

# THE KMU



# CORRESPONDENCE

The Official International Newsletter of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (May First Movement)

MAY 2026



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# Blood in the Cane Fields: The Toboso Massacre and the State's War on Negros Organizers

Errol Wendel arrived in Negros with a notebook.

A researcher for the Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura, he had come to document the tiempo muerto - the dead season, when the sugarcane harvest ends and hunger moves into the homes of farmworkers across the island. He was counting empty plates, not carrying weapons.

On April 19, 2026, soldiers shot him dead in Barangay Salamanca, Toboso.

Wendel was one of nineteen people killed when the Armed Forces of the Philippines opened fire in what the military swiftly described as an armed encounter. But the faces of the dead told a different story.

Among the victims were 8 other civilians: Roel Sabillo, youth farmer; R.J. Nichole Ledesma, community journalist; Alyssa Alano, student leader; Maureen Keil Santuyo, land reform advocate; two minors: Jemina Gumadlas and Dexter Patajo; and two Americans: Lyle Prijoles and Kai Sorem, who had come to document human rights conditions on the island. Their only "weapons" were notebooks and cameras.

## An Island Built on Inequality

To understand Toboso, you have to understand Negros.

The island remains one of the most unequal in the Philippines, its landscape carved into haciendas where a handful of sugar barons control land that generations of farmers have tilled without ever owning. Eighty-two percent of rural households remain landless. Organizers have long called it the last bastion of feudalism - a place where asking for fair wages can make you an enemy of the state.

It is in this context that activists, unionists,

and researchers are routinely red-tagged - publicly labeled as communist sympathizers - a designation human rights groups say functions, in practice, as a death warrant.

## 'One Sister Dead, One in Chains'

Three days after the massacre, the repression continued.

On April 22, an unmarked vehicle intercepted a van in Talisay City. Among those inside was Julie Ann Balora, a National Federation of Sugar Workers organizer and UMA national council member. She and her companions were ordered to kneel on the road. Operatives, she later reported, planted firearms and grenades in their vehicle before placing them under arrest on fabricated charges.

What made her detention particularly cruel: Balora's sister, Genevieve, had been among those killed in Toboso just seventy-two hours earlier.

## A World That Must Not Look Away

On Labor Day, thousands marched demanding justice for the Negros 19. Their demands: accountability for the killings, the immediate release of Julie Ann Balora, and the abolition of the NTF-ELCAC - the government task force critics say has institutionalized red-tagging.

The Kilusang Mayo Uno has taken those demands beyond Philippine shores, calling on international labor federations, human rights bodies, and foreign governments to investigate and condemn the systematic targeting of organizers on the island.

The killing of a researcher and the arrest of another for documenting poverty is not a local matter. It is an assault on the rights of workers everywhere - and the world must not look away. The cane fields of Negros are waiting for the world to respond.



# BY THE NUMBERS: Attacks on the Freedom of Association in the Philippines

**EJK**

**4 cases**  
**4 victims**

**ABDUCTION**

**1 case, 1 victim**

**ILLEGAL ARREST/  
DETENTION**

**7 cases, 9 victim**

**TRUMPED-UP  
CHARGES**

**7 cases**  
**9 victims**

**RED-TAGGING  
THREATS,  
HARASSMENT,**

**INTIMIDATION  
SURVEILLANCE  
INTERROGATION**

**69 cases,**  
**approx.**  
**11,280 victims**

**UNFAIR  
LABOUR  
PRACTICES**

**21 cases,**  
**1,609 victims**

**UNION  
BUSTING**

**6 cases,**  
**approx.**  
**867 victims**

**CONSTRUCTIVE DISMISSAL  
ILLEGAL DISMISSAL  
ILLEGAL TERMINATION**

**UNIONIZED  
11 cases,  
377 victims**

**NON-UNIONIZED  
9 cases,  
58 victims**

**POLITICAL PRISONERS  
CURRENTLY IN JAIL**

**20**

**RELEASED WITH  
PENDING CHARGES**

**22**



Photo by Niño Jesus Orbeta | INQUIRER

# Gunfire in the Senate, Floods in the Streets: The Crisis of Bureaucrat Capitalism

Bureaucrat capitalism is the system in which the government operates as one big enterprise of the wealthy elite - landlords and big compradors serving as agents, clients, and benefactors of US imperialism, using state power not to serve the people, but to plunder them. Three cases in the Philippines today lay this bare.

