**Action Network Human Rights- Philippines**  
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Disclaimer: The news articles available in this review are only collated from local newspapers. They were not written by the Action Network Human Rights- Philippines.
MANILA, Philippines - Labor groups mostly in red shirts gathered along España Boulevard in Manila to demand increased workers' benefits from the government.

The protesters, including Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), Trade Union Congress of the Philippines and Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino, assembled around Welcome Rotonda ...

The groups echoed eight labor issues discussed in a dialogue between President Benigno Aquino III, government officials, businessmen and labor leaders from 19 organizations on Tuesday.

The passage of the Security of Tenure bill protecting independent contractors and the Freedom of Information Bill, resolution of extra-judicial killings of militant leaders, tax issues, agro-industrial plans as well as high power costs are among the matters raised by Labor Day movements.

Aquino had announced on Tuesday that will not certify the Security of Tenure bill as "urgent" as its provisions may be in contrast with his administration's goal to increase employment in the country.

Other issues pressed by the protesters are the welfare of migrant workers and rights of the urban poor whose informal houses are about to be seized. [...] Manila Archbishop Luis Cardinal Tagle, meanwhile, will celebrate Mass dedicated for workers and commemorating Saint Joseph the Worker at Plaza Miranda in the morning.

By Camille Diola

MANILA, Philippines - Labor groups set 8-point demand for Mendiola protest

Belmonte: 'More work' needed to solve labor issues

MANILA, Philippines - House Speaker Feliciano Belmonte, Jr. on Wednesday admitted that more work "needs to be done" before the plight of Filipinos in the labor force can be completely alleviated.

In his message for Labor Day, Belmonte said that the 15th Congress have "filed and passed" measures addressing problems in the workforce but that the "dignity" of workers remain to be fully served.

"It is important, however, to know that steps have been taken and will continue to be taken," Belmonte said, saying that the 16th Congress, which will open this year, will be more willing to dialogue with workers.

Belmonte, meanwhile, urged workers to "cooperate" with the government's efforts to solve more labor-related issues.

"We have seen how much further cooperative efforts can lead us and it is my hope that today marks the start of our journey together," he said.

Belmonte added that House of Representatives that he led examined the difficulties of Filipino workers including those abroad, recognizing that they have "greatly contributed" to the growing economy.

"It is this sector that has been recognized globally for the high quality of work that the Filipinos have been known for today," Belmonte added.

He also expressed gratitude for workers for their "sweat and sacrifice" that keeps the country going.

By Vanessa L. Almeda

CARRASCAL, Surigao del Sur - Besieged by tribal discontent and a strong Catholic Church-backed anti-mining opposition, Marcventures Mining and Development Corp. (MMDC) finally decided to temporarily shutdown its operation in Barangay Cabangahan in Cantilan town, Surigao del Sur.

Jegie Pereda, MMDC vice president for operations, confirmed Monday the company closed its Cabangahan operations but did not say for how long the suspension will last. [...] Members of the Manobo tribe have been barricading the road in Barangay Cabangahan leading to the mining operations of MMDC in the past several weeks. [...] This town’s Mayor Vicente “Baby Boy” Pimentel separately confirmed that the mining firm shutdown its Cabangahan operations and has pulled out its equipment allegedly due to threats from Lumads to burn them.

Pimentel told MindaNews last Tuesday that it will be a "great loss" for the people of Cantilan to lose the investment of MMDC, accusing anti-mining groups, including the Cantilan local government unit, of depriving its people of the economic benefits of mining. [...] Pimentel alleged that Bat-ao and his clan asked a very "unreasonable demand" of P50 million outside the one percent royalty fee mining firms are mandated to give to indigenous peoples.

The mayor disclosed that MMDC will transfer its mining operation in his town, which could further boost the municipality’s income to an estimated P220 million in 2014 from P185 million in 2012. [...] Get out of our land [...] The Bat-ao and Hunanihan clans of Barangay Cabangahan are claimants to areas covered by MMDC’s mining operation. Earlier, Bat-ao said they want MMDC out of their ancestral lands and to pay them damages amounting to P150 million for the desecration of their burial grounds and other sacred places and the destruction of their main water source. The “hawudon” or elder of the Bat-ao clan also reiterated an earlier stance that their demand is “just and based on our customary laws and constitutional rights.” [...] He denied the P50 million demand, as alleged by Pimentel, as well as demanding a royalty fee and a 10 percent share solely for their family. [...] The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) requires companies operating in ancestral lands to obtain the Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the tribe. “Is it not written in the law that before anyone can use and exploit our lands, they (private companies) should [...] consult us?” Bat-ao said, noting they were not consulted in the FPIC process.

Bat-ao said they also wanted the mining company out of their ancestral lands because “the truth is that there is little that they have contributed to the welfare of the people in Cabangahan.”

He cited that of the 1,800 Manobo residents in the village, the company employs only 157 individuals working on a contractual basis but allegedly out of jobs since last October.

The scholarships offered by MMDC also benefited a handful of youth only, Bat-ao said.

‘Tulisan’

Mayor Pimentel, [...] is one of the stockholders of CTP Construction and Mining Corp. based in the town, [...]. The mayor also lamented the anti-mining groups for displacing people from their work as a result of the stoppage of operation of MMDC in Cabangahan. [...] Bat-ao [...] is already a signatory to another case filed against the mining firm that led to the issuance of a temporary environmental protection order.
Action Network Human Rights- Philippines
The Philippine Star, 19.05.2013

Gov’t urged to protect rights of gays, lesbians
By Pia Lee-Brago

MANILA, Philippines - Experts and youth from East and Southeast Asia yesterday urged the government and authorities to protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

In a forum marking International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia at the University of the Philippines-Diliman, LGBT activists emphasized the importance of enacting anti-discrimination laws that protect LGBT people.

Convened by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Agency for International Development (USAID) and its Regional Development Mission for Asia and the Pacific, the forum included discussions by panelists of the impacts of discrimination against LGBT people in education and employment where they suffer human rights violations.

"Anti-discrimination laws that protect LGBT people are long overdue in many countries," said Michael Tan, dean of the UP College of Social Sciences and Philosophy.

"They are an essential tool that enables marginalized and discriminated groups to participate in the society on an equal basis as everyone else. This is good for LGBT people and for the societies around Asia," he added.

Achievements highlighted.

The panelists also highlighted the progress made in politics and access to health services. They cited governments that have enacted laws and local ordinances prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Philippines was cited for passing anti-discrimination ordinances in Cebu, Davao and Naga recently.

[...] Social media and crowd-mapping were identified as facilitating the LGBT movement in Asia.

“The United Nations recognizes that human rights apply to everyone, including LGBT people. Therefore, this event helps us better understand how the rights of LGBT people can be better promoted in Asia," said Clifton Cortez, regional manager from the UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Centre in Bangkok. [...]"

Endorsement for Tampakan project under new SouthCot execs unlikely
By Bong S. Sarmiento

KORONADAL CITY – The ban on open pit mining in South Cotabato will remain a major stumbling block to the effort of foreign-backed Sagittarius Mines, Inc. (SMI) to operate the Tampakan project with the election of the new set of provincial officials on May 13 polls.

