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Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights, and Peace

The Golf War: A Story of Land, Golf and Revolution in the Philippines

(39 minutes: 1999 Anthill Productions, LLC)

Transcript courtesy of Bullfrog Films (www.bullfrogfilms.com)

Earl Woods: Mr. President and the Filipino citizens, you have an opportunity to see one of the great, great golfers of the world, my son Tiger Woods.

Jen Schradie: Mr. Woods, Mr. Woods, how do you feel like the development of golf courses can help the people of the Philippines?

Earl Woods: I really have no opinion on that. I don't know.

Narrator: The Philippine government and a large real estate developer want this civilized game to help their country. They planned one of Asia's most ambitious golf and tourist resorts and decided to put it in a community called Hacienda Looc, one of the most scenic places in the Philippines.

Macky Maceda: What's the use of having such a beautiful area if you can't really show it off to the tourists?

Narrator: There's just one problem with this plan □

Guillermo: If the project will push through, we will surely get evicted. We will be uprooted.

Narrator: Peasants organized to stop the construction, but then found their village overrun by armed guards and the military. Golf course opponents face violence and even death.

Romy Capulong: You have here, connivance, collusion, between unscrupulous developers and corrupt public officials against the people.

Narrator: But across the Philippines, peasants have joined the New People's Army, a guerrilla movement which has threatened to intervene in Hacienda Looc if any more peasants are killed.

Narrator: While the government and developers won't back down, villagers refuse to let their ancestral land be overrun by yachts and golf carts.

Roniel Asahan: I will not be a golf caddy. I'd rather become a farmer here in Hacienda Looc.

Visitacion Darean: What we need is to be able to farm, plant and produce food, not golf balls.

Guillermo Bautista: This land was being cultivated by my ancestors and then by my parents. And now I farm this land.

Narrator: Guillermo Bautista lives with his family in Calayo. Calayo sits on the China Sea and is one of four villages, or barangays, that make up the Hacienda Looc area, home to 2000 families.

Adelaida Sevilla: My name is Adelaida Sevilla. I was born and live here in Barangay Calayo in Hacienda Looc. Our life here is bonded to the land, we plant, we harvest rice and fruits from our land. The farmers and fishermen work jointly. They work together because there are only two sources of livelihood - farming and fishing.

Celedonio Sevilla: We are content with our life here.

Narrator: Celedonio Sevilla met his wife Visitacion Darean here in the barangay of Calayo.

Adelaida Sevilla: If we would live in a city we would not have means for livelihood. We do not know the jobs there, unlike here, where we can eat as long as we plant kamote. We can buy our household necessities as long as we plant eggplant. Our aspiration is to have land to till and cultivate all throughout our lives, as long as we live because it is what feeds and supports our children.

Narrator: Hacienda Looc sits on one of the 7000 islands of the Phillipines, a country in Southeast Asia. In the 16th century Spain colonized the area and forced Catholicism and the Hacienda plantation system on many regions of the new colony. Hacienda Looc is about 50 miles south of Manila but could be just about anywhere in the Phillipines which is still primarily an agricultural country. About half of the nearly 80 million Filipinos depend on agriculture, but many don't own their land. Since the 1980's the rate of rural poverty has dramatically increased to over 70%. In 1898, the United States bought the Phillipines from Spain and then brutally crushed a Filipino independence movement and propped up loyal leaders. In 1972 one such ruler, dictator Ferdinand Marcos, instituted martial law and violently suppressed opposition. Corazon Aquino was swept to power in 1986 amidst a nationwide movement against Marcos. She promised land reform and human rights. Instead, the U.S.-backed military continued its violence against peasant and labor activists. And

Aquino, a large landholder herself, exempted 75% of the land from redistribution to peasants. After Aquino stepped down, Fidel Ramos was elected president. Ramos, a second cousin of Marcos and a general under his dictatorship, was trained at the U.S. West Point Military Academy. Under President Ramos, golf course development boomed as part of a larger policy of converting fertile agricultural land to tourist areas, industrial zones, and residential subdivisions. In 1998, Ramos greeted the world's most famous golfer, Tiger Woods, as he arrived at the Mimosa Golf and Country Club. [President Ramos: "Welcome to the Philippines."] --- Though Tiger was just 100 miles north of Hacienda Looc, he didn't know yet about this community.

