

## SECURITY PROBLEMS AFTER LAND TRANSFER

On 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2009 officials of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), a police unit, a military squad and six IPON observers gathered in an agricultural region near La Castellana in Negros Occidental. On a landholding called "Hacienda Agueda" human rights defenders (HRD) of the non-governmental organisation Task Force Mapalad (TFM) are fighting for access to land, water and other natural resources that are essential to attain a dignified life.

The reason for the gathering was an administrative measure: an official installation. The term „installation“ is characteristic for the situation of farmers in Negros - such as the human rights defenders of TFM - who have obtained land through the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). Even after all legal issues have been resolved, the former landowners sometimes try to keep them away from their land by newly erected fences and gates, threats or violence. In those cases, the DAR carries out a land handover ceremony in order to symbolically push the legal transfer of the land.

Even though an escort of approximately 40 soldiers and policemen was attendant, the installation could not start immediately. In order to have "permission" to enter the land, negotiations with security guards hired by the former landowner had to be conducted for almost one hour. When the new landowners finally were allowed to enter the land, the short installation ceremony took place. Afterwards, the officials left immediately. During the following days, the HRD reported

several encroachments and threats to the local police. Security guards had damaged one hut and had hindered them at gunpoint from entering their land. Last but not least, 1.8 ha of their land was ploughed by workers loyal to the former landowner. Even though local authorities were aware of the gravity of the situation, they did not act immediately.

On October 12, IPON attended a meeting held by three human rights defenders, the police and DAR officials. The attending IPON observers were glad to hear about the planned police presence from October 14 to 16 in order to allow the farmers to plant their sugar cane.

The IPON observers visited the spot again on October 14. While the police presence seemed to considerably ease the situation, the new landowners were threatened and hindered from entering their land before the police arrived. The observers are worried that further security problems may arise once the police will have left the area.

IPON is concerned by the lack of action taken against those who threatened the human right defenders, hindered them from entering their land and ploughed their land. While the farmers reported the first incidents to the police on September 29, no police investigation against the security guards was brought to IPON's attention. However, the situation might improve as a dialogue between the former landowner and her loyal farm workers, the state actors and the human rights defenders seems to be underway.

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