July 15, 2019

To Whom it May Concern:

Earth Law Center and the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (a network of over 100 organizations and individuals worldwide) voice their support for the introduction of a Bill on the Rights of Nature in the Philippines.

We applaud the tremendous efforts and commitment by the Philippine Misereor Partnership, Inc. (PMPI), NASSA/Caritas Philippines and their colleagues in their undertaking of the draft bill, of which Earth Law Center provided expert consultation.

Rights of Nature laws are emerging in over 20 countries as a solution to our environmental crisis. Rights of Nature laws change our current anthropocentric paradigm, where humans are owners of and separate from Nature, towards humans as a part of Nature with responsibilities and obligations owed to Nature. Such a paradigm shift is necessary to ensure a future for humankind and non human life on Earth.

In 2008, Ecuador became the first country to recognize Nature’s rights in its constitution. Bolivia quickly followed suit, adopting the Law of Mother Earth in 2010, which identifies rights that Mother Earth is entitled to, similar to that of the proposed Philippines bill.

Since 2008, countries around the world have introduced Rights of Nature laws and we have learned much about what else is needed to ensure implementation of the Rights of Nature. This includes: identifying the standards for the Rights of Nature, and when we will know if its rights are violated, highlighting and ensuring that our obligations and responsibilities are corollary to rights, creating the institutions to represent Nature in decisions and disputes, creating the institutions to implement and enforce the Rights of Nature, identifying how to respectfully and appropriately connect Rights of Nature laws to existing customary and Indigenous laws, identifying penalties and remedies, and ensuring citizens can hold industry and government accountable.

In this regard, the Philippines draft bill represents a comprehensive effort to recognize and protect the Rights of Nature in law, and also ensure the Rights of Nature are considered in policy decisions before damage is done. The creation of the Commission, for example, is incredibly important to ensure this bill is enforced proactively, as well as judicially.

Philippine law already allows citizens to sue on behalf of the Nature for violations of environmental law. This is a great first step and one that many other countries do not have. Such law has already proven successful, for example to protect the largest Marine Protected Area, the Tañon Strait, from oil exploration.

Despite these successes, we are seeing that more is needed in order to not only protect but *restore* ecosystems to health. The Rights of Nature amendment is the next step towards realizing a future in which the needs of Filipinos are balanced with those of the environment.

If the Philippines pass the proposed bill, they will become the first country in South- East Asia to do so . The Government of the Philippines would also help pave the way for other countries in the region to follow suit in recognizing the Rights of Nature. We cannot voice our support enough for this great undertaking.

On behalf of people and planet,

Earth Law Center (ELC), USA

Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN)