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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.*

The Action Network Human Rights – Philippines *advocates the sustainable improvement of the human rights situation in the Philippines. Members are: Amnesty International, Bread for the World – Church Development Service, Misereor, Missio Munich, philippinenbüro e.V., the International Peace Observers Network (IPON) and the United Evangelical Mission (UEM).*

HEADLINES & POLITICS

The Philippine Star. 01.05.2015

Global press freedom: Phl mpves up to 86th

By Jose Katigbak

WASHINGTON – The Philippines inched one spot up to 86th place in the rankings on global press freedom among 199 countries and territories assessed in the Freedom of the Press 2015 report.

Still, the Philippines remains one of the most dangerous places for journalists, said the report issued by Freedom House on Wednesday.

Conditions have deteriorated sharply around the world for journalists as they face mounting restrictions on the free flow of news and information, including grave threats to their own lives, the report said.

The Freedom of the Press report assesses the degree of media freedom across the globe every year and each country and territory receives a numerical score from 0 (the most free) to 100 (the least free), which serves as the basis for a status designation of free, partly free or not free.

InterAksyon.com, 07.05.2015

Walking in Fear: The deadly work of of defending human rights in the Philippines

By Carlos Conde, Human Rights Watch

In a country where extrajudicial executions by state security forces are a longstanding problem, potential victims take any threat seriously.

So when farmers' rights activist Eduardo Regidor noticed that three armed men were trailing him around Davao City last week, he sought refuge in the local offices of one of the Philippines' largest human rights organizations, Karapatan. Regidor had recently filed a complaint with Karapatan against local elements of the military, so he had good reason to be fearful. Regidor's hunch proved right.

The very next evening, one of those same three men tried to forcibly enter the Karapatan compound via the front gate, while the two others tried to scale the wall. They fled when police arrived on the scene. Regidor wasn't harmed, but several staff and volunteers saw the attempted assault unfold. Among the witnesses were victims of military abuses in the area, including a woman allegedly raped by a soldier.

Karapatan has long been a target of the Philippine security forces. The military has often linked Karapatan and other non-governmental groups holding decidedly left-wing political views with the rebel New People's Army (NPA).

The NPA, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, has been waging an insurgency against the government since 1969. The conflict has sparked extrajudicial killings, en-

forced disappearances, and torture; and many of the victims have been human rights defenders.

Defending victims of human rights abuses by the Philippine security forces can have dire consequences -- in several instances during the Benigno Aquino III presidency, human rights defenders have been targets of violent attacks. In 2013 a senior military official described Karapatan as an "enemy" of the state, putting the group at particular risk.

The dangers for groups like Karapatan are especially great in areas that are strongholds of the NPA. This includes the eastern and southern Mindanao regions, where Davao City is located. But there is little to keep security force personnel who commit abuses in check. Despite the arrest last year of the notorious retired army major general Jovito Palparan, who has been implicated in abduction, torture, and enforced disappearances, the Philippines government rarely prosecutes members of the security forces for serious human rights abuses.

The Philippines government needs to get serious about protecting human rights defenders, and investigating those who threaten or attack them. It could start by identifying and arresting the three men who attacked Karapatan's offices last week.

Until the government shows that it will no longer tolerate these grave threats, Eduardo Regidor and others who speak out will continue to walk the streets in fear.

Philippine Daily Inquirer, 08.05.2015

Red leaders arraigned for 1980s 'purge' killings

By Nathaniel R. Melican

In a packed, sweltering Manila courtroom, top officials of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) were arraigned Thursday for a nine-year-old multiple murder case that started with the discovery of a mass grave that allegedly yielded the remains of suspected government spies "purged" by the communist rebel movement in the 1980s.

Satur Ocampo, Randall Echanis, Rafael Baylosis, Vicente Ladlad and spouses Benito and Wilma Tiamzon did not enter a plea when charges for 15 counts of murder were finally read to them after repeated postponements at Manila Regional Trial Court-Branch 32.

Judge Thelma Bunyi Medina entered a plea of not guilty on behalf of the six accused, whose supporters crammed the courtroom [...].

Their lawyer, Rachel Pastores, made a last-ditch effort to have the arraignment postponed again, citing their pending petition in the Court of Appeals to stop the trial on the ground that the complaint was defective when filed by the government in 2006 during the Arroyo administration.

But Medina, who earlier agreed to reset the proceedings twice this year in view of the CA petition, denied Pastores' latest appeal, saying the court had set aside "more than enough time" to wait for the result of the petition. The judge set the pretrial hearing for July 30.

Speaking to reporters later, Pastores said "what we have been saying is that these are trumped-up charges against our clients. So we will study what we can do and if we have other remedies

that we can avail ourselves of in the pretrial. But we are preparing our defense in case the trial continues.”

The murder charges stemmed from the respondents’ alleged orders in 1985 to purge the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) of members suspected of being government spies, under what the military and the police then called “Operation Venereal Disease.”

The charges are also anchored on the discovery of a mass grave in Sitio Sapang Daco, Barangay Kaulisihan, Inopacan, Leyte province in 2006, where authorities said the skeletons of 15 people killed in the CPP purge were found.

Pastores said the charges could affect her clients in their functions as consultants in the stalled peace process between the government and CPP-NDFP. “How can the consultants work for

peace when they are busy defending themselves from these trumped-up charges?” she said.

Ocampo, Baylosis, Echanis and Ladlad were arrested in 2007 and 2008 based on warrants stemming from the case, but the Supreme Court, in separate rulings, allowed them to post bail. Ocampo was granted provisional liberty by the high court after arguing against the validity of the charges, while Echanis, Baylosis and Ladlad were released in recognition of their role as the NDF consultants in the peace process.

Currently detained in Camp Crame, the Tiamzon couple were arrested last year for this case and other criminal cases – including murder and illegal possession of firearms and explosives – pending in other courts.

Manilatimes.net, 15.05.2015

MOA inked for Maguindanao peace

By Moh Saaduddin

TACURONG CITY, Sultan Kudarat: Officials of the Maguindanao provincial government, 6th Infantry Division (6ID) and the regional police of Muslim Mindanao inked on Thursday a memorandum of agreement (MOA) aimed at attaining peace and security in Maguindanao, especially in emergency responses.

The three-pages MOA was signed by Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu of Maguindanao, commander of the 6ID Maj. Gen. Edmundo Pangilinan and acting regional police director Senior Supt. Ronald Estilles during their recent joint peace and security meeting held at Ginalyn Resort here. It was witnessed by local officials, brigade commanders and police municipal chiefs.

The covenant emphasized primarily the necessity of “coordination” between local chief executives, the military and the police while conducting operations, especially on emergency responses in the troubled province of Maguindanao.

Maguindanao, which literally means “people of the flooded plain,” was recently placed twice this year under “state of calamity” because of drought and dry spell that struck the province following the military’s all-out offensive against the Bang-

samoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) weeks after the Mamasapano bloody clash on January 25.

The province is also known to be the enclave of the BIFF and its splinter radical groups such as Justice for Islamic Movement and Ansarul Khilafah or supporters of the caliphate.

In the MOA, the three parties agreed to have an “open line of communication and to serve complementing or supporting body in conducting disaster response to both human induced and natural calamities.”

Also both the military and police will provide security and manpower for relief operations including the validation, assessment and psycho-social debriefing of displaced people, while the provincial government will take the lead in dispatching relief assistance to affected residents.

The military will provide training relative to disaster relief, rescue and life-saving to the personnel of the provincial government and the police and their auxiliaries, to enhance their capability enhancement at their own expense, as stated in the covenant.

Inquirer.net, 20.05.2015

Juana Change, UP prof, other activists on House blacklist

By Aries Joseph Hegina

A LAWMAKER representing the youth sector slammed the alleged blacklisting of militant leaders and activists in the House of Representatives (HOR).

