



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

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EDITORIAL

ICYMI: The Duterte regime is culpable for crimes against humanity

It is already globally acknowledged that President Rodrigo Duterte and his cabal of security officials are culpable for the murder, torture, unjust imprisonment and harassment of tens of thousands of Filipino citizens. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, no less, reported that “persistent impunity for human rights violations is stark and practical obstacles to accessing justice within the country are almost insurmountable.”

As we write this, the ICC Prosecutor called for a full investigation into allegations of “crimes against humanity” against Duterte, unearthing the evidence needed to file formal charges against this mass murderer.

Duterte’s fake ‘war on drugs’ has resulted in the killing by police forces of more than 30,000 suspected drug dependents and small-time dealers. Meanwhile, illegal drugs continue to proliferate, fattening the pockets of police and military officials, as well as Duterte’s cronies.

Duterte’s vain ‘war against communism’ has resulted in the killing by military and police forces of thousands of civilians, political activists and human rights defenders. Hundreds more are unjustly detained, unremittingly harassed and forced to ‘surrender’. The most vicious security officials are promoted, awarded plum positions in the civilian bureaucracy and grow fatter from ‘reward money’. Meanwhile, this vicious war has only pushed more Filipinos to take the path of armed revolutionary resistance.

Security forces of the Duterte government have acknowledged and master-minded intentional and direct attacks against Filipinos who are not active participants in the armed conflict. They have launched bombings and artillery shelling of civilian communities, causing civilian deaths and injuries, and destruction to civilian properties. They have intentionally attacked, nay mutilated, medical personnel of the New People’s Army. They callously obstruct the release of dead combatants or murdered political activists to their loved ones.

Yes, in case you missed it: the Philippine National Police, Armed Forces of the Philippines and their commander-in-chief Rodrigo Duterte are culpable for countless murders already punishable under their own laws. They are equally culpable of numerous violations of international humanitarian law in the context of the ongoing internal armed conflict.

We trust that the armed forces of the NDFP respect and abide by the Rules of the NPA, the Rules for Establishing the People’s Democratic Government, the 1998 GRP-NDFP Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law and the pertinent provisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Internal processes are in place and operational in protecting the civilian population in the course of the armed conflict.

Does anyone still trust Duterte and his officials to respect GRP laws and international humanitarian law? It is high time that this regime be summoned to face up to its horrendous crimes against the Filipino people. **UP**

Human rights groups: Stop the killings!

A total of 103 civil society, religious organizations and concerned individuals signed a [joint open letter](#) on 7 June addressed to the Philippine Supreme Court and Department of Justice, expressing “profound and urgent concern on the recent extrajudicial killings, judicial harassment, arbitrary arrests and detention and threats through red-tagging against human rights defenders, human rights lawyers, trade unionists and public sector unions, and organizers of community pantries in the Philippines.”

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The open letter enumerated grievous human rights offenses, including the killings of trade union leaders Emmanuel Asuncion and Dandy Miguel, fisher leaders Ana Mari and Ariel Evangelista, urban poor activists Melvin Dasigao and Mark Bakasno, and indigenous farmers Abner and Edward Esto and Puroy and Randy dela Cruz in March 2020.

The group condemned the arrest of Karapatan human rights alliance Chairperson Elisa Lubi and the judicial harassment of other Karapatan officers. In a similar situation are Windel Bolinget, Jong Monzon, United Church of Christ in the Philippines Bishop Hamuel Tequis and Lindy Panucho.

These are just the latest in the alarming and ongoing pattern of criminalization and violence against human rights defenders in the Philippines, the group stressed.

Aside from Philippine human rights groups, signatories to the open letter included the Asian Human Rights Commission, Center for Constitutional Governance (Uganda), Center for International Human Rights of the City University of New York, CIVICUS, FIDH, Front Line Defenders, International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances, International Service for Human Rights, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, Legal Resources Centre (Moldova), United Church of Canada and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

The group appealed to the Supreme Court and Department of Justice to stop the killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, judicial harassment, threats and red-tagging against human rights defenders in the Philippines. They called on the prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into the various offenses, insisting that "those responsible must be held accountable."

They also called for a review of the rules in serving search warrants, noting that these "appear to be routinely used to judicially harass and arbitrarily detain" human rights defenders.

The group said that the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 should be repealed. They also said that measures should be enacted to protect the defenders and to criminalize red-tagging. **UP**



Revolutionary forces to investigate accidental killing of two civilians

The National Democratic Front of the Philippines on 11 June expressed its sincere condolences to the family of Kieth Absalon, 21, and his uncle, Nolgen Absalon, 40, who were killed in Masbate City on 6 June by an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated by the New People's

Army. The Communist Party of the Philippines in a June 8 statement admitted the error of the military action and expressed deep remorse over the deaths of the two. Both were unarmed civilians not taking part in the armed conflict.

Following the accidental deaths of Keith and Nolgen, President Rodrigo Duterte, his security officials, and various civilian personalities and organizations condemned the NPA actions. Duterte's security officials demanded that those involved be surrendered to the authority of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP).

In the 11 June statement signed by NDFP Chief International Representative Luis Jalandoni and NDFP Negotiating Panel Interim Chairperson Julieta de Lima, the NDFP stressed that it had the responsibility to investigate the incident. They said that, under the 1998 GRP-NDFP Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL), the NDFP has "sole jurisdiction over complaints against units and personnel of the New People's Army, in the same way that the GRP has the sole jurisdiction over complaints against its own armed units and personnel".

They added, "The agreement is in consonance with the fact that the GRP and NDFP are engaged in a civil war and is a step forward in the direction of negotiating a just peace between the two parties.

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The agreement established the Joint Monitoring Committee as the principal mechanism to monitor the implementation of the CARHRIHL.”

On 9 June, the CPP assured the public “that the higher and lower Party committees, NPA commands and revolutionary organs of governance are fully capable of determining the necessary course of action to correct the errors of the NPA unit that led to the June 6 Masbate tragedy... The incident is being fully assessed with the aim of avoiding such errors in the future and further strengthening the NPA in serving and defending the people.”

The Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform issued its own statement expressing deep sorrow over the deaths of Keith and Nolgen Absalon. “While the tragic incident is truly condemnable, it is also a timely reminder for us to pause and reflect. The deaths... fully underscores the cost of the armed conflict in the country.”

The PEPP added, “There are calls for justice from the family and public. There are mechanisms in place that can hopefully provide justice like the CARHRIHL and related agreements and we hope that it is not disregarded by both parties even though the peace negotiations are suspended.”

They stressed that “the most viable option to stop the violence on the ground and to resolve the conflict is through a negotiated peace settlement between the warring parties.”

In a related development, three unarmed civilians also from Masbate City were killed by elements of the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines. The armed security forces claimed they engaged the civilians in an armed encounter. Family and relatives of the victims however asserted that they are not members of the NPA. **UP**



*Faked photo of NPA surrenderers and firearms.
Photo: Philippine Army.*

Fake NPA surrenders source of military corruption -- CPP

The Communist Party of the Philippines on 2 June denounced the “farcical numbers” reported by the Duterte government’s National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) of New People’s Army rebels who have surrendered. CPP Chief Information Officer Marco Valbuena said the report is a “desperate bid to make the public believe Duterte is winning the war against the revolutionary movement, in the hope of securing billions upon billions of pesos more funds for the military.”

The NTF-ELCAC announced on 30 May that 17,958 ‘rebels’ have surrendered since 2016, of which 3,684 are regular members of the NPA. On the same day, National Security Adviser Gen. Hermogenes Esperon reported that NPA members are down to 4,000.

“Using the AFP’s concocted figures,” Valbuena said, “one can only conclude that the NPA has been able to replenish its ranks with 3,984 new fighters over the past 4 years, or around 1,000 new members a year. This contradicts their repeated claims that the NPA has been ‘weakened and is on a decline’.”

Valbuena said, “The real aim of these figures is to secure more and more funds for the anomalous counterinsurgency programs of the AFP and the NTF-ELCAC, now that budget deliberations are soon to open. These military-controlled programs include the much assailed Barangay Development Program (BDP) and the Enhanced Community Livelihood Integration Program (E-CLIP), which are all cash cows serving as the military’s pork barrel.”

Under the E-CLIP, each ‘surrenderee’ is supposed to receive ₱65,000. However, the ‘surrenderee’ typically receives only a grocery bag of rice and canned goods.

“Gen. Esperon is puffing up his numbers with the ambition of securing ₱44 billion for the BDP in the 2022 budget to serve as election war chest for the Duterte-Duterte tandem,” Valbuena said, referring to the daughter and father, Sara and Rodrigo, running for president and vice-president in 2022.

He stressed that the 17,000 who ‘surrendered’ are unarmed peasants “who have been subjected by the military to relentless harassment and suppression.” They are “victims of false and baseless accusations”, forced to ‘cooperate’ under pain of being arrested on trumped up charges or killed, Valbuena insisted, “which has become the norm in the conduct of the AFP’s dirty war.”

The CPP affirmed that despite the brutal war of suppression being waged by the Duterte regime, the NPA and all revolutionary forces “remain determined to resist and surmount the fascist onslaught of the Duterte terror regime.” **UP**