



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

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EDITORIAL

Respect the dead, friend or foe

It is a tradition in most cultures in the world to respect the dead, whether the deceased was a friend, a foe or an unknown. This culture of respect is even more ingrained among the Filipino people who honor, nay, even venerate, their departed. More so, many even extend the period of mourning up to forty days after the demise of their loved one.

Thus, it was a shock to the people that Ka Randall Echanis, a respected champion for genuine land reform and a major consultant of the NDFP peace panel for social and economic reforms, was brutally murdered before dawn of August 10 by suspected state agents.

Adding anger to the shock, on the evening of the same day, Ka Randy's mutilated body was forcibly taken by the police from his widow, family and friends. The obvious aim for the abduction was to obliterate marks of torture from his body.

This is in fact not the first time that armed minions of the regime maltreated the remains of their victims.

After an armed encounter in Laguna province last 5 August, the police took the remains of three NPA members from a funeral home to their base, Camp Vicente Lim, without the knowledge much less the permission of the victims' relatives. The three NPA victims and two more are still held in the base as of this writing.

Earlier on 5 February, the remains of two murdered peasant activists were found hastily buried under false names in a cemetery in Calamba, Laguna. Before this, the police claimed that the two were NPA fighters and that they, the police, even helped their families to bury them. This preposterous lie was debunked when the two peasants' remains were later found in the mislabeled graves.

These three cases and many similar ones are patent violations of international norms on the respect of the deceased as well as the GRP-NDFP Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) which guarantees basic rights for combatants and non-combatants on both sides. These guarantees include respect for the dead and the right to a decent burial.

Last Wednesday, 12 August, was International Humanitarian Law Day, a celebration supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross, pursuant to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949. The GRP formally submitted its adherence to these conventions.

The regime, through its foreign affairs secretary and AFP chief-of-staff paid lip service to the conventions' humanitarian principles. But its hands holding guns do the opposite.

The regime and its armed minions have seemingly lost all traces of humanity. **UP**



Peasant leader brutally murdered

Randall Echanis, 72, beloved peasant leader and Chairman of opposition Anakpawis Partylist was brutally murdered at around 1:00am on Monday, 10 August, in his rented house in Quezon City, Metro Manila. Eyewitnesses reveal that six as yet unidentified killers forcibly entered Randall's house the night he was killed. His body bore signs of torture, gunshot wounds and several stab wounds with an icepick.

His wife Erlinda Echanis identified Randall's remains. Local police officials, however, took away his remains, claiming he was another person.

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Only after numerous protests from Erlinda, lawyers and human rights defenders, did the police turnover his remains to the family, belatedly admitting that fingerprint tests established it was indeed the remains of Randall Echanis.

The extremely brutal murder drew a wide range of protests. Protest actions were immediately organized, despite the Covid-19 restrictions. The Anakpawis Partylist, consisting of labor union center Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU, May 1st Movement) and national peasant association Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP, Peasant Movement of the Philippines) condemned the Duterte regime, the police and military. They raised their fists in anger and condemnation.

Randall was also the KMP's Deputy Secretary General.

Prof. Jose Ma. Sison, Communist Party of the Philippines Founding Chairman condemned President Duterte and his gang of butchers. The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) cited the brilliant record of Randall as a veteran peasant leader who played a key role in forging the Genuine Agrarian Reform Bill (GARB) as early as 2007.

The Amihan Peasant Women organization cited Randall's significant contributions to the peasant struggle for land and genuine land reform and national industrialization. It declared that Ka Randall helped coconut farmers seek recovery of billions of pesos of the coco levy fund by building the General Small Coconut Farmers' Fund. He also helped frame the Free Irrigation Bill and the Rice Industry Development Act (RIDA).

The National Union of People's Lawyers, through its Chairperson Atty. Edre Olalia vigorously condemned the Duterte regime and firmly defended Randall and his family. Olalia and other lawyer organizations and some opposition politicians sternly criticized the police for forcibly taking away the remains of Randall.

Randall was also an active member of the NDFP Reciprocal Working Committee on Social and Economic Reforms. He was the head of the NDFP unit for agrarian reform and rural development. During the 3rd round of peace negotiations with the Duterte government in Rome in January 2017, he and his team achieved a significant victory when both the NDFP and GRP panels agreed to the free distribution of land to the peasants.

Among peace advocates in the Philippines and abroad, Randall was highly appreciated for his dedicated, effective and humble service in advancing the peace efforts.

The Chairperson of the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) Len Cooper praised Randall as a true internationalist and anti-imperialist. Len cited his active participation as the Deputy Secretary General of the Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) and in the Asian Peasant Coalition with more than 15 million members representing 21 organizations. He praised Randall's more than five decades of service to the peasants, workers and all the exploited and oppressed.

