



***Fight for
Land & Life!***
Concept Paper



Background of the Land Dispute

Then called the Mindanao Agricultural College, President Carlos Garcia granted what is now known as Central Mindanao University (CMU) 3,401 hectares of land through the Presidential Proclamation No.476 in 1958.

In 1974, 321.9 hectares of the original area of the university were appropriated for the government's agrarian program, leaving the university 3,080 hectares. The following year, 1975, part of the university lands was leased out to Philippine Packing Corp. (PPC), the contract lasting for ten years. It was for the cultivation of rice fields where farmers from the locality and some settlers from Visayas were employed. CMU also ran a rice project but this failed. When they could no longer pay the farm workers, the latter launched a series of actions to ask that they be allowed to till the lands previously dedicated to the rice project. In response to this, CMU created the Kilusang Sariling Sikap Program. In 1986, the university allowed the farmers to rent the land that had been previously leased by PPC. However, even before the farmers could harvest their crops, they were already given a memorandum informing them that their lease contracts would not be renewed.

Refusing to give up their only means of livelihood, 1,200 farmers formed the Bukidnon Free Farmers and Agricultural Laborers Organization (BUFFALO) to petition for the land. The following year, 1987, the government started the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). The farmers under BUFFALO applied for the 1,200 hectares of land that they had been tilling.

In 1989, the Department of Agrarian Reform Adjudication Board (DARAB) approved 400 hectares for distribution to 252 of the petitioners under Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) No. 00055668.

In 1990, more farmers united to apply for the land that wasn't granted to BUFFALO. They converged under the organizations Tried Agricultural Movers Association of Rural Active Workers (TAMARAW), the Landless Tillers Inhabitants of Musuan (LIMUS), and



TALADULA. They also won with the Omnibus Decision of the DARAB.

But in 1992, what victory the farmers won was robbed from them when the Supreme Court ordered the cancellation of the CLOAs. The land was supposedly 'exempt from coverage under Section 10 of R.A. 6657 (CARP) because the lands are actually, directly and exclusively used and found to be necessary for school site and campus, including experimental farm stations for educational purposes, and for establishing seed and seedling research and pilot production centers.'

Over the years, the communities negotiated for the extension of their lease and declared that they would only leave the land if the university could offer them a decent relocation site. In 1998, the three organizations merged to form the BUFFALO-TAMARAW-LIMUS (BTL), strengthening their ranks to gain leverage in negotiations with the university.

In 1999, they, as an organization, were able to negotiate a five-year extension of their lease. However, no relocation site was offered until 2007. The relocation areas – in San Fernando and in Cabanglasan – were on steep slopes and are not feasible for farming. Another area was offered in Talakag, but there were already other farmer claimants and it was not enough to accommodate all the BTL members.

Blood Sacrifices

Even before the decision of the Supreme Court, CMU had already taken violent measures in barring the farmers from tilling the land.

On July 5, 1989, over a hundred farmers went to the motor pool along the highway to get seeds, preparing for the planting season. However, upon going back to their community, guards of the university, many of them hired through the Philippine Association of Detective and Protective Agency Operators (PADPAO), stopped them. The tension escalated into a commotion and the guards fired at the defenseless farmers, injuring many of them and killing Leonardo Loable on the spot. This was just the beginning of the blood sacrifices the fight for land necessitated.

The year the CLOA was cancelled, another attack was directed to the farmers. While BUFFALO president Florentino Macote, Jr. was cooking, an unidentified assailant shot him. He survived the attempt, but it was some time before the bullet that lodged in his face was removed. Because of the bullet, his eye would bleed when he got tired. The university's security guards also burned down 100 homes of the farmers to force them to leave the land.

Despite this, the farmers were not deterred from tilling the land, their only means of surviving.

In 2011, then-new CMU President Maria Luisa Soliven banned the farmers from the land. CMU presented a new proposal: the farmers were allowed to stay on for only three more years with P1.00 rent per hectare. However, a third party (i.e. the LGU) will shoulder the burden of looking for a relocation area for the farmers. With or without a site, the farmers will be forced to leave their lands once the three-year contract expires. Additionally, the contract was to be per individual, the university refusing to enter into an agreement with the organization. The BTL rejected this proposal, refusing to allow CMU to discard its responsibility of looking for a suitable relocation area, and more importantly, guarding against factions in the group.