The first involves Sen. Ronald “Bato” dela Rosa, the PNP chief who led Duterte’s bloody drug war. The ICC warrant charges him with the crime against humanity of murder of no less than 32 persons from 2016 to 2018. After months in hiding, dela Rosa surfaced on May 11, 2026 not to face justice, but to cast the decisive vote in a Senate coup that installed Duterte ally Alan Peter Cayetano as Senate President. When NBI agents moved to serve the warrant that same day, he fled through the Senate halls. On May 13, gunfire erupted as police and marines closed in. By dawn, he had slipped away, shielded by fellow

criminals in the legislature.

The second involves Vice President Sara Duterte, who pocketed PHP 612.5 million in confidential government funds as vice president and education secretary. On May 11, 257 House members voted to impeach her - the first Philippine official impeached twice. Public money meant for education and governance vanished into the machinery of the Executive.

The third involves President Ferdinand Marcos Jr - the mastermind who sits at the apex of this rotten system. Under his watch, drug-related killings have continued - 841 dead since he took office in 2022, with police convicted in only four cases since 2018. More continue to fall victim to extrajudicial killings and state terrorism.

He presided over flood control budgets that ballooned 6 to 8 times in favored

provinces, with the Department of Finance estimating up to PHP 118.5 billion lost to ghost projects - substandard, defective, or never built. Marcos is the enforcer of a system where corruption, state violence, and impunity are policy.

But the people refuse to be silent. On September 21, 2025, an estimated 100,000 marched at the Baha sa Luneta protest demanding accountability, the arrest of the corrupt, and the return of stolen funds. Protests have continued through November 2025, February 2026, and into today.

From flood-soaked streets to a Senate hall echoing with gunfire, the rot of the system is visible to all. The workers and people of the Philippines march on, not merely for accountability within the system, but for its fundamental transformation.

# Mangahas! KMU Holds Historic 13th National Congress Amid Intensifying Workers' Struggles

Mangahas! (“Dare!”) was the spirit that defined the successful 13th National Congress of Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), held from June 27–30, 2025. More than 300 workers from unions, federations, and mass organizations across Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao gathered in the first Congress convened since 2018.

Held amid a worsening economic crisis, neoliberal attacks, and continuing fascist repression under the US-Marcos Jr. regime, the Congress marked a bold assertion of the militant and democratic traditions of the Filipino working class movement.

Despite years of pandemic lockdowns, union busting, red-tagging, political repression, and attacks on labor rights, KMU reaffirmed its role as the militant center of the labor movement and an important force within the broader national-democratic movement of the Filipino people.

In his report, outgoing National Chairperson Elmer Labog highlighted both the internal efforts to strengthen the organization and the external challenges work-

ers continue to face. Delegates affirmed the continuing struggle for a living wage, the reinstatement of a national minimum wage, regular jobs, the right to unionize, and the fight against contractualization as central tasks of the labor movement today.

In a historic move during Pride Month, the Congress amended the KMU Constitution to formally uphold the rights and welfare of LGBTQI+ workers and oppose discrimination based on SOGIESC. The Congress also elected its first-ever Secretary General from the LGBTQI+ community, marking an important step in strengthening inclusivity and representation within the labor movement.

The Congress adopted a 3-Year Program of Action focused on arousing, organizing, and mobilizing workers and the people. It emphasized intensifying campaigns for economic relief, strengthening solidarity between workers and other oppressed sectors, and advancing the leading role of the working class in the national-democratic struggle.

Key resolutions included broadening

the wage campaign through alliances with farm workers and other sectors, addressing job insecurity and the effects of automation and digitalization, defending human rights, campaigning for the release of political prisoners, and exposing state-sponsored fake workers' groups.

The Congress elected a new national leadership for 2025–2028: Jerome Adonis as National Chairperson, Florentino Viuya as National Vice Chairperson, and Mary Ann Castillo as Secretary General. Delegates also honored Elmer “Ka Bong” Labog as Chairperson Emeritus in recognition of his decades of leadership and contributions to organizing, campaigning, and international solidarity work.

The Congress featured solidarity messages from local and international allies, including labor and peasant leaders, international trade union representatives, and progressive organizations. Following the Congress, delegates marched in support of the proposed P1,200 Living Wage Bill and condemned the anti-people and fascist policies of the US-Marcos Jr. regime.



