



Duterte's First 100 days: Significant achievements, intensifying contradictions

*Report of the National People's Summit
on the status of the People's Agenda
during Duterte's first 100 days in office
October 5, 2016*

The PEOPLE's AGENDA for CHANGE

People's Summit

Katipunan Room, Quezon City Sports Club

October 5, 2016

President Rodrigo R. Duterte was swept into office by a vote of more than 16 million, based on a promise of change and on a commitment to stamp out criminality and corruption. His first 100 days in office have yielded some positive developments but have also brought to the fore intensifying contradictions and growing challenges from forces opposed to change and forces pushing for more radical reforms.

On June 29, hundreds of people's organizations, cause-oriented groups, institutions and individuals gathered at the University of the Philippines Diliman Film Center for the National People's Summit in support of the People's Agenda for Nationalist and Progressive Change (People's Agenda). The Summit laid out a 15-point agenda for change as well as more specific recommendations contained in five areas of concern: Economy, Progressive Social Policy, Peace and Human Rights, National Sovereignty and Foreign Policy and Governance and Democracy.

The highlights of the agenda include genuine agrarian reform, national industrialization and economic sovereignty, economic relief for working people, an end to contractualization, independent foreign policy, resumption of the peace talks with the NDFP, campaign against corruption, a pro-people social policy and a progressive social policy in relation to health, education, housing and social protection. The People's Agenda also includes short-term proposals for the first 100 days of the administration.

Last September 30, organizers of the Summit met again to report on the progress of the People's Agenda. It is against these demands and proposals that we assessed the performance of the Duterte administration; identifying the positive outcomes as well as negative aspects, shortcomings and stark differences. The Duterte regime is full of contradictions and it is necessary for the people to identify the progressive aspects and support these while countering the reactionary and anti-people aspects. It is necessary for the people's movement to maintain its independence even as it engages in principled unity and struggle with the Duterte administration.

The most outstanding achievements of the Duterte administration in its first 100 days have to do with the resumption of the peace talks with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the historic, unprecedented assertion of national sovereignty and an independent foreign policy. These two important thrusts of the administration have the potential of paving the way for meaningful change, pro-people reforms and nationalist development.

In the peace talks with the NDFP, Duterte has already accomplished more in his first 100 days compared to Aquino's entire six year term. Major achievements include the affirmation of previously signed agreements¹, the release of 22 political prisoners who are protected under an immunity agreement², reconstitution of the list of protected persons, reconvening of the Joint Monitoring Committee for a human rights pact³ signed by both sides, acceleration of discussions on socio-economic, political and constitutional reforms, recommendation for a general amnesty for political prisoners and the existence of unilateral ceasefires from both sides. The peace talks with the NDFP are premised on addressing the root causes of the armed conflict as a way of achieving a just peace. Duterte has shown interest and seriousness in pushing the peace talks forward.

In the field of foreign relations, Duterte has rightly criticized US intervention and has sought an end to unequal relations while opening new relations with other countries not

1 <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/579084/news/specialreports/phl-gov-t-ndf-joint-statement-after-oslo-peace-talks>

2 *Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees*

3 *Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law*

aligned with the US. So far, Duterte has called for an end to US war games in the Philippines, an end to joint patrols in the West PH Sea, a review of the EDCA, the pull-out of US troops in Mindanao as well as seeking new defense ties with Russia and China. All these steps are signalling a possible end to PH dependence on US military aid and equipment. Duterte also aims to use the favorable ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in addressing the Philippine's dispute with China, but he will do so without any US intervention.

The presence of progressives in the Duterte administration has also made possible immediate reforms beneficial to the people. These can be clearly seen in the undertakings of the Department of Agrarian Reform and the Department of Social Welfare and Development. The DAR has sought to distribute land in Hacienda Luisita and rectify a previous, unjust land distribution scheme. The DSWD for its part has stood firmly against pork barrel practices involving lawmakers and their constituents. The DOLE and DSWD also worked for the swift repatriation of displaced OFW's in the Middle East.

The leadership of the National Anti-Poverty Commission meanwhile ended questionable contracts for so-called overpaid consultants. Also notable are the actions of the present Environment Secretary in relation to the audit and suspension of at least 20 companies engaged in destructive mining operations.

The President is committed against corruption and has warned corrupt officials in the police, military and the civilian bureaucracy including local government units against committing the same. So far, investigations in both houses of Congress have focused mainly on the drug trade and have not uncovered the other misdeeds of past administrations. The Department of Transportation for its part showed responsiveness when it stopped the basis for so-called "tanim bala" scams at the airport. The government's Freedom of Information, while positive and was implemented early, should continuously be tested due to the many listed exemptions. Duterte should be credited for not renewing the license of online gambling firm PhilWeb Corporation owned by Roberto Ongpin because of the proliferation of its gambling operations and the failure to pay correct taxes.

The human rights record of the Duterte administration meanwhile has generated the most criticism because of the President's handling of the "war on drugs". There have been serious allegations of summary executions and extra-judicial killings of suspected drug dealers and users by state security forces. These have been blamed on the President's often public endorsement of the killings of suspected criminals. The number of dead, even by official police estimates, is alarming and has reinforced impunity among law enforcement institutions. There is a mounting call here and abroad for a stop to the drug-related killings.

