

HEADLINES NEWS REVIEW SEPTEMBER 2015

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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

HRonlineph.com, 23.09.2015

Paramilitary groups, impunity....the entrenched legacies of martial law - TFDP/MAG/PAHRA

More than nine months for the Aquino administration term end, his administration will be remembered for lost ground on important measures of breaking impunity which is the entrenched legacy of martial law, said the Medical Action Group Inc. (MAG), Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) and Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) on the 43rd commemoration of Martial Law.

The harassments and killings of human rights defenders are on the rise in the country. Based on the documentation by the MAG and TFDP under its "Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) Protection project", since September 2013, there are 34 cases of harassment, intimidation and extra judicial killings committed to HRDs. Most of them are resisting land grabbing, mining and other development aggression projects.

"These incidents are part of a growing pattern of criminalization of human rights work and alleged human rights violations committed against human rights defenders in the country that must be broken before it escalates beyond control," Edeliza P. Hernandez, MAG Executive Director said.

While human rights defenders play crucial role in seeking accountability for human rights violations both by government and corporations, they have faced significant challenges such as filing of trump up charges against them leading to their arrest and detention, which are systematically used by authorities to suppress dissent. For instance, the case of Barangay Chairperson Antonio L. Tolentino, human rights defender and one of the leaders of Anibanng Nagkakaisang Mamayanng Hacienda Dolores (ANIBAN), was arrested due to trumped up charges filed by private land developer and detained since April 16, 2014.

InterAksyon.com, 25.09.2015

Lumad slam CHR for veering away from rights violations during inquiry

MANILA, Philippines -- Leaders of hundreds of Manobo sheltering in a church compound in Davao City after fleeing the militarization of their communities blasted the Commission on Human Rights for allegedly veering away from the abuses that drove them to evacuate.

The Manobo datu also accused Commissioners Roberto Eugenio Cadiz and Leah Tanodra-Armamento, who presided over the Thursday hearing that opened the CHR's inquiry into atrocities against indigenous people in Mindanao, of refusing to allow the *Pasakkaday Salugpongan Kalimuddan* or PASAKA, a federation of lumad organizations in southern Mindanao, to participate in the inquiry.

Datus Mentroso Malibato, who is also spokesman of *Karadyawan*, an organization of Manobo from Kapalong, Davao del Norte, and Kaylo Bontolan of Talaingod town in the same province and PASAKA spokesman, told InterAksyon.com in an interview that, instead of looking into the human rights violations, such as the occupation by the military and paramilitary groups of their communities and tribal schools, that drove them to flee their homes, Cadiz and Armamento "focused their questions on the conditions inside (the Haran Mission House of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines) and if we would be willing to transfer if they and the (Department of Social Welfare and Development) could find us another sanctuary."

While acknowledging the difficulties at Haran, Malibato and Bontolan said they preferred to stay at the church compound, which has provided them sanctuary from the incessant militari-

zation of their communities since the 1990s, "because we feel safe here."

Besides, he added, "simply transferring us is not the solution to our problem and will only expose us to harassment, or worse, by the military and the *Alamara*" militia.

And when the lumad pressed their demand that the military withdraw from their villages and disband the *Alamara* and other militias, the two datu and PASAKA chairman Kerlan Fanagel said Cadiz and Armamento responded by asking if they would also demand the pullout of the New People's Army.

"Why pass the burden for counterinsurgency to the lumad and make us responsible for driving away the NPA? Why force us, civilians, to take part in their campaign?" Fanagel asked.

"*Dismayado kami* (We are dismayed)," Malibato said. "*Dili nila kayang tubagon ang among panawagan* (They could not respond to our call)."

Malibto and Bontolan described the attitude of the CHR officials as "no different" than that of North Cotabato Representative Nancy Catamco, the chair of the committee on indigenous people at the House of Representatives who, together with the military, has claimed the Haran refugees are not evacuees but victims of "trafficking" who have been "manipulated" by groups they accuse of supporting the communist rebel movement. It is a claim discredited even by United Nations special rapporteur on the human rights of indigenous people Chaloka Beyani but which they continue to cling to.