Kabataan Rep. Terry Ridon on Wednesday presented a copy of the memorandum dated March 18, 2015 which has the subject “Blacklisted/Banned Persons to the House of Representatives” which listed names of persons who allegedly violated rules on “proper behavior” and “decorum” in the Congress’ lower chamber.

Some of the names included in the memorandum were activist-performer Mae Paner also known as Juana Change, UP College of Mass Communication professor Danilo Arao, National Union of Students of the Philippines chair Sarah Elago and College Editors Guild of the Philippines president Marc Lino Abila.

Members of Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, League of Filipino Students, partylists Kabataan, Anakpawis and ACT Teachers, and group Kilos Bayan sa Kalusugan were also listed.

In the memorandum, some of the violations listed which were allegedly committed by the blacklisted persons include: [...] “vandalism” and “shouting and displaying of placards in the conference room.”

Ridon said that the memorandum was secretly implemented and only came to his attention after some resource persons invited for committee hearings were barred from entering the HOR complex.

“This new memorandum, issued by Legislative Security Bureau (LSB) Director Isabelito Flores, is inimical to the image and message of Congress being the ‘House of the People.’ People included in the list are known progressives and socio-civic leaders who are frequently invited by the Lower House itself to share their knowledge and expertise in several pieces of legislation,” Ridon said.

The lawmaker said that the “draconian” memorandum curtails the right of freedom of expression.

“This new security memo is essentially a draconian move instigated by an insecure administration who will go to any length to curtail dissent and the people’s freedom of expression and association. How can Congress be truly a House of the People if leaders of peoples’ organizations are not even allowed to step into its premises?” the lawmaker said. Ridon said that he is mulling to file charges against those who are behind the memorandum.

INSTITUTIONS

Manila Bulletin, 27.04.2015

Ombudsman dismisses QC prosecutor for extortion

By Chito A. Chavez

The Quezon City prosecutor nabbed in an entrapment operation conducted by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) last year for alleged extortion has been ordered dismissed from the service by Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales.

Prosecutor Raul Desembrana was ordered dismissed from the service after being found guilty of administrative charges of grave misconduct, conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service and violation of Section 7 (d) of Republic Act 6713 (Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees).

The office of QC Chief Prosecutor Donald Lee was furnished the order and was directed to inform the Ombudsman the date when the dismissal order was implemented.

Aside from dismissal, the Ombudsman also cancelled Desembrana's civil service eligibility, forfeited his retirement benefits, perpetual disqualification from holding public office and barred from taking civil service examinations.

The NBI agents arrested Desembrana in an entrapment operation in a restaurant inside the Quezon Memorial Circle on Nov. 14, 2014 after receiving the amount of P80,000 from the lawyer of a party in the case he is handling.

Atty. Rey Cortez sought the help of the NBI after Desembrana demanded the money from him in exchange for a resolution of an unjust vexation case which will favor his client.

Following his arrest, Desembrana was immediately relieved from his position at the QC Prosecutor's Office and all the cases assigned to him were unloaded and re-raffled to other prosecutors.

Meanwhile, in the Ombudsman order, it was stated that under its Memorandum Circular No. 1, Series of 2006, the filing of a motion for reconsideration or a petition for review does not prevent the immediate implementation of the dismissal order.

The Philippine Star, 01.05.2015

Anti-political dynasty bills gathering dust at Senate

By Christina Mendez

MANILA, Philippines - No anti-political dynasty bills have been acted upon in the Senate since the start of regular session in 2013.

Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago has filed two anti-political dynasty bills - Senate Bills 1580 and 55 - while Sen. JV Ejercito filed Senate Bill 1906.

In her bill, Santiago described political dynasty as an "anathema in a democracy." She said political dynasties have become "invulnerable and constitute an open defiance of our Constitution... blatantly undermining the rule of law."

Santiago's proposals deal with political dynasty in local and national elective posts.

"Concentration of political power today is no longer just local, but also national, most likely because of the greater efficiency and nationalized impact of various systems of information dissemination," she said.

Santiago's anti-dynasty bills remain pending at the Senate committee on electoral reforms and peoples' participation chaired by Sen. Aquilino Pimentel III.

In his bill, Ejercito said the extended family system in the political arena has found its pernicious effects as public office has become the exclusive domain of influential families.

"Such families have become so well-entrenched in Philippine politics they have monopolized political power and public resources at all levels of government," he said.

He noted that once a politician is elected to public office, he or she immediately builds a strong political base to ensure not only his or her re-election but also ensure that such electoral support will extend to his spouse and other relatives.

Ejercito cited the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report by Temario Rivera which showed that 94 percent or 72 of the 77 provinces have political families.

The UNDP also reported that the average number of political families per province is at 2.31, meaning there are at least two political clans in most of the provinces.

Rivera said most political families have succeeded in winning gubernatorial and congressional elections since the 1987.

Ejercito's measure limits the dynasty provision to those running for local posts.

SB 1906 stated that political dynasty relationship exists when a person who is the spouse or relative up to the second degree of consanguinity of an incumbent elective official runs simultaneously with the incumbent official within the same city or province.

In case the constituency of the incumbent elective official is national in character, the relatives shall be disqualified from running only within the same province where the former is a registered voter, Ejercito said.

Siblings at the Senate

There are two sets of siblings at the Senate - Alan Peter and Pia Cayetano and Ejercito and his half-brother, Jinggoy Estrada.

Jinggoy and Ejercito's father, former President Joseph Estrada, is mayor of Manila while Ejercito's mother, Guia Gomez, is mayor of San Juan.

The Cayetanos' younger brother, TV and film director Lino Cayetano, who is representative of the second district of Taguig City, is reportedly being groomed for the Senate when Pia finishes her term next year. Alan's wife, Lani, is mayor of Taguig.

The Philippine Star, 09.05.2015

CHR chief, 4 execs end terms

By Janvic Mateo

MANILA, Philippines - Commissioner Loretta Ann Rosales ended her term as chairman of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) on Tuesday, leaving another agency under the Aquino administration without a head.

Rosales was joined by commissioners Cecilia Rachel Quisumbing, Ma. Victoria Cardona, Norberto de la Cruz and Jose Manuel Mamauag, who also vacated their positions on May 5, almost five years after they assumed office in September 2010.

Marc Titus Cebreros, who was appointed executive director last month, is currently the agency's officer-in-charge.

Citing multiple sources, GMA News reported that the President has named Chito Gascon, Liberal Party (LP) vice president for social movements and a member of the Human Rights Claims Board, to replace Rosales.

The same report said former House deputy speaker Erin Tañada and executive director Laisa Alamia of the governor's office in

the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao office would also be named as commissioners.

Malacañang has yet to confirm the report. Cebreros said they have yet to receive an official notice from the Palace about the replacements.

A three-term Akbayan party-list representative, Rosales was appointed to the CHR following the election of Aquino in 2010. She was among the members of the party-list, which formed an alliance with LP, who was appointed to plum posts in the cabinet.

During her term, the President signed Republic Act 10368 or the Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act of 2013, which provided for the creation of the Human Rights Victims Claims Board that is tasked to document and recognize the victims of human rights violations under the dictatorship of

Ferdinand Marcos.

The terms of Rosales and the commissioners ended even as the CHR is in the middle of its investigation on the deadly Mamasapano clash in January, which saw the deaths of 44 officers of the Philippine National Police's Special Action Force.

The report is expected to be released later this month.

Aside from the CHR, the Presidential Commission on Good Government, which is tasked with the recovery of the Marcoses' ill-gotten wealth, was also left without a head after Aquino appointed its chairman Andres Bautista to the Commission on Elections.

Aquino is also yet to assign the heads for the Philippine National Police, Commission on Audit, Civil Service Commission and Department of Energy.