This after Rep. Daisy Avance-Fuentes (second district), who has been elected as the new governor, vowed to implement the ban on open-pit mining in the next three years, or until 2016.

It was Fuentes who signed the controversial Environment Code that bans open-pit mining before stepping down as governor in 2010 after completing three straight terms.

Fuentes (Nationalist People’s Coalition) defeated incumbent Gov. Arthur Pingoy Jr. (United Nationalist Alliance) on Monday’s elections [...].

[...] Pingoy’s term, he implemented the open-pit ban signed by Fuentes, despite lobbying from the company and mining groups for him to disregard the prohibition.

[...] Efforts of SMI to develop the Tampakan copper, touted as the largest known undeveloped copper reserve in Southeast Asia, has been hobbled by the open-pit mining ban imposed by South Cotabato.

In December last year, the company announced that it was moving the start of commercial operation from 2016 to 2019.

Among the major challenges the company cited facing its operation was the open-pit ban in South Cotabato.

Last February, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources granted SMI an environmental compliance certificate (ECC), after rejecting it twice last year on the ground of the open-pit mining prohibition of South Cotabato.

As set by the ECC, an endorsement from the provincial government is among the other requirements needed by the firm before it can proceed to commercial production. [...] “With the passage of the Aquino Administration’s National Mining Policy and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Memorandum directing that all local legislations be consistent with the national mining law, we hope that through continued dialogue with incoming Governor Fuentes and the rest of the South Cotabato provincial government officials, there will be a timely resolution to the open-pit ban in the South Cotabato Environment Code,” he [SMI spokesman John Arnaldo] said. [...]"

Army intelligence chief to be named
By Florante S. Solmerin

The Board of Generals (BOG) led by Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Emmanuel Bautista has a short list of candidates to take over as Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, a powerful position in the military, sources said.

Brig. Gen. Roberto Detablan Domines, assistant commander of the 7th Infantry Division based in Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, was a leading candidate, the sources said.

Domines is a member of the Philippine Military Academy Sandigan Class of 1982. He was former commander of the 1001 Infantry Brigade in Mindanao. The position Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence was left vacant when Maj. Gen. Francisco Cruz retired last Saturday.

Aquino bares AFP buildup vs ‘bullies in our backyard’
[...] President Aquino on Tuesday announced a $1.8-billion military upgrade to help defend the country’s maritime territory against “bullies," amid an ever-worsening dispute with China.

In thinly veiled comments referring to China, Aquino vowed during a speech to mark the Philippine Navy’s 115th anniversary that the Armed Forces would be given the resources necessary to protect Philippine sovereignty.

“We have a clear message to the world: The Philippines is for Filipinos, and we have the capability to resist bullies entering our backyard,” Aquino told naval chiefs.

Aquino detailed a P75-billion ($1.82 billion) military modernization program that gives priority to upgrading the Navy, which is
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one of the weakest in Southeast Asia. […] “We will also improve our communications, intelligence and surveillance systems,” he said.

Aquino said the government had already spent P28 billion on military modernization over the past three years […].

[…] The increasingly bitter territorial dispute with China is over competing claims to parts of the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea), which is believed to sit above vast amounts of oil and gas. It is home to rich fishing grounds.

Sun.Star, 24.05.2013

Folks assert ‘no mining’ policy in Kibungan

By Maria Elena Catayan

KIBUNGAN folks continue to shun mining activities in the highland town. Locals are now baying for the exception of the entire area from large scale mining operations claiming the entirety of the town is part of an ancestral domain.

A dialog was pushed by local folk at the Bishop’s residence Thursday to thresh out concerns of the majority as well as to drum up support for the petition which has reached the Office of the President.

[…] The local folks are asking for an assurance for the protection of the entire municipality from large scale mining activities. Recent mining uproar caused by Da Gamma Minerals united Kibungan folks anew in their advocacy to stop any mining activities in the area.

Years ago, Da Gamma was granted a 25-year Mining Lease Contract (MLC) Area which expired in 2012. A renewal of permits was not granted to the company but a new exploration permit has been forwarded to the DENR-MGB tagged as EXPA-105, which the agency has yet to grant.

The contract which was granted to Gamban Mining and Dev’t Corp covers 812 hectares but exploration activities will be concentrated in five lots covering less than 50 hectares.

Sacpa said the dialog was needed to get new information of the new mining executive order issued last year by the President Aquino to appease fears of the Kibungan folk on companies wanting to come into the community and explore mineral reserves.

Sacpa said the dialog has helped give guidelines on how to protect the area from large scale mining and prevent companies to enter the highland town.

Kibungan folk have consistently opposed exploration activities here, maintaining a no mining policy in the area.

Philippine Daily Inquirer, 27.03.2013

Form panel for claims now, Marcos victims urge

By Leila B. Salaverria

Saying the victims of martial law abuses have waited long enough, human rights groups are urging Malacañang to form immediately the panel that would process their claims for compensation.

Bayan Muna Rep. Neri Colmenares said Sunday there was no reason for the administration to delay the appointments to the nine-member Human Rights Victims’ Claims Board.

Colmenares, one of the authors of the Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act, said the government did not have to wait for any implementing rules or regulations to be formulated before naming the board members.

The board will draft the implementing rules for the compensation process, which is why its completion is crucial for the law to take full effect, Colmenares explained.

President Aquino signed the compensation measure into law on Feb. 25, the 27th anniversary of the Edsa People Power Revolution […].

The law was intended to recognize the struggles of the people who fought the dictatorship and provide them remunerations for their sufferings. The money would come from a P10-billion fund out of the ill-gotten wealth recovered from Marcos.

“Until the board has been completed, the application period [for the victims’ compensation] could not begin,” Colmenares said in a phone interview.

Victims dying: […] Samahan ng Ex-Detainees Laban sa Detensyon at sa Aresto (Selda), which earlier lamented the non-implementation of the measure, said that in the two and a half months after the measure was signed, some of the victims had died due to illnesses without seeing the law take effect.

“Martial law victims cannot afford to be disenfranchised, much more neglected again. The law was a victory for the victims. We cannot allow our efforts to go down the drain,” Selda national coordinator Roneo Clamor said in a statement.

Selda earlier also submitted nominees to the board. Its nominees included martial law victims who were involved in the filing of the class suit—around 9,000—against the Marcoses and in pursuing the enactment of the law to compensate the victims, as well as members of human rights organizations. […]

Requirements […] The law itself states the requirements for the board members: persons of known probity, competence and integrity; must have a deep and thorough understanding and knowledge of human rights and involvement in efforts against abuses during the Marcos regime; and must have a clear and adequate understanding and commitment to human rights protection, promotion and advocacy.

At least three board members must be lawyers who have been practicing for at least 10 years. […] The martial law victims have six months from the effectivity of the rules to file applications for reparation.

The claims board has two years to complete its work of determining the amount of compensation for each victim.

Sun.Star Cagayan de Oro, 29.05.2013

AI to elected execs: Act on rights abuses

By Abigail C. Malalis

AMNESTY International-Philippines (AIPh) challenged newly elected government officials to act further on the rising number of victims of human rights abuses in the country.

AIPh made the call on Tuesday as it launched the Amnesty
Action Network Human Rights - Philippines

International Report 2013 in Cagayan de Oro City[…].

