A COLLECTIVE STATEMENT OF EXTREME CONCERN BY CONCERNED CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS ON THE GROWING NUMBER OF HASTILY APPROVED MASSIVE LAND RECLAMATION (OR DUMP AND FILL) PROJECTS IN THE COUNTRY’S COASTAL CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES AND THE NON-COMPLIANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SAFEGUARDS AS SET BY EXISTING LAWS AND REGULATIONS

July 2021

WE VOICE OUR EXTREME CONCERN AND OPPOSITION TO THE GROWING NUMBER OF HASTILY APPROVED MASSIVE LAND RECLAMATION (ALSO REFERRED TO AS DUMP AND FILL) PROJECTS LARGELY INITIATED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS THAT THREATENS COASTAL AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS AROUND THE COUNTRY. WE CALL ON THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT TO IMMEDIATELY HALT THE HASTY AND IRREGULARLY APPROVED PROJECTS FOR UTTERLY FAILING TO COMPLY WITH ENVIRONMENTAL SAFEGUARDS IN LINE WITH THE CONSTITUTION, LAWS AND REGULATIONS.

It bears stressing that large-scale reclamation projects have been sprouting all over the country. These include the following:

- 174 hectare-reclamation along Dumaguete City’s coastline,
- 230-hectare reclamation in Consolacion, Cebu,
- 100-hectare reclamation in Minglanilla, Cebu,
- the 23 reclamation projects in Manila Bay, in various stages of development, among others.

These projects lead to dumping and filling of materials that devastate further and kill our once-rich coastal and marine ecosystems. These not only have negative and irreversible impacts on our coasts, but also to the areas, where the filling materials are sourced.

The Philippines is known as the center of the center of marine biodiversity as it is found at the apex of the Coral Triangle. However, this reputation may soon be lost with the wholesale approval of large-scale reclamation, aptly described as dump-and-fill projects all over the country. Similar massive projects in the past have already destroyed thousands of hectares of mangroves, seagrasses and coral reefs and irreversibly destroyed fishing grounds, thereby displacing hundreds of thousands of the fisherfolks and their families, despite the social justice provision in the Constitution that our small-scale fisherfolks have preferential access to marine resources. Mangrove forest cover used to be 450,000 hectares in 1918 but at present, only less than 240,000 ha are left.

Willful destruction of our biodiversity is illegal because it violates our Constitutional right to a balanced and healthful ecology and displaces the artisanal fishers. It is also illegal under several environmental laws, as follows:

- Amended Fisheries Code (Republic Act 10654), which punishes destruction of marine habitats, mangrove conversion, causing aquatic pollution, etc.
- Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System (Act) (RA 11038), which prohibits acts that destroy habitats and resources inside protected areas
- Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act (RA 9147), which punishes acts that destroy wild flora and fauna, especially inside critical habitats
- Clean Water Act (RA 9275), which penalizes the deposit of material of any kind into water bodies which could cause water pollution or impede natural flow in the water body
• Environmental Impact System Act (PD 1586), which prescribes a full-blown environmental impact assessment process for fisheries as an environmentally critical area, taking into account not only of the environmental impacts but the social acceptability of the reclamation project.

• National Cultural Heritage Act (RA 10066), which disallows modification and alternation of national landmarks like Manila Bay and other declared historical sites.

• Local Government Code (RA 7160), which prescribes mandatory requirements, such as a national law and plebiscite, for substantial alteration of boundaries of local government and amount to illegal disbursements of the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) to local government units.

• Climate Change Act (RA 9729) which declares as a state policy the integration in various phases of policy formulation, development plans, poverty reduction strategies and other development tools and techniques by all agencies and instrumentalities of the government.

Dump-and-fill projects hide behind the promise of economic progress and infrastructure development at the expense of the environment, as well as the socio-economic welfare and livelihoods of many marginalized Filipinos, especially our fisherfolks. These projects cause irreversible damage to environmental, socio-economic, and cultural identities of the people. What are at direct risk in all these dump-and-fill projects are the food security and self-sufficiency of coastal residents, especially the municipal fisherfolk and other sectors whose livelihood are directly dependent on the fisheries and aquatic resources of their prime fishing grounds. These projects will literally decimate their means of survival and adds to their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, which have to be factored in this time of the covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis.

It is worth noting that these massive projects were also introduced without adherence to the requirements of regularity, transparency, accountability, and participation by public and private proponents alike. The lack of public consultation is an alarming indication of the propensity by local government units and their officials of railroading the approval process to their own selfish advantage. Under existing laws, there must be full compliance of these requirements, especially by those chosen by the people to lead. They cannot decide without prior, informed, and public consultation. They must strictly follow environmental laws before approving, or even considering, destructive and unsustainable development projects.