During a controversial visit to Haran in July, Catamco was caught on video berating the refugees and insisting they should

return to their communities even as she insisted the military and militias should not pull out of their villages.

Catamco is also widely seen as having instigated a violent attempt later that month to evict the Haran *lumad* and force them to return home.

Since then, the congresswoman has also suggested the passage of a measure that would, in effect, legitimize the tribal militias the military has organized as part of its counterinsurgency program and who have been blamed for the worst human rights abuses against *lumad* communities.

This includes the September 1 murders of Emerito Samarca, executive director of the Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development, and Manobo leaders Dionel Campos and Datu Bello Sinzo, by the *Magahat* militia in Lianga town, Surigao del Sur, which triggered a mass exodus of some 3,000 *lumad* who remain at the sports center in the provincial capital Tandag City.

Following the Lianga killings, the military, which in the past has acknowledged using the militias as “force multipliers” against the New People’s Army, have taken to denying anything to do

with the paramilitary bands. But Surigao del Sur Governor Johnny Pimentel has dismissed their denials even as he has demanded that the Army “disarm, disband or kill” the militias he says have been responsible for atrocities that have seen the *lumad* in his province trapped in a cycle of evacuations for the past six years.

The datu also questioned what they called Cadiz and Armamento’s refusal to recognize PASAKA and allow it to participate in the proceedings.

“We are not a support group. We represent the *lumad* as the federation of tribal organizations in southern Mindanao,” Fana-gel stressed.

“Not recognizing us shows they are insensitive to the collective nature of *lumad* community life” and worse, “is consistent with the (military’s) claims that we are among those who supposedly ‘manipulte’ the *lumad*,” he added.

On Friday, the Haran refugees staged a picket in front of the Apo View Hotel in Davao, where the inquiry is being held, and where the CHR will be hearing testimony from the military and other government agencies.

INSTITUTIONS

Philstar.com, 01.09.2015

Philippines: New Police Chief Should Tackle Abuses

(Manila) – The [Philippine](#) National Police should hold to account all police officers responsible for human rights violations, Human Rights Watch said today in a [letter](#) to the police chief, Director General Ricardo Marquez. President Benigno Aquino III appointed Marquez to the position on July 14, 2015.

“Police chief Marquez has the opportunity to turn the Philippine National Police into a rights-respecting, professional organization,” said [Phelim Kine](#), deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “He has the duty and the responsibility to make sure that the national police meets its domestic and international human rights obligations.”

Marquez should ensure prompt, transparent, and impartial investigations of alleged police abuses, and take appropriate action against those responsible, regardless of rank, Human Rights Watch said. National police personnel have long been implicated in numerous human rights violations including [torture](#) and [extrajudicial killings](#).

Task Force Usig, created by the Philippine National Police in 2006 to investigate the extrajudicial killings of activists and

journalists, has only secured 9 convictions out of the 181 cases it has documented since 2001. Marquez should direct the task force to improve its investigation and documentation of cases of alleged extrajudicial killings, Human Rights Watch said. The task force should submit a regular – preferably monthly – progress report on the status of these cases.

Marquez should address the country’s epidemic of [extrajudicial killings](#) by acting on the recommendations of the May 2014 Human Rights Watch [report](#) on summary killings in Tagum City in Mindanao. Specific police officers assigned to the Tagum City police were identified as complicit in the operation and control of the so-called “Tagum Death Squad.” Marquez should reform the national police’s Human Rights Affairs Office, which has failed in its role as a monitor for police human rights violations.

“Marquez urgently needs to tackle the problem of rampant human rights abuses by the Philippine National Police,” Kine said. “It’s in his hands whether the police can transform itself from predator to protector of the people.”

CURRENT CASES OF HR VIOLATIONS

Karapatan – Urgent Alert, 07.09.2015

ALCADEV Executive Director, two Lumads killed by AFP units and paramilitary group; community members forced to evacuate

On August 30, 2015, about 40 soldiers of the 36th Infantry Battalion-Philippine Army (IBPA), the 75th IBPA, AFP 1st Special Forces, and known members of the paramilitary group—who call themselves Magahat-Bagani Force/Marcos Bocales group—occupied the function hall and parts of the school grounds of the Aternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV) in Sitio Han-ayan, Brgy. Diatagon, Lianga, Surigao del Sur.

