



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF THE PHILIPPINES

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EDITORIAL Perpetual Isolation

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque confirmed recently that President Rodrigo Duterte has been in “perpetual isolation” after having been exposed to the coronavirus from Interior Secretary Eduardo Año who had been tested positive.

Then, on 25 August, Duterte ominously revealed in a TV address that his Barrett’s esophagus, a disease causing regurgitation of stomach acids, is nearing stage one cancer. Much earlier, on different occasions, he revealed he has also been suffering from Beurger’s disease, myasthenia gravis, and daily pains from a spinal injury from a motorcycle accident for which he has been using the opioid fentanyl.

Obviously Duterte’s rapidly deteriorating health condition is the cause of his disappearance from public view. Last time he appeared in a live broadcast was on 27 July, and was afterwards seen only on pre-recorded weekly late-night TV addresses. Even on his highly edited TV clips, his physical and mental capabilities were clearly seen as on a very steep decline.

Duterte’s physical and mental condition seem to widen the cracks in his tottering regime.

His supporters are once again barking for a misnamed ‘revolutionary government’, in essence a bid for federalism, to maintain Duterte in power or prevent him from being prosecuted after his term Constitutionally expires in 2022. But this so-called revolution is being opposed, at least outwardly, by both active and retired high-ranking military officers.

Duterte has been acquiescent to China for its business incursions into the Philippines, especially development projects with high interest loans, and its military aggression in the West Philippine and South China seas. Now these Chinese intrusions are being more openly defied by his military officials and his foreign secretary. The latter, following US strategy on its conflict with China, even strongly recommended terminating contracts between the Duterte regime and Chinese businesses involved in projects in the disputed seas.

The corrupt Duterte and his cohorts are grossly negligent in facing the onslaught of the COVID-19 virus in the Philippines. Instead they take advantage of the incessant lockdowns to vastly enrich themselves. They rampage to kill, arrest and imprison those who protest and demand a stop to the worsening poverty and dire misery.

But the revolutionary movement and the democratic opposition to the regime are rapidly expanding. More groups and individuals from all urban sectors of society are organizing themselves and are together voicing dissent. The peasants in the countryside are joining the New People’s Army. The conditions are ever more favorable for the nascent People’s Democratic Government and it’s People’s Court to dispense justice.

Justice, not disease, should put Duterte in perpetual isolation. **UP**



Negros human rights defender Zara Alvarez murdered

Zara Alvarez, community health worker and human rights defender, became the latest victim of extrajudicial killing under the Rodrigo Duterte government. Zara, 39, was gunned down by suspected state security forces on the night of 17 August near her home in Mandalagan village, Bacolod City in central Philippines. A week earlier, peasant leader and Anakpawis Partylist Chairman Randall Echanis was tortured and brutally killed inside his residence in Quezon City also by suspected state security forces.

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Zara was a local paralegal officer of the Karapatan human rights alliance and an official of the Negros Island Health Integrated Program. She had been subjected to harassment and threats by state security and intelligence officials since the Gloria Arroyo administration. Officials of the Duterte regime included her in a list of so-called terrorists in 2018. Security officials have been posting ‘Wanted’ flyers with her photo and name, accusing her of being a leader of the New People’s Army.

“There could be no other culprits behind this brutal and cowardly act than the fascist butchers of the State,” said Cristina Palabay, Secretary General of Karapatan human rights alliance.

“It is no secret to anyone – even to the international human rights community with whom Zara worked with – that State forces have long wanted her dead, and that her senseless killing could only be their handiwork as part of a systematic and worsening crackdown on human rights defenders in the country.”

Karapatan condemned the killing and echoed the call of family, colleagues and friends of Zara for an immediate, independent and impartial probe on her killing.

In a [letter to President Rodrigo Duterte](#), the International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) expressed “profound concern for the killings of prominent human rights defenders, Randall Echanis and Zara Alvarez.”

They said, “These attacks appear to be part of a wider pattern of attacks on human rights defenders in the Philippines. The Philippines has repeatedly been highlighted as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for human rights defenders.”

They called on the Duterte government to put a stop to the killings of human rights defenders and conduct “prompt, independent and impartial investigations into the killings of Randall and Zara. Those responsible must be held accountable.”