The road to recovery from this pandemic must not be paved by ill-thought of intentions by a few. Rather the path chosen must be those agreed by and for the benefit of the majority of the people. We should also veer away from false, short term benefits but look into nature-based, sustainable solutions.

These are our urgent calls.

We call on our government to impose a moratorium on the continuing approval of land reclamation or dump-and-fill projects, whether large or small.

We also call on the government to immediately conduct an investigation on the highly irregular and questionable processes undertaken by local governments in approving these massive reclamation projects and hold accountable under existing laws all those who are responsible for failing to abide by existing laws.

Finally, we call on the government to ensure that local government officials strictly follow environmental safeguards in approving and/or considering coastal land reclamation projects.
ORGANIZATION SIGNATORIES as of July 30, 2021:

1. Oceana
2. Philippine Earth Justice Center (PEJC)
3. STEP Philippines
4. Center for Environmental Concerns - Philippines Inc. (CEC)
5. Oriang
6. Sanlakas
7. PANGISDA Pilipinas
8. Earth Island Institute Philippines
9. Kids for Kids Philippines
10. Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCI)
11. Living Laudato Si’ Philippines
12. Environmental Legal Assistance Center (ELAC)
13. Zoological Society of London - Philippines (ZSL - Philippines)
14. Health Care Without Harm - South East Asia (HCWH - SEA)
15. Pangingisda Natin Gawing Tama Network (PaNaGaT Network)
16. Kataila Foundation Inc.
17. UP Zoological Society
18. Aniban ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (AMA)
19. 350.org Pilipinas
20. Computer Professionals’ Union
21. Mindoro Biodiversity Conservation Foundation Inc. (MBCFI)
22. AGHAM Diliman
23. Kalikasan PNE
24. Extinction Rebellion Philippines
25. Tambuyog Development Center
26. Institute of Social Order, Inc.
27. Integrated Rural Development Foundation, Inc.
28. Greenpeace Philippines
29. Aguman da ring Pantas ampon Talasuyu ning ACSci king Scientia ampon Naturalesa (APTAS)
30. Save Philippine Seas (SPS)
31. Philippine Society for Freshwater Science
32. NGOs for Fisheries Reform (NFR)
33. Balay Alternative Legal Advocates for Development in Mindanaw (BALAOD Mindanaw)
34. Philippine Center for Terrestrial & Aquatic Research
35. Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities
36. Large Marine Vertebrates Research Institute Philippines
37. Saribuhay
38. Center for Energy, Ecology and Development (CEED)
39. Lalum Freedive
40. Mabuwaya Foundation
41. UP Photographers’ Society - UPLB
42. Ahon Freediving
43. VIP CORALS - Batangas State University
44. The Pisces Project Initiative Inc.
45. UPLB Zoological Society (OZOOMS)
46. UP Ecology and Systematics Major Student Society
47. KAISAHAN
48. UPLB Society of Pre-Med Students
49. The Alternative Law Groups
50. Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center - Friends of the Earth Philippines
51. UP Buglas
52. UP Association of Biology Majors
53. EnGendeRights
54. Project Mariknows
55. Philippine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation Inc.
56. Philippine Taxonomic Initiative, Inc.
57. Siliman University
58. KARATULA-UPV
59. Philippine Association of Marine Science 16 2019-2021
60. Regional Center of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RCE-Cebu)
61. NoTo174 Dumaguete
63. Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Samahan sa Kanayunan (PKSK)
64. Pederasyon ng mga Maliliit na Manginisda ng San Miguel Bay (PEMMA-SMB) Inc.
65. Gugma han Maqueda Bay Iguin Undong Han Organisasyon Samarnon. (GIOS- Samar Inc.)
66. Pinalakas na Ugnayan na Maliliit na Manginisda ng Luzon, Mindanao at Visayas (PUMALU-MV)
67. Payao Credit Cooperative
68. Kahugpungan sa Masilakong Mananagat (KASAMMA)
69. Philippine Association of Agri Aqua Organic Farmers, Inc.
70. Samahan ng mga Manginisda sa Region XI
71. Banate Bay Integrated Small Fisherfolk MPC
72. Sapu Cove Integrated Coastal Resource Management Association
73. Samahan ng Artesano at Maliliit na Manginisda sa Calatagan (SAMMACA)
74. Batangas Seaweed Farmers Association
75. Pitalo Fishermen Association
76. Ang Nagkakaisang Mamamayang Kostal ng Balayan (ANAK BALAYAN)
77. Sambiar Farmers and Fishermen MPC
78. Balud Fishermen Association
79. PANLIPI
80. Institute for Environmental Conservation and Research (INECAR)