

## FREEMAN REGION

## Negrense labor leader, "father of 13th month pay," passes away

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BACOLOD CITY, Philippines – Lawyer Zoilo de la Cruz, a Negrense labor leader and human rights fighter who was known as the "father of the 13th month pay," passed away Saturday night in Makati City. He was 84.

De la Cruz, of Murcia town in Negros Occidental, succumbed to kidney failure at the Makati Medical Center, according to his son, Roland de la Cruz, acting director for Youth of the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines.

The elder De la Cruz, who had been undergoing dialysis for a year, was a respected national trade union leader with decades spent defending workers' rights and welfare. He succeeded in securing programs and better benefits for sugar plantation workers, their families, and communities.

He conceptualized the 13th month pay, the Social Amelioration Program in the sugar industry and payment of cost of living allowance to workers in the private sector. He organized the Sugar Industry Foundation Inc. and was one of the founders of the TUCP.

"A pillar of the trade union movement, my father, even in his sick bed, reminded us to never give up the fight for the welfare of the workers," Roland said.

Roland said his father's remains are now at the Santuario de San Antonio in Makati City and will be flown to Negros Occidental on Friday, where it will lie in wake at the Sugar Workers Livelihood Center in Bacolod City.

On Saturday, a necrological service will be offered by the different labor unions at the Center at 9 a.m. On Sunday, the body will be brought to the family home at Barangay Sum-ag in Bacolod for another necrological mass at 4 p.m.

De la Cruz's remains will be brought back to Manila on Monday, where it will be cremated and laid to rest at the Santuario de San Antonio crypt in Forbes Park, Makati City.

De la Cruz is survived by his children Jess, Linus, Benjie, Zolly, Lizalyn, Roland and Vivian.