# Mayo Uno 2026: Celebrating the International Workers' Day

Amid a deepening crisis worsened by war and economic instability, workers and communities across the Philippines marked May Day 2026 with large-scale mobilizations nationwide. The day reflected both a celebration of collective strength and a renewed urgency for structural change.

Across the country, workers advanced unified demands for a living wage, lower prices of fuel and basic commodities, and expanded government subsidies. Alongside these demands, they raised urgent calls for an end to war, freedom from US military intervention, and genuine social transformation.

In Metro Manila, at least 30,000 workers and supporters under the National Wage Coalition marched along España Boulevard toward Recto Avenue. The convergence of major labor formations reflected mounting anger over worsening living conditions and the continued neglect of workers' welfare under the Marcos administration.

Broad alliances - including the Labor Consultative Assembly, No to OPH Coalition, All Workers Unity (AWU), and Laban Manggagawa - also joined the mobilization, underscoring growing unity across labor and other sectors.

After the program in Recto, around 10,000 participants proceeded to the US Embassy.

Led by Kilusang Mayo Uno, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, and AWU, protesters condemned US-Israeli military aggression in the Middle East and denounced the continuing dominance of US imperialist interests in Philippine political and economic affairs.

They also criticized President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. for deepening alignment with the United States, warning that such policies drag Filipinos in foreign wars.

Mayo Uno 2026 marked the culmination of a series of nationwide actions leading up to Labor Day.

It reflected the growing resistance of Filipino workers and people against inequality, repression, and systemic neglect. From encampments and barricades to strikes, workers demonstrated the ex-



Photo by Altermidya

panding power of collective action under worsening social conditions.

In the week before May 1, regional labor alliances in NCR, Region III, and Region IV-A simultaneously filed petitions before Regional Wage Boards demanding wage increases toward a PHP 1,200 family living wage.

In the Cordillera, KMU Cordillera held teach-in discussions at the University of the Philippines Baguio. On Labor Day, hundreds marched from the Baguio Convention Center to Igorot Park, joined by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Baguio.

In Central Luzon, the largest mobilization took place in Angeles City, led by Work-

# Celebration and Struggle Labor Day Across the Philippines



ers Alliance in Region 3 (WAR III-KMU). Workers in Bataan held coordinated protests through the Coalition of Labor Unions in Bataan. In Subic, Seatrium and Umicore workers launched a motorcade with hundreds of participants. In Bulacan, a forum was held in Meycauayan while marches were organized in Malolos.

In Southern Tagalog, thousands converged at Calamba Crossing under Pagkakaisa ng Manggagawa sa Timog Katagalugan (PAMANTIK-KMU). Workers in Cavite also staged protests at the gates of the Cavite Economic Zone in Rosario, highlighting continued labor struggles in export-processing zones.

In Bicol, workers marched toward the Pinaglabanan Monument in Legazpi City, led by ADLO-KMU. A regional workers' forum brought together laborers, peasants, and farmworkers in a shared discussion of urgent socio-economic issues.

In Cebu, Alyansa sa mga Mamumuo sa Sugbo (AMA Sugbo-KMU) organized preparatory actions culminating in a march along P. del Rosario Street and Colon Street in Cebu City.

In Negros, a broad coalition of transport workers, youth, church groups, women, peasants, and labor organizations gathered at the Bacolod City Public Plaza.

In Panay, the largest gathering was held in Iloilo City, where workers marched from Infante Flyover to the Provincial Capitol led by KMU Panay and United Labor Panay. Simultaneous actions were also held in Crossing Banga, Aklan, and Roxas City, Capiz.

In Eastern Visayas, youth and workers held protests in Tacloban City, Leyte.

In Davao, hundreds marched to Freedom Park led by KMU Southern Mindanao Region, marking the largest Labor Day mobilization in Mindanao.

In the CARAGA region, workers of the Cagdianao Mining Workers Union (CAMWU-NAFLU-KMU) staged a workplace protest in Dinagat Islands, raising demands for living wages, job security, and lower prices of basic goods.

Across all regions, a shared reality echoed through slogans and testimonies: deepening hunger and inequality continue to drive collective anger and resistance. This reflects a system where corporate interests and state policies systematically undermine workers' rights, livelihoods, and dignity.

The massive Labor Day protest is only a beginning. Bigger, broader, and more militant actions are expected in the coming weeks and months.

