

LAKAD KATARUNGAN, LAKAD MATUWID NA DAAN *12,923 EKTARYA NG APECO, IBALIK SA MAMAMAYAN*

- On November 24, 2012, 125 residents of Casiguran— representing at least 2,983 families— began marching 370-kilometers from Casiguran, Aurora to Malacañang Palace, in order to voice the opposition to the Aurora ecozone long expressed by the local communities of Casiguran.
- Their struggle against APECO has received national-level support since 2010, and has consistently engaged with policymakers in the House of Representatives, the Senate, and Executive Departments like the Department of Agrarian Reform and the Department of Justice— yet to no avail until the present

WHAT IS APECO?

- APECO, or the *Aurora Pacific Economic Zone and Freeport Authority*, is the 12,923-hectare special economic zone now being built in the town of Casiguran, Aurora
- APECO aims to attract foreign investors into Casiguran by offering tax incentives and infrastructure-building projects— all promoted as “*development*” for Casiguran’s residents
- APECO was created through R.A. 9490 in 2007 and amended through R.A. 10083 in 2010, sponsored by Senator Edgardo Angara and Congressman Juan Edgardo Angara, with the endorsement of Governor Bellaflor Angara-Castillo
- The APECO law (RA 10083) was not approved by the President and merely lapsed into law

WHAT HAVE BEEN APECO’S REAL IMPACTS?

Legalized Land Grabbing and Dislocation

- APECO is now seizing large tracts of prime agricultural lands (525 + 105 hectares), and forest stewardship arrangements (288 hectares) from the farmers of Casiguran— the first of which is a clear violation of the CARPer law (RA 9700)
- APECO has intruded into the ancestral lands (11,900 hectares) of the Casiguran Agtas without their *Free, Prior and Informed Consent* (FPIC)— a violation of the IPRA law (RA 8371)
- All of these areas are titled lands, or lands that have been undergoing titling processes for decades— yet APECO has falsely claimed in 2010 that most of the occupants of these lands were merely ‘*informal settlers*’
- APECO has displaced at least 28 fisherfolk families due to the construction of its soon-to-be 1.5 km airstrip; hundreds more will eventually be crowded out of their fishing grounds in the Casiguran bay should APECO’s international seaport be constructed and has been cutting centuries old mangroves to give way to its port— a violation of the Fisheries Code (RA 8550)

“Walang Daang Matuwid” Governance

- The APECO law was passed without any consultation whatsoever with the people of Casiguran
- APECO was established without the approval of the local government unit of Casiguran— a violation of the Local Government Code (RA 7160) and the APECO Law itself
- APECO’s subprojects— such as its airstrip and corporate campus— have all failed to secure the necessary feasibility studies, environmental impact assessments, environmental compliance certificates and engineering and geological surveys, building permit and LGU permits prior to their construction
- APECO paid more than P650,000 per hectare for the lands of former Provincial and Environmental Natural Resource Officer Benjamin Miña, while paying only P45,000 per hectare for the lands of those who have already lost their homes— a violation of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act (RA 3019).
- APECO has paid Industries Development Corporation— Casiguran’s sole logging company, APECO’s first investor and former APECO board member— a total of P120 million for the supposed purchase of its logging rights— a violation of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act (RA 3019).
- APECO has already cleared away at least ten hectares of mangroves— a clear violation of environment policies in PD 705 and DENR DMC 2008-03.

Human Rights Violations

- The early days of APECO's operations were overshadowed by human rights transgressions against anti-APECO campaigners— involving drop-in interrogations, harassment and black propaganda
- On June 26, 2010, Father Jose Francisco Talaban, one of the foremost local leaders in the struggle against the ecozone, narrowly survived a midnight assassination attempt involving the use of explosives (M203 grenade launchers) and assault guns (M14 rifles)

WHO ARE MARCHING AGAINST APECO?

- These marchers represent four sectors of residents who have actually been struggling for equitable access to land and basic resources in Casiguran for several decades. They are:
 - *Lowland Farmers* from Sitio Reserva, in Brgy. Esteves who have been struggling for land titles since 1962— they have slowly and independently transformed a neglected 105-hectare government reservation into one of Northern Aurora's primary rice granaries
 - *Upland Farmers* from the San Idelfonso Peninsula who are seeking the defence and renewal of the steward contracts for the forest lands and upland farms that they have sustainably managed since the 1980's
 - *Fisherfolk* that have increasingly applied sustainable fishing and mangrove cultivation practices since the 1990's to retain both the ecological balance and livelihood viability of the Casiguran Bay, yet who are in the process of being gradually excluded from their fishing and docking grounds by APECO
 - *Indigenous Peoples* who have long since been crowded out of their ancestral lands due to migration of lowlanders, and the entry of logging companies, but who have been pressing their ancestral domain claims since even before the passage of the IPRA law

WHAT ARE THE CASIGURAN MARCHERS DEMANDING?

The Casiguran marchers call upon President Benigno Aquino, III, to address these *six policy demands* in order to protect the lands and livelihoods of the poor and marginalized residents of Casiguran:

1. *Malacañang*: Push forward an independent review and/or evaluation of APECO towards a possible repeal and/or modification of the APECO laws (RA 9490 and RA 10083)
2. *Senate*: Zero budget allocation of APECO for 2013, insofar as the review/evaluation of APECO is ongoing
3. *DA-BFAR*: Provide settlement areas for small fisher families already displaced by APECO as of November 2012
4. *DAR*: Distribute 105 hectares of prime agricultural land to 56 landless farmers of Sitio Reserva, Brgy. Esteves, to end 50-year land struggle of Reservation farmers for titles
5. *NCIP*: Execute guidelines and measures to ensure the credibility and integrity of *FPIC*-soliciting processes within the Casiguran municipality
6. *DENR*: Ensure the respect of stewardship contracts of 90 households under Integrated Social Forestry Programs in 288-hectares of APECO-covered areas

The Casiguran marchers believe in *participatory and sustainable development*. Unlike the case with APECO, participatory development thrives on democratic processes, ensures that lands and resources are distributed equitably among those who rely on it for their livelihoods, and that the poor themselves have *ultimate control* over the development process itself from the bottom-up.

The pillar of participatory development, as envisioned by the Casiguran marchers, is the implementation of *asset reforms*. The actual control of farmers, fisherfolk and IP's over key livelihood resources such as lands, municipal waters, and ancestral domains, lies at the core of rural '*development*' that begins from the efforts and situation of the basic sectors themselves.

(For more inquiries on how to support the cause of the Casiguran marchers, please call *PAKISAMA: The National Confederation of Small Farmers' and Fishers' Organizations* at (02)434-2079, or check the anti-APECO Facebook page: "*Laban para sa Casiguran: No to APECO!*")