

Free Antonio Tolentino

What the Philippines' biggest land investor doesn't want you to know.

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*Barangay [captain](#) and environmental defender **Antonio Tolentino** has been detained on trumped-up criminal and administrative charges for protecting farmers' rights against Ayalaland's land-grabbing for eight years.*

Tolentino chaired the Aniban ng Nagkakaisang Mamamayan ng Hacienda Dolores (Association of the United Citizens of Hacienda Dolores, ANIBAN) under the nationwide organisation Kilusan Para sa Repormang Agraryo at Katarungang Panlipunan (Movement for Agrarian Reform and Social Justice, KATARUNGAN).

He mobilized the community despite increasing violence. Together, they documented more than 30 cases of property destruction, victimisation, illegal arrests, trumped-up charges, threats and intimidation, forced surrender and waiver signing, and forced recruitment of local indigenous Ayta people to serve as guards and thugs.

Farming

Ayalaland Logistics Holdings Corp is associated with widespread violence against locals fighting for their land rights in Hacienda Dolores, including the imprisonment of village leader Antonio "Apung Tony" Tolentino.

The contested land is in Hacienda Dolores, a barangay in Porac, Pampanga. The site is ecologically important and sensitive, as it is in a forest upstream from a river.

Real estate developers including Ayalaland began buying and taking over farmers' land as early as 2005. Ayalaland wanted to develop a luxury mixed-use commercial center branded as the next Makati, which is currently the Philippines' top financial hub.

Locals requested protection for their land rights under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform

Program (CARP), but their land was ordered exempt without any prior consultation and notice.

A former Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) regional director granted the exemption because the land was allegedly unsuitable for farming despite Dolores having been farmed for nearly 200 years.

Killing

Developers took complete control, forcefully denying access and ownership to the farmers despite their long history of tillage. Forcing their way onto the farms, corporations cleared out the land with heavy machinery with assistance of private armed security guards and hired thugs.

The police are also accused by protesters of physically harassing and criminalising land rights defenders. More than 300 farmers were forcibly evicted and many homes were burned down. Developers destroyed crops and livestock.

Security guards blocked farmers who were on their way to their farm lots on 13 January 2014. The guards, provoked, shot at the farmers, killing 34-year-old ANIBAN secretary Arman Padino and wounding two others – Noel Tumali and Antonio Tolentino.

Tumali and Tolentino had arrived on scene to support the farmers and were able to capture one of the security guards in a citizen's arrest, but the others fled.

Then 30 combat personnel arrived at the barangay hall to arrest Tolentino under false charges because of his intervention in the killing on 16 April 2014.

Fear

The guards and AyalaLand conspired against Tolentino, filing kidnapping and carjacking cases against him, both non-bailable offenses, as well as other false charges. This also covered up one of the guard's citizen's arrest. Consequently, Tolentino was unable to put up bail.

Security guards also falsely charged 30 ANIBAN members with grave threats, grave coercion, and usurpation of real rights in real property.

Tolentino did not have due process because he was not informed of any charges and thus could not file a counter-affidavit. He is facing three cases for car-napping and malicious mischief, kidnapping with attempted murder, and administrative charges for misconduct.

But the violence continued to mount. Two hitmen riding tandem on motorcycle also shot 57-year-old ANIBAN leader **Menelao “Ka Melon” Barcia** on 2 May 2014, killing him instantly and injuring his wife Maria.

Barcia had been monitoring the administrative charges against Tolentino. Witnesses are afraid to speak for fear of further violent retaliation.

Terror

Farmers and their families have continued to protest and petition for years against the now-

completed luxury development and its injustices despite forced displacement, criminalisation, and harassment by employees and security guards over the dispute.

However, no one is publicly informing the people about Tolentino's continued imprisonment because Ayalaland is also one of the Philippine's main advertisers and suppresses the news locally. Mainstream media does not want to cover Ayalaland's secrets.

Tolentino, now more than 70 years old and unwell, is still detained in Angeles City Jail, unsure if he will ever be granted freedom by the Philippine justice system.

The need to condemn the entire elitist justice system is long overdue. It is important for the people to get their leader back because he sustained and encouraged the movement from the ground.

They are waiting for him and even re-elected him as leader while still behind bars. We must spread word of the story of this jailed leader so that terror does not continue to divide the community.

A spokesperson for AyalaLand Logistics Holdings Corp told *The Ecologist*: "We wish to clarify that Ayala Land, Inc. (ALI) and ALI subsidiary, AyalaLand Logistics Holdings Corp (ALLHC) have no participation in the alleged activities stated in the article. We are not involved in any case concerning Mr Antonio 'Apung Tony' Tolentino."

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Featured image: Environmental defender Antonio Tolentino with his family. (Source: Environmental Justice Atlas)

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