It was the day after the commemoration of the school’s Foundation Day. While there were visitors who stayed behind after the event, most of the visitors had already left. Those who stayed behind saw for themselves the soldiers and members of the paramilitary group in the community.

During the military and paramilitary encampment, elements of the 36th IBPA, 75th IBPA, SF, and members of the Bocales group threatened the school’s faculty members, staff, and the community members that they will be massacred, unless they leave in two days. Soldiers also asked community members of the

whereabouts of Reynaldo Campos, ALCADEV coordinator; Norma Ampis, TRIFPSS executive director; Dionel Campos, MAPASU Chairperson; and, two other TRIFPSS teachers.

At dawn of September 1, at around 4 a.m., soldiers went from house to house in Han-ayan and in Km. 16 and ordered residents to get out of their houses and to proceed to the basketball in Km. 16. Han-ayan is less than a kilometer from Km. 16’s basketball court.

At the ALCADEV grounds, the soldiers and paramilitary forcefully knocked at the dormitory. The soldiers told the students and staff to come out of the school. One resident, **Guideon Galicia**, who was about to go up to the second floor of the ALCADEV guest house to get Samarca met a soldier who immediately hit him with the butt of a gun. Samarca saw Galicia and asked the soldiers not to hurt him. He then introduced himself as Executive Director of ALCADEV. The soldiers let go of Galicia and held Samarca instead.

Philippines: UN experts urge probe into killings of three Indigenous peoples' rights defenders

GENEVA – The United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, and on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, today called on the Philippines Government to launch a full and independent investigation into the killings of three human rights defenders in Surigao del Sur, Mindanao, which is currently affected by armed conflicts.

One of the human rights defenders killed was the director of the Alternative Learning Center for Agriculture and Development (ALCADEV), a school providing education to indigenous youth who live in the mountains and service communities in the CARAGA region. He was found murdered in one of the ALCADDEV classrooms in the town of Sitio Han-ayan on 1 September.

This occurred immediately after members of the Philippine Army and alleged members of paramilitary forces had occupied the school's function hall as well as its grounds, and after members of the paramilitary had detained the director. As a result of the forced occupation by the Philippine Army and paramilitary troops of the school's premises, 2,000 residents have had to evacuate to nearby Tandag City. "Military occupation of civilian institutions and killing of civilians, particularly in places such as schools which should remain safe havens for children from this type of violence, are unacceptable, deplorable and contrary to international human rights and international humanitarian standards," the Special Rapporteurs said.

Two other representatives of the Manobo community, including a tribal chieftain and the chairperson of MAPASU, an indigenous (Lumad) organization protesting against human rights violations, mining operations and land conversions, were shot in front of their community members by alleged paramilitary forces.

Following the murders, the military is hindering the access of indigenous communities from spending long periods of time needed for tilling in the mountains where their farms are located. The communities are also denied access to the sacred burial sites also located in those mountains.

The incident followed another set of brutal murders which took place on 18 August in Mendis, Pangantucan, Bukidnon, Northern Mindanao where five members of an indigenous Manobo family, including a 72 year old blind person and two children, were murdered, allegedly by members of the Philippine Army. "We take note of the announcement made today at the Human Rights Council in Geneva by the delegation of the Philippines that an investigation is underway," they said. "We urge the Philippines authorities to ensure that such investigation into these tragic events be carried out independently to identify and bring perpetrators to justice, to ensure the safe return of the indigenous peoples displaced by the recent violent events, and guarantee redress to the victims' families in compliance with their indigenous traditions and the demilitarization and restoration of peace in regions affected by armed conflicts including in Surigao del Sur and Bukidnon."