The AI Report compiled facts on the state of the world’s human rights, covering 159 countries and territories.

Dr. Aurora Corazon A. Parong, AIPh director, said insecurities were observed even in areas where armed conflict is absent and the number of people living below poverty line is growing.

“The world is becoming increasingly dangerous especially for refugees and migrants including Filipinos. […] The local government officials play a key role in turning around the situation of misery and insecurity,” Parong said in a statement.

The group also reported, based on the SWS survey, an increase of hunger among families in the Visayas from 14.6 to 15 percent while poverty level in Mindanao increased from 26.3 to 29.2 percent.

“In the Regional Development Plan 2011-2016, the local government of Northern Mindanao has committed to doubling its efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of reducing poverty and hunger through a human rights based approach to development and governance,” Parong said.

“We hope the LGU in the region will triple its efforts to make inclusive growth a reality where the poor and marginalized will also benefit from the growth within the region,” she added.

Meanwhile, Parong also criticized the failure of the government to address the increasing numbers of victims of torture, killings and enforced disappearances despite promises to bring perpetrators to justice.

“The LGUs and the police at the cities, municipalities and provinces must not allow perpetrators to get away with their crimes. They can play a key role in the delivery of justice,” Parong added.

ELECTIONS
The Philippine Star, 02.05.2013

DOJ to probe NPA crimes

By Edu Punay

MANILA, Philippines - The government will pursue criminal investigation of armed attacks and extortion perpetrated by the New People’s Army (NPA) on candidates in this election period.

Secretary Leila de Lima said yesterday the Department of Justice (DOJ) would create a special task force to determine criminal liabilities of NPA guerrillas involved in a recent spate of election-related attacks and abuses.

De Lima said the team, composed of state prosecutors, state counsels and agents of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), would be tasked “to look into those alleged unlawful and irregular activities attributed to the NPA and recommend appropriate courses of action or measures to exact accountability and put a stop to said activities.” […]

 […] De Lima said the special task force should first determine the appropriate mechanisms to be used in the criminal investigation. […]

Among the incidents to be probed by the DOJ task force is the recent attack on Gingoog Mayor Ruth Guingona that wounded her and killed two of her aides.

The NPA owned up to the attack and regretted having killed two civilians. The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in a statement last April 23 admitted to a number of attacks against several politicians in the provinces. The NPA has also been putting up checkpoints and continue to collect revolutionary taxes or “permits to campaign” from politicians.

Administration senatorial candidate former Akbayan representative Risa Hontiveros on Tuesday called for an investigation of criminal offenses by the NPA.

Hontiveros urged the DOJ to act on what she described as a “pattern of abuse and gangsterism that threatens the chance to effect social change through democratic, peaceful and clean elections.”

Manilatimes.net, 15.05.2013

Foreign observers report serious poll irregularities

By Joel Sy-Egco

VOTE-BUYING, intimidation and minors casting their votes were among the “serious irregularities” witnessed by members of the 2013 International Observers’ Mission organized by the Compact for Peaceful and Democratic Elections (Compact).

The group’s report covered the six areas it monitored during the conduct of the midterm elections on May 13. “Based on the six areas we monitored, the elections were conducted in a relatively fair and orderly manner. Nevertheless, the problems we saw and documented, unless properly addressed by concerned government agencies and stakeholders, will undermine an electoral process reasonably credible by international standards,” said Compact National Coordinator Arnold Tarrobago.

[…] Tarrobago said the observers from 30 countries divided themselves into six groups, with each group monitoring Pampanga, Cagayan, Camarines Sur and Masbate, Cebu, and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Vote buying, underage voting

The foreign observers also reported vote-buying incidents in the areas that they monitored. “Although they did not personally or directly witness vote buying, majority of those interviewed openly admitted that vote buying is happening, including paying people not to cast their votes in the areas controlled by the incumbent candidates and political clans,” Tarrobago said. […]

Election-related violence

Compact also reported that the high presence of police and military personnel in the areas observed, particularly in Masbate and ARMM, failed to address the climate of fear in the voting areas. […] Foreign observers witnessed military and police presence near and even inside polling areas in the ARMM. […]

No secrecy

Likewise, the election observers said one big issue that hounded the six areas they monitored concerned ballot secrecy. “One common but extremely disturbing issue […] concerned the voting public’s right to ballot secrecy. In many polling precincts, there was a deficiency of ballot secrecy folders. Voters were also inserting their ballots to the PCOS machines without any attempt at concealment […]” the Compact official stressed. The aim of ballot secrecy, Tarrobago explained, is to guarantee that the public voted free from intimidation and bribery. It also ensures that political views are not known to any other entity. […]

Long lines

The group also said long queues were also observed in several areas. The voting process was difficult in some areas due to problematic voters lists and clustering of precincts. […] He [Tarrobago] said several PCOS machines stopped working.

In Pampanga, one PCOS machine printed no text during zero sum printing. Others just failed to function as expected. Un-
Latest PNP tally: 51 dead, 65 wounded in poll violence

By Alexis Romero

MANILA, Philippines - A total of 51 people were killed and 65 others wounded in 81 poll-related incidents since the start of the election period, police said yesterday. The number of fatalities was slightly lower than the 56 recorded in the same period in 2007 and 54 in 2010, police data showed. The number of wounded persons also went down slightly from 69 in 2007 and 74 in 2010. The figures covered incidents from Jan. 13, the start of the gun ban, until the May 13 election.

Philippine National Police (PNP) spokesman Chief Superintendent Generoso Cerbo Jr. said the figures could still change as they are still receiving reports from the field. [...] PNP said 62 of the 81 poll-related incidents are still under investigation, while 19 have been referred to the prosecutor’s office. The violent incidents this year seem to be scattered across the regions. The region with highest incidence of election violence was Calabarzon with nine, followed by Western Visayas and Zamboanga peninsula with eight each. [...] Despite the violence that marred the elections, security forces claimed this year’s election was “relatively peaceful.” [...] Unprecedented Saudi-PH labor pact seen to improve deal for household workers

By Stella Tomeldan

MANILA, Philippines - Amid the jitters caused by Saudi Arabia’s crackdown on illegal foreign workers, a whiff of positive news: the kingdom has signed with the Philippines a labor agreement with unprecedented terms meant to ease the deployment of more Filipino household service workers (HSWs) and improve the situation of those already there.

San Diego said while the Constitution explicitly prohibits political dynasties, no law in the last 25 years has been passed to make it operational. In the absence of a law, he said MAD considers a family a political dynasty if two of its closely related members occupy national or local elective positions at the same time. He said dynasties deny equal opportunity, control resources and worsen corruption and poverty in the country. [...] MAD said at least 18 political dynasties have been hurt by the "growing antidynasty sentiment.” [...] War on dynasties seen until 2016

By Paolo Romero

MANILA, Philippines - Judicial reform will remain a priority of the incoming 16th Congress, following the results of elections showing people’s support for the Aquino government’s reform agenda.
After the May 1 rally in Mendiola, Crisostomo said he was preparing to leave his Quzon City home to join Labor Day protests when, “at around 9 in the morning, a neighbor reported that a blue van was spotted slowing down in front of our house ... seemingly doing surveillance.”

 […] Crisostomo said the neighbor reported the van to security guards of their housing village who confirmed that the driver “identified himself as MSgt Federico Sagun Tambacao, Jr. and presented an military ID card.”

 However, Crisostomo said the men in the van “did not know and could not tell the guards the exact address of their destination,” which prompted a guard to follow the vehicle and eventually ask them to “turn back and leave the village.”

 After the May 1 rally in Mendiola, Crisostomo said he was talking to a colleague when “I noticed a man holding a cell phone who kept looking at me from a few feet away.”

 Suspecting the man was tailing him, the Anakabayian chairman said he approached the rally stage to get out of his follower’s line of sight and then jumped onboard a jeepney ferrying other youth activists away.

 The man he suspected of following him stood up, “anxiously searching, and looking at the direction where I initially went,” Crisostomo said.

 […] A few months ago, suspected military agents broke into the venue of our youth leaders’ meeting in the middle of the night and stole all our laptops and gadgets.”

 […] Crisostomo said the government’s recent moves to terminate peace talks with communist rebels “could also be an indication that it is planning to intensify military offensives and step up its attacks against activists.”

 Citing records from the human rights group Karapatan, Crisostomo said there have been 137 extrajudicial killings, 72 incidents of torture, 498 illegal arrests, and 30,260 victims of forced evacuation under President Benigno Aquino III.

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 Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr., who is expected to be re-elected Speaker of the House of Representatives, yesterday cited President Aquino’s commitment to judicial reforms.

 “In early April of this year, during the 15th Congress, the President had signed statutes creating numerous new court branches. These were designed to de-clog court dockets all over the country and make justice more accessible to ordinary Filipinos, especially to the poor,” the House leader said in a statement.

 Based on congressional records, not less than 55 new branches of the regional trial court and not less than 35 new branches of the metropolitan trial court were established all over the country in three years.

 The new branches of the regional trial court are located in various areas, including General Santos City, Agusan del Sur, Negros Occidental, Cebu, Aurora Province, Batangas, Romblon, Kalinga, Davao City, Zamboanga City, Compostela Valley, Tacloban City, Bislig City, Cavite, Calamba, Navotas, Valenzuela City and Bogo City.

 These do not include the creation of municipal trial court branches in Puerto Princesa in Palawan, Cagayan de Oro and Misamis Oriental. […]
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A day after An Waray Partylist Representative Florencio “Bem” Noel, a mayoralty candidate of this city, stormed DYBR and tried to grab the microphone from Manuel Marta, a block timer, a male caller threatened to throw a grenade at the station if Marta would not stop talking about the incident.

Last April 26, 2013, Cong. Noel barged into the announcer’s booth of DYBR and demanded that he be allowed to answer the issues raised against him by the block-time anchorman. When Marta refused, citing lack of material time, the lawmaker allegedly tried to grab the microphone from the radioman.

Marta had filed a case of harassment and intimidation against the partylist representative before the office of the Commission on Election.

DYBR tied black ribbons around its premises while its employees wore black armbands to condemn the attack on press freedom and to raise awareness on the importance of the fundamental right to freedom of expression.

[...] The Committee to Protect Journalists has meanwhile released its annual list of countries where journalists were murdered regularly and governments fail to solve the crimes. [...] InterAkksyon.com, 11.05.2013

Cop raid on Samar villages leaves residents terrified; media barred from coverage

By Eladio Perfecto

CATARMAN, Northern Samar – Dozens of battle-ready policemen, ostensibly in search of firearms, swooped down on four villages in the Northern Samar town of Pambujan, some 40 kilometers east of the provincial capital Catarmán, early Saturday morning, leaving residents terrified and local government and military officials wondering about the real purpose of the operation.

Journalists who rushed to cover the raid on Barangays Cabarian, Canjumadal, San Ramon and Manahaw found the road blocked by a police vehicle and were told they could not proceed.

Villagers returning home around 7 a.m. said they were surprised to find the police vehicle, with government license plate SF 647, blocking the road to Cabarian with two policemen who told them no one was allowed to enter or exit the villages.

When asked by reporters why they had blocked the road, the two policemen, whose nameplates were barely readable, said they had orders from their superiors not to talk to anyone.

When Jazmin Bonifacio, a radio reporter from Tacloban who had joined the local journalists, called up Eastern Visayas police director Chief Superintendent Elmer Soria, to ask about the blockade, he replied they were hunting for gunmen who were allegedly out to disrupt Monday’s elections.

He also advised the journalists not to enter the blockaded villages.

Later in the day, reporters who asked Colonel Arvin Lagamon, commanding officer of the 63rd Infantry Battalion based in Catubig town, about the reported gunmen were told that he had not received any reports of private armed groups operating within his area of responsibility.

The blockade was finally lifted at noon, more than five hours after the lock down, when the two policemen told the stranded villagers they could go home.

[...] When the journalists finally reached Cabarian, they saw a visibly shaken barangay captain Bert Sosing Palco, who said a company of policemen, led by Senior Inspector Joseph Abalos Imperial, entered the village and showed him a search warrant issued by Branch 19 of the Catarmán Regional Trial Court.

Palco said the policemen searched his house but found no weapons.

He said eight other houses not covered by the warrant were also searched to no avail.

As this was going on, he said, Imperial ordered all the male villagers to come out of their homes and line up.

Pastora Ponce, 73, had to be rushed to the Pambujan health center after she suffered chills, apparently from fear, after five policemen armed with assault rifles and with a bomb-sniffing dog barged into her home, which was not covered by the warrant, and conducted a search.

An irate Pambujan Mayor Rogelio Tan, who is running for reelection, condemned the blockade of the villages and claimed the operation was politically motivated.

DavaoToday.com, 09.05.2013

Missing 60-year old farmer-organizer, surfaced, jailed in Dipolog

By Marilou Aguierre-Tuburan

DAVAO CITY, Philippines – The 60-year old organizer of Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas and Anakpawis Party believed to be abducted by military agents since April 27 was reportedly found in Dipolog City Jail.

In a phone interview, Father Cristopher Ablon of rights group Karapatan-Northern Mindanao, confirmed it was Estelita Tacalan whose mug shots were furnished to them by the local media.

Human Rights News May 2013
PHILIPPINES: Soldiers prevent displaced indigenous villagers from access to their farms

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has been informed that soldiers are harassing and preventing indigenous villagers, who were displaced on masse last month due to an armed conflict, from getting access to their farms to harvest crops. The soldiers imposed restriction on the villagers' movements on the pretext of ensuring their safety; however, it is clear that their intentions are to repress them for not informing about the presence of rebels in their community.

CASE DETAILS:
On April 18, 2013, soldiers attached to the 39th Infantry Battalion, Philippine Army, under the command of Lt. Col. Norman Zuniega, figured in an armed encounter with the New People’s Army (NPA) in Sitio Tah Canton, Malawanit, Magsaysay, Davao del Sur. A witness said that the soldiers allegedly used the villagers, namely Pedro Mandrial, Antonio Canten, Malawanit, Magsaysay, Davao del Sur, Antonio Camag and Rey Mandrial, as their guides during the combat operation.

