



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

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Amsterdamsestraatweg 50, 3513AG Utrecht, The Netherlands
T: : +31 30 2310431 | E: updates.philippines@ndfp.org | W: updates.ndfp.org

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EDITORIAL

Identify, prosecute and punish the murderers

By their own admission, Duterte's armed security agents broke into numerous private homes in Cavite, Batangas, Laguna and Rizal provinces in the early hours of Sunday, 7 March, arrested six individuals and killed nine persons. We are very familiar with the sordid explanation: police and military agents conducted so-called legitimate armed operations and the armed criminals were killed because they resisted arrest.

At this point however, after more than 20,000 "suspected drug personalities" and hundreds more "communist terrorists" have been killed since the beginning of the Duterte administration, who in the world still believes in this drivel? It's already known around the world that these police and military agents plant guns, grenades and other weapons on the murder victims to support their false claims. Independent human rights investigators are denied access to case files of these so-called legitimate operations. Countless eyewitnesses, families, friends and colleagues of the victims attest that their loved ones were unarmed and could not resist arrest, let alone could have engaged in a gunfight.

The Filipino people and the international community are appalled by these crimes. They are revolted by the Duterte regime's callous justifications and whitewashing. The calls for justice for these latest murders are echoing from the victims' loved ones, from various sections of the Philippine population, and all around the world, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

It has not escaped our attention that Duterte's spokesperson Harry Roque was forced to admit that those killed on 7 March were all unarmed, despite the police agents claims to the contrary. That his government commits to investigate, prosecute and punish those who violated the law. Will we then see the swift and effective delivery of justice for these crimes?

So much empty words and false commitments. Calls for justice demand a speedy, thorough and truly independent investigation. It should be independent from the police and military generals who are themselves complicit in the crimes. Identification, arrest, prosecution and commensurate punishment of the criminals. And a stop to the extrajudicial killings and other atrocious human rights violations.

The Filipino people cannot expect to obtain justice under the Duterte regime. To whom can Filipinos turn to for justice? **UP**



APPALLED. UN OHCHR spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani. UN youtube.

Storm of condemnations after "Bloody Sunday" massacre in Southern Tagalog

A storm of condemnations and protests followed the simultaneous killings and arrests on 7 March 2021 perpetrated by Duterte's armed security forces in four provinces in the Southern Tagalog region. Brandishing almost identical search warrants, elements of the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines broke into the homes and offices of unarmed

social activists, abducted some and killed nine of them, while planting guns and explosives as fake evidence.

Ravina Shamdasani, Spokesperson of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that they are "appalled by the apparently arbitrary killing of nine activists in simultaneous police-military operations last Sunday."

Shamdasani recalled that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet already warned in June 2020 that red-tagging, meaning being accused of being fronts for the NPA and the CPP, has proved to be extremely dangerous to the activists.

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Phil Robertson, Human Rights Watch Deputy Asia Director said, “these raids appear to be part of a coordinated plan by the authorities to raid, arrest and even kill activists in their homes and offices” and were “clearly part of the government’s increasingly brutal counter-insurgency campaign.”

In the Philippine Senate, Senator Ralph Recto called for the Duterte government to end its “dirty war”. In the House of Representatives, the Makabayan bloc together with other opposition parliamentarians criticized the Duterte government and pointed out the killings came just a couple of days after Duterte ordered his forces to kill communists and “don’t mind human rights”.

Philippine human rights organization Karapatan condemned the Philippine National Police (PNP) for the massacre of innocent civilians on what it called “Bloody Sunday”. It decried that the families of the victims are being tortured twice over, from the killing of their loved ones and then being forced to “suffer dehumanization, threats and harassment” just to retrieve their loved ones’ remains.

The Communist Party of the Philippines condemned in the strongest terms the spate of extrajudicial killings and arrests carried out by the AFP and PNP across the Southern Tagalog and Bicol regions. The CPP further said the attacks followed the pattern of coordinated attacks in other regions across the country over the past years.

The CPP called on the Filipino people “to manifest their indignation and protest these atrocious crimes of state terrorism and gross violations of human rights.”

It added, “We urge the friends of the Filipino people abroad to condemn and help expose the brutal attacks and the Duterte regime’s growing list of fascist crimes.” **UP**



Journalist and labor unionist released from prison

Manila Today Editor-in-Chief Lady Ann Salem and trade unionist Rodrigo Esparago were ordered released on orders of Judge Monique Quisumbing Ignacio of the Mandaluyong Regional Trial Court on 5 March 2021. The judge declared that the search warrant used to enter Salem’s home is invalid, rendering the firearm and explosives purportedly found in her home as inadmissible evidence before the court.

Despite the court’s orders however, Duterte government prosecutors still attempted to keep Salem and Esparago in jail. Their lawyers, volunteers from the Public Interest Law Center, were able to assert that the orders are final and executory, allowing the two to eventually walk out of prison.

