



EDITORIAL:

## **Charter Change: 'Trojan Horse' to perpetuate political dynasties in power**

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Amidst the urgency to address systemic landlessness and widespread poverty in the country, the Marcos ruling clique chose instead to renew and fund a public campaign that aims to amend the Government of the Republic of the Philippines' (GRP) constitution. At its core, this push to change the constitution (often called Charter Change or ChaCha) aims to surrender economic sovereignty to foreign capital and perpetuate political dynasties in power.

On the other hand, Filipinos cry for higher wages, free distribution of land, price control of basic needs like rice, free health and education services, sufficient aid, affordable housing, and genuine freedom.


Recently, a signature campaign for a so-called "people's initiative" or PI for ChaCha started circulating and was by no doubt financed by politicians using public funds. PI is defined by the GRP constitution as one among valid methods that can legally open the constitution for review. The other two methods are the Constitutional Convention and the Constituent Assembly. PI was so scandalous as member of the House of Representatives (HOR) used their personnel and local patronage networks to campaign for signatures, that people derisively call the campaign a "politicians initiative." HOR members plan to amend the conduct of the Constituent Assembly (convening the Senate and HOR jointly), by stipulating that voting shall be done jointly, not separately, thus effectively controlling the voting process (24 senators versus 316 HOR members).

Though the campaign was so outrageous, initially the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) accepted the submitted signatures, but eventually stopped because of the overwhelming popular pressure and the basic legal infirmity of PI.

While Marcos Jr. feigns ignorance concerning the legislators' push for ChaCha, it is under his behest that his minions in Congress are reviving ChaCha. The elimination of the nationalist provisions of the GRP constitution supports the US imperialist's desire to fully open the economy for plunder and deepen the puppet state's neo-colonial dependence to it.

The intense in-fighting between HOR members and senators on ChaCha merely reflect the severe split in the ruling Marcos-Duterte coalition. Former President Duterte publicly denounced the politicians-initiated PI, called for the resignation of Marcos and the separation of Mindanao from the Philippines. The Duterte faction has agitated the military against Marcos. In fact, AFP Chief-of-Staff Brawner publicly warned about a brewing coup de Etat. Duterte's insecurity of being arrested by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity triggered this trouble within the ruling coalition.

The Filipino people cannot be fooled by Marcos and his minions about Chacha. The real purpose of the ruling dynasties is to perpetuate themselves in power, to lift the term limits in office.

There is a nationwide groundswell of popular opposition against Charter Change among the ranks of the toiling masses, students, professionals, church people and civil libertarians. In this context, it becomes imperative to commemorate the anniversary of the February 25 People's Uprising by grasping the most important lesson of history that the people are decisive in the genuine transformation of society! 

## UN experts recommend dissolution of 'outdated' NTF-ELCAC

Two Special Rapporteurs of the United Nations (UN) recommend the dissolution of the National Task Force to Eliminate Local Armed Communist Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) for the harm it has caused to the rights of the Filipino people, reports Ang Bayan, on 7 February, 2023.

On 2 January, after a 10-day investigation, Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression recommended the abolition of the NTF-ELCAC which she said is "outdated" and "the promoter" of red-tagging. Khan also recommended "unblocking" or removing restrictions against progressive websites imposed by the reactionary state.

Even though the Marcos government insists that it has no policy that promotes red-tagging, Khan said that there is clear evidence that it is being practiced by state security forces as part of their 'counter-terrorism' strategy.

These recommendations come from Khan's dialogue with various media groups and other democratic sectors, and even with state officials and armed forces. She also visited imprisoned journalist Frenchie May Cumpio and two others jailed in Tacloban.


Besides Manila, Khan went to the cities of Baguio, Cebu, Tacloban and Davao. Democratic organizations welcomed her and launched pickets and discussions regarding Khan's arrival in the Philippines.

Khan said, "NTF-ELCAC was established about six years ago in a different context. It is outdated. It does not take into account the ongoing prospects of peace negotiations."



image: philippinerevolution.nu

Before her, Ian Fry, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, also recommended the dismantling of the agency on November 2023, to uphold and defend human rights in the context of climate change. Like Khan, Fry met with various democratic sectors in the country.

"I met with civil organizations who told me horrific stories on how they were treated," Fry reported. "And in my recommendation to the government, I have suggested that they disband the NTF-ELCAC because it is clear that (it) is operating beyond its original mandate." He spoke of entire communities being red-tagged, and allegations that "private financial interest (is) driving NTF-ELCAC to do this." 

## Filipino workers to mobilize vs Cha-Cha, for wage increase

National labor center Kilusang Mayo Uno launched a nationally coordinated action on 16 February carrying the banner call "Wage Increase, not Charter Change," and asserted that wages can and must be raised significantly without need to amend the Constitution. The group stated that Marcos' Cha-cha would, in fact, lead to further depression of wages contrary to government promises of economic development.