Earl Woods: Mr. President, I am very, very pleased to be in your country today. I've never visited your place, and it's a gorgeous, gorgeous country. I want to tell you a couple of things that went into bringing this young man up. He has this work ethic. There are no short cuts. Practice, practice, practice and he will work even harder to improve in the future.

Jen Schradie: Why is it important that Tiger Woods is holding a junior golf clinic?

Junior Golfer: Cuz it's a great sport and like Tiger Woods is the greatest player in the world, and he can show us the right way to the sport.

Tiger Woods: I want all of you to learn and grow from this experience. Invariably you're gonna learn life, gonna learn about life because golf is a microcosm of life.

Narrator: Tiger's corporate sponsors orchestrated a one-day media event called the Day of the Tiger that received all-day television coverage from the government network. He was paid to play in an exhibition match and to promote the game of golf.

Macky: Oh, I think it's going to be a great picker upper for the entire country in general. Everybody's feeling kind of down with this economic crisis. And Tiger is just, I know it, he's going to give everybody a good feeling.

Narrator: Macky Maceda is a vice-president for Fil-Estate Land, Incorporated, the golf course developer in Hacienda Looc. Tiger didn't come to support this development, but Maceda was clear about what Tiger's visit could do.

Macky Maceda: That's going to help pick up the game and the development of courses here in the country.

Romy Capulong: Tiger Woods should be barred from entering this country, I think.

Narrator: Attorney Romy Capulong serves as legal counsel for the Hacienda Looc farmers.

Romy Capulong: If I can do something about it-- I'll certainly do that -- to bar him from entering this country and propagating golf.

Narrator: Tiger wasn't the only American to promote golf in the Philippines. In 1991, the U.S. Agency for International Development paid for a study that concluded that the Hacienda Looc area is ripe for tourism, and land conversion.

Romy Capulong: We have globalization, we have privatization, we have land conversion. All of these are just complete manifestation of US -- dictated policies, mainly through the IMF and the World Bank, now through the World Trade Organization. Land conversion, which the government and the capitalists call development, quote unquote, destroys culture, destroys homes, communities, environment, and doesn't really bring any benefits to our people.

Macky Maceda: Here's a scale model of the Fil-Estate Harbortown development and over here where it says golf course 1, that's an 18-hole golf course that will be designed by Jack Nicklaus. There's gonna be a marina in this area and various residential areas, so-called marina housing or canal housing.... Like I said, it's a balanced mix of land uses and it's a special project.

Guillermo Bautista: There will be a golf course on top. Here will be the Greg Norman course. The plains will be converted into a marina where yachts can sail and dock.

Narrator: Fil-Estate, the company that wants to develop Hacienda Looc into Harbortown, plans a luxury beach resort with residential villas. The plains would be flooded for a yacht marina. And the hillsides transformed into four 18-hole golf courses. To support his family Guillermo Bautista depends on his rice field of one hectare, or about 2 1/2 acres. Now, Guillermo and over 7000 other residents of Hacienda Looc face eviction from their homes and fields for what Fil-Estate calls eco-tourism. Guillermo's cousin Philip is also worried about his community.

Philip Bautista: You see, when we talk about Harbortown, this is the proposed Harbortown. These people, these are small farmers, these are small fishermen live here. If this will make marina, or Harbortown, where do these people move? Where will they live?

Narrator: According to Fil-Estate, its jobs would develop the area. For the villagers, losing their farms and seas to fish would mean they must find other jobs in a country where the minimum wage is less than \$5 a day.

Philip Bautista: No have permanent jobs. How do these people live forever? Here in this kind of place, even like this, as a farmer, they live forever here, so happy, very very happy, even me.

Narrator: Twenty-one year old Roniel was told that these jobs are a sign of development.

Roniel Asahan: If that project will push through the people will fall short of income because they cannot farm or fish any more.

Narrator: The jobs available in a tourist area like Harbortown would be golf caddies, groundskeepers, maids and even GRO's. GRO is a common term for prostitute. Prostitution is widespread throughout the Philippines, especially around tourist areas.

Adelaida Sevilla: They say it's a job, but we do not need jobs from Fil-Estate because the status of women will be degraded. We cannot rely on the development. Never will we women allow development.