HRonlineph.com, 27.05.2015

End the list! Sign and Ratify the Convention Against Disappearances Immediately!-CAED

Jonas Burgos, Rudy Romano, Hermon Lagman, Joseph Belar, Jovencio Lagare, Romualdo Orcullo, Diosdado Oliver, Artemio Ayala, Arnold Dangkiasan, Edgardo Estojero, Renato Topacio, Sherlyn Cadapan, Karen Empeño, Leo Velasco, Manuel Manaog, the list of the disappeared goes on with no end in sight. They may have been silenced, but their friends and families continue to speak up. And now, their friends and families demand that government end the list immediately.

In observance of the International Week of the Disappeared, the Coalition Against Enforced Disappearance (CAED) stands in solidarity with other organizations around the world in pushing for the universal ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPAPED). CAED calls on the Philippine Government to sign and ratify the Convention immediately!

"In a country plagued by impunity and a weak justice system, it is imperative that we ratify the Convention as it will complement our domestic law," said Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, CAED Convenor and Secretary-General of the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD). The Philippines is the first country in Asia that enacted an anti-enforced disap-

pearance law (RA 10353), and yet no perpetrator has been convicted under such law.

"The law is there, but it is not being implemented fully," said Nilda Lagman-Sevilla, Co-Chairperson of the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND), and sister of Atty. Hermon Lagman who disappeared in 1977. "We need the Convention to strengthen legal protection from enforced disappearance," she added.

"If the President is committed to upholding human rights as he claims, I see no reason for the Philippines not to sign and ratify the Convention," said Ron de Vera, AFAD Country Coordinator for the Philippines. De Vera's father was disappeared on Fathers' Day in 1990 during the administration of Pres. Aquino's mother, the late Corazon C. Aquino. "Let this be the President's legacy to our families. Otherwise, his administration will just be another long stretch along the 'tuwid na daan' (straight path*) to empty promises," De Vera said.

CAED demands a stop to enforced disappearances. End the list! Sign and ratify the Convention against disappearances immediately!

HRonlineph.com, 30.05.2015

No to Mining Industry zone! Groups want congress to kill riders in the Mining Revenue Bill -PMPI

Groups from different mining-affected communities in the country exclaimed their opposition in the establishment of Mining Industry Zones (MIZ) in the Philippines as indicated in the proposed mining revenue policy in the congress.

In their meeting in Quezon City last May 28, the groups would like to send their appeal to the House of Representatives to omit the riders in the mining revenue bill and focus their discussion only on the fiscal regime on mining.

"We believe that the provision for the declaration of MIZ in the House Bill 5367 is outside the context of the fiscal regime and therefore should be omitted right away in the discussion," said Fr. Joy Gillarme, executive director of Social Action Center Diocese of Marbel.

Elizabeth Manggol of Marinduque Council for Environmental Concerns (MACEC) added that they could not accept the proposed policy especially the MIZ because it contradicts their call for "no go zone" for mining.

Manggol also noted the discrepancy on the process of declaring areas as "no go zone" compare to the process for MIZ.

"Based on our experience and the other communities in the country, protecting an island from mining would take many steps and time – from the barangay level to congress. But the MIZ is like a breeze to mining companies because for mining to happen, it seems that they would only need proclamation from the president and endorsement from the LGU," she added.

Edel Garingan, project officer for the anti-mining campaign of Philippine Misereor Partnership Inc. (PMPI) commented that the bill on its current form would threaten more communities and key biodiversity areas as the process to begin a mining project seemingly would be cut short.

"The bill is giving the national government an exclusive authority to regulate mining operations in the country, this is a direct assault to local autonomy," Garingan added.

PMPI is a network of about 300 civil society organizations and church-based groups in the Philippines working on various development issues such as peace, sustainable agriculture, climate change and the anti-mining campaign.

CURRENT CASES OF HR VIOLATIONS

Bulatlat.com, 30.04.2015

Govt union leaders receive threats via mail

By Janess Ann J. Ellao

MANILA – On the eve of Labor Day, a government workers' union assailed the harassment of their leaders who received letters from suspected military agents, redbaiting them as members of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

"This is clearly a direct threat and we have nobody but this government to blame if something bad happens to them," said Ferdinand Gaité, national president of government workers' union Courage.

"These military personnel did their homework, they know where the leaders live, their families, what time they arrive and leave for office and what route they take. Obviously, we have been under surveillance. If there is one thing we will admit to, it is the crime of doing organizing work for government employees' rights and advocate genuine public service," Gaité said in a statement.

Gaité said Rosalinda Nartates, Courage secretary general and president of the Consolidated Union of Employees of the National Housing Authority received a letter from a certain Capt. Evangelista of the Philippine Army.

Another government union leader, Manny Baclogan said identical letters were sent to both his office and home address.

Gaité cited an incident when a woman leader of Courage, whose name they withheld, was harassed by a suspected military agent who sat next to her inside a jeepney. Gaité said the agent, who introduced himself as Jay, gave a handwritten letter to the union leader, telling her to change her ways "for the country's sake." Copies of the letters were furnished to the media in a press conference today, April 30.

"From someone who is also working in the government, I want you to cooperate and work together for your own good while you are still employed by the government. I hope that you will not disregard this help I am offering you as this is the most effective way for you to make amends with the government," one of the letters read. [...]

Gaité, in a statement, deplored how the military has maliciously insinuated that the accusations came from Randy Vegas and Raul Camposano, two of their organizers who have been detained in the Bicol region for three years due to "trumped-up cases." [...]

One letter even warned a union leader to call them "before it is too late."

These letters were sent to union leaders just this week. Though this is not the first time, Gaité said at the press briefing that they were alarmed.

Gaité told Bulatlat.com that such harassment is a result of their active organizing both in national and local government offices. He said their group has at least an annual 10 percent growth in their membership. They are also among progressive groups calling for decent wages for government employees and a critic of what they refer to as anti-people policies.

He said they would file a complaint before the Commission on Human Rights and would consult human rights groups and lawyers on other possible legal moves they could take, citing a recent victory when the Court of Appeals granted the protection writs of amparo and habeas data to human rights lawyer Catherine Salucon in March. [...]

Sun.Star Cebu, 03.05.2015

Lapu brgy. captain shot dead

By Rebelander S. Basilan

A BARANGAY captain in Lapu-Lapu City was shot and killed by two unidentified gunmen in Clarin, Bohol yesterday morning.

Agus Barangay Captain Jovencio Lauron, 56, was on a tricycle bound for Sagbayan town when he was shot several times past 8 a.m. He was with his wife, two children, five of his barangay councilors and dozens of relatives and neighbors.

They were to join the annual fiesta in Sagbayan today and tomorrow.

Councilor Julian Fuentes, 54, said they arrived in Clarin at 8 a.m. and hired five tricycles. [...]

A motorcycle drove close to the tricycle and shot the barangay captain when they reached Barangay Caboy, Clarin, Fuentes said.

The driver wore a helmet while the gunman covered his face with a black cloth.

Lauron fell on the road and struggled to take cover in a canal but another gunman on board another motorcycle shot him twice there.

The two motorcycles then sped off.

Fuentes said the gunman who shot the barangay captain in the canal did not cover his face.

Lauron suffered six gunshot wounds, including one on his head and chest, said Fuentes. He was rushed to the Clarin District Hospital but was declared dead on arrival.

Lauron's wife Carolina remained in shock hours after the shooting. [...]

Condemned

She condemned the violence and asked for the speedy arrest of the culprits.

"I ask the Police Regional Office 7 to dig deep and find the culprits," she said in an interview with reporters. [...]

Fuentes said Lauron, father of four, was a well-performing barangay captain who had no record of being in a physical fight. "[...] He was not a bad person," he said.

Elected

Lauron was elected barangay captain in 2002. He lost his reelection bid in 2010 but won again in 2013. [...]