The three villagers were last known to be in the military custody at the headquarters in Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur. The fighting between the rebels and soldiers resulted in the displacement of about 57 households (249 persons) [...]. The villagers fear [...] that the soldiers would target them on the suspicion that they are either supporters or rebels. Given below is the list of displaced persons.

After this massive displacement, when some of the villagers attempted to return to cultivate their land and to harvest their crops in order to support their families the soldiers deliberately prevented them.

The soldiers argued on pretext that it was to protect them because they might be caught in the crossfire between rebels and soldiers; however, even after the fighting ended the villagers were still refused permission to return home.

For example, on April 21 at 11am, returning villager Maria Batawan and her son, Richard, were inside their house where soldiers who had just arrived and were descending from a miliary operation in the mountains, pointed their weapons at her. [...]

On April 22 at 7am, another villager, Arsenia Manife and her children had approached the soldiers to allow them to return home to collect the 12 sacks of corn, 30 sacks of charcoal and to be able to cultivate their land, but the soldiers refused. They told Arsenia that if she goes, she could be caught in crossfire. The soldiers also told her that she and other villagers had lied to them that there are no rebels in their community.

To address this problem, local NGOs on April 25 wrote to the town mayor, Jess Lumanog, requesting for a dialogue. However, their request was ignored because the mayor's representatives choose to have a dialogue with the soldiers instead of the villagers who made the request.

On April 26, when the villagers approached Mayor Lumanog they were unable to speak to him because he was inebriated. [...]

Activists in N. Luzon decry intensifying surveillance, threats

By Ronalyn V. Olea

MANILA - Human rights defenders and development workers in the Cordillera and Ilocos regions reported incidents of surveillance, red baiting and harassment by suspected state security forces.

In an urgent action alert, the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance (CHRA)-Karapatan raised concern over recent incidents believed to be perpetrated by elements and troops under the 86th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army (IBPA) and the 5th Infantry Division.

Since January this year, Jude Baggo, secretary general of the CHRA-Karapatan has been receiving text messages warning him to cease from his political activities otherwise he would be ar-
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rested. One of the messages he received associated his presence and activities in Ifugao to the activities of the New People’s Army (NPA). The NPA is the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). This April, he was threatened with imprisonment “just after the elections.”

According to the CHRA, reliable sources validated that the messages were from state security forces. Baggo and his colleagues also noted surveillance and monitoring of his whereabouts by suspicious individuals.

William Bugatti, a paralegal of the CHRA-Karapatan also reported incidents of surveillance and harassment against him. He was barred several times from visiting political detainees at the Ifugao Provincial Jail. The Jail warden claims that there is a “Regional Memorandum” stating that Bugatti is not allowed to enter the jail and visit the political detainees.

Both Baggo and Buggati were listed as #21 and #22 respectively and tagged as “UTAK NG NPA” (Brains of the NPA) in a document entitled “MUNICIPALITY OF TINOC (Target Persons).” The two-page document, a copy of which was obtained by CHRA-Karapatan in October 2012, bears the logos of the Charlie Company of the 86th Battalion (Highlander) of the 5th Infantry Division (North Star), Philippine Army. It contains names of individuals, their alleged association with the NPA, mobile phone numbers, organizations, and the remarks/assessment by the 86th IBPA and the 5th ID.

Among those in the list are members and leaders of legal people’s organizations, human rights defenders and development workers from the Center for Development Programs in the Cordillera (CDPC), Montanosa Research and Development Center (MRDC) and the Ifugao Resources and Development Center (IRDC).

According to the CHRA, the 86th IBPA has been notorious in Northern Luzon for its human rights violations since President Benigno Aquino III came into office. In 2012, the human rights group documented various human rights violations perpetrated by this particular Army unit such as illegal detention and torture, destruction and divestment of properties, several counts of threats/harassment/intimidation.

An officer of the 86th IBPA, Capt. Danilo Lalin is the primary suspect in a rape case involving a minor in Mankayan, Benguet last March 2012.

The same unit was also responsible for filing charges of murder, frustrated murder and attempted murder against youth leader Mildred Salang-ey in 2011. The charges were eventually dismissed due to lack of evidence.

This unit also filed murder charges against activists Grayson Naogsan, Rene Boy Abiva, Virgilio Corpuz, Randy Vegas and Raul Camposano who were arrested in separate incidents. Abiva is organizer of ACT Teachers party list. Corpuz is the regional coordinator of Cagayan Valley for Pagkakaisa ng mga Samahan ng TsUPER at Operetoryor Nationwide (Piston). Naogsan is the son of a rebel leader in the Cordillera.

They are detained at the Ifugao Provincial Jail.

Meanwhile, Vegas and Camposano are both long-time union organizers of the Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government (COURAGE) who were arrested on December 3, 2012 in the National Capital Region. They are now detained at the Camarines Norte Provincial Jail for other fabricated charges.

Claudine Panayo and Fernando Alikes of the Ifugao Resources Development Center have also reported incidents of surveillance on them and their office especially this April and May. Willy Kuan, a development worker of the Regional Development Center – Katinnulong Daquití Umlilí ti Amianan a Luzon (RDC-Kaduami) received threat messages through his mobile phone this April as well.

“We are alarmed and confirmed that the intensity of threats and political vilification are serious warnings of actual arrest, detention and even graver forms of human rights violations,” Audrey Beltran, CHRA deputy secretary general, said. […]”[…] It is condemnable that human rights workers are being silenced by the State that is mandated to uphold and defend human rights.”

Davao.Today.com, 27.05.2013

Anakpawis coordinator killed in ComVal town

DAVAO CITY, Philippines – A coordinator of Anakpawis Party-list in Davao town, Compostela Valley Province was gunned down by unidentified armed men “believed to be agents of the state” on Saturday morning, human rights group Karapatan-Southern Mindanao reported.

Eddie Cañon, 43, a resident of Sitio San Isidro was killed in Nuevo Iloco village.

“The victim allegedly sustained gunshot wounds on his head causing his death,” said Senior Superintendent Camilo Cascolan, Compostela Valley Philippine National Police Provincial Director […]. […] Cañon reportedly sustained 13 multiple gunshot wounds in his head and body.

Based on the initial investigation conducted by the Mawab Police Station, Cañon was on his way to the town proper to purchase some food items and to pay his electric bill when two unidentified men blocked his motorcycle and shot him several times using a .45 caliber pistol. The suspects fled onboard a black Yamaha STX motorcycle with no plate number.

Police authorities recovered one slug of .45 caliber pistol and three fired cartridge cases at the crime scene.

HaniMay Suazo of Karapatan-Southern Mindanao said that prior to Cañon’s death, he was “frequently harassed” by elements of the Philippine Army’s 66th Infantry Battalion led by one Sgt. Castillo, Dante Ramirez, a certain De Cuenca and Rey Santiago. These military men, she added, “villified Cañon’s affiliation with the progressive party-list.”

UPDATES ON CASES OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Press Release - Human Rights Watch, 10.05.2013

First Conviction for Extrajudicial Killing During Aquino Administration

(Manila) – Philippine authorities should ensure that those who planned and financed the killing of an environmental activist in 2011 are arrested and prosecuted, Human Rights Watch said today.

