RESOLUTION

URGING THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES THROUGH THE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS TO CONDEMN AND INVESTIGATE, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, THE DEATH OF PEASANT LEADER JOSEPH CANLAS IN CENTRAL LUZON

WHEREAS, on March 30, 2021, elements of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) conducted an operation that led to the arrest of peasant leader Joseph Canlas;

WHEREAS, at around 6:40 AM on March 30, 2020, joint operatives of PNP and CIDG-Pampanga raided the office of peasant organization Alyansa ng mga Magbubukid ng Gitnang Luzon (AMGL) in Sapang Maisac, Mexico, Pampanga. Following the raid, police arrested peasant leader Joseph Canlas who serves as the Chairperson of AMGL and Vice-chairperson of Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP). Police allegedly found a .45 caliber pistol, ammunition, and a grenade in his house. KMP strongly believes that these weapons were planted to justify the arrest of Canlas;

WHEREAS, on April 1, 2021, according to Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, Canlas was transferred and put under quarantine to CIDG Region 3. While under quarantine, he was not allowed to receive visitors even from family members and counsel. After 14 days, Canlas was transferred to the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) Detention Center in Angeles City after an x-ray examination. He was listed to be put under quarantine as BJMP’s facility was full. On April 22, 2021, he was put in BJMP’s quarantine facility, along with 100 more detainees;

WHEREAS, on May 7, Canlas exhibited physical weakness, needing help in eating and walking. In a call with relatives, Canlas exhibited stuttering in speech and by night time he had difficulties in breathing. It was only on May 8 in the evening when Canlas was rushed to the hospital in Angeles City due to a possible stroke and low oxygen level. Early morning the next day on May 9, he was transferred to the Intensive Care Unit due to acute respiratory failure. Canlas also tested positive for Covid-19. On May 10, he slipped into a coma and was intubated and connected to a mechanical ventilator. Before his arrest, Canlas had comorbidities such as hypertension and diabetes. Peasant organization KMP believes that Canlas was likely infected with the Covid-19 virus while in jail and under the custody of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP).
WHEREAS, on May 11, peasant leader and land defender Joseph Canlas passed away due to the complications brought about by COVID-19 which he acquired because of unjust and prolonged detention;

WHEREAS, the Philippines has one of the most congested jails in the world with a congestion rate of 534 percent according to the BJMP. Poor jail conditions put detainees at great risk of contracting different illnesses. The congestion especially makes them highly vulnerable to the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The Department of Justice (DOJ) has previously implemented measures to reduce congestion and prevent the spread of the virus in detention facilities, such as the proposal to release 10,000 inmates;

WHEREAS, before his arrest, Joseph Canlas was repeatedly red-tagged and vilified by the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). Along with other activists he was named in posters and tarpaulins falsely tagging them as recruiters of the New People’s Army;

WHEREAS, the NTF-ELCAC, created through Executive Order 70 by the Duterte administration, has been condemned by rights groups and by the people for its vilification and red-tagging campaigns against activists, critics, and even celebrities who were merely airing out their political opinions. The extremely well-funded task force has also been called out for spreading fake quote cards online and false allegations against media outlets. Various complaints have already been filed against the Executives of the NTF-ELCAC. Red-tagging often lays the ground for further human rights violations such as illegal detention and extrajudicial killings against activists and critics;

WHEREAS, as Chairperson of AMGL, Joseph Canlas led campaigns to improve the situation of agricultural workers in Central Luzon. He was also active in campaigns against mining in Zambales. In Pampanga, he was active in the resistance against the Clark Green City project, the Airforce Military Complex, and the geothermal power plant project of the Aboitiz Power Plant Corporation that threatened to displace farmers and Aetas from their land and destroy the remaining forests in Tarlac. He was also active in the campaign for the access of indigenous people in the Pantabangan and Casecnan Watershed in Nueva Ecija. He also worked to protect the coasts of Manila Bay in Bulacan, Pampanga, Bataan, and Zambales against land reclamation projects;

WHEREAS, the arrest of Joseph Canlas by the police based questionable warrants, his unjust detention in congested facilities, lack of testing, and the delayed medical attention from BJMP authorities despite his complaints of symptoms and his pre-existing comorbidities, all contributed to his untimely passing. Under the Duterte administration, at least 400 political prisoners jailed on trumped-up charges face the same prison conditions amid the pandemic;

WHEREAS, it is imperative for members of Congress, as representatives of our people, to defend the rights of our people and check on excesses and violations, especially in this time of crisis. It must bring perpetrators to account to put a stop to the killings and rights violations against its people. Laws and rules should serve the interest of our people, and should not be weaponized to suppress their rights and oppress them;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, that the House of Representatives, through the Committee on Human Rights, issue condemnation and
conduct an investigation, in aid of legislation, on the death in Central Luzon of the peasant leader and land defender Joseph Canlas.

Adopted,

REP. EUTEMIA C. CULLAMAT
Bayan Muna Partylist

REP. CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE
Bayan Muna Partylist

REP. ARLENE D. BROSAS
GABRIELA Women’s Party

REP. SARAH JANE I. ELAGO
Kabataan Partylist