"Marcos' Cha-Cha will only worsen the situation of workers. Of course, the government will do everything to attract foreign investment. The likely ending is that wages will remain depressed, contractualization will intensify and trade unions will continue to be harassed and targeted to prevent workers from fighting back. The only people who will experience this so-called 'development' that they are peddling are foreign and big corporations," said Jerome Adonis, KMU secretary general.

Happening at the same time as charter change discussions, the Philippine senate passed on second reading a bill calling for a Proo (approximately \$2) across-the-board wage increase. The bill was however contested by lawmakers in the lower house Stella Quimbo and Joey Salceda who claimed the proposal will hurt micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

Meanwhile, Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) Chief Information Officer Marco Valbuena pointed out that "MSMEs are burdened, not by the wages they pay their workers, but by the overbearing and oppressive weight of the big capitalists and the bureaucrat capitalist state who eat away at their profits in many different ways."

Earlier this week, health care workers held a nationwide protest on Valentine's Day, dubbed the "Black Hearts Day Protest" also demanding a salary increase and the release of their overdue benefits and allowances. "The current situation of health workers continues to worsen – with low salaries, unpaid and inadequate benefits, job insecurity, high taxes and being overworked due to chronic understaffing," Alliance of Health Workers (AHW) national president Robert Mendoza said.


KMU called on all workers to speak up, launch protests, and intensify struggles for wage increase and against Charter Change. 



image: philippinerevolution.nu



## CPP Founding Chairperson Jose Maria Sison's 85th Birthday celebrated



*image: philippinerevolution.nu*

The 85th birthday of the late Jose Ma. “Joma” Sison, Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) Founding Chairperson, was celebrated by the revolutionary movement, allies and local and international friends last 8 February. Ka “Joma” passed away last December 16, 2022 in Utrecht, The Netherlands.

In a statement, the CPP paid tribute to the continuing relevance of Ka “Joma” and the validity of the struggle for national democracy.

“We remember his invaluable contributions to the revolutionary resistance of the Filipino proletariat and people, both as an ideological leader and a practical organizer of their struggle for national and social liberation and socialism,” the CPP stated.

The CPP said: The continuing relevance of Ka Joma’s ideas and analysis and validity of the struggle for national democracy stem from the historical fact that the country remains dominated and oppressed by US imperialism—the singular force that has condemned the Philippines to its present backward, agrarian, non-industrial state, and mere supplier of cheap raw materials and cheap labor.

“The relevance of Jose Ma. Sison’s writings and the validity of the struggle for national democracy with a socialist perspective becomes even more stark amid the deteriorating conditions of the semicolonial and semifeudal system under the US-Marcos regime, the aggravating socioeconomic conditions of the broad masses of the Filipino people, intensifying fascist

repression, and worsening national oppression amid the protracted crisis of the global capitalist system and rising inter-imperialist contradictions leading to wars. This is now being proven by the steady accumulation of strength of the people’s revolutionary mass struggles across the country, and resurgence of armed resistance in the countryside, the CPP concluded.

“Revolutionary dedication and optimism remain alive and ablaze among the workers, peasants, urban poor, youth, women and the middle forces and indigenous communities in the province of Rizal. They are fully steeled with the highest commitment to move forward the rectification movement and advance the people’s democratic revolution until victory,” the NDF-Southern Tagalog said in a statement on Ka “Joma’s” birthday.

Kabataang Makabayan (KM, Patriotic Youth)- Rizal province, south of the capital Manila, meanwhile, launched an “OP-OD” (operation paint/operation paste). They put up a large portrait of Ka “Joma” in a crowded area near the public market. They also painted several revolutionary slogans, such as “Viva CPP-NPA-NDF!” and “Join the New People’s Army!” on several public walls.

In a statement, the KM-Rizal said the reactionary forces cannot stop the revolutionary youth from advancing the people’s democratic revolution. They draw their deep inspiration, they added, from the lofty examples of Ka “Joma” as a teacher, writer and patriot.

In the Netherlands, members of different NDFP allied organizations mounted an inspirational cultural tribute to Ka “Joma” in a community center in Utrecht, where Ka “Joma” lived with his comrade-wife Ka Julie since 1987.

Carrying the CPP’s call for rectification and resurgence, the cultural tribute tackled through various performances the topics of basic revolutionary attitude, mass line, organizing work, and revolutionary sacrifice. Short video-interviews of Ka “Joma”, on his reflections about the revolutionary movement and the practical day-to-day application of revolutionary theories, were shown. Comrades shared their reflections on Ka “Joma”, particularly his affection for Filipino migrants.

Friends, allies and admirers alike sent their moving birthday greetings to Ka “Joma” via Facebook and several other social media. “Your (Joma’s) life and inspiration will always remain alive among all patriotic Filipinos”, the messages said. 