Workers and communities remain committed to advancing this struggle toward a peoples' strike to challenge the Marcos government, widely condemned as subservient to US interests, incompetent, corrupt, and fascist.



Photo by Mayday Multimedia

# Kowloon Strike Ignites New Hope for Workers in the Service and Food Industry

For six days, workers at Kowloon stood firm on the picket line, halting operations and confronting management through collective action. What began as a labor dispute inside the concessionaire and restaurant chain soon grew into a powerful assertion of workers' dignity and solidarity amid worsening economic hardship in the Philippines.

Led by the Genuine Labor Organization of Workers in Hotel, Restaurant, and Allied Industries - Kilusang Mayo Uno - Kowloon House West Chapter (GLOWHRAIN-KMU-KHWC), the strike ended with significant victories for the workers. The union secured a PHP40 wage increase over two years along with a package of benefits that includes signing bonuses, vacation and sick leave, union leave, loyalty pay, educational assistance, and mobilization

support for International Workers' Day and Bonifacio Day activities.

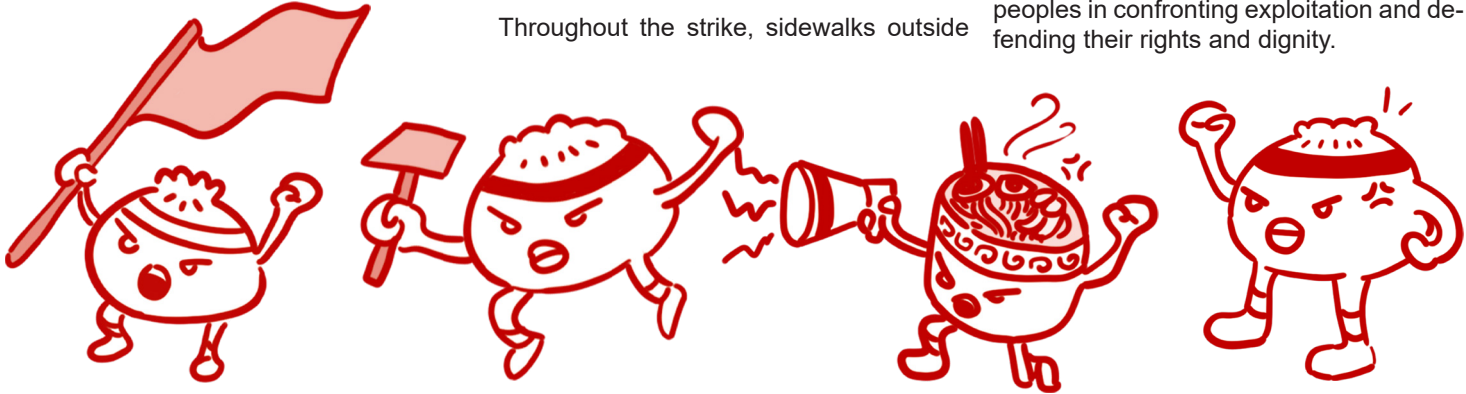
Workers also succeeded in reclaiming service charge benefits withheld by management over the past three years, which will now be distributed weekly from July to November.

The strike carried significance far beyond the workplace. It was the first strike in decades in the country's hotel, restaurant, and food service industry, and the first strike at Kowloon in eighteen years. Amid deepening economic crisis, rising prices, and intensifying global conflict, the strike became a powerful image of resistance and collective defiance. It reflected the broader struggle of ordinary people confronting exploitation, insecurity, and worsening social conditions brought about by crisis and war.

Throughout the strike, sidewalks outside

the establishment became spaces of political education and solidarity. Workers, students, church people, and supporters gathered daily to sustain the picket line, transforming the strike into a broader expression of public discontent over inequality and exploitation. The experience affirmed a central lesson of the labor movement: when workers unite and collectively withhold their labor, employers can be compelled to heed workers' demands.

For Kilusang Mayo Uno, the Kowloon victory stands as an inspiration to workers across industries who continue to struggle for living wages, humane working conditions, and respect for the right to organize and strike. More than a successful negotiation, the strike demonstrated that solidarity remains the strongest weapon of the working class and other oppressed peoples in confronting exploitation and defending their rights and dignity.



