



**CASER:**  
**Socio-Economic**  
**Reform for Peace**

A primer on the proposed Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms, CASER) between the Government of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP)

When President Rodrigo Duterte took office, the peace talks reopened between the Government of the Philippines (GRP) and the national revolutionary movement represented by the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in the negotiations. The objective of the peace talks is to achieve a just and lasting peace by resolving the roots of the armed conflict.

There are **four substantive agenda** in the peace talks:

- 1) respect for human rights and the international humanitarian law;*
- 2) socio-economic reforms;*
- 3) political and constitutional reforms; and*
- 4) cessation of hostilities and disposition of forces.*

Each agenda has a corresponding agreement. In 1999, this agreement was signed -- the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL).

In this primer, we will focused on the proposed agreement of the second substantive agenda: the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (CASER).

## **1. What is CASER?**

It is a joint agreement in the process of being formed between the GRP and the NDFP relating to social and economic reforms. This agreement is considered the “meat” of the peace talks as it will contain the concrete steps needed to solve the problems of poverty, social backwardness, and lack of social justice that are the root of the armed conflict.

Even before the close of the second round of peace talks on October 2016, the two sides were able to unite on an outline for CASER. The contents of this was the scope and framework for CASER that will be completed during the third round of the peace talks.

Each side has their respective proposals that they will strive to unite on within one joint agreement. Once the joint agreement is signed, the CASER is to be implemented by both sides within the scope of their respective power and authority.

## **2. What is the scope of CASER?**

Socio-economic policies are what determine the ways in which the wealth and resources of a given country will be used for the benefit of all, if not the vast majority. Among these socio-economic policies are those pertaining to land ownership, wages, profit, prices of goods, tax system, investment regulations, trade, loans, and the development of multiple sectors of the economy (agriculture, industry, service). Also included in these are the policies concerning basic rights to health, education, water, electricity, transportation, communication, culture, etc.

Therefore, these are the policies that directly relate to the everyday welfare of the people.

For a long time, the socio-economic policies that the GRP has implemented are only favorable to the big monopoly foreign capitalists and a few wealthy, powerful families (oligarchy), which is caused by the intense and widespread poverty, exploitation and oppression, especially to the working masses. Through the CASER, the changes in this anti-people system will be pushed.

## **3. How will the current socio-economic policies of the government look like?**

In the past three and a half decades, the neoliberal economic doctrine has lead the formation of the socio-economic policies of the GRP.

Under neoliberalism, private capitalists are given full advantage, especially the foreign monopoly capitalists, to plunder the country's economy while the government and the people are removed from any power to stop this.

Included in these neoliberal policies are the opening of our economy to the indiscriminate outpour of foreign products and capital (liberalization), the decrease of budget for service workers and privatization of the public ownership and service (privatization), the deregulation the operation of private businesses and their accumulation of profit (deregulation), the

continuous dissolution of the local production and economy and the domination of foreign capital (denationalization) and the heavy burden of debt in taxing the broad masses (regressive taxation).

Under the guise of “globalization,” these policies are dictated by foreign imperialists, lead by the United States and the international agencies that dominate such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), so that the Philippines can continue to be a source of cheap raw materials, cheap labor reserve, and remain a market to surplus products of big capitalists and developed capitalist countries.

They partner with big local businesses, big landlords and bureaucrat capitalists (corrupt officials from the government) in this systematic plunder of our economy, natural resources and labor.

While the foreign corporations and ruling classes rake in huge profits, the people are trapped in poverty and are denied basic democratic rights--this applies to the workers, peasants, fisherfolk, indigenous communities, national minorities, ordinary employees and professionals, and the small business people. Jobs and livelihoods are incredibly scarce, the price of goods and services are exorbitant, the government is corrupt and cannot be relied upon. Because of this, millions of our compatriots are forced to go overseas for work in order to ensure their family's survival.

If these socio-economic trades and policies do not change, the country will not progress, remain unequal and we will not have justice and long lasting peace.

Discord and armed struggle will continue in our society, primarily by the armed revolution that is led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), New People's Army (NPA) as represented by the NDFP.



#### **4. How will CASER change these harmful policies and regulations?**

CASER will only be effective if it will change the current neoliberal policies and programs of the government. In this matter, the NDFP's proposal of CASER is appropriate because its objective is to turn away from these neoliberal policies by the GRP and implement the projects and programs that will improve the conditions of the mass base and the broad masses.

## **5. What is discussed in CASER in terms of the national economy?**

There are three major programs of CASER in regards to improving the national economy:

### **A. Agrarian reform and rural development**



The national economy's progress is key in ending the monopoly of land perpetrated by big landlords, uplifting the livelihood of small farmers and fishers, and the progress of agriculture and fishing.

In the proposal of NDFP's CASER, agricultural land will be distributed to landless farmers that would like to till the land. Land that is claimed by foreign corporations and despotic landlords will be confiscated.

Big plantations and corporate farms will be owned by cooperatives or farmer associations and farmworkers.

Adequate compensation will be given to the former owners of the distributed land and they will also be allowed to farm up to five hectares in their former ownership.

Professionals, OFWs and retired employees who were able to acquire no more than 15 hectares within 10 years will be compensated more for their land.

The government will be providing free irrigation, infrastructure, facilities for production and selling, subsidy for seeds and tools, crop insurance, a small loan and technical support through the help of their cooperatives and associations to the farmers that will be receiving land. The living wage will be ensured, along with sufficient benefits and the right to unionize the farmworkers. The rights of small farmers will be recognized, including those that benefit from coco levy fund, sugar amelioration fund and tobacco excise tax.

Land use conversion, usury, and establishing private military in the lands that are included in agrarian reform will be prohibited, and massive importing of agricultural products that will harm the livelihood of farmers will also be prohibited.

Bodies of land and water for fishing are included in the agrarian reform. Fisheries, fish pen and fish cages that are up to three hectares will be reconverted into common fishing areas or will be delegated to cooperatives or associations for small fisherfolk. Big commercial operations (ships up to 10 tons or more) under 15 kilometers of municipal fishing grounds will be prohibited.

The rural industries will be nourished, including the industries of coconut, sugar, meat, milk, tobacco, abaca, fish, food processing, salt, sea-weed and many more.

## **B. National industrialization and the progress of economy**

In correspondence to agrarian reform is the establishment of Filipino industries that will be dedicated to the creation of tools for production and common tools for everyday use of the masses. In the progress of the industry sectors and manufacture, the number of skilled jobs will increase, the workers will have increased wages, science and technology will be improved, and the lives of the people will be



improved.

Under the NDFP's CASER proposal, the ownership and control of the Filipino people over its economy will be ensured so that it can guarantee that it serves the national interest and needs of the country. The foreign ownership of any businesses will be limited to 40%.

The primary factor of the economy's progress is the establishment of heavy industries and high technology. This includes the nationalization and ownership or control of the government over the strategic industries of electricity, water, mining, oil, transportation and telecommunication. This ensures that these industries will provide adequate, affordable and skilled services and products that will serve the broad number of masses and that it will result in the improvement of many sectors of the economy.

This will also ensure that key industries are under the ownership and control of Filipinos, which includes the industries of steel, chemical, machine, electronics, pharmacy, fabric and clothes, food and water, transportation, agricultural tools and machinery, and many other consumer goods. Cartels will be disbanded and big foreign company and comprador Filipino ownership will be disbanded to give way for the national industrialization program. Instead of being an instrument of plunder, these will be ran based on the needs of the people and local economy.

The strong collaboration and support of big industries with small industries and small businesses is important. They will be given a chance to own micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that will have progressed through the lowered cost of production (electricity, oil, water, telecommunication and infrastructure) if not comprehensive support of loans, technology, distribution and marketing of their products. Not to mention the removing MSMEs from the burden of the government such as corruption, bureaucratic red tape and useless regulation and unnecessary taxation.

### **C. Protection of the environment and rehabilitation and compensation for those affected**

The economy will not improve if the decades-long plunder of our natural wealth in the country and the destruction this has caused in our environment and communities will not be reversed. The land, forests, air, ocean and damaged bodies of water, pollution,

negligence and natural calamities must all recover. It is also important to protect the ones that have not been damaged yet.



The NDFP's CASER includes the end of destructive activities such as widespread deforestation, open-pit mining, reclamation and plantation. Exported logging, dumping the waste that comes from other countries, and other dangerous production and agricultural work will all be prohibited. Included in this is the prohibition of military activities by the government and foreign troops that damage the communities and the environment, as well as the entry of nuclear, biological, and chemical arms.

The CASER also emphasizes the limitations of mining. It will ensure that it is based on the needs of national industrialization and that it uses procedures that will not cause widespread destruction of the environment. It will prohibit the banning of islands, seashores, primary forests and watershed area, and agricultural lands.

It will also ensure the rehabilitation and compensation for the community and individual victims of calamities and natural disasters.

## **6. What does CASER say about the economic, social and cultural rights of the people?**

There are three major parts of the CASER in respect to the aforementioned rights:

Upholding the rights of the working masses and the exploited sector

In NDFP's CASER, the economic rights of farmers, farmworkers, fisherfolk, workers (local and OFW), semi-proletariat, employees, professionals and their families are recognized and protected.



