



## Asian Peasant Coalition (APC)

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**PRESS RELEASE**

*APC hails peasants' victory in their struggle*  
**Panama people, to get back their lands**

The Asian Peasant Coalition (APC) hails the victory of the farmers & fishers belonging to the Organization for the Protection of Paanam Paththuwa (OPPP) in winning their lands back through unified peoples' struggle.

"On February 11, the Cabinet of Ministers decided to release the lands, taken under the control of Sri Lanka Army and the Sri Lanka Air Force as High Security Zones of Palay in the Northern Province and the lands under the control of the Air Force in the Panama area in the Eastern Province, to its original owners. This is a positive move by the new government and a great victory for the struggles of the people in Walikamam and Panama and for other civil society players in Sri Lanka," stated Chintaka Rajapakshe, moderator of the Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR), saying that P. Somasiri, the convener of OPPP, called their office to thank everyone who supported their struggle to win back their lands.

"It can be recalled that MONLAR and APC conducted an International Fact Finding Mission (IFFM) in Defense of Land and Livelihood in Panama, South-east Sri Lanka, from 24<sup>th</sup> February to 01<sup>st</sup> March, 2013. The IFFM team of twenty two (22) local and international participants from Pakistan, India, Nepal, Philippines, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, found out that the World Bank and the Sri Lankan government, under President Mahinda



Rajapakshe, were behind the Arugam Bay Special Tourism Promotion Zone project that displaced 350 families from the villages of Upassa, Egodayaya, Horewkanda, Ragamwela and Shastrawela. The IFFM team demanded for the implementation of the order of the Local Magistrate's Court to allow the people of Panama to cultivate their land once again," remarked Zenaida Soriano, APC Southeast Asia Coordinator and national chairperson of AMIHAN (National Federation of Peasant Women), who joined the IFFM team.

P. Somasiri (right) during the IFFM press conference.

“The Cabinet decision is a great victory! Our struggle was supported by so many people, groups, and organizations, both here and abroad, and we are very grateful to all of them who helped us and strengthened our fight to get back our lands. It is a collective effort. Amid threats and harassments we all had the courage and commitment in the struggle. Truly, it is a peoples’ struggle,” P. Somasiri said, adding that, “It is not over yet. We know that there has been a Cabinet decision, the relevant authorities are yet to convey us an official message of what, when, how the proceedings are going to be on the ground in implementing the decision. So, we are here, vigilant!” ended P. Somasiri.

“We call on the new Sri Lankan government for the speedy implementation of the aforesaid decision in accordance with the peoples’ demands and in compliance with the court rulings in this regard, with the full participation of the communities affected,” Chinthaka added.

“We demand for the implementation of genuine agrarian and aquatic reform in Sri Lanka so that all landless farmers and fishers would have access and control over their land, water and its resources for them to have decent livelihood and dignified life,” ended Soriano.

The MONLAR and OPPP are members of the Asian Peasant Coalition (APC). #