Aquino vows total land reform by 2014

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President Benigno Aquino 3rd and some members of his Cabinet discuss agrarian reform with farmers in Malacañang. MALACAÑANG PHOTO MALACAÑANG on Thursday ordered the full implementation of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) in two years by distributing all agricultural lands to qualified beneficiaries ‘between now and June 2014.”

Presidential spokesman Edwin Lacierda made the announcement following a meeting between President Benigno Aquino 3rd and farmer-members of Task Force Mapalad who called on the former to hasten the distribution of CARP-covered lands to them.

Lacierda said landholdings with 25 hectares and above will be prioritized and distributed effective immediately. “Between now and June 2014, all agricultural lands shall be covered and distributed to qualified beneficiaries. Priority shall be given to landholdings 25 hectares and above and notices of coverage would be issued on or before December 2012,” he said.

“This will include peaceful and orderly installation of farmer beneficiaries of all lands under the program. To put all landholdings under the program, notices of coverage or NOCs of lands 10 hectares and above shall be issued on or before December 2012 for landholdings under 10 hectares, notices of coverage shall be issued not later than July 2013; and Republic Act (RA) 9700 has allocated at least 150-billion for the program which would be utilized to successfully complete the implementation of agrarian reform,” Lacierda added.

Joining Mr. Aquino and Lacierda during the meeting were Budget Secretary Florencio “Butch” Abad, Agriculture Secretary Proceso Alcala, Agrarian Reform Secretary Virgilio de los Reyes and Presidential Management Staff chief Julia Abad.

Also present were former Senator Aquilino Pimentel, Jr., Christian Monsod, and lawyer Armando Jarilla of Task Force Mapalad, the national coordinator; Alberto Jaime, Task Force Mapalad president; and Edna Sobrecaray, Task Force Mapalad spokesman.

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Lacierda said that with respect to support services, as mandated by Section 37 of RA 9700, the provision on initial capitalization for new agrarian reform beneficiaries and socialized credit for existing agrarian reform beneficiaries shall be implemented.

To this end, the DBM has committed the immediate release of P1 billion to be allocated for support services. He added that the Land Bank of the Philippines shall review its policies, rules, and regulations on providing credit to farmers to make it more accessible to agrarian reform beneficiaries.

Moreover, the DAR and the Department of Agriculture, with assistance from DBM, will develop a socialized credit program solely for agrarian reform beneficiaries that is mutually acceptable to both parties. Socialized credit program shall enable farmers to maximize the productivity of their land and utilize the resources available to them. Both sides have agreed to set up the multi-stakeholders mechanism.

A multi-stakeholders mechanism convened by the President and composed of representatives from DAR and other CARP-implementing agencies of the government, church, NGOs, peoples’ organizations, and other farmer groups and federations shall be immediately established to monitor the implementation of the CARP, especially on the following: coverage and distribution of agricultural lands; movement and performance of DAR personnel; delivery of support services to the beneficiaries; and budget allocation and utilization.

Lacierda said that the details will be further discussed by the members of that stakeholders’ mechanism, while consultations on administrative orders will continue. Meanwhile, the resolution of pending cases on stock distribution options and lease back arrangements before the Presidential Agrarian Reform Council or PARC will be fasttracked.

During a previous meeting between Interior and Local Government Secretary Jesse Robredo and the farmers, the government committed to do the following tasks: work on the lease areas where there are enforcement issues; review the tasking of PNP and refer to the Department of Justice the proposed changes in 2009 guidelines as it applies to DAR orders; establish PNP outposts in critical areas where installed farmers are being harassed; and establish direct line of communication with the DILG.

Dismal

Earlier, Church leaders decried the government’s dismal performance in agrarian reform, saying that the Aquino administration has the worst record compared to other post-EDSA administrations.

Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo lamented that the DAR has been consistently “underperforming,” particularly in land acquisition and distribution.

“The current DAR administration has recorded the lowest CARP accomplishment when compared to all DAR-CARP administrations,” Pabillo said in an open letter to President Benigno Aquino 3rd. The letter was also signed by Fr. Marlon Lacal, executive secretary of the Association of the Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines.

They cited the huge backlog of 1,093,000 hectares of agricultural lands. Pabillo said that in 2011, DAR accomplished only 54.6 percent of its land acquisition and distribution target.

“The DAR performance for the first six months of 2012 is expected to be equally dismal,” the bishop said.

Conspiracy
Meanwhile, the militant peasant group Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) also described on Thursday the rumored resignation of de los Reyes as a “collateral damage” of the “evil conspiracy between President Aquino and his allies in Akbayan to once again evade the distribution of Hacienda Luisita.”

The KMP issued the statement after reports said that a cabinet revamp is on and that the DAR chief, who is now implementing the Supreme Court ruling to distribute Hacienda Luisita, would be replaced by Akbayan Rep. Kaka Bagao.

“We believe there is strong pressure on Secretary De Los Reyes to resign. He is a collateral damage of the Aquino-Akbayan conspiracy to circumvent the Supreme Court decision on Hacienda Luisita,” KMP deputy secretary general Willy Marbella said.

According to Marbella, Aquino and Akbayan are ganging up against Hacienda Luisita farmers. They are out to turn Hacienda Luisita into a so-called agrarian reform community (ARC) under the sham CARP.

“ARC only has a hairline difference from the notorious stock distribution option (SDO) since control over the land does not belong to farmer beneficiaries,” he pointed out.

Marbella pointed out that “the grand zarzuela staged by Aquino’s yellow gang that demanded for the so-called fast-tracked implementation of the bogus CARP is obviously designed at placing Akbayan Rep. Kaka Bag-ao to the DAR.”

“At the same time, the Cojuangco-Aquinos are clapping behind the farmers’ marches and so-called hunger strikes. Aquino and his rabid allies in Akbayan exploits the legitimacy of the farmers’ demand for land while giving false hopes on Carper or the very same sham land reform program that was used by the President’s family to evade land distribution. This grand deception must be exposed and opposed,” Marbella stressed.

“May we remind the people that the bogus CARP was originally designed by the then landlord-President Cory Aquino to evade Hacienda Luisita’s distribution. CARP and the notorious SDO is not a glowing legacy but the biggest embarrassment of the former President,” Marbella pointed out.

With a report from Sammy Martin