Salem thanked Judge Quisumbing-Ignacio for “seeing the truth behind the fabricated charges.” She thanked all those who supported the campaign for her release and that of labor organizer Rodrigo Esparago.

Both were arrested on 10 December 2020, together with other labour leaders Denise Velasco of Defend Jobs Philippines, labor center KMU-Metro Manila Deputy Secretary General Romina Astudillo, KMU-Metro Manila Executive Committee Member Mark Ryan Cruz, KMU-Metro Manila member Jaime Gregorio, Jr., and Solidarity of Labor Rights and Welfare officer Joel Demate. A few days earlier, Jose Bernardino of the Workers’ Alliance was also arrested.

Rodrigo Esparago is a founding member of the Quezon City Labor Force. He is a labor organizer among hotel and construction workers, janitors and worker communities in Metro Manila. Aside from Manila Today, Salem is also the Communications Officer of the International Association of Women in Radio and Television.

Their arrest on trumped-up charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives met with immediate international condemnation. The Global Unions called on international bodies, the UN Human Rights Council and the International Labor Organizations to consider as an emergency the deterioration of human rights conditions in the Philippines and to employ all official and diplomatic avenues available, including sending missions to investigate the human rights and trade union repression in the Philippines.

The Council of Global Unions is composed of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), ten Global Union Federations (GUFs) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The PILC lawyers said the other labor leaders remain in detention. “We hope that the other victims of the trumped-up charges resulting from the implementation of this void search warrant will be released from detention.” The campaign for their release continues both in the Philippines and in the international arena. **UP**



*UNBOWED. Atty. Angelo Karlo Guillen.
Photo: NUPL.*

Lawyer vows to fight on after assassination attempt

Four days after a nearly fatal attempt on his life by yet unknown assailants, human rights lawyer Atty. Angelo Karlo Guillen vowed to continue to defend victims of human rights violations.

From his hospital bed on 7 March, Atty. Guillen, Assistant Vice President for Visayas of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers, said, "Physically, the attack has weakened me. But my resolve to continue with the NUPL work has never been stronger... We can never let fear prevent us from fighting the battles for the cause of human rights."

Addressing his colleagues and clients, he said, "I can't wait to get back out there and stand beside you again."

Two unidentified assailants wearing masks and caps stabbed Atty. Guillen on his left temple and back on the night of 3 March 2021 on his way home in Iloilo City. The perpetrators took his laptop computer containing, among others, the files of the cases he was handling. These included the petition to the Supreme Court against the Anti-Terror Law, the massacre of indigenous Tumandok leaders in Panay Island in December 2020, the Sagay 9 Massacre in Negros Occidental, and other cases of human rights violations.

Atty. Guillen, in representing activists and human rights defenders, has been himself red-tagged, accused of being a member of the Communist Party of the Philippines and New People's Army, subjected to illegal surveillance and harassment. He was arrested on 1 May 2020 when he tried to prevent the arrest of 42 protesters after the murder of Jory Porquia, Bayan Muna Iloilo coordinator.

In condemning the assassination attempt on Atty. Guillen, the NUPL said that 54 lawyers and judges have already been killed in the performance of their work since Rodrigo Duterte came to power in 2016. They pointed out that Atty. Guillen is the fourth NUPL member who survived attempts on their lives since 2016.

Labor center KMU, Migrante International and numerous groups in the Philippines and abroad condemned this blatant violation of human rights. **UP**

The revolutionary movement will outlast Duterte -- CPP

The Communist Party of the Philippines on 6 March 2021 stated that it will outlast the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte whose term will end in 2022. "The New People's Army will grow stronger in Duterte's remaining days in office," CPP Information Officer Marco Valbuena said. "We are confident that even by the end of Duterte's term or life, the AFP's plans of crushing the New People's Army will be unrealized."

Valbuena made the statement after Duterte ordered his security forces to disregard human rights and "kill, kill, kill" members of the New People's Army. Two days later, in the early morning of 7 March, Duterte's security forces massacred nine unarmed activists in the Southern Tagalog region, near the nation's capital.

Valbuena said that the Duterte government's present policy of terror and armed oppression have only resulted in more people fighting back and joining the New People's Army. "The present economic crisis and the anti-people policies and corruption of the government have angered the Filipino people to fight back."

In response to the growing number of opposition to his rule, the Duterte government has been buying more helicopters, airplanes, drones and bombs. Duterte and his cronies are also amassing public funds meant for health, education and the social and economic needs of the people.

"With the boundless support of the people, the NPA will continue to recruit new members, help the masses in their struggles, defend them against the state terrorists, overcome the AFP's offensives and advance the people's armed resistance," Valbuena said.

"The people's war will persevere long beyond Duterte, until the people's desire for national freedom and social liberation is satisfied," he said. **UP**