Bulatlat.com, 14.05.2015

Fact-finding mission reports torture, food blockade by soldiers in Blaan communities

By Janess Ann J. Ellao

MANILA – A fact-finding mission in the provinces of Sarangani and Davao Occidental documented human rights violations against the indigenous communities of Blaan, committed by the Phil. Army's 73rd Infantry Battalion.

Led by the Alliance for the Advancement of Peoples Rights (Karapatan), the mission documented cases of violation of domicile, illegal search, threat, harassment, and intimidation, grave

coercion, torture, hamleting, interrogation, destruction of properties, illegal detention, forced child labor, and saturation drive or zoning.

The mission was held on April 27 to 29, and documented incidents from March 27 to April 10 in various communities of Malapatan, Sarangani and Malita, Davao Occidental.

At least 12 sitios (sub-villages) were subjected to economic

blockade, 11 sitios, to illegal military encampment and one, aeral bombing, the mission said.

"A number of these cases happened after the Armed Forces of the Philippines failed to pursue members of the New People's Army," Cristina Palabay, Karapatan secretary general, said in a statement. "Unable to find and fight their equal, the AFP has time and again resorted to retaliatory violence, victimizing the unarmed population. Let us not allow such barbarity to continue."

At gunpoint

Ruben Wating, 35, a Blaan farmer and a member of the group Kafye de lagad (literally, for the good of the farm) of Upper Suyan village in Malapatan, Sarangani told the fact-finding team that on April 5, three soldiers from the 73rd Infantry Battalion accused him of being a New People's Army (NPA) fighter who was involved in an encounter with government troops on April 2.

In Karapatan's fact sheet, Wating identified the three soldiers as Ricky Sotal, Toto Sukal, a certain Gober, who came with a policeman. The four forced him to join them in drinking the two gallons of tuba that they brought. At around 9 p.m., the four brought him to a nearby creek, where they kicked him in the neck, causing him to fall into the water. They accused him of being a rebel, but Wating insisted that he is a civilian.

The soldiers, not contented with his answer, clipped Wating's left thumbnail with pliers. Then, another soldier pulled out a .45-caliber gun, aimed it at his forehead, and threatened to kill him.

The soldiers then told him to get up and run. But Wating did not move an inch, afraid that the soldiers would shoot him. They brought him to the house of his neighbor, Boyet Lanab, where a soldier punched him on his right shoulder.

Soldiers told him to guide them in their operation against the NPA fighters. One smashed Wating's hands with a bamboo stick.

Before allowing Wating to return home, one soldier hit his back with a belt, and told him not to go anywhere. His house was closely guarded by at least six soldiers.

Two days later, soldiers came and told Wating to "surrender" in their military camp. But the latter refused to go, saying that soldiers do not have any warrant of arrest and that he did not do anything wrong. The soldiers then left him.

Documented human rights cases in communities of Malapatan, Sarangani and Malita in Davao Occidental (March 27 to April 10, 2015)

Number of cases	Nature of rights violations
26	Violation of domicile
5	Illegal searches
32	Threat, harassment, and intimidation
2	Grave coercion
5	Torture
3	Hamleting incidents
5	Interrogation
4	Destruction of properties
2	Illegal detention
2	Forced child labor
3 communities	Saturation drives or zoning

Source: Karapatan

More cases

Peasant brothers Masulong and Jimmy Ambat were also among the victims of torture, economic blockade and harassment from the military.

On April 4, at around 6 p.m., the two went to Pag-asa village in the municipality of Alabel, Sarangani to buy 25 kilos of rice. On their way home, the two were blocked at Maybaka subvillage in Upper Suyan by at least 21 soldiers from the 73rd IB, led by a certain Lt. Jordan and Cpl. Peter Maquiling.

The soldiers asked who told them to buy 25 kilos of rice.

"These are ours, sir, for our family's consumption," they told the soldiers who then retorted, "That is not yours. It is for the NPAs."

Soldiers confiscated their rice then tortured and interrogated them about the NPAs. The soldiers punched the brothers, and threatened them with a knife and a rifle.

One soldier even placed a grenade at Jimmy's side and told him that they would let it explode if he would not tell the truth.

During the nine-hour interrogation, soldiers threw away the 25 kilos of rice, confiscated two packs of cigarettes, two packs of instant noodles and Masulong's wallet. They even tore his village residence certificate.

Soldiers then accompanied Jimmy and Masulong to their home in Kabaklod subvillage where they saw that the two has a small store. The soldiers then apologized, saying, "We thought it was for the NPAs."

On April 5, at around 6 a.m., nine soldiers, one of whom was a certain Cpl. Maquiling, knocked at the house of Rexan Tagi, a resident of Kabaklod subvillage in Upper Suyan.

Tagi related to the fact-finding team that soldiers asked him to boil water for their coffee. While they were having coffee, another soldier whom he identified as a certain "PL" asked him to go outside for a talk. Then, they interrogated him about the NPAs.

"I do not know where the NPAs are, Sir," he told the soldier.

The soldiers, however, insisted that they saw NPAs in their village the night before. Tagi denied the allegations, saying that there were no NPAs in their village.

"Do not try to pretend, just tell the truth - you are the contact of the NPA here," said a soldier. "We know they left a gun in your house." Another called Tagi a liar and kicked him twice in the back.

A soldier even told Tagi to surrender the gun and he will be rewarded with a cellphone and \$23. But the latter insisted that there was no gun in his house.

Soldiers then searched the house, trampling on their clothes, the family's sleeping mat and even Tagi's father, Manda who was lying down, sick. His mother Joma nearly fainted with fear.

Soldiers stayed at Rexan's house until 10 p.m.

Record of violations

Harrassments among the Blaan tribe was earlier reported by *Bulatlat.com* back in 2011 when the military encamped in the heart of the Dlumay village in Upper Suyan. The [soldiers tagged the alternative school, Blaan Literacy School and Learning Center, as an NPA school](#).

Palabay said all military units involved in the reported human rights violations should be pulled out from communities. The 73rd IB and Maj. Gen. Eduardo Año, she added, must be made accountable for the rights violations against the Blaan tribe.

The 73rd IB is under the 10th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army, headed by Año, one of the high-ranking military officials implicated in the enforced disappearance of farmer-activist Jonas Burgos.

Bulatlat.com, 15.05.2015

Rights group blames paramilitary, private guards for disappearance of Lumad activist

By Dee Ayroso

The human rights group, Families of the Disappeared for Justice or Desaparecidos is blaming paramilitary men and guards of a private company in Sultan Kudarat province for the disappearance of a Lumad anti-logging activist two weeks ago.

John Calaba, 28, the public information officer of the Manobo group, Kisasabanay Dulangan Manobo (Kiduma), had been missing since April 30 and is feared dead. He was last seen inside the compound of the David M. Consunji, Inc. (DMCI) in Sabanal village, Kalamansig, Sultan Kudarat.

"We demand from the BS Aquino government to immediately surface John Calaba," said Lorena Santos, Desaparecidos secretary general. Santos added that members of the paramilitary group SCAA (Special Civilian Armed Auxiliary) and the Consunji guards should be held accountable for his disappearance.

Santos said that in the morning of his disappearance, Calaba was at his house in Salangsang village, in Lebak town, when three DMCI company guards arrived. The guards, Christopher dela Cruz, Loloy Aquino and Jayjay Cruz, invited Calaba to their outpost in Sabanal village, Kalamansig, to eat roasted chicken with them. DMCI guards have persistently tried to befriend Calaba, said Santos.

Timoteo Asong, a worker at the water reservoir owned by the Consunji Company saw Calaba at the outpost eating, and the latter even invited Asong to eat with them. After 20 minutes, Asong heard gunshots from the outpost, and the sporadic firing lasted until around 10 a.m.

As villagers rushed to the outpost, the guards told them to go back home so as not to be caught in the crossfire with their "enemies." At around 10:30 a.m., after the firing ceased, resident Marcial Usong saw six company guards loading something wrapped in canvass into an elf truck. The truck left a trail of blood.

