

**PHILIPPINE LANDOWNERS WARN OF VIOLENCE OVER REFORMS.**

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MANILA, Aug 25, Reuter - A major coalition of Philippine landowners today labelled President Corazon Aquino's land reforms "communistic" and said violence might erupt if the program was pushed through.

"This is a polarisation of classes," Eduardo Hernandez, chairman of the Council of Agricultural Producers, told a news conference.

He said a land reform bill up for approval by the House of Representatives called for confiscation of all holdings over 50 hectares (125 acres) and imprisonment ranging from six months to six years for landowners who resisted the reforms.

"Confiscation is an act of violence," Hernandez said. "Is that not a communistic act? If the government is the first to impose that, then the people will react."

The sweeping reforms, signed into law by Aquino last month, aim to re-distribute all farmland to landless peasants.

They carry forward the distribution of rice and corn land, begun by former president Ferdinand Marcos in 1972, and include coconut, sugar and banana plantations.

Aquino has left to Congress a decision on controversial aspects of the reforms like land ceilings, compensation for the landowners and a schedule for introduction of the reforms.

The House yesterday suspended floor debates on the land reform bill after Agrarian Reform Committee Chairman Bonifacio Gillego said pro-landowner lobbies wanted to water down some of the bill's more radical provisions.

Hernandez said the council's 150 members represented owners of small and medium-sized holdings.

"This sector provides between 80 and 85 per cent of the country's total agricultural income," he said.

The council did not endorse violence, he said, "but whether we can control it is another matter altogether".

Odilon Mallari, leader of a landowners' alliance in Mindanao, the Philippines' second largest island, said 1,000 landowners had already forged a "tactical alliance" with the Moslem secessionist Moro National Liberation Front.

"The bottom line is that most of our members will join the MNLF if the government confiscates their lands," he said.

Mallari said he expected little trouble from the military because most soldiers and lower-rank officers were themselves landowners.

Plantation owners on Negros Island, called the "sugar bowl" of the Philippines, have set up a private army to fight the reforms and launched a separatist movement called Movement for Independent Negros.

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