But even as they were negotiating, Soliven had already barred the farmers from tilling their



lands in March 2011. Hunger prompted the BTL communities to launch Operation Tikad where they grouped themselves and took turns in farming and guarding the university guards. The farmers also set up a camp-out outside the main gate of the university on May 23 that year to protest the relentless attacks perpetrated against them by the university guards while the farmers are in the Operation Tikad.

After almost a month, on June 14, the camp was violently dispersed. Security guards hired through the Chevron Security Agency, opened fire at the protesters hitting six of the farmers. Around 40 others were wounded from shrapnel and stone flints. The guards then hacked and dismantled the camp, carting off tents, streamers, cooking utensils, and megaphones.

The farmers filed a case against Soliven at the Ombudsman. This was dismissed last year, after which the farmers faced harassments anew. Inspired by the dismissal the university set up a guard post in the middle of the fields tilled by BUFFAO last year—signaling renewed attacks against the farmers. But the farmers dismantled this. In retaliation, the university filed a case against the BTL leaders.

Pitting Education against the Farmers' Right to Land and Life

CMU has been using the need for land for educational purpose as a justification of its act. However, this claim is not followed through in the actions of the university that has been leasing land for commercial purposes throughout the years. In 1997, the university granted Sto. Rosario Farms a lease for 250 hectares, RGR Agri-Ventures 400 hectares, and the Bukidnon Resources Company, Inc. 600 hectares. These are just the big lessees. Smaller companies include Bukidnon Sugar Company and a Taiwanese company renting area for an irrigated farmland. Even Bukidnon Governon Jose Ma. Zubiri, Jr. rents 10 hectares of the university land for a jatropa plantation. Other known lessees are: Ricardo Barrios for more than 100 hectares of sugarcane and Mudpress Agriventure for seven hectares. Two hectares of the university lands are also dedicated to a Japanese sawmill.

After the peak of the camp-out of the farmers in 2011, the children of the farmers who were studying in CMU were ostracized by the administration. Some of them were even barred from their classes.

Current Situation of the Farmers

After the case against Soliven at the Ombudsman for the violent dispersal of the 2011 Kampuhan was dismissed last year, 2016, CMU has started to become aggressive against the farmers. In April 2016, the CMU put up a guard post in the middle of the farmers' ricefields, signifying that it is once more imposing its hold over the land. CMU also fenced off a part of the area of the BTL. The farmers, however, in a unified action dismantled these structures asserting their ownership of the land.

The communities are not recognized by the government and are therefore not eligible to apply for basic needs like electricity, water, roads, irrigation, and other government services. This has been their situation for three decades now. The guards also tried to prevent the farmers from bringing in construction materials inside the lands, forbidding them to put up permanent structures. However, the farmers, again through collective action, were able to put up training halls in their communities, a necessary space for their organizations to congregate in. Each organization [BUFFALO, TAMARAW, LIMUS] has also maintained a communal farm, whose earnings are used to maintain funds for organizational needs. They



have their own communal seedbank, and were able to put up a training center in the BUFFALO area even as the building of the latter was difficult with the attacks of the CMU guards disrupting construction.

Rationale for the Campaign

- Many of the BTL farmers have been tilling the land since they were hired by Philippine Packing in 1975. Throughout the changes in the university administration, the farmers were able to continuously work on the land because of their unified assertion of their right, first as individual reactions to their need for livelihood in 1986, then as organized groups from 1988 onwards. Functioning like a big landlord, CMU leases its lands to agribusinesses instead of allowing the farmers to utilize the land for their food. This experience shows that farmers can only rely on their collective strength if they would want to win their fight against the continuing feudal land relations.
- There is no longer an existing land reform program. And even with then CARP, the lands were exempted due to its supposed classification for educational purposes. However, the lands of CMU have continuously been used for commercial purposes – vast hectares rented out to companies over the years. Sec. 2. of E.O. 407 states that: The Departments of Agriculture, and Environment and Natural Resources are hereby authorized and directed to cancel all lease agreements covering fishponds, pasture, agro-forestry lands and other lands of the public domain suitable to agriculture which have remained undeveloped within three (3) years from the date of the effectivity of the lease contract and underutilized or abandoned or in cases where the terms and conditions embodied therein have been violated, taking into consideration the requirements of due process.
- The land has once more been reclassified as ancestral domain and the indigenous communities are now applying for a title at the NCIP. The farmers want to make it clear that they respect the Indigenous Peoples' right to their ancestral domain, but assert that their communities can co-exist peacefully in the lands that are vast – given that they are not pushed to fight each other by companies occupying a large portion of the productive lands.
- The BTL believes it is not through the use of prime agricultural land for income generation of the university that will address the problem in its budget, but a higher state subsidy for education. The fascist attacks of the university against the farmers and their children proves that as an educational institution, it did not have the welfare of its students – who are formed by the university – in mind, but on the profit it is generating.