# From “Partners” to Workers: Filipino Platform Riders Fight for Labor Rights



Photo by Jerome Ascano

Across the Philippines, thousands of delivery and motorcycle taxi riders keep cities moving. From transporting food and parcels to bringing workers and commuters safely to their destinations, platform riders have become essential to Filipinos. Despite being called “partners” by app companies, riders continue to face low incomes, dangerous working conditions, arbitrary penalties, and the absence of basic labor rights.

In recent years, riders have increasingly organized to challenge this system of exploitation. One of the most significant victories came in Tacloban City, where the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC) ruled that 126 Foodpanda riders should be recognized as regular employees rather than independent contractors.

The Tacloban ruling follows earlier victories by Foodpanda riders in Davao and Cebu from 2022 to 2024, where the NLRC also recognized employer-employee relationships and ruled against illegal dismissals and unfair reductions in delivery fees. These decisions expose the contradiction of platform companies claiming riders are “self-employed” while tightly controlling their work through quotas, algorithmic mon-

itoring, penalties, and performance ratings.

These gains were achieved through collective struggle. Rider organizations and unions have carried out protests, coordinated log-outs, legal actions, and public campaigns demanding fair compensation, transparency, and humane working conditions. The recent court order reinstating 131 dismissed Ninja Van riders in January of 2026 also showed how workers can successfully resist mass dismissals and union-busting through sustained organizing and solidarity.

However, riders continue to shoulder rising fuel prices, vehicle maintenance costs, and risks from road accidents and extreme weather. A 2025 Fairwork Philippines report highlighted how gig workers remain largely unprotected during typhoons, floods, and extreme heat despite being expected to continue deliveries under dangerous conditions. Motorcycle taxi groups are also continuing their call for the passage of a motorcycle taxi law that would provide legal recognition and stronger protections for riders.

The challenge now is to strengthen and expand the movement nationwide. Riders’

unions and organizations must continue building stronger, broader, and more militant campaigns capable of confronting giant platform corporations and pushing for national policies that guarantee labor rights for all gig workers.

The victories won in Tacloban, Davao, Cebu, and other cities must be nationalized so that protections secured by a few become rights enjoyed by every rider across the Philippines. Only through sustained organizing, militant unionism, and collective struggle can platform workers secure genuine justice and lasting change.

Towards this end, Kilusang Mayo Uno, in partnership with Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, held Connect2Defend, a national consultation on platform work and labor rights this May 23 to 24. Platform workers from across the country came together to share their experiences, struggles, and demands, and to strengthen a united campaign for the protection of the rights and welfare of platform workers in the Philippines.

