

FEATURE STORY

INDIGENOUS LADY JOINS KILOS MAGNINIYOG MARCH TO RECOVER COCO LEVY FUND

NOVEMBER 3, 2014 | ADMIN | 2 COMMENTS

EXCLUSIVE

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Jobela Santican, 21 years old indigenous member of Pala'wan tribe joins the march to recover the coco levy fund.

m Bugsuk Island, Balabac, Palawan is so resolute to complete their arduous march that will cover the 71 days journey to Malacañang Palace to demand the President to sign the executive order establishing the coconut farmers trust fund.

According to Jobela Santican, 21 years old, she joined the group of 70 marchers to amplify the cause of the 3.5 coconut farmers all over the country, who was robbed of their entitlement of PhP71 billion coconut levy fund, she told *The Philippine Examiner* in an interview last November 1 in Albay Cathedral.

Jobela, is joined by her two female cousins in the march. She just finished high school in their home town, the three of them are living witness herself to the stalking poverty in their community, like with other coconut farmers all over the country – they still remain poor, regardless of and the struggles of their family and other coconut farmers in their village in Bugsuk Island to make both ends meet after the land of her grandparents was grabbed by Jewelmer International Corporation during Martial law.

“My family lost almost 1,000 hectares including our fishing ground in Bugsok to Jewelmer International Corporation, a company owned by Eduardo Cojuangco, Jr. When the company arrived in our place, my grandparents lost their land in a dubious land swap deal” she narrated.

We do not only lost our agricultural lands to them, but they also grabbed our fishing grounds, because Cojuangco’s company was more interested with his pearl farm there, the local fisherfolks of Bugsok and the nearby Pandanan Island are no longer allowed to fish in the area after the Jewelmer managed the pearl farm, the fishermen of Bugsok were treated like thieves. All the fishing paraphernalia like bancas and fishnets are confiscated and fishermen are being arrested including children, she lamented.

Supreme Court Decision

In 2004, the Supreme Court upheld a ruling by the Sandiganbayan declaring that 7.2 percent of shares of United Coconut Planters Bank [UCPB] transferred to businessman Eduardo Cojuangco Jr were owned by the government.

The high court reiterated its January 2012 ruling that the Sandiganbayan had jurisdiction over the subdivided amended complaints that included Cojuangco’s



The 71 marchers reach Guinobatan, Albay demanding the government, that the principal amount of Php71 billion coconut levy fund remains deposited in the bank.

After two years, the federation of coconut farmers is demanding President Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III to issue an executive order creating a trust fund for the coconut farmers.

The 71 marchers are demanding the government, that the principal amount of the coconut levy fund remains deposited in the bank while the interest of Php 71 billion be used in the development of coconut industry via research and other programs to develop the livelihood of 3.5 million coconut farmers who are still living within the poverty line.

Pearl Farm in Bugsok Island

Bugsok Island is an island village of Balabac, Palawan and the home to some uncommon indigenous fauna and flora, among them is the nocturnal Philippine mouse deer or lo-



Google Map of Bugsuk Island, Balabac, Palawan, Philippines.

cally known as *Pilandok*. In 1974, Eduardo Cojuangco, Jr set his eyes on this island – not because of a coconut nursery, but pearl. So coveted with the treasure, he used his influence as a Marcos crony, he used the mighty government military in his favor.

Some 500 families in Bugsuk Island and its neighboring Pandanan Island were forced to leave their lands and farms, under an unjust land swap agreement. Residents were made to sign on a blank piece of paper.

These families belonged mainly to the Pala'wan and Molbog tribes including some long-time Christian settlers.

In 1970, the track of land within Bugsuk Island was converted into a hybrid coconut farm, a coconut nursery designated to produce a high yielding variety using the Coco Levy Funds [CLF] to prepare the future of the Philippine coconut industry by using new technology. this program was imposed by Marcos regime together with his cronies to earn money using the Philippine Coconut Authority as the buyer of the hybrid coconut variety.

But the project was abandoned by the government, however, the land was not returned to the former owners and it was converted into other use. The beachfront was converted to the business of Eduardo Cojuangco, Jr who ventured into pearl farming – and the fishing ground of Bugsuk was virtually an exclusive pearl farm of Jewelmer International Corporation.

Eduardo Cojuangco, Jr partnered with a Frenchman, Jacques Branellec and put up the Jewelmer International Corporation who set up the pearl farm between Bugsuk and Pandanan Islands. The pearl farm became one of the foremost pearl producers in the world. Since then, an entry in the islands is strictly restricted as it is heavily guarded.

Human Rights Violation

The indigenous *Pala'wan* tribe in Sibanga,, Bugsuk Island are in constant fear due to the security personnel of Jewelmer International Corporation manning the pearl farm have prohibited the community from fishing between Bugsuk and Pandanan Island when the operation started in 1981.

The welfare of the indigenous *Pala'wan* tribe to cultivate their own agricultural lands was put in great compromise because of a dubious land swap deal. The coconut nursery which was put up in Bugsuk Island was just a disguise of development and was used by Conjuangco as an entry point to put up the pearl farm.

Fishermen were forbidden to fish because they will disturb the pearl-bearing oysters, a Tribal Leader of *Pala 'wan and Molbog* tribe were denied access to their traditional fishing ground. Children are being detained by the security guards of Jewelmer Corporation when caught fishing in the area.

The case of human rights violation and their uncertain plight was taken up by Renato Santican, 46 years old, a Tribal Leader of *Pala'wan tribe* during a consultation with Rodolfo Stavenhagen, U.N. Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People.

The case is now pending in Congress.

2 THOUGHTS ON “INDIGENOUS LADY JOINS KILOS MAGNINIYOG MARCH TO RECOVER COCO LEVY FUND”



Velvet

MARCH 31, 2016 AT 8:00 PM

Four score and seven minutes ago, I read a sweet article. Lol thanks



★ admin

APRIL 29, 2016 AT 7:50 AM

Thanks for reading the article.