

“Pinoyorkers” Rejoice GMA’s Exit But Vigilant Over “P-Noy” - MabuhayRadio

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By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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If not for their placards, the Filipino New Yorkers would have been mistaken for celebrating in advance the Fourth of July last July 2nd.

Wearing party hats and party dresses, members of militant groups assembled in front of Philippine Consulate in New York city to bid goodbye to former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and gave the new President Noynoy Aquino a grand salute.

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Among the community grassroots organizations and alliances that joined the rally were the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns (NAFCON), Bayan–USA, Gabriela USA, Philippine Forum New York and New Jersey, Kabalikat Domestic Workers’ Support Network, Anakbayan New York/New Jersey, Filipinas for Rights and Empowerment (FiRE) and New York Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines (NYCHRP).

In a statement, the groups said, “During Arroyo's term, more than a thousand activists, civilians and members of legal organizations had fallen victims to extra judicial killings and enforced disappearances. This was part of Arroyo's Oplan Bantay Laya (OBL) 1 & 2, with the intention to crush the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA), which obviously failed during her nine years in office.

“In Noynoy Aquino's term, we demand justice for the victims and to stop the OBL or anything similar, and to have Gloria Arroyo prosecuted for having these people -- who had been critical of the government and who are only fighting for their rights -- killed and abducted under her chain of command,” said Garry Labao of BAYAN USA.

Mr. Labao also reiterated the need for the Aquino administration to release all political prisoners and the need to pursue peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Mrs. Arroyo's crimes against women and children were also raised. Jackie Mariano, in behalf of GABRIELA USA, reminded the public of the Morong 43, the community health workers who were illegally arrested and tortured almost five months ago, falsely accused by the government of being rebels, more than half of whom were women, two were even pregnant.

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Zabrina Collazo, a member of Filipinas for Rights and Empowerment (FiRE-NYC) also said, "Arroyo has done more crimes than we can imagine, with women and children as her targets. It's such a shame we had her as President. Now we're more than happy to send her off."

People vs. Arroyo's Corruption

A rroyo's track record also highlights the massive corruption in her administration. The charges of corruption, one of which tackles the controversial NBN-ZTE deal, has been the first in the agenda of progressive party lists, who recently won in the Philippine elections, such as Bayan Muna, the moment Mrs. Arroyo stepped out of office as President of the Philippines.

According to Joyce Pena of Philippine Forum New York, "Although there's a new administration, the struggle is not over. We must fight and prevent corruption from happening again in this new government. Looking back, we have only seen lavish spending by the Arroyo administration instead of attending to the needs of the people and preventing national man-made calamities. We do not want any more of those in Noynoy's term."

People vs. Labor Export Policy (LEP)

The Labor Export Policy (LEP) institutionalizing the export of Filipinos, which had been rampant during Arroyo's term and with an all-time high of 3,500 Filipinos leaving the country everyday, resulting in thousands of broken Filipino families and sometimes also leading to abusive working conditions by employers, was also criticized.

Jonna Baldres, NAFCON NorthEast Coordinator, cited the four-year-running landmark case of the Sentosa 27++ and the Avalon 11 (the nurses and their lawyer, Atty. Felix Vinluan), who sought the help of the Philippine government during Arroyo's term and were turned down, but who eventually won against the Sentosa Care Agency with the help of the Filipino community and friends – in the US, in the Philippines and all over the world.

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Michelle Saulon, coordinator for the KABALIKAT Domestic Workers' Support Network also said, "The previous government had not been very efficient in addressing the needs of Filipinos working here in the United States. The cases of Ate Fely Garcia (2007) and Ate Putli Anjali (2008), domestic workers who died while working here in New York

, were concrete examples of the Philippine government under the Arroyo administration not heeding the calls of the common Filipino people. These campaigns would not be possible if not for the Filipino community coming together. And their remains would not be sent back to the Philippines

had the Filipino community here in New York

not pressured the Philippine consulate."

The groups also called on Noynoy Aquino to fulfill his promises to overseas Filipino workers: that more jobs will be created in the homeland so that there will be no more need for Filipinos to leave the country, and that while that has not happened yet, he will instruct the government agencies to intensify in addressing the needs of overseas Filipino workers, as stated in his inaugural speech last June 30.

"What we truly need is a Philippine government that places National Industrialization and Genuine Agrarian Reform as its primary agenda. These alone can generate jobs enough to sustain economic development and to pull the nation back from the ashes of economic instability that Arroyo had left behind. Only when these matters are addressed can LEP and the forced migration of Filipinos be stopped and prevented," added Baldres.

People vs. Hacienda Luisita Massacre

A nother issue tackled by these groups, which was more addressed to President Noynoy, was the accountability of the Aquino family on the Hacienda Luisita Massacre, wherein 14 farm-workers were killed during a strike in November 2004.

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"The issue of Hacienda Luisita is a national issue. It is an issue of land tilled by the peasants and farm workers, who feed the nation. As Noynoy Aquino sits as the new President, we demand that he address and face this subject concerning his family. If he cannot address this immediately, and if more peasants get attacked by the new government, how can we expect him to genuinely address and implement Genuine Agrarian Reform?" said Anakbayan New York/New Jersey Chairperson, Yves Nibungco.

Goodbye, GMA! Hello, Noynoy!

The organizations and alliances, happy to have GMA finally out of Malacañang, sang "Na-na-na-na, na-na-na-na, GMA.... Goodbye!" and chanted " **Prosecute, Prosecute, GMA! Singilin, singilin, pagbayarin!** " (Charge her, charge her, let her pay!)

"The Filipino people, however, must remain vigilant that Arroyo will not maneuver her way into becoming Prime Minister -- with the steps she and her family and cronies are taking to push for Charter Change -- now that she has become a legislator representing her province, Pampanga. And so must we be also watchful not to let President Noynoy take the same wicked course that GMA, nor the past Philippine Presidents, had trodden," concluded Garry Labao. # # #

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