The 'Baktas BTL'

Dubbed as 'Baktas BTL: Fight for Land and Life!', 100 farmer leaders and supporting organizations and individuals will traverse 1,497 kilometers separating their homes and the national capital to set up camp at the Department of Agrarian Reform at the Quezon Circle on October 11. The collective journey and the campout aim to press the government, through the DAR, to officially declare the farmers as the rightful owners of the BTL-tilled lands, and at the same time recognize the rights of the Lumad to their ancestral domain. They will officially submit their petition to DAR and gain public support for their demand.

They will march from Manila to Quezon City, passing by churches and other government institutions on the way.

They will leave Cagayan de Oro on October 8, and pass by various provinces for some awareness-raising actions before proceeding to Manila. The farmers will be at the camp-out from October 11 to 25, and will hold forums, discussions and other actions in schools, and other support institutions.

Main call:

Respect the farmers' right to till the lands, distribute 517 hectares of CMU lands to BTL Farmers!

Other calls:

1. Stop harassment against BTL Farmers!
2. Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights to their Ancestral Domain unjustifiably allocated for CMU Income Generating Projects!
3. Certify GARB as urgent bill!

'Baktas BTL' is organized by the BTL Farmers' Association, and the Kahugpungan sa mga Mag-uuma sa Bukidnon (KASAMA-Bukidnon). KMP is spearheading the national campaign in behalf of KASAMA, which is its local chapter in Bukidnon. The activity is also supported by the following organizations: Sentro Para sa Tunay na Repormang Agraryo, Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, AMIHAN National Federation of Peasant Women, Sinagbayan, Rise for Education, Alliance of Concerned Teachers, Congress of Teachers and Educators for National Democracy-UP Diliman, People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty, International League of People's Struggles, and the Asian Peasant Coalition.