The [ESCR-Net is the largest global network](#) of advocates for economic, social, cultural and environmental justice consisting of over 280 organizations and individuals from 75 countries.

In a related development, [62 human rights and civil society groups](#) from around the world sent a letter to member states and observer countries of the UN Human Rights Council on 27 August, calling their attention to the brutal killing of Zara and Randall and expressing their “continued grave concern over ongoing extrajudicial executions and other serious human rights violations” in the country.

“To date,” they said, “there has been virtually no accountability for unlawful killings committed by police and their associates... Not only has the government sought to evade accountability, but the President and other high-level officials have continued to encourage killings and given assurances to perpetrators that they would enjoy impunity for such killings.”

They called on the UNHRC member states to adopt a resolution “establishing an independent international investigative mechanism on extrajudicial executions and other human rights violations committed in the Philippines since 2016, with a view to contributing to accountability.” **UP**



Indigenous Lumads of Mindanao.
Photo: gmanews.tv

AFP forcibly evicts 2,000 Lumads

In Bukidnon, Mindanao, 15 communities in the town of Cabanglasan were being occupied by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The indigenous people of the area, the Lumad, resisted the forced occupation by the military and their abuses.

Two hundred residents led by their tribal leaders confronted the soldiers and demanded an end to the military occupation. The military reacted by declaring the communities ‘No Man’s Land’.

The areas were bombed 15 times, shelled 11 times, and strafed on 22 June 2020. The soldiers strafed the houses of the Lumad peasants. They butchered their pigs and other

domestic animals. Corn fields were destroyed.

Lumad evacuees were declared New People’s Army ‘surrendered’. The military collected large amounts of money from the Manila government for reporting the big number of ‘surrendered’. The evacuees were coerced to undergo a so-called nine-day paramilitary training to serve as the military’s cannon fodder in combating the New People’s Army.

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Military operations continued non-stop in villages and communities of Bukidnon since the last week of June. Red fighters of the New People's Army in Bukidnon, however, have been able to maneuver and carry out counter-attack operations against the 88th and 8th Infantry Battalions of the AFP.

On 22 June, after a military attack, the NPA was able to counter-maneuver, killing four soldiers. A few hours later, another NPA unit conducted two successive harassment and sniper operations against reinforcing soldiers. The next day, another unit of the AFP was ambushed by the Red fighters. Two soldiers were killed on the spot.

On 30 June, an NPA team ambushed an intelligence agent of the 88th and 8th IB. The said agent was responsible for the murder of activists and peasant leaders in the area.

However, in a firefight in Cabanlasan town on 31 July, a Red fighter was martyred. The NPA in Bukidnon honored the Lumad fighter, Ka Daligas, declaring "Your death is heavier than Mount Pantaron!" He had joined the NPA in 2017. He was known for his perseverance in organizing Lumad youth and inspiring them to join the armed revolution. **UP**



Julieta de Lima appointed Interim Chairperson of NDFP Negotiating Panel

Julieta de Lima has been appointed by the National Council of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines as the Interim Chairperson of the NDFP Negotiating Panel in peace talks with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. Ms. De Lima is a member of the NDFP Negotiating Panel and is also currently the Chairperson of the Reciprocal Working Committee on Social and Economic Reform (CASER). She replaces Fidel V. Agcaoili, who passed away suddenly on 23 July 2020.

The other members of the NDFP panel are Benito Tiamson, Coni Ledesma and Asterio Palima.

Prof. Jose Maria Sison remains as the Chief Political Consultant and Luis Jalandoni as Senior Adviser.

Randall Echanis, a peasant leader and member of the Reciprocal Working Committee on Social and Economic Reform (RWCSER) was tortured and stabbed to death by an 8-member military death squad on 10 August 2020. He headed the RWCSER Subcommittee on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development.

There are also NDFP Consultants who are in prison and whose release the NDFP Negotiating Panel has been demanding from the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. These are Vicente Ladlad, Adelberto Silva, Rey Cassambre, Eduardo Sarmiento, Frank Fernandez, Fernando Castillo, Renante Gamara and Esterlita Suaybaguio.

The NDFP insists that the Consultants be released in accordance with the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) which stipulates the safety and immunity from surveillance and arrest of those participating in peace negotiations. **UP**



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