Santos said the villagers doubted if the guard had an actual fire fight with their "enemies."

Calaba's group Kiduma had actively protested the mining and logging activities of the DMCI in their community.

The Martial Law-era SCAA was revived by the Arroyo administration as "investment defense forces," especially for the protection of mining companies. They serve as Consunji's company guards, and are trained by the Philippine Army's 38th Infantry Battalion, Santos said.

Manilatimes.net, 16.05.2015

Valenzuela inferno unmasks workers abuse

By Catherine Talavera, Llanesca T. Panti, Jing Villamente, Jefferson Antiporda and AFP

The deaths of 72 workers in a fire that gutted a footwear factory in Valenzuela City has exposed abusive conditions for millions of poor and desperate laborers across the nation.

The tragedy, in a long row of gated factories in an industrial hub in the northern end of Metro Manila on Wednesday, was one of the country's deadliest workplace accidents.

The House of Representatives on Friday announced the holding of a congressional inquiry into the tragedy as 69 remains were temporarily interred at the city's public cemetery.

Labor Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz also on Friday described the owners of the footwear factory as "immoral," saying they illegally exploited their workers.

Baldoz said the owners of Kentex Manufacturing had broken employment laws that were meant to guarantee minimum salaries, pensions and social security. [...]

The 72 workers died when the fire tore through Kentex's two-story factory, which produced cheap sandals and slippers for the local market, in an industrial district in Valenzuela City.

A welding job that was being carried out close to inflammable chemicals ignited the fire, according to authorities.

Nearly all of those killed were trapped on the second floor of the factory, with steel bars over windows ensuring they could not escape.

The company had provided no fire safety training to its employees, according to survivors of the blaze, as well as victims' relatives and unions.

They also accused the company of paying salaries well below minimum wage, as well as withholding pensions, health benefits and other forms of social security.

"The deaths should serve as a wake-up call for businessmen to stop these abuses... they should give their employees dignity," Baldoz said.

She confirmed that the company had used a "fly-by-night subcontractor" to hire casual workers, with the middleman agency not paying required salaries and benefits. [...]

After inspecting the site on Thursday, Interior Secretary Manuel Roxas 2nd hit out at the company's safety standards, stating that the welding job should never have been done close to inflammable chemicals.

He pledged to investigate why 69 of the 72 people killed had been trapped on the second floor behind steel bar-enclosed windows and with no viable fire exit.

Labor union leaders have also accused the government of being partly responsible for failing to carry out proper inspections that would ensure such companies were following labor laws.

About 50 labor union activists picketed the burned Kentex factory also on Friday, criticizing the authorities and the factory management.

The exploitation of the workers at the factory, where lax safety standards caused the fire, is anything but unusual across the Philippines.

The workers, who produced cheap sandals and slippers for the domestic market, were paid well below the minimum wage of 481 pesos a day and were denied a host of legally mandated benefits, survivors of the blaze and victims' relatives told reporters.

They said the workers were forced to toil 12-hour days, seven days a week without overtime, had legally-required social security and health insurance payments withheld and were forced to constantly inhale foul-smelling chemicals.

"This is a very common situation. This is just one factory but it represents the... kind of factories in this country," Alan Tanjuszay, spokesman for the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, said.

Tanjuszay noted that compliance with safety standards was "really bad" not just in factories, but also construction sites where workers often do not wear protective clothing.

Poverty, corruption

The Philippines has very strong labor laws and a vocal union movement but the massive numbers of impoverished people and endemic corruption throughout society are two key factors that allow workers' exploitation to flourish.

Roughly one quarter of the nation's 100 million people live in poverty, which is defined as surviving on about one dollar a day, according to government data.

High school dropouts desperate to support relatives are particularly easy prey, according to Baldoz. [...]

Baldoz added that President Benigno Aquino 3rd's administra-

tion, which has been in power for five years, had worked hard to improve labor conditions.

She cited the closing down of 10,000 of an estimated 15,000 illegal employment agencies.

Those agencies are an integral part of the exploitation chain because they hire workers as casuals, allowing companies to turn a blind eye to exploitation such as withholding pensions and paying below the minimum wage.

Baldoz also pointed to the establishment of arbitration courts that resolve labor disputes in as little as 30 days.

But she said factory owners and labor unions were responsible for ensuring that these safety laws were observed.

'Wolves guarding sheep'

This voluntary compliance is one of the big problems, according to the Partido Manggagawa.

"Voluntary compliance and self-assessment means that the government is asking the wolf to guard the sheep. No wonder the sheep get slaughtered," party chairman Renato Magtubo said.

Valenzuela City, the industrial district where the fire occurred, promotes itself as a "premier business and industrial center."

But workers at surrounding factories—which manufacture

products such as cosmetics, plastics, paper plates and small appliances—recounted similar tales of exploitation as those at the Kentex factory.

They emerged from garrison-like compounds, surrounded by towering fences topped with barbed wire and with security guards patrolling the perimeter, with stories of long hours for little pay.

A common theme was being paid well below the minimum wage. [...]

Mass burial

Only three of the 72 remains recovered from the fire scene had been identified as of Friday, authorities said.

DNA samples were collected from the victims' bodies and from the family and kin of the missing workers.

Forensic experts will cross-match the samples to determine the identity of the victims. [...]

Mark Apostol, 25, was close to tears as he gazed at the row of white coffins.

His sister, Melissa, was among those believed to have been killed in the fire.

"[...] Somebody should answer for this as so many people lost their lives," he said. [...]

Bulatlat.com, 19.05.2015

3 farmers shot dead in Bicol

By Janess Ann J. Ellao

MANILA - A farmer was killed in a crossfire while two farmer-activists were gunned down in two provinces in Bicol region in a span of only three days, a human rights group said.

Ellyboy Arozo Rey, 30, was killed on May 12 at Udoc village in Libmanan, Camarines Sur, during a clash between government troops and New People's Army (NPA) rebels.

A fact-finding mission by Karapatan-Bicol revealed that residents heard Rey shout that he was a civilian. But it was followed by more gunshots, which lasted for at least five minutes. Rey sustained a fatal gunshot wound in his temple.

Later that day, Karapatan said Lt. Col. Joselito Pastrana, commander of the Philippine Army's 42nd Infantry Battalion (IB), and a certain Ka Michael, NPA spokesperson, confirmed in separate radio interviews that there was indeed a clash between their forces. Pastrana confirmed that a civilian, referring to Rey, was killed.

Rey's wife, Rosaley Perez, heard the gunshots from their house. Fearing for herself and their four children's safety, they moved to her aunt's house where she learned that her husband was shot. She immediately rushed to where the clash took place and found Rey still breathing.

She then begged the soldiers to bring Rey to the hospital. He

was, however, declared dead on arrival at the town's district hospital.

Soldiers provided Rey's coffin and gave his family two boxes of canned goods.

Two farmers killed

In the island province of Masbate, on May 14, farmers Jomar Escorel and Ryan Almosara were gunned down at around 4 a.m. by suspected military agents between the villages of Canturna and Togoron in Monreal, Masbate. Their killings came right after Karapatan conducted a fact-finding mission on reported abuses of soldiers in the area.

Escorel and Almosara had frequently joined various mass actions in the region.

Vince Casilihan, spokesperson of Karapatan-Bicol, told *Bulatlat.com* that the two were not part of their fact-finding mission, and their deaths had no clear connection to the mission.

Casilihan, however, said that both the killings and military abuses in the area were meant to sow terror among residents. Soldiers from the 9th IB were deployed in the area in the guise of protecting government projects, he said.

"[...] There are 59 victims of extrajudicial killings in the Bicol region under President Benigno Aquino III.