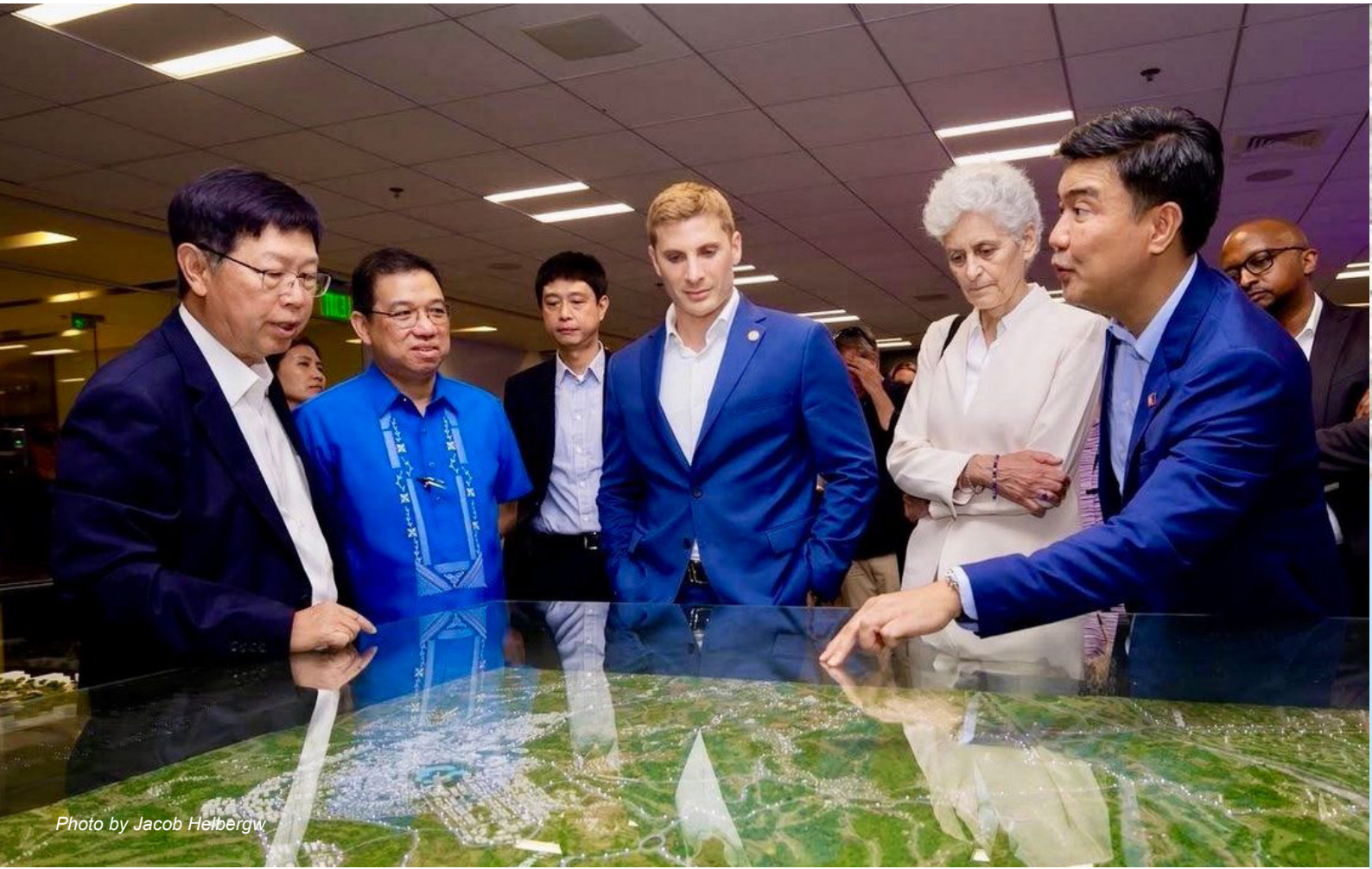


Photo by Jacob Helbergw

# Pax Silica and the Philippines: Exploitation, Plunder and War

On April 16, 2026, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed the Pax Silica Declaration, a move that formally binds the Philippines to a United States led initiative aimed at securing global supply chains for semiconductors and artificial intelligence infrastructure. While Finance Secretary Frederick Go describes this as a strategic opportunity to utilize the nation's mineral wealth and geographic position, the terms of the declaration reveal a framework built entirely around American strategic interests. In this arrangement, the Filipino people are made to play a game they will ultimately lose.

## What is Pax Silica?

Pax Silica serves as the response of the United States to its intensifying technological rivalry with China. The central objective is to consolidate American dominance over semiconductor supply chains,

AI infrastructure, and the critical minerals that underpin both. This framework integrates industrial policy with military strategy by drawing allied governments into its orbit. In the Philippines, this takes the form of the 1,620 hectare Luzon Economic Corridor intended to host semiconductor production facilities alongside the accelerated extraction of nickel, copper, cobalt, and other strategic minerals.

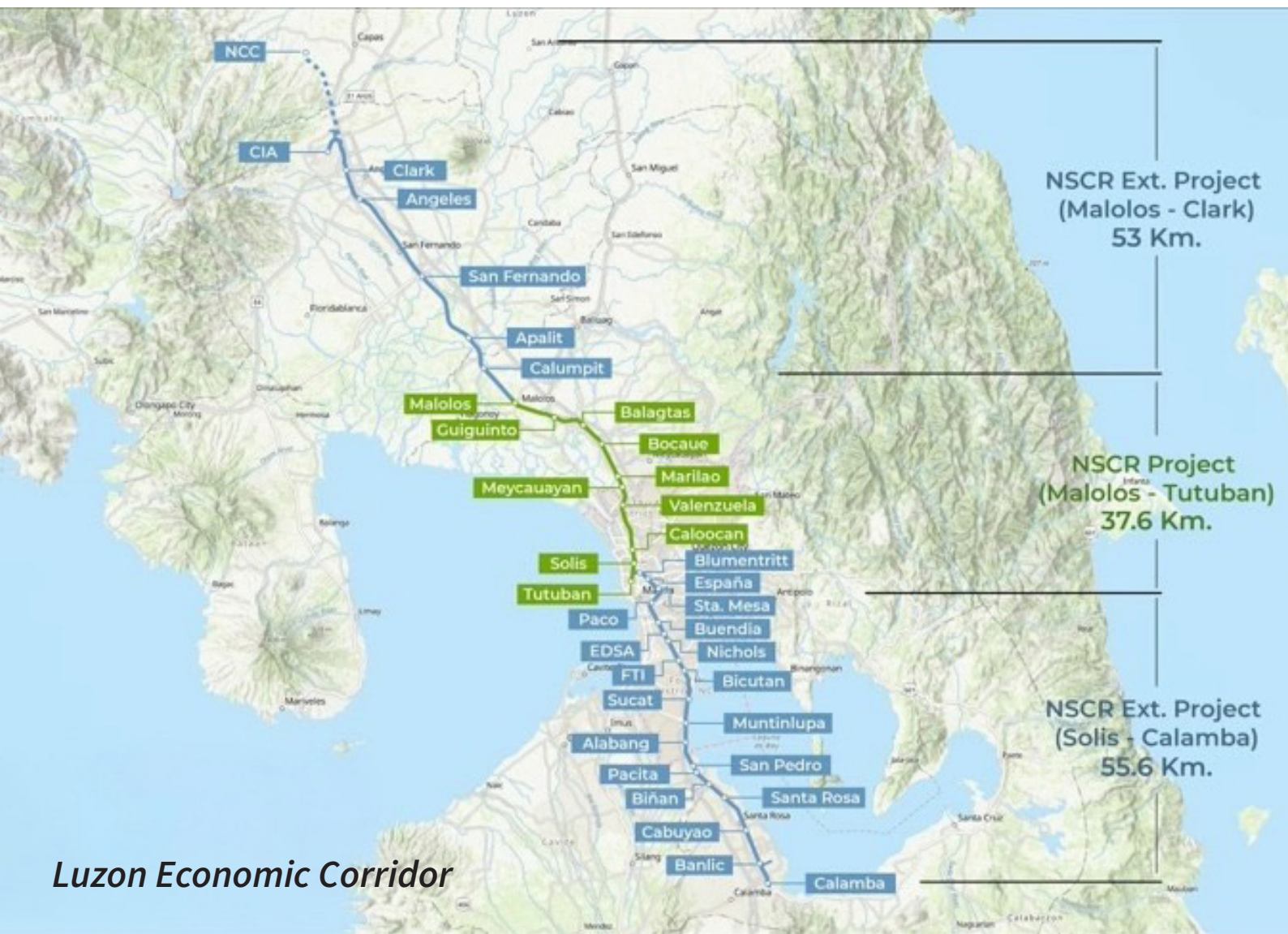
## Why the US needs the Philippines

The Philippines holds some of the largest nickel reserves in the world, along with substantial deposits of cobalt and copper. These minerals are indispensable to semiconductor manufacturing and the production of advanced military hardware. The country's position along the South China Sea places the nation squarely within the theater of the US and China rivalry. The Marcos administration has

met US interests with a series of massive policy concessions. It has cut the corporate income tax to 20 percent, making it among the lowest in Southeast Asia. It has also extended tax holidays for designated strategic investments for up to 27 years and is progressively relaxing restrictions on foreign ownership across key sectors of the economy.

## The Filipino people on the losing end

The semiconductors intended for production in the Luzon Economic Corridor are largely destined for missiles, drones, and other components of the US military supply chain, making Philippine territory part of the operational infrastructure heightening risks of unwanted involvement in the conflict. Communities living within the footprint of the corridor face displacement to make way for facilities that serve for-



## Luzon Economic Corridor

oreign defense procurement. Furthermore, the expanded mineral extraction Pax Silica demands will accelerate environmental pressures on mining-affected communities. Many of these involve indigenous peoples whose land rights remain insecure under Philippine law. These vulnerable sectors are also targets of heightened repression under the pretext of so-called counterinsurgency.

### False hopes for workers

The administration claims that technology transfer and job creation are central benefits for Filipino workers, but the declaration itself does not support these claims. Core technologies and intellectual property remain within the control of US firms by design. Filipino workers gain access only to the lower segments of the value chain, such as assembly operations, extraction work, and export oriented production with weak connections to domestic industries.

