Dagiti Mannalon ti Isabela (DAGAMI), organized a fact-finding mission among marginalized communities in San Mariano, Isabela, with the support of Action Solidarité Tiers Monde (ASTM), to document and analyze the concerns about patterns of land-grabbing and about a bio-ethanol project of the Japanese-Filipino corporate consortium Green Future Innovations, Inc. (GFII). In the process of carrying out this mission, members of the IFFM confirmed the recent findings of the national fact finding mission conducted from February 22 to 23 by KMP, DAGAMI and Rural Missionaries of the Philippines.

For all members of the IFFM, it became highly evident that residents in the area are gravely concerned with widespread patterns of landgrabbing, militarization and intensive agro-industrial development serving the interests of agribusiness corporations. The unequivocal concern from local farmers was the lack of redistributive justice in relation to agrarian reform in San Mariano, and the exacerbation of these historical injustices by the large-scale land acquisitions for monocropping of sugar cane.

The project will be operational by March 2012, with the processing plant and plantations spanning across 11,000 hectares of prime agricultural lands and forest restoration areas. It is currently promoted as an environmentally responsible industry that will bring an economic boom to the region, decrease the Philippines' current reliance on imported biofuels and be a unique investment which will make Isabela the site of the largest biofuel project in the country. Japanese companies are also in the process of certifying this project as a Clean Development Mechanism.

However, a large part of the 11,000 hectares in Isabela targeted for the plantation project are occupied and tilled by thousands of farmers in San Mariano and neighbouring towns. These lands are the primary source of livelihood for resident families, providing harvests of vegetables, bananas, pineapples, indigenous rice crops, and corn varieties. However, most local residents - including beneficiaries of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), Indigenous Peoples with claims to ancestral domain, and land patent holders - are concerned they will be displaced by the sugarcane plantations.

The region is marked by historical complexities of shifting land tenure over generations and a large number of conflicting claims over ownership. It is incorrect to classify the targeted land as idle, unproductive or unpopulated. Many affected farmers and IP occupant-tillers have already applied for patents but most applications have been denied. Fact finding mission members recorded first-hand cases of how unscrupulous persons in connivance with government officials took advantage of the farmers and indigenous peoples' lack of knowledge about land titling laws and engaged in fraudulent titling schemes. The entry of the bio-ethanol project has made these farmers and communities of Indigenous Peoples increasingly vulnerable to landgrabbing and land speculation schemes. Notably, most of the CLOAs are facing foreclosure proceedings by the Land Bank.

The practices of GFII contractor and Eco-Fuel Land Development Inc. have also been subjecting farm

workers (many of whom were previously small – scale farmers, but now displaced by landgrabbing) to severe violations of labour rights. Workers report highly exploitative conditions in sugarcane plantations, including low wages based on a pakyaw system. All wages reported during the interviews were below the mandated minimum wage for agricultural workers in the region (233php per day). Other conditions include: spraying toxic fertilizers and pesticides without any safety equipment, working 6 days per week without a contract, frequent occupational health problems (including severe limb injuries), and no Social Security System or PhilHealth benefits, even when these have been promised.

If the project pushes through, it will significantly reduce the food production capacity of the community and cause further encroachment of forest areas as farmers will clear new lands to farm for food. It is evident to the fact finding mission members - as international and national experts in forest biodiversity and agroecology issues - that the conversion of lands once allotted for diverse cropping and forest cover will lead to significant carbon emissions and biodiversity loss. This project is also a serious threat to the declared protected areas such as the Sierra Madre Natural Park that covered forest ecosystems of San Mariano, which have been providing water resources for food production of the communities. Being located in the north of Luzon - an area where typhoons typically strike on a seasonal basis - also means there would be increased vulnerability of the area to landslides and flooding. The long term socio-economic costs, as enumerated above, compounded with ecological impacts will be disastrous.

The IFFM heard directly from local residents about an increasing presence of soldiers and military camps in areas where there is a growing opposition to the project. Residents who are vocal against the bio-ethanol project are victims of human rights abuses such as intimidation, coercion, attempted shooting, death threats, false accusations as members of the NPA and criminalization. The military detachments deployed in residential areas is a clear violation of the terms of the Comprehensive Agreement for the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CAHRIHL), and must be addressed with urgency.

Based on the findings of the international fact finding mission, representatives of the HoR, Senate, DAR, DENR, and DA are called upon to take immediate action to:

1. **Listen to the farmers', farm workers', and Indigenous Peoples' demands** to recognize and respect their human rights, in particular to own and till their land and to end **land grabbing and anomalous land titling**. Uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their ancestral domain and their traditional systems of knowledge and governance which are threatened by the bio-ethanol project. Investigate and prosecute cases of widespread anomalous land titling and landgrabbing by unscrupulous individuals in connivance with government officials. Stop foreclosure of land deeds. Initiate proceedings to reverse and cancel land titles acquired through fraudulent means and misrepresentation.
2. **Withdraw all state support and endorsement of the GFII biofuel project in Isabela**. Revoke support for the registration of the Isabela bio-ethanol project as a Clean Development Mechanism project. Recognize monocropping for biofuel as a form of ecological destruction which will exacerbate problems related to global warming, land erosion and loss of biodiversity, and review national Philippine legislation related to biofuels in this respect.
3. **Removal of all military detachments and camps in the populated centres** of the barrios of San Mariano in compliance with provisions of the Comprehensive Agreement for the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CAHRIHL). Stop the harassment by military, paramilitary and security forces of community members and allies opposing the biofuel project. Respect the human rights of residents, and prosecute perpetrators of human rights abuses.