HRonlineph.com, 22.05.2015

Killing of a Human Rights Defender - Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)

[...] A former priest and human rights defender of indigenous people and farmers was killed by unknown assailants on a motorcycle at Dionisio Micayabas Street, North Poblacion, Maramag, Bukidnon last February 12, 2015, around 7:45 in the morning.

Teresito Mula Labastilla, also known as Fr. Sito, 46 years old, dropped his son at Maramag Central School on the morning of the day of the incident. While Labastilla was about to leave the school premise, he was peppered with bullets by the two motorcycle-riding men. His son Tristan Matthew, who just got down from the vehicle, heard a series of gun shots and heard his father calling him. He saw their Isuzu Samurai vehicle accelerate toward the concrete wall, skidded and overturned with his father still inside.

Shocked onlookers ran towards the overturned vehicle and

helped Labastilla get out. The men aboard the motorcycle sped off. The victim was bloodied and unconscious. The onlookers helped lay him down on the concrete road while they waited for a vehicle to bring Labastilla to the Bukidnon Provincial Hospital in Maramag. He was declared dead on arrival. He sustained three gunshot wounds in his neck, face and chest. The attending physician said that all the bullets went through his body. [...]

Arline Amigo, Labastilla's live-in partner, learned about what happened when someone went to their house in Barangay Base Camp, Maramag to fetch her and accompany her to the hospital.

"[...] Witnesses recounted to her that the two assailants rode a white or blue XRM motorcycle that had no plate number. Both men were wearing masks. [...] Tristan Matthew was almost hit by the motorcycle. He told his mother that he already noticed the motorcycle-riding men since December 2014. The suspects

usually stood by the front of his school and he saw them every time his father dropped him off at school.

Labastilla was a well-known environmental activist in the province. He was a priest for 14 years and was assigned in Malaybalay City, Lantapan, and San Fernando, Bukidnon diocese. He left the priesthood in 2000 and had his own family.

He ran for mayor in Lantapan, Bukidnon in 2010, but lost. The current mayor filed a case of Oral Defamation against Labastilla. A day before he was killed, he was convicted and had the penalty of imprisonment for ten days and was ordered to pay ten thousand pesos (P10,000). During his campaign, Labastilla said that he desired for honest and sincere services to be given to the people of the municipality. His main advocacy was for the issues of land and water to be resolved for the farmers and indigenous people in his area.

He is also the spiritual adviser and consultant of the local organ-

Bulatlat.com, 28.05.2015

Peasant couple gunned down, burned in Negros

By Ronalyn V. Olea

MANILA - A peasant leader and his wife were found dead in Tacpao village, Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental in the morning of May 25.

According to Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas and Tanggol Magsasaka, Endric Calago, 47, was found lying in a pool of his own blood outside the house. His face was shot at close range. His body was riddled with bullets. Empty shells of M-203 grenade launcher and M-16 armalite rifle were found in the crime scene. According to the police, at least four magazines of bullets were used.

Calago was the newly elected vice chairperson of Kapunungan Alang sa Ugma sa Gagmayang Maguuma (Kaugmaon), the KMP's local chapter in Negros.

The body of Calago's wife, Rosalie, 45, was found near the kitchen. She was lying on her stomach with a bullet wound on her chest.

According to KMP, the night before, at around 10:45 p.m. of May 24, Calago made loud noises inside their house apparently to call the attention of neighbors. Rosalie was heard shouting and asking for help "[...] Please help us. The soldiers are in our house". After a few minutes, gunshots were heard and the house was on fire.

The couple's daughter, Erlie, 16, arrived from town at around 5:00 a.m. the next day. She was accompanied by neighbors and local police officers from the Guihulngan Police Station.

Antonio Flores, KMP secretary general, condemned the killings. "The Calago couple was brutally murdered. Whoever perpetrated this heinous crime intended to kill them in the most brutal manner to inflict harm and sow terror among the townfolk of barangay Tacpao and Calagos' colleagues and fellow peasant leaders and members of Kaugmaon."

HRonlineph.com, 30.05.2015

Violence mars peaceful protest vs gov't inaction on agrarian reform bills -Pakisama

Security clashed with peaceful protesters part of an estimated 200 farmers at the House of Representatives on Tuesday calling for the passage of bills to complete land acquisition and distribution.

"This was not the response we expect from government," said Rene Cerilla, president of the Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA), who spoke today at the rally. PAKISAMA is one of four national farmer federations present during the clash, including Task Force Mapalad (TFM), PESANTE, and Kilusan ng Magbubukid sa Bondoc Peninsula

ization called Bukidnon Agrarian Reform and Agri-Business Multipurpose Association (BARAMA). The organization was established last February 3, 2008. It promotes organic farming among the IPs and farmers in the province.

Agrarian reform beneficiaries in Barangay Base Camp, Maramag were having difficulties in occupying the awarded 34 hectares of land after a former owner sent private armies to the area and harassed them. The beneficiaries solicited advice from Labastilla and he accommodated them. He used his vehicle and drove for the farmers when they needed to make follow ups regarding their case. Amigo and the other people close to Labastilla think that this might be the reason why he was killed. [...] Amigo now fears for her life and her children's. They have noticed motorcycle-riding men going around their residence. [...]

Army denies involvement in death of farmer couple

By Judy F. Partlow

The 11 th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army rejected yesterday a statement from the militant farmers' groups condemning the deaths of a couple who were farmers in Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental, Sunday.

Lt. Col. Paul Idul, 11 th IB commander [...] said there is no truth whatsoever to the allegations of the groups, that the couple, Endric Calago, 47, and his wife, Rosalie, 45, were killed and burned by military personnel in their house in Barangay Tacpao, Guihulngan City, during the pre-fiesta activities Sunday. [...]

Idul denied the allegations, saying that early police investigation showed the couple appears to have personal grudges that might have triggered the attack against them.

He also said he believes that Endric had the same last name as the barangay chairman of Tacpao, so the couple might have been mistaken to be military informants.

Tacpao barangay chairman William Calago is an avid supporter of the military in the implementation of development projects in the barangay, Idul said.

Idul said Guihulngan still has remnants of the NPA rebellion with its members mostly mobile and crossing boundaries to Negros Occidental

Visayan Daily Star.com, 27.05.2015

Based on initial reports, soldiers of the Army's 11th Infantry Battalion are suspects in the killing. In a [report](#), Lt. Col. Paul Idul, 11th IB commander, denied the allegation. Idul said the couple "appears to have had personal grudges that might have triggered the attacks against them."

At the same time, Idul said the military would look into the incident and recommend the deployment of regular troops in the area where the couple was killed.

The KMP said, "Negros Oriental is a known hotbed of agrarian unrest and conflict and farmers' struggling for lands become automatic victims of human rights violations."

According to human rights alliance Karapatan, 238 have become victims of extrajudicial killings since President Benigno Aquino III assumed office until March this year. Sixty-one percent or 145 were farmers.

pepper spraying headed to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) to file their complaints against culpable House personnel also under investigation by the House leadership.

Meanwhile, the House passed late Tuesday evening one of two agrarian reform bills pushed by the farmers, House Bill No. 4375 creating the Agrarian Reform Commission. The other awaiting passage is House Bill No. 4296 seeking to extend indefinitely, or at least until the end of the term of President Benigno Aquino III, the period for issuance of Notice of Coverage (NOC) on 'CAR-Pable' lands.

Cerilla says the farmers remain undeterred in pushing for legislation. If the other bill, HB No. 4296, is passed, the DAR can resume the issuance of Notices of Coverage and correct or reissue, if necessary, previously issued Notices of Coverage, and accept Voluntary Offer to Sell, involving all remaining agricultural lands subject to agrarian reform coverage under RA 6657 or the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform law.

"The next step is to pass a unified bill to extend the date for the issuance of NOCs indefinitely, or until all lands that should be under CARP are included," says Cerilla.

Without the law, the hard-fought ownership of lands by farmers across the country is put at continuing risk, and their impoverished condition is worsened by government inaction.

