

Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 5403



INTRODUCED BY ANAKPAWIS PARTY-LIST REPRESENTATIVE
ARIEL B. CASILAO

**CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE, EMMI A. DE JESUS, ANTONIO L. TINIO,
ARLENE D. BROSAS, FRANCE L. CASTRO, AND SARAH JANE I. ELAGO**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

A world without International Rice Research Institute is a world free from monopoly of rice crop varieties and from diseases and deaths brought by IRRI's agro-chemicals. IRRI's existence in the Philippines is more than half a century but failed to contribute in attaining food security in the country. This concrete situation pushed Filipino peasantry, agriculturists and scientists, food security advocates and people's organizations to press the government of agricultural programs and policies based on genuine rural development, free from foreign monopoly control and sincere in achieving food security for the people.

IRRI was established in 1959 by virtue of a Memorandum of Understanding between the government of the Republic of the Philippines and both the Ford and Rockefeller foundations. The institute was envisioned to be the world's prime mover in rice science and technology purportedly to reduce food-insecurity-related poverty in the Philippines as well as in the rest of the rice-producing countries in the underdeveloped regions.

Fifty-seven years hence, however, according to the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), a nationwide peasant organization, IRRI cannot at all claim of its positive contribution to the food security of the country or of other poor and agricultural countries. IRRI's researches, which they claim to improve rice and even corn production have not led to any significant development in the country's agricultural productivity. In fact, the state of Philippine agriculture has consistently worsened to the point that the very host country of IRRI, fell to becoming the world's biggest net importer of rice in 2008, and being the third last year, following China and Nigeria.

One of the highlighted cases of extreme starvation and production difficulties was experienced by more than 6,000 farmers and Lumad people from Kidapawan and other parts of North Cotabato in Mindanao, who protested

demanding food on April 1, 2016. While this was predominantly driven by the extreme drought, they also suffered abuses such as displacement and militarization that hampered their agricultural cultivation and exacerbated their access to food. Worsening was, the government neglect, amidst the many reports of hunger, the local and national government failed to address the situation, through immediate food relief and assistance. The farmers' action were replied with a bloody dispersal by the Philippine National Police known as the Kidapawan Carnage that left two farmers dead, more than a hundred injured and seventy eight detained, including elderly and pregnant women.

If IRRI actually accomplished anything, it was the institutionalization of a rice production system that is highly dependent on agro-chemical products such as pesticide, promoted by its transnational corporation (TNC) partners. IRRI's science and technology mandate has long been geared almost solely toward the constant development and dissemination of hybrid, genetically engineered crops to complement and perpetuate the use of the said harmful chemicals promoted by predatory TNCs such as Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer, Dow Chemical, Du Pont and BASF among others. For over five decades now, IRRI has indeed been an instrument of monopoly capital's onslaught upon the agriculture of the Philippines and of other Third World nations.

The introduction of IRRI's high yielding varieties of rice and corn grains during the now infamous Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s led to an unprecedented use of and dependence to agro-chemicals that eventually harmed the natural ecosystem in the rice fields. Scientific tests have in fact proven how genetically modified (GMO) crop varieties produce particular types of toxins and allergens that not only prompt allergic reactions but could also cause damage to vital human organs.

On April 8, 2015, Bill Gates, the 2017 Forbes richest billionaire, donated USD10.3 million dollars to IRRI through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) intended for various research on genetically modified Golden Rice, a genetically manipulated variety that contains beta carotene. According to Masipag, a network of farmer's groups and scientists, the funding will be used for high technology purported solutions like chemical farming and GMOs that would create further trouble among poor peasant families and consumers.

Moreover, IRRI is enjoying its immunity to the point of blatant disregard of its workers who were exposed to harmful and dangerous agro-chemical products and outright violations of labor rights. According to *Brotherhood of IRRI Support Services Group (BISSIG)*, a labor organization in IRRI, it has been abusing its international status through its seemingly endless list of violations of its workers' rights to organize, to collectively bargain and negotiate, and to hold strikes. Moreover, IRRI is enjoying its immunity to the point of blatant disregard of its workers who were exposed to harmful and dangerous agro-chemical products and outright violations of labor rights. According to

Brotherhood of IRRI Support Services Group (BISSIG), a labor organization in IRRI, it has been abusing its international status through its seemingly endless list of violations of its workers' rights to organize, to collectively bargain and negotiate, and to hold strikes. At least 8 former IRRI workers, who used to apply pesticides in IRRI's field test farms, had died due to pesticide poisoning, as reported by the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Philippines based from its fact-finding mission in 2000.

In 1979, President Marcos issued Presidential Decree No. 1620 declared IRRI as an international organization, with all the privileges and immunities that came with the granting of such status. IRRI thus has been able to justify its anti-labor practices. IRRI has intermittently carried out mass lay-offs in 1989, 1993 and 1996. It has implemented a questionable retrenchment program that has warranted the unfair dismissal of regular employees. The institute has also engaged in union busting which included the harassment of union leaders and members.

These workers have failed in their various attempts to seek redress from the courts given IRRI's immunity from suit which it enjoys under Presidential Decree No. 1620. The same immunity has also been invoked to bar the workers from claiming compensation for having been afflicted with illnesses due to exposure to toxic chemicals and to inhuman working conditions.

Presidential Decree No. 1620, however, is not an international pact that cannot be repealed. IRRI does not in fact approximate a party such as a representative of any sovereign state entitled to privileges and immunities as are contained in the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations*. Neither can IRRI invoke to be an entity comparable to a specialized agency of the United Nations.

Moreover, the international agreement signed by former President Fidel V. Ramos and representatives of ten (10) countries in May 19, 1995, which acknowledged IRRI as an international organization has yet to be ratified by the Philippine Senate. The said agreement furthermore does not compel any party to the agreement to grant IRRI any privileges and immunities or any form of financial support.

This legislative measure seeks to repeal PD 1620 precisely to strip IRRI of these said unjustifiable privileges and immunities which have been used to grossly violate the fundamental rights and freedom of IRRI workers with impunity, as well as, shielding from potential legal liabilities brought about by agro-chemical agriculture, impact on the environment and health. This bill, which was filed during the first regular session of the Fourteenth Congress by then Anakpawis Representative Rafael Mariano and during the third regular session of the Sixteenth Congress by former Representative Fernando Hicap is being refiled today to fulfill the rights of Filipinos and decisively challenge the collusion of IRRI and agro-chemical TNCs, in the hope of altering the

country's agricultural dependence on agro-chem, which is contributory to the deterioration of people's health, producers, as well as consumers, and significantly, wiped out the traditional practices of food production in the country. Thus, this is not only in defense of the welfare of Filipino workers and peasants but also a commitment to Philippine sovereignty and patrimony.

In view of the foregoing, the speedy passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



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**AN ACT REPEALING PRESIDENTIAL DECREE NO. 1620 OTHERWISE
KNOWN AS "GRANTING TO THE INTERNATIONAL RICE RESEARCH
INSTITUTE (IRRI) THE STATUS, PREROGATIVES, PRIVILEGES AND
IMMUNITIES OF AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION"**

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in
Congress assembled:*

SECTION 1. Presidential Decree No. 1620 otherwise known as "Granting to the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) the Status, Prerogatives, Privileges and Immunities of an International Organization" is hereby repealed.

SECTION 2. All laws, jurisprudence, executive orders, executive issuances or letter of instructions, or any part thereof, inconsistent with or contrary to the provisions of this Act are hereby deemed repealed, amended or modified accordingly.

SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) national newspapers of general circulation.

Approved.