Guillermo Bautista: I learned the news that Tiger Woods is coming to the Philippines, but it would be better if he would come to Hacienda Looc to find out for himself how the people strongly oppose the golf course.

Narrator: At the Mimosa Golf Club Tiger taught aspiring golfers a few pointers.

General Secretary of the National Golf Association: He can really help develop the sport. And even for the younger guys. He should serve as a role model.

Jen Schradie: So what do you think about Tiger being here today?

Security Guard: We're proud.

Junior Golfer: Tiger Woods is introducing the game to other types of people like the poor ones or just little kids like us.

Jen Schradie: Do you play golf?

Security Guard: Nah, no we just work here.

Jen Schradie: Would you like to play golf?

Canadian Fan: He's got a great personality, a lot of presence, and it's good for the country and golf. Outstanding.

American supervisor: It's going to be very helpful to getting the youngsters up and off the streets and out playing golf.

Jen Schradie: Why don't you play golf?

Security Guard: We don't have money to play golf. We just work here.

Jen Schradie: So what are you doing here today at the tournament?

Security Guard: We're just guarding the □[turns and sees his supervisor] □ Thank you.

Jen Schradie: Just in general, how can golf help the people of the Philippines?

Earl Woods: It can provide them with an opportunity to learn about life.

Guillermo: When my father was cultivating the land, we paid one-fifth of every harvest, be it rice or corn... to Magdalena, the landlord.

Narrator: But after the government foreclosed on the landlord, two government agrarian reform programs awarded ownership of roughly 5000 out of the over 8000 hectare estate to the residents. Then, in 1993, all 8650 hectares of Hacienda Looc were sold to a real estate developer, even the land granted to farmers under land reform. Without even notifying peasants, the government's Assets Privatization Trust, or APT sold the entire Hacienda Looc estate for only one-fifth of its market value.

Gerry Bulatao: But I don't know, the attitude right now is that it's water under the bridge.

Narrator: Gerry Bulatao, an undersecretary for the Department of Agrarian Reform, could not explain how peasant land awards, administered by his own department, had been sold to developers.

Gerry Bulatao: But for some reason I'm not aware of, APT sold the land to the highest bidder and Manila Southcoast Development Corporation got the title. Why they did that? I don't know.

Narrator: The Manila SouthCoast Development Corporation owns the land but is collaborating with Fil-Estate to build Harbortown. The terms of the sale allowed them to develop the 3000 hectares not covered under land reform, and they could use the land awarded to peasants if they could prove it was not agricultural.

Macky Maceda: The main line is that these lands are not really agriculturally viable.

Guillermo Bautista: We can clearly see the evidence of how productive these lands are, even the mountains where there are fruit-bearing trees like mango, santol, guava, star apple and other fruits which can be grown here and that people live on.

Narrator: But Fil-Estate convinced the Department of Agrarian Reform to overturn the distribution of over 1,200 hectares of land previously awarded to peasants. Fil-Estate won the hills to build four 18-hole golf courses, but the plan for a yacht

marina is on the land now occupied by villagers' homes and fields in Calayo, so the developer once again turned to government officials.

Jen Schradie: What are you hoping that the Harbortown project will do for the community of Hacienda Looc?

Conrado Apacible: Ah, it means a lot of progress for the community. Not only for Calayo, but for the town, and for the province, for the nation as a whole.

Narrator: Conrado Apacible, a former congressman, appeared among many politicians at this Fil-Estate and government sponsored ceremony in Calayo, designed to gain support for Harbortown. Residents were fed, entertained and promised they could keep their homes. But government officials handed peasants certificates of no legal value, and no one mentioned Fil-Estate's plans to build a yacht marina in the same place where the villagers live, fish and farm.

Reynaldo Dimayacac, Sr.: In my own opinion, this is the most important period of our lives because in spite of the dissenting opinions to the project of the Manila South Coast Development Corporation, as joint venture with Fil-Estate, everybody, not only you here, will benefit from the job opportunities.

Romy Capulong: They're all in support of the so-called development project. Many of these officials have acted because of corruption in favor of the developer.

Narrator: In a series of law suits, residents and attorney Capulong have accused local officials of taking property on behalf of Fil-Estate, using methods such as having peasants sign blank documents and producing contracts from dead people.

