

Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO) e-News June 2008

In this issue of the CODE-NGO e-News, we bring you:

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Only 4% of Congresspersons and Senators Open Up on their PDAF/CA Projects

Only 9 congresspersons and 1 senator have responded positively to the request of PDAF Watch/CODE-NGO for information about their Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) and Congressional Allocations (CA), including their guidelines for selecting/prioritizing projects to be funded by their PDAF/CA and a list of their PDAF/CA projects since the 14th Congress started on July 1, 2007. This number represents only 4% of the total members of both the House of Representatives (240) and the Senate (24). Party List congresspersons are apparently not much different on this score from other legislators as only 1 of them gave the requested information.

Letter-requests were sent to the congresspersons and senators in October 2007 and again in April 2008. The few who provided information were Cong. Rozzano Rufino B. Biazon (Muntinlupa City), Cong. Victor E. Agbayani (Pangasinan, 2nd District), Cong. <Name> Representative <ProvinceDistrict>, Cong. Emmanuel Joel J. Villanueva (Party List: CIBAC), Cong. Roilo Golez (Paranaque City, 2nd District), Cong. Elpidio F. Barzaga, Jr. (Cavite, 2nd District) and Cong. Rosendo S. Labadlabad (Zamboange del Norte, 2nd District). On the other hand, Cong. Eduardo Nonato N. Joson (Nueva Ecija, 1st District) and Cong. Benhur L. Salimbangon (Cebu City, 4th District) promised to give the information soon. Finally, a staff of Sen. Aquilino Pimentel, Jr. wrote to inform CODE-NGO that the senator's PDAF and CA funds for 2006 and 2007 have not yet been released.

New Executive Order 720 reconfirms PCNC as government's partner in accrediting donee institutions

New Executive Order 720 was signed by GMA, re-confirming the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC) as government's partner in accrediting NGOs as donee institutions for which charitable donations are tax-deductible. The new E.O. 720 supersedes the controversial E.O. 671, which earlier divested PCNC of its function of evaluating and endorsing to the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) the certification of qualified NGOs for donee institution status.

A new provision of the E.O., in addition to the current practices of PCNC in accrediting donee institutions, is the representation of the DSWD in the PCNC Board, as well as of other relevant government agencies, such as CHED, DOST, etc., depending on the

subject matter of Board deliberations, e.g. if the applicant NGO being evaluated falls under the regulatory supervision of the government agency concerned. It was not clear for many NGOs, however, whether or not all applicant organizations should first register with DSWD before PCNC can process their application for certification. In the recent PCNC General Assembly last June 30, the certified NGOs urged PCNC then to actively engage BIR as it prepares the implementing rules and regulations for this E.O. so as to clarify this concern. The E.O. also has a transitory provision clarifying that those already certified and registered with the BIR retain their donee institution status until the expiry date as indicated in their BIR certificate of registration.

Credibility problem to hound lawmakers in proposed Con-ass – UP professor

With legislators suffering from a credibility problem, a Constituent assembly (Con-ass) of members of Congress may again experience difficulties getting public support, said UP Law Professor Ibarra Gutierrez. In contrast, Atty. Gutierrez noted that a Constitutional convention would be a far more credible body.

Speaking in the same forum, Akbayan party-list chairman Joel Rocamora proposed that the delegates of Con-con be elected at the same time as the presidential candidates of the 2010 elections. This, according to him, would minimize expenses on the part of the government. It is also seen as the only participatory and democratic means to a Constitutional reform process that would pave the way for a federal system of government.

The failure of Congress to pass quality reform measures to improve the lives of the poor is enough reason why the citizenry should not entrust Charter change and the federalism proposal to politicians, said Raul Socrates Banzuela, national coordinator of the Coalition for a Citizens' Constitution (C4CC). "The repercussions will be more serious and far-reaching if the Constitutional reform process paving the way for a federal system is left to a Con-ass (Constituent assembly) composed of congressional members with dismal records in asset reform," he added. He further noted that the loopholes created by a landlord-dominated Congress in the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law already made it difficult for numerous farmer-beneficiaries to actually possess the lands that they have tilled.

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