In the first conviction for an extrajudicial killing since President Benigno S. Aquino III came to office in 2010, a court in Palawan on May 7, 2013, sentenced Marlon Recamata to 40 years in prison on the January 24, 2011, killing of Gerry Ortega. Recamata had been arrested半个月 after shooting Ortega and subse-

quently confessed to the crime, implicating others.

“The conviction of the gunman in the killing of activist Gerry Ortega is an overdue milestone for the Aquino administration,” said Brad Adams, Asia director. “But the alleged mastermind is still at large and should not escape justice.”

While in custody, Recamata identified his accomplices, among them Rodolfo Edrad, a former soldier who allegedly coordinated the plot. Edrad in turn accused Joel Reyes, who was governor of Palawan from 2003 to 2010, as the author of the crime. Ortega
Action Network Human Rights- Philippines

had hosted a radio program on environmental issues and corruption that frequently criticized Reyes. The gun used in the murder was later traced to a person who had served as Reyes' provincial administrator.

Seven other suspects in the case were taken into custody. Five are awaiting trial, one suspect died of natural causes while a second died under unclear circumstances.

In the past decade, government officials and members of the security forces in the Philippines have been implicated in several hundred politically motivated killings, but successive administrations have failed to obtain any convictions. The murder of Ortega, among the first extrajudicial killings during the Aquino administration, was one of the very few where the authorities gathered strong evidence and witnesses against the suspects.

In June 2011, a Department of Justice panel formed to investigate the case recommended the filing of charges against four suspects. But it removed Reyes, the former governor, his brother Mario, and five others, citing a lack of evidence.

After Ortega’s killing, protesters tried to charge Reyes and others, the Justice Department created a new panel to re-investigate the case, which in March 2012 proposed filing charges against Reyes, his brother, and three others. After arrest warrants were issued against Reyes and his brother, they evaded arrest by fleeing the country. Their lawyers, meanwhile, went to the Court of Appeals, which ruled in March 2013 that the charges against the Reyes brothers and the others should be dropped, citing judicial overreach by the Justice Department. The case is now pending in the Supreme Court. [...]

Visayan Daily Star, 13.05.2013

Alleged witnesses to killings surface

By Lisa Gapac

Two former New People’s Army rebels tagged Mayor Meleci “Beboy” Yap, suspected NPA leader Gregorio Tuayon and Bernardino “Toto” Patigas, as the alleged masterminds in the series of killings in Escalante City, Negros Occidental.

Ex-rebels Ermolino Baynosa, with the aliases of “Morphy, Genie, Wewen, Morino, and Jean” and Irving Taberros, alias Errol, who claimed to be eyewitnesses to the spate of killings in Escalante, also alleged that Supt. Santiago Rapiz, former Escalante police chief, retired Army Maj. Arthur Tupas, former police officer Angel Sinadjan, acted as conspirators in the killings, at a press conference in Bacolod City Saturday.

However, Yap told the DAILY STAR yesterday that he is not a member of the NPA, and that he does not know Baynosa and Taberros.

[...] In their signed affidavit submitted before the Provincial Prosecutors Office in Bacolod City on April 29, copies of which were distributed to the media, Baynosa and Taberros said they were former members of the NPA Roslyn Jean Pelle Command in Northern Negros, and they received orders from Yap to kill those who are not supporting his cause.

“I am not a criminal,” Yap said, as he dismissed the accusations against him as mere “political propaganda” and a desperate move of his political opponents.

The two former rebels also claimed that Yap is one of the officials of the Komiteng Tagapatuman-Larangan Gerilya, and the biggest financial supporter of the rebel group.

[...] “We will file counter charges against the complainants and witnesses once the election is over to show that our charges are serious, and not merely for political propaganda,” Pondevilla [counsel of Yap] said.

Baynosa and Taberros also claimed that Tupas, Rapiz, and Sinadjan, a former policeman assigned in Escalante, participated in the killings so that policemen could not respond to the crime scene. They added that the firearms were provided by them.

Rapiz, who is now assigned as Operations Branch chief of the Negros Occidental Police Provincial Office, dismissed the accusations against him as politically-motivated, adding that it would be very difficult to prove that he joined in the planning of the assassination, as he was not yet the police chief of Escalante when the incident happened.

He said he received the subpoena on April 29, and his lawyer is now readying their counter affidavits.

[...] Baynosa and Taberos further claimed that all their meetings were being held at the house of Patigas. Taberros also said they are not afraid if they will be included in the cases because they were then part of the planning. They just want to give justice, especially to the families of the victims, he added.

[...] Finally, after almost six years of search for the suspects in the series of extrajudicial killings in Escalante, there will justice,” Barcelona [Escalante mayoral candidate] said.

He said majority of the victims were his supporters[...].

Patigas chairs the Negros Alliance of Human Rights Advocates, while Tupayon, who was arrested last month in Manapla for murder and robbery-in-band, homicide and murder, was reported by the military to be the regional finance bureau chief of the Komiteng Rehiyonal-Negros

Bulatlat.com, 21.05.2013

Kin of missing UP students oppose bail petition of accused soldiers

By Ronalyn V. Olea

MANILA – Asher Cadapan had the opportunity to attend the hearing of the case filed against the suspected abductors of her daughter, Sherlyn, May 20. He has been working in the Visayas and so, his wife, Erlinda, often attend the hearings alone.

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[...]

Benguet police chief admits lapses in Balao case probe

By Kimberliz Olmaya N. Quitasol

BAGUIO CITY – Benguet Provincial Police Office (PPO) Provincial Director Rodolfo Azurin admitted lapses in the investigations conducted in relation to the disappearance of activist James Moy Balao.

In an interview with Northern Dispatch, Azurin pointed out that there were procedural lapses in the conduct of the investigations on the Balao case. One of the lapses he mentioned was the failure of the investigators to immediately verify the exchange of text messages between James and his family and colleagues as reported by the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA).

“The investigators should have verified with the Globe Telecoms if there really an exchange of text messages between James and his family,” he said.

He also admitted that he had to study and familiarize himself with the case since he just assumed office this year.

Earlier, Branch 63 of the Regional Trial Court through a final report penned by Judge Jennifer Humiding expressed disappointment over the police’s failure to present new leads in the enforced disappearance of Balao. [...] The court added that despite the creation of Special Investigation Task Force Group-Balao, the police was not able to present any result except the recantation of a witness and unverified and unconfirmed identities of possible suspects.

CHR probe on Fr. Pops’ murder leads to ‘missing link’

By Ace R. Morandante

DAVAO CITY, Philippines – If there is one thing that’s glaring with the recent public inquiry on the case of murdered Italian missionary Fausto ‘Father Pops’ Tentorio, it would be that the multi-agency body created by the Department of Justice to investigate the case has “failed.”

This was according to Father Peter Geremia, of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions and parish priest of Arakan in Cotabato.

It has been almost two years since Tentorio was brutally killed inside the compound of his parish in Arakan town on October 17, 2013. Yet, the the Task Force Tentorio, which is composed of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) and the Philippine National Police, among others, has not yet come up with any solid conclusion.

“The opposite is happening instead. It’s leading to a cover up. I don’t think this case will be resolved,” Geremia, a long-time colleague of Tentorio, said in exasperation.

The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) led by Secretary Etta Rosales held the inquiry here from May 22 to 24. [...] Who is Loloy?