Randall's widow Erlinda Echanis spoke out with determination: "Turn our grief into revolutionary courage! The struggle continues!" **UP**



Thousands of protesters marched in Metro Manila. Photo: Carlo Manalansan | Bulatlat.

Condemnation, protests greet Duterte's State of the Nation Address

Despite the Duterte government's draconian ban on public gatherings, thousands of indignant Filipinos turned up in the streets of Metro Manila and in various parts of the country on 27 July during President Rodrigo Duterte's State of the Nation Address, to declare 'the real State of the Nation'.

In Metro Manila, thousands gathered with face masks in the University of the Philippines campus, coming from all sections of the population: farmers, fisherfolk, workers, women, youth, government employees, teachers, healthcare professionals, religious officials, the urban poor and many others. Speaker after speaker exposed and denounced the widespread joblessness, poverty, hunger and rapid spread of the Covid-19 disease in Philippine society. They condemned the Duterte government's "incompetence, corruption, repression and its complete disregard and abandonment of the people's well-being" and called for its resignation or ouster.

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Various types of protest actions were held in other parts of the country including in Cagayan Valley, Isabela, Baguio City, Pampanga and Tarlac in the north, Cavite and Laguna in the Southern Tagalog region, Legazpi, Albay, Naga and Catanduanes in the Bicol region, Iloilo, Capiz, Aklan, Cebu, Dumaguete City and Bacolod City in the Visayas islands. Catholic churches tolled their bells in solidarity with the protest actions. In Duterte's hometown Davao City, police tried to stop a protest action by requiring participants to present quarantine passes. The protesters instead held their program in front of the trade union center's headquarters, Kilusang Mayo Uno.

The Communist Party of the Philippines ridiculed Duterte for his "empty SONA speech". In their statement, the CPP said, "(Duterte) made no mention about the plight of farmers, workers and others that are direly affected by his inept, militarist and failing response to the pandemic."

Instead of addressing the worsening spread of the virus, "he revived his proposal to implement the death penalty, provide incentives to corporations and extend his emergency powers to enable him to accumulate more kickbacks."

CPP Founding Chairman Prof. Jose Maria Sison for his part, lambasted Duterte's speech as being "outrightly false, inaccurate, evasive, self-contradictory, repetitious and inane."

He said, "Worst of all, the SONA does not manifest any remorse and desire to rectify all the colossal crimes that Duterte and his ruling clique have committed to make his regime not only the worst since the end of the Marcos fascist dictatorship but surpass this in terms of tyranny, treason, mass murder, plunder and chicanery. The SONA proves that the Duterte reign of terror and greed is incorrigible and must be ousted as soon as possible to stop the ruination of the nation."

Expressing their indignation, famous artists also launched an online concert called 'People's Voice'. One of the concert's highlights was a community singing of 'Di nyo ba naririnig?', a Filipino adaptation of Les Misérables 'Do you hear the people sing?'. Other artists also posted online performances, criticizing the Duterte government's incompetence, corruption and repression. **UP**



*Marcventures mining operations.
Photo: steelguru.com*

AFP bombs Samar villages for bauxite mining operations

Troopers of the 8th Infantry Division of the Armed Forces of the Philippines subjected hinterland villages of San Jose de Buan town, Samar Province, to artillery shelling on 14 and 29 July, forcing up to 50 farmers to evacuate their communities.

According to *Ang Bayan*, at least 64 rounds of howitzer and mortar shells were fired at farmlands near the town center of San Jose de Buan on 14 July. This was followed by 24 rounds of mortar shells fired at a communal forest area on 29 July in the village of San Nicolas of the same town. The troopers of the Duterte government are conducting security operations for the opening of the

Samar Bauxite Project of the Marcventures Holdings, Inc.

The mining venture, owned by the Davao-based Alcantara family, is projected to ravage more than 12,000 hectares of land said to contain about 73.2 million metric tons of bauxite. The mining operations will directly affect the towns of Motiong, Paranas, Gandara, San Jose de Buan, San Jorge and Matuguinao in Samar Province.

The New People's Army in the area is supporting the local communities' resistance against the impending mining operation. NPA units have been conducting harassment operations against the AFP troopers who are acting as 'investment defense forces'.

On 1 July, an NPA unit successfully drove away AFP troopers from communities of Motiong town after a soldier was killed by an NPA sniping operation in the village of Beri. On 7 July, two AFP troopers were killed in another NPA sniping operation in San Nicolas village.

The 8th Infantry Division retaliated by carrying out the artillery shelling of the communities' farmlands and communal forest areas. There were no NPA units in the area at that time.

AFP soldiers also abducted farmer David Dacles, resident of San Nicolas village, San Jose de Buan, on 25 July. He is currently being detained, interrogated and tortured in a military camp in Catato village, Paranas town. **UP**