This includes the job security and livelihood, living wage, joining organizations and unions, sufficient and quality public services, timely response to crises from the government, and freedom from high taxes and government fees.

This also guarantees the rights of a few **special sectors**:

**Women** - equal treatment in all aspects of jobs and livelihood, lessening the load of domestic work and family rearing, having reproductive health and sex education, 6 months worth of paid maternity leave and paternity leave, protection from discrimination and violence, same sex marriage, divorce and many more.



**Children** - the right to proper care through ensuring that their parents have sufficient work and livelihood.

Ensures the right to food and health, help especially for street children, and the end of exploitative child labor and physical and sexual abuse.

**Seniors** - financial support and services so that they can remain an active and productive part of society, this includes a pension system for all seniors and facilities and services for senior communities.

**People with disabilities** - competent services and training for people with disabilities so that they are productive and excel in using their abilities to its fullest; equal opportunity for jobs.

The NDFP's CASER recognizes the following ***rights of the working masses and the people***:

**Public services** - this includes the reversal of policies that corrupt public funds and privatizing public services and ensuring that these are extended to the national minorities.

**Education** - this includes free education up to college and technical-vocational lead by public schools, and uphold a national, scientific, mass-

oriented and democratic education system. End the K-12 program, ensure that the wages and trainings of the teachers and non-teaching personnel are sufficient, and respect democratic rights and expertise of the student. Ensure the educational rights of national minorities and give importance to their culture and tradition.



**Health** - uphold a free and quality health services in the overall system for all and end the policies that privatize public hospitals and services. Give priority to preventive medicine, nutrition and family planning. Ensure that there are doctors and health workers especially in the rural areas and raise their wages and benefits. Treat illegal drugs, related activities, and the effective rehabilitation of its victims as a health issue.

**Housing** - establish a comprehensive and national program on housing for the masses, especially the urban poor, workers and semi-proletariat. The poor community will not be easily demolished if there are no sufficient relocation programs on-site or in-city and adequate help for them to move houses, get housing, livelihood and services.

**Water** - Ensure that the right to sufficient and clean water and sanitation services, including the deprivatization of policies in water services.

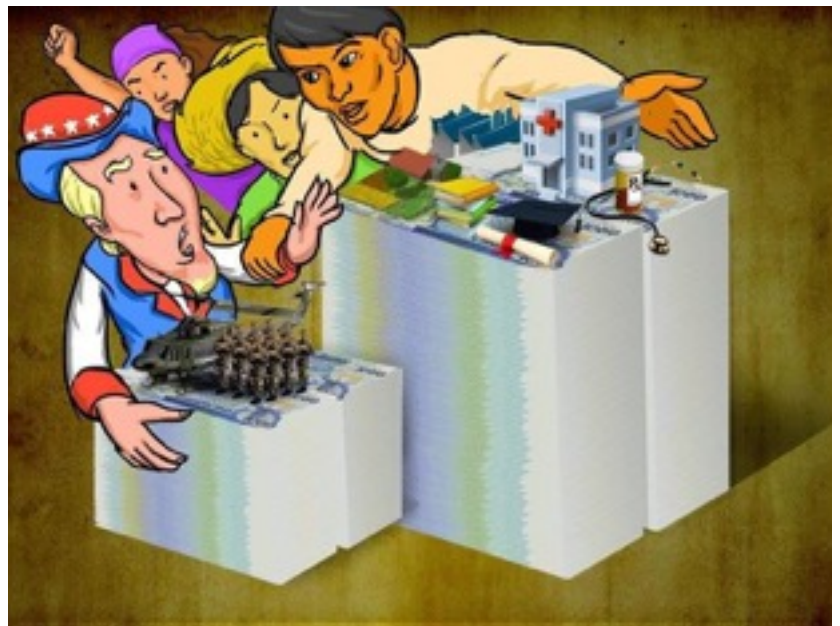
**Electricity** - Guarantee sufficient and affordable electricity through deprivatization and deregulation of the electric industry under the junking



of the Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA). Reinstating the role of the National Power Corporation as the primary caretaker of the industry from creating to distribution of electricity. Push for the use of renewable energy source in different communities and electric cooperatives.

**Mass transportation** - push for comprehensive programs for mass transportation in the entire country, including the repair of the traffic system and regulation of transportation fare. Deprivatize the LRT and MRT, tollways, pier, airports and other infrastructures.