For one, Geremia and members of the Justice for Father Pops Movement were surprised when one of the witnesses presented
Action Network Human Rights- Philippines

by the NBI recanted his previous affidavit which charged brothers Jimmy and Robert Ato as the perpetrators. […] [Dominador] Damlayon explained how he was able to sign the affidavit, which he said he didn’t understand in the first place because it was written in English. He narrated that a relative, Roberto Mabilao, went to his house in Arakan town last February and asked him to go with him to Marilog, a village in Davao City. They were supposed to meet somebody. Both of them traveled aboard a motorcycle rented by Mabilao. When they arrived in Marilog late afternoon, they met a man named “Loloy” who invited them to dinner. After which, Damlayon said, “Loloy” brought them to Cagayan de Oro City (CDO), […] When they reached CDO, they were brought to the NBI office. Damlayon said “Loloy” taught him how to answer to the inquiry on Tentorio’s killers. He was taken a few hours later to one of the rooms in the said office and was made to sign an affidavit. Damlayon said he signed the affidavit, fearing that he could no longer return to Arakan. “Loloy” allegedly gave him PHP 500 afterwards and another PHP 300 for his fare back to Arakan town from Marilog.

Military trained tribal warrior – say NBI, ex-gov Piñol

By Keith Bacongco

DAVAO CITY – A lawyer of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) revealed before the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) that the military was the one that trained the baganis (tribal warriors) so they could help in the counter-insurgency campaign. Even former North Cotabato governor Emmanuel Piñol corroborated the NBI lawyer’s statement, but he stressed that the purpose of the baganis is to defend the territories of the indigenous people. He admitted that the baganis were trained during his term as governor, from 1998 to 2007. Wenceslao Galendez, agent of the NBI’s North Eastern Mindanao Office based in Cagayan de Oro City, told the CHR panel that the baganis were led by Roelito Ayupat Gawilan, who is the barangay captain of Barangay Sinoda in Kitaotao, Bukidnon. The CHR, led by chair Loretta Rosales, was in the city on May 22 to 24 for a three-day inquiry on the killing of Italian missionary Fausto Tentorio in Arakan, North Cotabato in October 2011. “In our report, the term bagani, the lumad for warriors, was created, organized by the 73rd Infantry Battalion,” Galendez said. Citing a report obtained by the CHR, Rosales asked Galendez, “So who organized this group, the military?” “Yes your honor,” the NBI agent confirmed. Galendez added that the baganis was organized to assist the military in its counter-insurgency campaign. Gawilan, who earlier appeared during the public inquiry on May 23, denied the accusation that he is the leader of the bagani group. He insisted he is a datu, not a bagani. But Gawilan, who is the chair of the Federation of the Matigsalug and Manobo Council of Elders (FEMMATRIC), admitted that there are some members of his tribe who are part of the baganis. […] Gawilan said those who are on the side of the NPA as known as “pulang bagani” (red warrior). When asked by CHR Commissioner Norberto dela Cruz who is the leader of the bagani, Gawilan responded: “It depends. There are ‘pulang baganis,’ and there are baganis with the military.” The tribal leader was referring to the NPA’s Pulang Bagani Command headed by Leoncio Pitao, also known as Commander Parago. When Dela Cruz further asked what camp Gawilan belongs, the latter answered: “I am the datu of the tribe. The baganis is different from the datu.” But Gawilan admitted that some baganis were trained to become members of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (Caftgu). He added that most of the bagani members who are also Caftgu members were the ones whose family members were killed by the NPA. Bagani doesn’t exist? Brig. Gen. Cesar Sedillo, former commander of the Army’s 602nd Infantry Brigade, said the lumad Caftgu members are not baganis. “If a tribes folk became a member of the Caftgu, some people refer to them as baganis. They’re not,” Sedillo told the CHR panel. “The Caftgu is not associated with the bagani. It’s just incidental,” he added. Arakan is part of the 602IB’s area of responsibility. Sedillo further said that there are private armed groups in the remote areas who are pro-NPA and there are those who are against the communist rebel group. But during a congressional inquiry on Tentorio’s killing in November last year, Sedillo said he was uncertain if bagani exists. He explained that during his term as commander of 602IB, which is based in Carmen, North Cotabato, there was no formal organization such as the baganis. […] At the same inquiry, a witness disclosed that he had attended a meeting with Jun Corbalà, the alleged bagani leader, at Sitio Kamanagan, Barangay Ganatan in Arakan. The witness said the place is a local camp of the Army’s 57th Infantry Battalion. It was allegedly in this meeting when the baganis plotted to kill Tentorio. In his affidavit signed April 12 last year, the witness, whose identity was not revealed for security reasons, said Corbalà alias Commander Iring is the known commander of the Bagani Special Force, which the witness said was organized by the elements of the 57IB. NPA, military as suspects For Piñol, there are only two groups that could be blamed for the killing of Tentorio because Arakan is controlled by two armed groups – the military and the NPA. Piñol said it is impossible for the killers to escape without the knowledge of the military or the NPA. He said that if the military says they didn’t notice the killers escape, it means that they have no control over Arakan. And vice versa. […] Piñol admitted that he used the province’s peace and order funds to help organize the baganis. “We can’t deny this fact; I was there. They were trained in Barangay Saging in Makilala town, inside a Special Forces camp. And I was there during the training,” he revealed. […]
PHILIPPINES: Another two falsely charged activists to be arraigned for robbery tomorrow

Further to our earlier appeal, the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has been informed that two of the co-accused in a fabricated charge of robbery which included 31 human rights and political activists will be arraigned tomorrow, May 28, 2013.

Updated information:
In our previous appeal (AHRC-UAC-152-2012), we mentioned that 31 human rights and political activists have been charged with "Robbery in Band" at the Office of the City Prosecutor in Sagay City, Negros. One of whom is Ronald Ian Evidente, a trade union organizer and spokesperson of Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU). On August 23, 2012, Evidente was arraigned and entered a plea of 'not guilty'.

Apart from Evidente, his co-accused Zara Alvarez, a licensed school teacher and staff member of the Northern Negros Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (NNAHRa), and Anceto Rojo, a church worker, will be arraigned for the charge of robbery in band. NNAHRa is a local group advocating protection of human rights.

Alvarez and Rojo will be arraigned tomorrow, May 28, 2013 at 2pm at the Regional Trial Court (RTC), in Sagay City.

In our earlier appeal, we already questioned the heavy reliance by the prosecution on the testimony of Freddie Sanchez, a rebel returnee and witness for the military, in the identification of the 31 accused.

His testimony, in no way would have passed the test of "positive identification", which could justify the inclusion of the names of the accused because he himself was not present at the crime scene.

Alvarez was arrested by the military without a warrant on October 30, 2012 at 6:15pm in front of Cadiz City Public Market. When she was arrested, a man wearing plainclothes get hold of her and about 30 others in military uniform surrounded her. When Alvarez asked for help, the military warned the onlookers not to interfere. She kept on asking why they were arresting her, the reason for her arrest and demanded that they show a warrant of arrest, but the military ignored her inquiries and handcuffed her.