Despite decades of foreign investment in

export manufacturing zones, the Philippine manufacturing sector has fallen to a historic low of 17.3 percent of GDP. Only one in fourteen members of the labor force work in manufacturing. The majority of Filipino workers are forced into informal arrangements without security, benefits, or adequate wages. Measures to address these are nowhere to be found within Pax Silica.

### Industrialization for whom?

Countries that achieved genuine industrialization did so by building domestic productive capacity and accumulating technological capability within their own institutions through assertive state intervention. Pax Silica moves in the opposite direction — channeling public subsidies and infrastructure investment toward foreign corporations while promoting liberalization in the Philippines while the United States is pursuing aggressive industrial protectionism at home. Export enclaves are designed to serve foreign

supply chains rather than build the Philippine economy from within.

### What Filipino workers are fighting for

Filipino workers oppose Pax Silica because of its interests, declared or undeclared, that run against their aspirations for genuine agrarian reform and national industrialization as key tenets of a self-reliant economy. The Philippines possesses the mineral wealth and the workforce to pursue industrialization built on domestic linkages, real technology transfer, and living wages. To achieve this, workers must also struggle for genuine national freedom and democracy as a requisite to self-reliance.

Workers in the Philippines and across the globe must come together to resist imperialist extractionism, plunder and war-mongering. They must forge their strength and tread the path to a world where the people and their interests come first.



# The 37th International Solidarity Affair of Kilusang Mayo Uno

Amid the worsening crisis of the global capitalist system and escalating US-led wars of aggression, the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) successfully mounted the 37th International Solidarity Affair (ISA) from April 25 to May 2, 2026, across various parts of the Philippines.

Gathering workers, trade unionists, labor advocates, and activists from the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Thailand, Japan, Catalonia, the United Kingdom, and Australia, the 37th ISA marked the largest international delegation hosted by KMU since the COVID-19 pandemic. Carrying the theme, "Resolutely advance workers' struggles, defend workers' rights, and oppose imperialist plunder, fascism, aggression, and wars," the event affirmed the historic role of the working class in leading the struggle against imperialism and all forms of exploitation and oppression.

The ISA formally opened with presentations from KMU leaders Jerome Adonis, Mary Anne Castillo, and Joanne Cesario; Kowloon House West workers' union president Bernie Dimaunahan; IBON Foundation researchers Rosb Guzman and Cay Tolentino; and IBON Interna-

tional Deputy Director Rodolfo Lahoy. Discussions centered on the worsening conditions faced by Filipino workers amid neoliberal policies, state repression, and foreign domination.

The succeeding days immersed delegates directly in the lives and struggles of Filipino workers and oppressed communities. Delegates integrated with unions affiliated with KMU across different industries, exchanging experiences on workplace organizing, collective bargaining, strike campaigns, and resisting contractualization and union-busting. They also visited urban poor communities, women workers, migrant workers, and transport workers confronting housing demolitions, job insecurity, and rising oil prices.

On April 28, delegates joined activities commemorating International Workers' Memorial Day. Victims and families affected by trade union and human rights violations shared testimonies on red-tagging, illegal arrests, surveillance, and other forms of state repression targeting workers and activists. A separate gathering highlighted the occupational health and safety issues faced by Filipino workers.

The following days were devoted to integration with peasant and fisherfolk communities, where delegates witnessed firsthand the semi-feudal conditions prevailing in the countryside. Amid these activities, the ISA delegation also faced threats, surveillance, and intimidation from state forces. Rather than sow fear, these incidents further strengthened the delegates' collective resolve to resist fascism and repression.

On May 1, International Labor Day and the 46th founding anniversary of KMU, delegates marched alongside thousands of Filipino workers in militant demonstrations demanding jobs, livelihood, a family living wage, and an end to imperialist wars.

The 37th ISA culminated in the adoption of resolutions strengthening international solidarity and advancing militant, genuine, and anti-imperialist trade unionism amid intensifying fascist attacks, neoliberal exploitation, and the erosion of democratic and labor rights worldwide.

The Philippine Labor Movement is steadfast in upholding our right to freedom of association. Amid state-sponsored attacks, we campaign to educate and we engage with different avenues to highlight our situation and garner victories. However, doing such requires finances and resources.

In this light, we request support from our brothers and sisters from the international community to make our campaigns successful. You may donate to our legal defense and campaign fund through the following channels:

#### **EASTWEST BANK**

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