To all Ateneans and student organizations:

We are the Ateneans for Agrarian Reform Movement (AFARM), a student-led task force of rural development advocates from the Ateneo community, and Buklod Atenista, the alliance of student governments in the Philippines composed of the Ateneo de Davao University, Ateneo de Manila University, Ateneo de Naga University, Ateneo de Zamboanga University, and Xavier University – Ateneo de Cagayan.

Grounded in our commitment to human rights and social justice, we stand in solidarity with the 3.5 million coconut farmers who have yet to benefit from the coco levy funds collected for nine years during the Marcos regime. The coco levy, which was ostensibly for the direct benefit of the coconut farmers and the development of the coconut industry, was essentially used as a private fund in service of the hands of a few. Today, a portion of the original 9.7 billion-peso coco levy has grown to over 150 billion pesos.

On September 2012, after a legal battle spanning nearly four decades, the government won one of its cases on the coco levy. Twenty-four percent (24%) of the Coconut Industry Investment Fund-San Miguel Corporation (CIIF-SMC) shares, worth 71 billion pesos, was declared by the Supreme Court as a public fund to be used only for the benefit of the coconut farmers and the development of the coconut industry.

Despite having recovered these funds, however, farmers still have not benefited from a single peso. At the moment, different government agencies are scrambling for a slice of the pie—once again forgetting that these funds, paid for by coconut farmers, should be in service of coconut farmers.

Last September 21, 42 years after the declaration of Martial Law, 71 farmers under KILUS Magniniyog began their march from Davao to Malacañang to call for the establishment of a perpetual Coconut Farmers’ Trust Fund. AFARM and Buklod Atenista are fighting alongside the KILUS Magniniyog marchers in support of this cause. The establishment of the Perpetual Coconut Farmers’ Trust Fund will be an act of historic justice—of returning what the rich have mercilessly stolen from the poor. With sufficient safeguards, the Coconut Farmers’ Trust Fund will protect the recovered 71 billion pesos from dissipation. Annual earnings will be used only for the direct benefit of 3.5 million impoverished coconut farmers and their families.

As advocates of social justice and being men and women for others, we invite you and your organization to join our growing network in our fight for historic justice. If you want to support our cause, we ask you to be one of the signatories of the “Ateneans’ Manifesto on the Coco Levy Issue” (attached below) by providing us with the following information:

- Name and Logo of the student Group
- Name and location of the Ateneo university in which the group is based
• Group’s e-mail address, website URL (if available), and social media accounts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)
• Name of the group’s head (with proper designation) and/or its point person/s (maximum of five) with their contact details (mobile numbers, e-mail addresses, and Facebook profile URLs)

For individual signatories, please provide us with your full name, year and course, and your university.

You may submit the following details through: labanlupa@yahoo.com with a title “Ateneans’ Manifesto Signatory” or through a message via the Laban Lupa Facebook page: www.fb.com/labanlupa. We will add you and your group immediately to the AFARM group (www.fb.com/groups/labanlupa/) and to the list of signatories as soon as we receive the required details above.

For urgent concerns and more information about our campaign, please reach us through labanlupa@yahoo.com or our contact details below.

We look forward to working with you in our fight for historic justice and for the betterment of the lives of millions of impoverished coconut farmers. Laban Niyugan! Laban para sa Kinabukasan!

For the right to livelihood and rural development of our farmers,

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LABAN NIYUGAN: LABAN PARA SA KINABUKASAN!

The Ateneans’ Manifesto on the Coco Levy Issue

On September 21, 2014, 42nd Anniversary of the Martial Law Declaration, 71 coconut farmers coming from nine national farmers’ federations and different provinces began marching from Davao City to Malacañang. This 1750-km march, running for 71 days, is an attempt to call attention to the coco levy fund, being tagged currently as the ‘biggest scam of the century’ that collected, consolidated and misused over Php 70 billion of coco levy for a privileged few.

We, the Ateneans for Agrarian Reform Movement (AFARM), a social justice task force of rural development advocates in the Ateneo community, and Buklod Atenista, the alliance of five student governments in the Philippines composed of the Ateneo de Davao University, Ateneo de Manila University, Ateneo de Naga University, Ateneo de Zamboanga University, and Xavier University - Ateneo de Cagayan, support the Kilusang Magniniyog (KM71) and the Filipino coconut farmers’ cry for historic justice.

We condemn the coco levy issue as the biggest scam that hit our country, having been left unresolved for 42 years. We side with the 3.5 million Filipino farmers who were robbed of their contributions during the Marcos dictatorship and who currently remain as tenants and farm workers mostly in small farms unreached by the existing agrarian reform legislation in the country.

Although the scam has been started by Marcos’ cronies who consolidated, amassed and misused the coco levy fund, we recognize that the inadequate response of the current Aquino administration contributes to the elusiveness of social justice to the coconut farmers. In 2012, the Supreme Court declared that 24% Coconut Industry Investment Fund-San Miguel Corporation (CIIF-SMC) must be owned by the government to be used only for the benefit of all coconut farmers and for the development of the coconut industry. However, to date, such funds remain unutilized for the direct benefit of our small farmers.

We recognize that a 42-year-long struggle has been too long for social justice to remain elusive to the nation’s poorest of the poor—the coconut farmers. We fear that the government’s inaction, when continued throughout the remaining years of the current administration, will consequently lead to the dissipation of the recovered fund that could benefit millions of small farmers and their families.

We, therefore, stand in solidarity with the 3.5 million coconut farmer beneficiaries and their families, in making the following demands. The coconut levy fund must be utilized to directly impact the lives of such coconut farmer beneficiaries and their families, through fresh coconut processing hubs as a potential alternative to the copra-centric coconut industry. In addition, the recovered coconut levy fund must be put in a perpetual trust fund, the annual interest earnings of which must be used in programs to develop the coconut industry with the upliftment of lives of farmers as the end goal. The small coconut farmers must be empowered and given substantial participation in the Coco Farmer Trust Fund mechanism that may be established by the current administration.

We remain hopeful about that the Coconut Trust Fund Bill be certified as an urgent legislation for the 16th Congress. Its passage as a law will ensure the welfare of coconut farmers across administrations to come. Until its resolution, we will remain watchful of the progress of the long overdue to finally uplift our coconut farmers from poverty.

Lastly, we call on the youth and our fellow Ateneans, as advocates of social justice, to join us in fighting for the rights of 3.5 million Filipino coconut farmers. The struggle against the coco levy scam is the fight not only of farmers, but also of every Filipino’s hope for the future of our nation and our commitment to rural development and social justice.

Laban Niyugan, Laban para sa Kinabukasan! #CocoTrustFundNow!