Apart from the case of robbery in band, Alvarez is also charged for murder. She was accused of being a member of the New People’s Army (NPA) who killed 1LT Archie Polenzo of the Philippine Army during an armed encounter in March 7, 2010 at Sittio Aluyan, Barangay Caduhaan, Cadiz City, Negros Occidental.

While in the military’s custody she demanded that she be taken to police. Later, the police arrived and it was only this time that she was taken to the Cadiz City Police Station. At the police station, the military forcibly took her cell phone and other personal belongings. Some of the soldiers also attempted to take her to a private room where they could question her but she refused. She remained overnight at the police station.

Alvarez is presently detained at the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology in Cadiz City.
PEACE PROCESS

No end to violence, no talks with Reds’
By Aurea Calica
MANILA, Philippines - After a string of armed attacks by the New People’s Army (NPA), Malacañang said yesterday it would resume peace talks with communist rebels only if they abandon their violent ways.

Presidential spokesman Edwin Lacierda said negotiations with the rebels will continue only if they pursue peace without resorting to armed struggle and drop the preconditions they have imposed.

Lacierda cited untenable demands made by the National Democratic Front (NDF), the umbrella organization representing the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the NPA, in talks with the government.

Government chief peace negotiator Alexander Padilla had lamented that the NDF virtually shut down the peace talks by demanding that the government abolish its peace and development efforts, including the conditional cash transfer, the PAMANA infrastructure upgrading in Samar and the military’s Oplan Bayanhan outreach program.

The NDF is also demanding the release of its jailed leaders, claiming they are consultants in the peace talks and covered by a guarantee of immunity against arrest.

Taking note of the statements made by NDF chairman Luis Jalandoni that they were still willing to resume peace talks, Lacierda said this would only happen if the conditions they set would be dropped.

He said nothing had happened with the regular track and a new approach must be agreed upon.

Lacierda quoted Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Deles as saying that in their discussion with the Norwegian facilitator last month that Jalandoni was present, they mutually established that the NDF had "killed" the special track that they themselves had proposed.

CPP founder Jose Ma. Sison had proposed the special track to speed up the negotiations by imposing no preconditions that would skirt the protracted process of the regular track.

But the NDF made some proposals that backtracked from their original position made by Sison. […]

Lacierda said some confidence building measures would be pursued but "there is no way forward on the regular track."

On the other hand, the CPP said the government “has chosen the path of the purely military approach.”

The communists also denied setting preconditions to allow the peace talks to continue.

“Contrary to the media spin of the Aquino regime, the NDF has never imposed any precondition for the resumption of formal peace negotiations with the (government). The release of NDF consultants is an obligation of the government under previous agreements,” CPP said. […]

Localized peace talks
The CPP also rejected the suggestion made by Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin to hold peace talks with the rebels at the local level.

The pursuit of ‘localized peace talks’ further show that the Aquino regime has no intent of addressing the roots of the armed conflict which stem not from local problems but from the policies of the national government,” the CPP said. […]

Interior and Local Government Secretary […] Roxas said the Office of the Presidential Adviser of the Peace Process (OPAPP) headed by Deles would likely take the initiative of pursuing localized peace talks with the rebels.

The military, on the other hand, said they are supporting efforts of pursuing peace talks with the rebels but is also prepared for any attacks. […]

The military said close to 400 people have died in atrocities and clashes against the NPA since 2011. […]

Sen. Teofisto Guingona III, chairman of the Senate committee on peace, unification and reconciliation, reiterated the need for the government to pursue the peace talks with the NPA.

[…] Guingona challenged the NPA leadership to turn over the guns and ammunition involved in the ambush of his mother, guaranteeing that they will face a fair trial. […]

Action Network Human Rights-Philippines

MAHG78 massacre suspects face charges over 58th victim
By Julie M. Aurelio
A Quezon City court hearing the 2009 Maguindanao massacre case has ordered the arraignment of 78 suspects for the 58th murder case filed recently on behalf of a slain photojournalist whose remains were never recovered.

Judge Joelyn Solis-Reyes of QC Regional Trial Court Branch 221 ruled that there was probable cause to continue with the case for the murder of photojournalist Reynaldo “Bebot” Momay.

The court set the arraignment of Andal Ampatuan Sr., former Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Gov. Zaldy Ampatuan, and 76 others on Wednesday at the Quezon City Jail Annex in Camp Bagong Diwa, Taguig City.

The court, however, deferred the arraignment of former Datu Unsay Mayor Andal Ampatuan Jr. and five other Ampatuan family members who still have unresolved motions.

Last year, the Department of Justice found probable cause to file the 58th murder count for Momay, who was among the victims of the Nov. 23, 2009, Maguindanao massacre who included 32 journalists.

The body of Momay, a photojournalist for the Midland Review, was never found after the carnage although a forensic team recovered parts of his dentures.

In the same five-page order, Reyes also dismissed the 58th murder case filed against PO1 Johann Draper, who was released from detention after the court dropped the original 57 cases against him for lack of merit.

The court also issued new arrest warrants for 92 suspects still at large.

UN-World Bank-MILF launch 3-year program to prepare for Bangsamoro governance
By Carolyn O. Arguillas
DARAGAN, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao (MindaNews/29 April) – The United Nations and World Bank launched Monday in partnership with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) a three-year program that would provide on-demand technical assistance in the run-up to the establishment of the Bangsamoro, the new autonomous political entity that would replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao by June 30, 2016. Read more
Graft-tainted ex-presidents, a dictator's unrepentant wife and politicians charged with crimes such as murder and child rape are among the candidates in the Philippines' mid-term elections on Monday.

The Philippines has long endured a corrupt and violent brand of democracy in which politicians use their influence to avoid punishment for crimes, creating a so-called 'culture of impunity' that enrages the masses.

Below are details on 10 politicians contesting the elections who are accused of corruption or criminal activities: Read more

MINDANAO PEACE DIVIDEND | Thai palm oil factory to rise in North Cotabato

MANILA - The peace talks between the Aquino administration and Muslim rebels in Mindanao have opened the door wider for foreign investors into this region, with Thailand's leading palm oil producer set to build a mill in Northern Cotabato.

Aside from the good growing conditions, the peace talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have made Mindanao increasingly attractive for Univanich Palm Oil, according to a report in The Nation. Read more

The Aquino administration at midterm

MANILA, Philippines - In May 2010, Benigno Aquino III was elected on a huge wave of hope: that he would bring back honesty, put an end to violence, corruption, human rights violations and impunity, and that, in the absence of corruption, he would end poverty.

Three years later, what has been achieved. What are the perspectives?

The efforts to improve governance and the human rights situation have not been successful because the administration did not touch the source of the problems: the grip of powerful families with huge patronage structures on a weak state. Read more

The right to vote and the UN Human Rights Committee

Civil society groups filed this month an unprecedented Communication with the United Nations Human Rights Committee in Geneva alleging violation of their right to vote pursuant to Art. 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The said article provides that "every citizen shall have the right to vote which shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors." Read more

Tribe groups seek UN hand on rights violations

BAGUIO CITY — Indigenous peoples groups sought the intervention of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) on the escalating human rights violations against indigenous peoples in the country in the ongoing meeting of the 12th Session of the UNPFII in New York, USA this May 20 to May 31. Read more