**Communication** - treat communication as a public service and ensure the affordable and reliable communication and information services, including free internet and streaming of traditional media and social media.



**Regarding garbage and waste**

- The organized collection, separation, recycling, and disposal of waste will be under the responsibility and control

of the government. The government will also encourage and aid the different communities to establish facilities for recycling, composting, etc.

**Disaster prevention and response** - Ensure that the response to natural calamities and disasters is timely, sufficiently prepared, and fast, as well as comprehensive rehabilitation of destroyed communities. A part of this is the establishment of a civil defense system that is composed of different groups of civilians in the community.

**B. Popularizing a national, progressive, and mass-oriented culture**

In the NDFP's CASER, the backwards, colonial, elitist, and self-centered mentality is recognized and is seen as a social crisis that is worsened by neoliberalism. Related to this is the push for a comprehensive program that will uphold a liberated, patriotic, scientific and mass-oriented culture. This

includes reforms in the education system, media and communication, science and technology, literature and art, religion, recognitions, language and symbol, sports and recreation.

Among the particular proposals of the NDFP in this matter are the following:

**Patriotic, scientific and mass-oriented education** - The curriculum, books, materials and practices in the school will be changed so that it will teach history in the point of view of the Filipino people's struggle. The love for our nation, appreciation of mass-oriented culture and tradition will be emphasized and promoted. Early education on equal treatment of people regardless of their gender identity, and appreciating their community and environment will be given priority in villages/ barangays. Reading and writing programs will be implemented in each village/ barangays.



**Progressive and pro-people media** - The industry of music, film, broadcast, publishing and software will ensure that it provides reliable and credible information and that it draws critical thinking and positively moves the people. As for public information, it must be supported and funded by the government to establish "people's media organizations" so that it can freely report the true conditions, interest and aspirations of the people. It will make sure that private media networks will give time and place for programs with progressive and patriotic topics. In all of this, freedom of speech, journalism and information will be guaranteed. Censorship and the removal of the criminal aspect of libel will be prohibited, and it will ensure the legislation of laws around freedom of information in all the three branches of government.

**Patriotic, progressive and pro-people art and literature** - Sufficient funds for producing visual arts, music, literature, theater, films and other disciplines of art that include the conditions and aspirations of the people will be ensured. "Community Centers for Culture and the Arts" will be established on the

regional, city, and local levels so that it can improve cultural work for the broad masses. Develop the use of Filipino as the national language while supporting the use of the Filipino language in mass media, education and literature. Ensure the support of publishing literature and other writings in this language. Prohibit the destruction and expropriation of places and things that are meaningful in our culture.

The right and welfare of teachers, media workers, art and culture - The right to job security, living wage, and build an organization of education workers, art and culture, as well as their civil and political rights will be respected. The establishment of a national union that will mark the basis for their well-being, abilities and ethics will be guaranteed so that they can avoid abuse and corruption. The government will ensure that foreign artists will pay equity fees and other liabilities in the industry.

### **C. Recognition of ancestral land and indigenous and national minority's territory**



In NDFP's proposal of CASER, it recognizes that since the time of the Spanish until present day, the indigenous people and Bangsamoro have experienced the most discrimination, exploitation, and oppression. Their ancestral land was forcibly taken and continue to be forcibly taken from them, while their community and culture are destroyed and vandalized.

In order to correct the historic denial of justice for indigenous peoples and national minorities, they shall be guaranteed a path for them to exercise their rights to self-determination and freedom to develop economically, politically and culturally, development based on their capabilities and free from external intervention. Alongside these are the issues of territory, political autonomy, sovereignty over land and natural resources within their territories and ancestral domains, use of their own regional languages, customs and traditions, and freedom of faith/beliefs.

In particular, the National Commission on Indigenous People that does not at all represent the interests of the indigenous peoples will be dismantled. All laws, policies, projects, and agreements that violate the rights of indigenous peoples and the Bangsamoro people will be junked or amended.

Included in this is the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA), related provisions in the 1987 Constitution, unequal agreements related to mining, logging, dam building, electrical plants, and other so-called "development" projects and the anomalous Certificate of Ancestral Land Titles (CALTs), Certificate of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs), and Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development Protection Plan (ADSDPP). New laws will be passed that guarantee their rights and self-determination.

## **7. What does CASER contain concerning economic sovereignty and national development?**

Appropriate foreign trade, investment, and financial policies are key to the development of any economy. CASER has two major parts for this topic:

Patriotic and progressive relations with external economy and policies

In NDFP's CASER proposal, the external relationship of the economy will be transformed so that it supports the objectives of progressive change that were laid out in the first part of the agreement.