Cerilla cites the case of Bugsuk and Pandanan islands in south

Palawan where 10,800 hectares of lands grabbed via forcible 'land swaps' by the late dictator Marcos crony Eduardo 'Danding' Cojuangco were issued NOCs by DAR in June 2014; DAR unfortunately has not followed up on this for almost a year now, and farmers are asking when will they get back the lands taken away from them, or from their parents, at gunpoint in the mid-1970s.

Cerilla cites a similar case in Casiguran, Aurora where farmers have been displaced by the Aurora Pacific Economic Zone (APECO), a development project backed by the Angara political clan. Construction on their agricultural lands is still under way despite an agreement with affected farmers for APECO to freeze it. The DAR has not acted on discontinuing operations and distributing the lands, though it is within the agency's power, as expressed in the opinion issued by the Department of Justice (DOJ).

In San Ysiro, Antipolo, farmers are wondering why a draft NOC issued on Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) land has not been signed for more than two years now by DAR officials. Non-issuance of NOCs have also been reported in Cagbalete, Bondoc Peninsula, Tagbakan, and Catanuan in Quezon.

"Give these farmers their lands now," says Cerilla. "They've waited long enough."

UPDATES ON CASES OF HR VIOLATIONS

Philippine Daily Inquirer, 11.05.2015

No amount can compensate for 2 UP students, says mom

CITY OF MALOLOS - The mother of missing University of the Philippines (UP) student Karen Empeño told the court on Monday that no amount of money could make up for her family's agony because of the disappearance of Karen and fellow student, Sherlyn Cadapan.

Concepcion Empeño, a public school principal in Masinloc, Zambales province, testified for the prosecution this week in the trial of retired Maj. Gen. Jovito Palparan Jr., who is facing kidnapping and serious illegal detention charges in connection with the disappearance of the UP students almost nine years ago.

Karen Empeño and Cadapan have been missing since they were abducted by suspected government soldiers in Hagonoy town in Bulacan province on June 26, 2006.

Palparan, the former commander of the Army's 7th Infantry Division based in Nueva Ecija, was present when Empeño took the witness stand at the Regional Trial Court Branch 14 here on Monday.

Empeño was asked to quantify the grief her family suffered due to the crime, to help the court determine the civil damages that the family can claim from Palparan and three other soldiers should they be convicted.

She said she could not put a price tag on her daughter's disappearance, though she pointed out that the effort to find Karen in the last nine years had affected her family's finances. Almost half of her P39,000 monthly salary had been spent to find Karen, she said.

Empeño said she had been looking for her daughter from June to December in 2006.

She cited the absences she incurred during her search and on days she was preparing the case against Palparan and three

other soldiers. These absences would be deducted from her retirement benefits once she retires in July, she told the court.

Empeño said she used up all her vacation leave credits and has been reporting for work only three times a week.

"I not only spent on the search or the lawsuits, I also attended meetings of families of the disappeared so I commute from Zambales to Metro Manila," she said.

"I believe that my daughter Karen is still alive. I wish that General Palparan finally tells the truth that he knew her and Sherlyn. [This is] not only for us but also for his own peace of mind," Empeño told the Inquirer after her court appearance.

Lawyer Diosab Formilleza, Palparan's counsel, tried to establish that Karen was no longer a UP student at the time of her disappearance, during the hour-long trial on Monday.

"You said that Karen was last enrolled in UP Diliman in 2005 in the College of Social Sciences [and Philosophy]. That meant that in 2006, when she was reported abducted ... she was no longer an enrolled UP student," he asked Empeño.

She said Karen, a graduating student of UP Diliman, was collecting data to complete her thesis when she was abducted.

"Her thesis was about the songs narrating the plight of farmers. [Karen] was out there in Hagonoy town conducting data gathering to complete her thesis because she earned an 'incomplete' [grade]," Empeño said.

It was Empeño's second time to appear in court on Monday. She had earlier testified against detained Lt. Col. Felipe Anotado and S/Sgt. Edgardo Osorio, the two other soldiers implicated in the case.

Another accused, M/Sgt. Rizal Hilario, has yet to be arrested.

Erlinda Cadapan, mother of Sherlyn, is expected to take the witness stand on May 18.

Bulatlat.com, 12.05.2015

Rights Commission member identifies military officer in Burgos abduction

By Janess Ann J. Ellao

MANILA - A member of a Commission on Human Rights (CHR) team that investigated the disappearance of farmer-activist Jonas Burgos took the witness stand at the Quezon City regional trial court hearing today, May 12.

Lawyer Robinson Biñas said the Supreme Court, [in a 2010 decision](#), ordered the CHR investigation. He said the team interviewed some 15 witnesses, among them, busboy Jeffrey

Cabintoy, who identified Major Harry Baliaga Jr. as one of the abductors.

Apart from the investigation, Biñas said eyewitness Cabintoy also positively identified Baliaga in a hearing at the Court of Appeals (CA) in 2012, where he was also present.

Baliaga is facing arbitrary detention charges in relation to the disappearance.

In Baliaga's motion for reconsideration filed before DOJ in September 2013, he described the CHR's investigation as "a result of a fishing expedition" and "a witch hunt."

In an interview with *Bulatlat.com*, Baliaga said he cannot understand why his name kept cropping up in hearings related to Jonas' disappearance.

Asian Human Rights Commission, 20.05.2015

Husband and daughter of murdered land rights activists suffer trauma -AHRC

[...] UPDATED INFORMATION: (Based on the documentation by the Medical Action Group (MAG))

Previously, we reported that a female land rights activist was killed in front of her husband and daughter. Her husband, Danny Boy, was able to report the incident at a nearby military camp that led to the arrest of the suspect.

The accused, Rannie Bugnot, was subsequently arrested and is presently detained at Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), Gumaca District Jail, Quezon. The case is pending at the Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 62 in Gumaca, Quezon. [...]

After Elisa Tulid's death, we have learned that her husband, Danny Boy, was observed staring into a space "tulala", quiet and uncommunicative. He developed poor sleep, such that his daughter would talk to him at night, to help comfort him. During such talks, she would notice her father crying easily. He has poor appetite, low energy, and expressed hopelessness, as well as fear that the people behind Rannie Bugnot might also kill him.

HRonlineph.com, 20.05.2015

Probe Mayor's Alleged 'Death Squad' Links -HRW

The Philippine government should investigate Davao City's Mayor Rodrigo Duterte for his possible role in summary executions in the city over the past decade, Human Rights Watch said today. Duterte has continued to espouse the killing of criminal suspects to combat crime in a city that has long had high numbers of apparent "death squad" killings - more than 1,000 since the late 1990s.

Duterte has been mayor of Davao City, located on the main southern island of Mindanao, almost continuously since 1988. He said in a speech on May 15, 2015, that his approach to crime fighting depended on the killing of suspected criminals. "We're the ninth safest city. How do you think I did it? How did I reach that title among the world's safest cities? Kill them all [criminals]."

"The Philippine government should take a zero-tolerance approach to any public official who publicly endorses extrajudicial killings as an acceptable means of crime control," said Phelim Kine, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. [...]

Duterte has been on a speaking tour across the Philippines for the past six months touting the killing of criminal suspects as an effective crime control technique.

Human Rights Watch documented the existence of the Davao "death squad" and Duterte's role in it in the 2009 report "You Can Die Anytime." The United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings included the Davao killings in his 2009 investigation and called on the government to end the use of death squads as a means of crime fighting.

[During the Court of Appeals hearing held on May 23 to 24, 2012,](#)

Baliaga said he was on board a bus to Baguio City at the time of Jonas' disappearance. He claimed that he arrived in their hometown in Besao, Mt. Province on April 28, around 4 p.m., where he stayed until May 1, 2007 to join a family reunion.