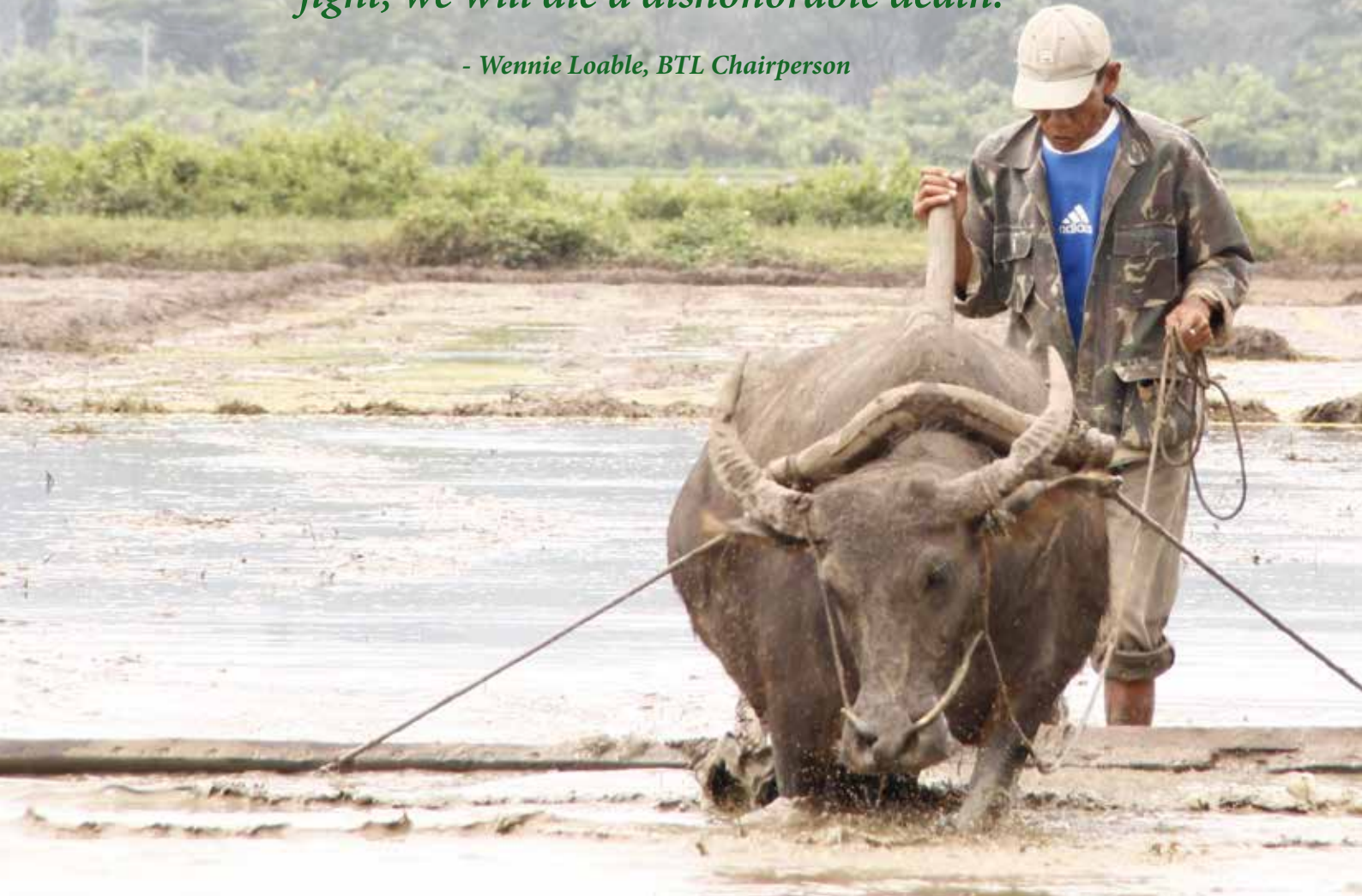
How you can help?

Baktas BTL need the support of the people of Manila and the solidarity of peoples all over the world. You can extend your support in various ways:

1. **Organize** a forum or any awareness-raising activities in your schools, churches, offices or communities.
2. **Visit** the Kampuhan from October 11-25 in front of DAR and interact with the farmers, or listen to their stories and songs of struggle, see their exhibit and cultural performances, and more.
3. **Speak** against this case of state-sponsored land grabbing. Issue a solidarity message, write CMU officials or President Duterte and international bodies, or voice out your opinions in social media and other channels in support of the BTL farmers.
4. **Donate** to support the farmers' cause for land and life. Help them sustain their camp out with rice, food and other material or cash donations, or you may buy their organic rice produce to augment their organization's income.

We are human, we need to eat. We need to send our children to school. We need to give medication to the sick members of our family. Thus, we need to till. If you rob us of our lands, this means death to us, and if we will not fight, we will die a dishonorable death.

- Wennie Loable, BTL Chairperson



*For details and other concerns, visit us
@ <http://btlfarmers.rmp-nmr.org/>*

you may also contact the following:

Baktas BTL National Secretariat
c/o KMP National Secretariat
217-B Alley 1 Road 7, Project 6, Quezon City,
Philippines
Telefax: +63(2) 456-5727
Email: kmp@kilusangmagbubukid.org
Web: www.kilusangmagbubukidngpilipinas.com

Baktas BTL Mindanao Secretariat
c/o RURAL MISSIONARIES OF THE PHILIPPINES
Northern Mindanao Sub-Region (RMP-NMR), Inc
Room 310, 3rd Floor, Diocesan Centrum, Salvador
Lluch St, Poblacion, 9200 Iligan City, Philippines
T/F: +63 (63) 303 1595 Mobile: +63 917 590 8804 E:
rmp.nmr@gmail.com W: www.rmp-nmr.org