Romy Capulong: At least two of the five barangay captains were buying agents and subcontractors of, of the developer. The mayor herself, the head of the town, was the first big buying agent of the developer.

Mayor Apacible: At times, they're telling me that I am an agent. I am not an agent. I am a mayor.

Narrator: As head of local resistance Guillermo was approached by local officials.

Guillermo: On October 7, 1996, I was called by Mayor Apacible and she offered me 1.2 million pesos on condition that I will allow the machine of Fil-Estate to operate.

Mayor Apacible: And an agent usually gets commission. No one ever did give a cent commission from me, especially from those areas. I'm just helping them out.

Romy Capulong: From the lowest official of the place, called Barangay officials, up to the town officials, up to the provincial officials, up to the national officials, all

the way up to the highest official of the land, the office of the president, all of them have supported the project.

Narrator: This advertisement that touts the President's support for another Fil-Estate resort is not the developer's only link to influential politicians. In 1996, Ramos appointed the brother of Fil-Estate's CEO as Undersecretary of Tourism after the developer had a stake in Hacienda Looc. This department is critical for a resort developer like Fil-Estate.

Macky Maceda: The Hacienda Looc area is one of the areas that's being promoted by the Department of Tourism to be developed.

Narrator: Macky is the son of Ernie Maceda, then the president of the Philippine Senate and now the ambassador to the United States.

Roniel Asahan: We cannot allow our lands to be grabbed by this giant developer. If we will pursue with our struggle, we will have a bright future because it is the land that we are fighting for.

Narrator: In 1996, the peasants formed an organization called Umalpas-Ka, which means "break free." Guillermo is the head of Umalpas-Ka.

Guillermo Bautista: We are fighting for our rights to our land.

Visitacion Darean: We cannot leave this place. That's why we joined the organization.

Narrator: Fil-Estate started bulldozing the mountainous hills for golf course construction, but Umalpas Ka members responded.

Adelaida Sevilla: There were many women who climbed the mountain. We formed a human barricade to prevent the bulldozer from excavating the land. It was a full force show-up by the Philippine National Police, the military, barangay and Fil-Estate security, but we proved how firm we were during the negotiations and we won.

Narrator: But peasants who joined Umalpas-Ka paid a price for their non-violent organizing against the development. They face an occupying military force in their community, including the Philippine National Police and armed security guards.

Celedonio Sevilla: I was on my way home. I met the barangay captain's brother along the way. Upon seeing me, he exclaimed, "You are one of them!" and slapped me at the same time. He even fired a shot. So I ran toward my house.

Narrator: Celedonio was one of several victims of harassment reportedly organized by local officials. The brother of Celedonio's assailant is a barangay captain and a Fil-Estate subcontractor.

Guillermo Bautista: I was harassed many times in forming the organization. In fact the harassment that we experienced was on August 9, 1996. The bodyguards of the barangay captain came with high-powered guns. They continuously harassed us every night, and they are still giving me death threats. They have also forcibly entered my house, and we are still getting harassed.

Celedonio Sevilla: I don't know any reason for the assault except my affiliation with Umalpas-Ka.

Phillip Bautista: Peaceful barrio. This is very peaceful. You could go everywhere here before, but now I am afraid. Other people are afraid. We cannot go somewhere.

Visitacion Darean: We went many times to the town hall, but no one helped us because, according to them, we cannot achieve anything in the town hall. They didn't pay any attention to us.

Celedonio Sevilla: They said that they could not do anything.

Visitacion Darean: They didn't pay us any attention. They said we cannot hope for anything there.

Celedonio Sevilla: They even laughed at us.

Mayor Apacible: I'm not there. I'm not present every day, but there's no such thing. Only there is some misunderstanding, and I think this is something like politics.

Roniel Asahan: At first, we publicized the issue to many people. This helped us expose what the military is doing to many people through holding rallies, pickets and media projects to protest and call a stop to militarization.

Romy Capulong: You have here a community of two thousand families ah, in 8,650 hectares completely militarized.

Narrator: In 1997, Fil-Estate security guards gunned down two opponents of Harbor Town, according to peasant and national newspaper reports. One of the Fil-Estate security guards left his identity badge at the crime scene. They were arrested for the murders but then released.