Jonas's brother, JL, said the higher court believed the eyewitnesses that they presented, rather than Baliaga's "biased witnesses," referring to the soldier's family who took the witness stand at the CA hearing.

Baliaga, he added, has failed to provide a strong alibi that he was not behind Jonas' disappearance.

Jonas was abducted on April 28, 2007 at a restaurant in Quezon City. He remains missing.

Danny Boy admitted he suffers from an extremely poor attention span and has problem concentrating. His mind is disturbed or "gulong gulo ang isip", such that he could not understand what other people are telling him. He developed palpitations and trembling, which occur almost daily, throughout the day. Two or three months after his wife's death, the symptoms decreased in intensity; however, his thoughts and memories of his wife's violent death remain easily triggered. [...]

Mr. Tulid said his daughter helps him recover. Apart from him, his younger daughter Belinda (alias), also suffers trauma, having witnessed her mother being murdered in front of her. Like her father, Belinda has also become uncommunicative and quiet. Mr. Tulid's oldest daughter, Clarita (alias), decided to drop out of school and get married early after her mother's death. [...]

The AHRC urges the government to ensure Mr. Tulid and his daughter are afforded adequate treatment for the trauma they are suffering, and that just compensation is given to them.

Duterte fires back at HRW for urging probe into Davao killings

By Jeffrey M. Tupas

DAVAO CITY, Philippines - Davao Mayor Rodrigo Duterte fired back at Human Rights Watch, which had urged government to investigate his role in alleged extrajudicial killings of suspected criminals in the Mindanao city.

"You are all hypocrites," Duterte said in a text message addressed to HRW that he sent to media Tuesday night. "You cannot even protect the human rights in your own country, the American-Africans (sic) and other minorities, not to mention your inutility in dealing with the genocide going on in Africa and others countries," he said, referring to the mounting furor in the US over the killings of unarmed black men by police and the massacres that accompany various conflicts in Africa.

He dared "the bleeding hearts of US-based crime watch (sic): You want a taste of justice, my style? Come to Davao City, Philippines, and do drugs in my city. I will execute you in public."

HRW on Tuesday urged the government to [look into Duterte's possible involvement](#) in the Davao killings that the rights group said have claimed up to a thousand lives.

InterAksyon.com, 20.05.2015

The official Commission on Human Rights has also investigated these allegations and in 2012 issued a resolution saying that it found probable cause to recommend that the Office of the Ombudsman file murder charges against Duterte. But the Ombudsman limited its investigation to the police officers implicated in the killings - not Duterte himself - finding 21 of them guilty of "simple neglect of duty," and fining them the equivalent of a month's salary. The country's Court of Appeals later overturned the verdict, saying the Ombudsman merely used statistics against the police officers. To date, not one person has been convicted for involvement in any of the killings.

The Ombudsman has not investigated Duterte for his role in the Davao death squad. Neither has the Department of the Interior and Local Government, which is under the Office of the President and has administrative and supervisory control over municipal governments. The National Bureau of Investigation, which is under the Department of Justice, has likewise failed to probe Duterte's alleged links to the Davao death squad. Duterte has a long history of inflammatory public statements that would seem to encourage the extrajudicial killing of suspected criminals. He has commanded his police officers to "shoot to kill" people ranging from suspected criminals to rice smugglers. That rhetoric has fueled protests from human rights groups and the Commission on Human Rights, which denounced the mayor for his statement and urged him to "operate on the rule of law."

Inquirer Central Luzon, 20.05.2015

Pemberton admitted to killing a 'he or she,' US Marine testifies

By Allan Macatuno

OLONGAPO CITY—The "liberty" companion of US Marine Lance Cpl. Joseph Scott Pemberton testified on Tuesday that the accused in the murder of transgender woman Jeffrey "Jennifer" Laude had told him that he might have killed "a he or she" on the night they went bar hopping here in October last year.

US Marine Lance Cpl. Jairn Michael Rose stood by his sworn affidavit and recounted his conversations with Pemberton when they returned to their ship after their liberty (rest and recreation) activities on Oct. 11, said lawyer Harry Roque, lead counsel for the Laude family.

Roque said Rose had told the court that Pemberton approached him shortly after they went back to their ship and told him, "I think I may have killed a he or she."

"After their conversation, he (Rose) said Pemberton went to sleep while he made a phone call to his parents to seek advice," Roque told reporters during a break in the hearing on Tuesday.

Rose, he said, later talked to US Marine Sgt. Christopher Miller, who did not leave their ship, to relay what Pemberton had told him.

The court has barred reporters from covering the trial. Details of the proceedings and testimonies given by witnesses are provided by the lawyers of the family, who would brief reporters during breaks. Lawyers of Pemberton have not granted requests for interview since the trial started in March.

Roque said Rose made clear descriptions of what happened between Pemberton and Laude inside a room of Celzone Lodge on Magsaysay Drive as relayed to him by the accused.

Duterte's Davao City model of extrajudicial killings as a crime-fighting strategy appears to have spread to other cities in the Philippines. United States State Department cables released by WikiLeaks in 2011 noted the apparent rise of municipal government-sanctioned death squads in cities including Cebu City, Toledo, and Carcar.

After a 2014 Human Rights Watch report about the Tagum City death squad in Mindanao, a Department of Justice investigation resulted in charges filed against Tagum City's former Mayor Rey Uy and 29 other local and police officials for their alleged role in summary killings there. But Philippine authorities have not taken action against other death squad operations.

[...] "The government should send an unambiguous message to Duterte and other officials that support for extrajudicial killings results in an investigation – not in speaking tours."

Citing Rose's testimony, Roque said Pemberton discovered that Laude was a transgender woman and this angered him.

"Rose said Pemberton choked Jennifer until she stopped moving and he then dragged her into the bathroom," he said.

A motel employee found Laude's body in the bathroom after Pemberton left the room past 11:30 p.m. on Oct. 11.

[...] Rose also identified himself from the group of soldiers who were inside Ambyanz Disco Bar on Magsaysay Drive, where Pemberton met Laude, as shown on closed-circuit television footage, Suarez [another counsel for the Laude family] said.

Asked why Rose was testifying against Pemberton despite their friendship, Suarez said, Rose told the court that he was abiding by the US Marines' honor system, which directs its members to tell the truth.

Miller, who took the stand on Tuesday afternoon, had said in his sworn affidavit that Rose and two other Marines—Lance Cpl. Bennett Dahl and Cpl. Daniel Pulido—returned to their ship at 12:10 a.m. on Oct. 12 after their "shore leave."

[...] Roque said personnel of the US Naval Criminal Investigation Service eventually took the statements of the soldiers.

Suarez said Dahl and Pulido were also called to the witness stand on Tuesday afternoon.

She said the American soldiers' testimonies were consistent with statements in their sworn affidavits.

Pulido was approached by Laude's friend, identified only as "Barbie," and was told, "Your friend killed my friend" when the American soldier was looking for Pemberton as their liberty time was about to end, Suarez said.

PEACE PROCESS

InterAksyon.com, 07.05.2015

MILF forms political party, to participate in 2016 elections

By Lira Dalangin-Fernandez

MANILA, Philippines - Saying it is determined to leave the armed struggle and join mainstream politics, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has organized a political party for the 2016 elections.

MILF peace negotiating chairman Mohagher Iqbal said the United Bangsamoro Justice Party was registered at the Commission on Elections on Wednesday.

"We will be engaging no longer (through) armed struggle, but through democratic struggle," he said in an interview after a dialogue with about a dozen lawmakers from Metro Manila about the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

He said the new political party of the MILF shows that they are sincere in working with the government in having peace in the region.

The MILF will not be dissolved, but will remain as a "social movement," he added.

Iqbal earlier said that MILF members will participate in the election of officials of the new Bangsamoro government that will be in place once the BBL is signed into law.

The BBL is the product of the comprehensive agreement between the MILF and the government. Congress is currently deliberating on the proposed law.