The Duterte administration meanwhile has made important contributions in other areas of human rights. Through the peace talks for example, we were able to see a favorable climate for the return of the Lumad to their communities. Some 1,500 Lumad evacuees in Tandag, Surigao del Sur were finally able to return home on September 2 after the military pulled out from Lianga. Through the peace talks, there is a possibility that a general amnesty proclamation for political prisoners can be realized under the present administration.

Indigenous people's rights have also been upheld by government with the suspension of destructive mining operations in the countryside. Duterte should also be cited for respecting the people's right to peaceably assemble and to air grievances as shown by his first State of the Nation Address. In another unprecedented move, rally participants were allowed to proceed near Batasang Pambansa, without any police block-

ade. Duterte also took time to meet with the rally leaders inside Batasang Pambansa after the SONA. He did the same for rally organizers during his inauguration in Malacanang.

Duterte's inclusive framework for peace talks with Moro rebels asserting their right to self-determination is also commendable. It remains to be seen though how the talks will progress given the different peace deals entered into by the Philippine government with the two main Moro groups.

We have also taken note of efforts by the government, through different departments, to gather inputs and proposals from various sectors and groups. Public participation in governance is appreciated, and hopefully will go beyond formal "summits" and "conferences".

Challenges and Contradictions

The administration's economic agenda is one of the major battlegrounds under the Duterte presidency. Various sectors are opposing the neo-liberal economic framework of the administration's economic team as contained in the so-called 10-point economic agenda. Economic managers still look to foreign investments and the opening up of the economy as the main drivers of economic growth.

There have been campaigns opposing budget cuts in health services, anti-people tax reform measures, continuation of failed public-partnership programs as well as the drive to further open up the economy to foreign investors. The fight to end the regime of contractualization is still seen as an uphill fight because of lack of concrete initiatives on the part of the DOLE. While a national minimum wage is now being studied, the oppressive regional wage boards still remain. Duterte has assailed the dominance of oligarchs but it remains to be seen how far he will actually go in dismantling their hold on the economy.

National industrialization can still be realized through the peace talks and through Duterte's efforts at developing beneficial economic relations with countries not aligned with the United States. Land reform shows promise but will expectedly be met by resistance by big landlords and by public officials who favor land-use conversion, such as the NEDA chief.

Contradictions between the people and the Duterte administration exist in areas such as health care where a P446.8 million budget cut has been imposed on 12 specialty hospitals and where corporatization of public hospitals is being encouraged. While it is good that Duterte ordered the DOH to learn from Cuba, it appears that the DOH leadership failed to truly understand the Cuban health care system and apply its best practices in the Philippines.

Contradictions likewise exist in the area of education where the K-12 program remains. It is gearing the educational system as suppliers of cheap labor for big corporations while intensifying the overall commercialization of education. In the field of public transportation, a public-private partnership for infrastructure and services has remained the main thrust of the DoTr. Groups have questioned the Transportation Department's accommodation of big business interests in the construction of a common station for the LRT-MRT train lines. Many have also criticized the appointment of Noel Kintanar, a top executive of the Ayala Corporation, as Undersecretary for Rails and Tolls where the Ayala Group has huge investments.

Duterte has succeeded in exposing for the first time the enormity of the drug problem and its links to officials from different levels of government. The President has exposed the links between bureaucrats, politicians, security forces and the drug syndicates. His approach, however, will continue to reap criticism as the body count in the war on drugs continues to rise. The President cannot go on publicly condoning or encouraging the

killing of suspected criminals through his anti-drug rhetoric. Such an approach not only justifies the violations of due process but also reinforces impunity among state security forces.

Various groups are also calling on the government to address the socio-economic roots of the drug problem, along with the demands for a comprehensive rehabilitation program. The President meanwhile is correct in denouncing the US and EU for human rights hypocrisy and for their history of using human rights as a tool for destabilizing regimes that assert independence from imperialist dictates.

The most serious challenge to the Duterte administration may yet come from the United States and other imperialist powers that seek to counter the Philippine president's assertion of sovereignty. Overt and covert US interventions against regimes asserting independence have been well documented. The public should remain vigilant against moves by foreign governments to unseat Duterte because of his independent stance. The President appears to be well aware of this. He has also made extra effort to go around military camps and solidify AFP support for his administration.

Duterte also faces challenges from within his administration, from officials who wish to retain neo-colonial relations with the US. On several occasions, at least three cabinet officials (Lorenzana, Yasay, Esperon) have openly contradicted the president on matters of foreign policy especially on issues involving US troops and military agreements. Duterte needs to put in writing his foreign policy and leave no room for misinterpretation or deliberate distortion by his officials.

The people's movement needs to rally around the progressive aspects of the Duterte administration while engaging in principled struggle and opposition with the negative aspects. We are a long way from fulfilling the People's Agenda for Change, but positive steps have been taken in some areas. The only sure way for the People's Agenda to advance is for the people to struggle for their just demands. These include national sovereignty, genuine democracy, economic reforms and a just peace. A lot more needs to be done after Duterte's 100 days. Current developments show that it will not be all smooth sailing and that the people should prepare for more intense struggles and contradictions between the different contending forces. ###