Mayor Apacible: Some of these cases have nothing to do with the land problem. There aren't even, there are security guards in one particular area, there are security guards. They went on drinking spree, and that's it.

Narrator: Later that year a third opponent of the Harbortown project died of gunshot wounds but local authorities never made any arrests.

Guillermo Bautista: Since the establishment of the organization Umalpas Ka, three farmers have been killed. They are: Perfecto Manalo, Francisco Marasigan, and Maximino Carpenter, who are all members of the organization Umalpas Ka.

Narrator: Peasants believe they were being killed because they opposed Harbortown, and so does the New People's Army. This guerrilla movement threatened retaliation against Fil-Estate. And then the militarization eased and the killings stopped. A spokesperson of the New People's Army, or NPA, Ka Roger, restated their position on Hacienda Looc.

Ka Roger: If they will continue these unnecessary killings the NPA will be forced to launch military operations against their armed goons and anybody responsible for these killings.

Narrator: Since the Communist Party of the Philippines formed the NPA during the reign of dictator Ferdinand Marcos, they have been a key force in fighting the government in areas of local support throughout the Philippine countryside.

Ka Roger: The Philippines is basically an agricultural country, so the problem is land.

Narrator: The New People's Army is calling for genuine agrarian reform -- a plan to demolish the centuries long tradition of haciendas, landlords, and land grabbing, and redistribute land ownership directly to those who farm it.

Ka Lian: Ultimately it would have to come down to armed struggle because that is the only way to change the whole system, the whole structure. We have to seize political power from the ruling classes and not leave it as just simply a legal battle or parliamentary struggle because it would never be resolved by those means, as history has proven time and again.

Narrator: The NPA has not intervened in Hacienda Looc, but their pledge of support marked a turning point in the villagers' struggle against Fil-Estate and the government.

Phillip Bautista: We welcome the NPA to have some assistance. I think it helps a lot to minimize the harassment - harassment from the municipality or from the barrio.

Roniel Asahan: We are glad to receive the support from those who will truly help us, that is the support from the NPA, because they are supportive of the struggle of the peasants here in our community.

Narrator: The villagers not only welcome the NPA's support, but also their message.

Guillermo: Here in our community, we can only achieve genuine agrarian reform by waging a struggle...a fight for our land. If we just rely on the government to implement it, we will never achieve genuine agrarian reform.

Press Conference MC: The World Number One □ Tiger Woods.

Ka Lian: Does he have any idea that despite the fact that he enjoys the game and other rich people enjoy the game so much what about its effects on the poor people?

Jen Schradie: Yes, Tiger with all due respect, I wanted to know what you had to say about farmers here in the Philippines who are being displaced for the construction on golf courses in a town called Hacienda Looc, and I was wondering what you would say to the farmers?

Tiger: Well to be honest with you, I really didn't know that until now.

Earl Woods: Have fun. Golf is a game.

NPA guerrilla: To them, maybe it's just a game but to millions and millions of farmers, it's life and death.

Earl Woods: its spelled g-a-m-e. Game. It is not life and death.

Tiger Woods: Unfortunately, that's a pretty tough situation. A lot of people want to play golf and also some people need to make a living farming, so it's one of those things I think over time we'll find out what the answer is, but initially as I said, it could be swayed back and forth.

Narrator: The NPA's numbers grew 25% the year after Tiger's visit.

Jen Schradie: Why are you a guerrilla rather than a golfer?

Ka Lian: It's because it's what is needed in our country. Right now, what we need is to liberate ourselves, to fight a revolution and not hold a golf club or play golf.

Narrator: And Fil-Estate considered talks with the NPA.

Macky Maceda: If the government approaches them for peace, why can't the private sector, right?

Narrator: But Fil-Estates' efforts were not successful in stopping resistance. And Tiger's fan, President Ramos, was replaced by another golfer, Joseph Estrada, a former movie actor turned politician, who, like Ramos, has also refused to return Hacienda Looc land back to peasants. The golf courses have not yet been built, but villagers still face off against Fil-Estate bulldozers, and the NPA is still watching.

Adelaida Sevilla: And if the government does not help and there are others who are willing to help...whose side will the people choose? Filipinos have a saying "An oppressed person will fight back with the blade."