Neoliberal policies will be rejected, such as liberalization, privatization, deregulation and denationalization that are dictated by capitalist countries lead by the US and the international multilateral agencies such as the IMF, WB, WTO, Asian Development Bank and others. The Philippines' membership in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) will be reviewed and if needed, revoked. The one-sided free trade agreement (FTA) and bilateral investment treaty (BIT) in other countries will also be rejected. The interference and swindling of big capitalist countries through the Official Development Aid (ODA) will be ended. All of these keep the Philippines semi-colonial and semi-feudal economy that is open to plunder and foreign monopoly capitalists.

The extreme dependence of the economy to the US and Japan will be ended and the relationship of the economy to other countries in Eastern Asia will be

broadened through the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and other Third World countries.

The entry of foreign capital and goods will be guaranteed to not negatively affect the local agriculture, industry and service, but rather help in developing this. Filipino business owners will be given priority in incentives and loan support, taxes, tariffs, foreign exchange and others. The dollar exchange and other foreign currency will be controlled so that it is not vulnerable to big speculators and derail the local economy. The orientation of export processing zones and enclaves will be transformed so that it is within the objectives of national industrialization, serve the needs of the local market and ensure that the rights of its workers.

## **B. Patriotic and progressive financial policies**

Money is the bloodline of the economy. In the NDFP's proposal of CASER, the regulation of finances, including public credit, assigning public budget, monetary supply, banking policies, loan interest, export of foreign capital, assignment and collection of taxes, and other matters related to money will be dedicated to the needs and progress of the Filipino people.



Bangko Sentral, banks and financial institutions will ensure the appropriate funds for the agrarian reform programs, rural improvements, and national industrialization. The Land Bank of the Philippines will also be the first to respond to the needs of farmers and their cooperatives and associations. The Development Bank of the Philippines will respond to the needs of big industrial projects and Filipino business owners. The Al-Amanah Islamic Investment Bank will take care of the particular needs of Bangsamoro and Souther Mindanao. Meanwhile, the Philippine National Bank will be nationalized once again so that it can answer to the development of the entire economy. The foreign investments and ownership of banks and financial institutions will be prohibited so that it can secure the use of funds into socio-economic development of the country. The role of workers in running the banks and financial institutions will be enhanced.

The government will assign the exchange of peso to dollar and other currencies and the regulation of credit will be tightened so that the financial system can be solidified and benefits the local economy, development projects and local businesses. The foreign credit and create steps to prevent harmful soaring of financial capital from the country.



A progressive system of taxing the wealthy more and less for the poor will be established. Value-added tax and increase of taxation for luxuries and vices such as alcohol, cigarettes and gambling will be dismantled. The income tax from the poor and small businesses will be decreased while increasing the taxation of rich corporations and families.

The investment of treasury will be prioritized in education (6% of GDP), and health (5% of GDP), the public use of water, electricity and transportation, infrastructure and flourishing the productive sectors. The military budget and budget for foreign debt will be decreased, and junk the automatic payment policy of public debt (Presidential Decree 1177). Pork Barrel system will be dismantled. The government will invest in projects that will produce jobs.

The laws and policies around anti-corruption will be strengthened and a campaign to clean the government from corrupt and abusive officials will be established.

## **8. How will CASER be implemented?**

When agreed upon, the CASER will be implemented under the scope of the GRP and NDFP, and will discuss the process until the final resolution for armed struggle is reached. On the GRP's end, it will go through the branches and departments involved in implementing the provisions of CASER, including the legislation of new laws and policies and amending the Constitution of the Philippines.



On the NDFP's end, it will go through its organs and political power, mass organizations and the NPA.

The CASER will remain effective regardless of the leaders on each side and the outcomes of the peace process.

## **9. What can the ordinary citizens do in order to forward CASER and the peace negotiations?**

In CASER, particularly in NDFP's proposal, the masses and the ordinary Filipino people's basic aspirations are to have sufficient jobs and livelihood, quality service, social justice, national development and progressive culture. This will only be achieved if both sides, the GRP and NDFP, feel the strong and widespread support from the masses.

This means that it is important to express our support for the peace negotiations, particularly for the NDFP's CASER proposal. We can do this as individuals and as a part of organizations or groups that we associate with. We must let our relatives and friends know about the peace negotiations and CASER. It would be better if the organizations we belong in will formally release its expression of support.

Let us join the movement and activities that tackle the issues related to peace negotiations. Let us use the CASER as an additional platform to assert our socio-economic aspirations. Let us emphasize that armed struggle will never end unless we give true and concrete solutions to the root causes of poverty and oppression of our country.







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