The Special Rapporteurs expressed serious concern about the increasingly pervasive insecurity and rising unlawful killings of human rights activists in the conflict-prone regions of the Philippines. Mr. Forst urged the Government to finally accept his repeated requests to visit the country in order to assess, in the spirit of dialogue and cooperation, the environment in which human rights defenders operate in the Philippines.

The experts' call has been endorsed by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns.

The Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Ms. **Victoria Tauli-Corpuz** (Philippines), is a human rights activist working on indigenous peoples' rights. Her work for more than three decades has been focused on movement building among indigenous peoples and also among women, and she has worked as an educator-trainer on human rights, development and indigenous peoples in various contexts. She is a member of the Kankana-ey, Igorot indigenous peoples in the Cordillera Region in the Philippines.

Mr. **Michel Forst** (France) was appointed by the Human Rights Council as the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders in June 2014. Michel Forst has extensive experience on human rights issues and particularly on the situation of human rights defenders. In particular, he was the Director General of Amnesty International (France) and Secretary General of the first World Summit on Human Rights Defenders in 1998.

www.ohchr.org, 22.09.2015

As residents and teachers were leaving Han-ayan, 25 soldiers of the 75th IBPA in full battle gear and three to five members of the paramilitary group, remained in the community.

In Km. 16, the people were ordered to gather at the basketball court. The armed men separated the men from the women and children. The ALCADDEV teachers and staff were also told to form their separate group. Bobby and Loloy Tejero of the Maga-

hat/Bagani Force approached Sinzo, who was at the group of men. He was asked to promise that the residents would "go back to the folds of the government" but Sinzo said it is beyond him. The armed men grabbed him and separated him from the group. People saw the armed men beat Sinzo with wood.

Campos and Itallo, who were at the house of Josephine Pagalan, were ordered to sit at a bench near Pagalan's house. Pagalan is spokesperson of the Kahugpungan sa mga Lumadnong Organisasyon sa Caraga (Kasalo Caraga or Organization of Indigenous Peoples Organizations in Caraga).

The armed men also confiscated all cellphones and cameras from the residents and ALCADDEV staff and remaining visitors in the community.

Some members of the paramilitary group said Itallo was seen in the company of the NPA in the mountains. Itallo, crippled by polio since childhood, reasoned out by showing her feet and saying it is not true because she has difficulty in walking. The armed men ordered Itallo to sit beside Campos while they grabbed Sinzo and separated him from the group.

Campos fell down when armed men whacked him in the neck, but he refused to bow down. He immediately lifted his head and looked at the people around him. Bobby Tejero and brother Loloy Tejero ordered the residents to 'drop' and then shot Campos on the head. Some 20 armed men fired indiscriminately in the presence of the people. After the indiscriminate firing, they saw Sinzo also dead, a few meters away from Campos. His arms were broken.

The community members saw the killing. Itallo, who ducked and just kept her eyes closed during the shooting, survived but was temporarily deaf because of the close range firing. The back of Campos's head was blown off.

Later in the morning, after the killing, the residents went back to their respective houses. The residents of Han-ayan also went back to their community and saw their cooperative store burned down and parts of the TRIFPSS school burning. While others tried to put off the fire at the TRIFPSS school, some teachers went back to ALCADDEV campus and found Samarca's dead body. His throat was slit open, with the cut that ranged almost from ear to ear, his face bruised and almost unrecognizable.

At the time of the incident, most of the elements of the 36th IBPA and Special Forces were in Km. 9.

Since 2005, members of Mapasu and ALCADDEV, who are active in the defense of Lumad ancestral lands against incursion by big business, have been victims of red tagging, trumped-up criminal charges, illegal arrests and detention, torture, and forced evacuation.

ALCADDEV was established in July 19, 2004 as an alternative learning system especially designed to provide secondary education to indigent indigenous youth – Manobo, Higaonon, Banwaon, Talaandig and Mamanwa – who live in the mountains of Surigao del Norte and Sur, Agusan del Norte and Sur. ALCADDEV is born out of the joint efforts of indigenous peoples organizations in CARAGA region. MAPASU is a regional

organization of indigenous people in Caraga and is well known for its strong stance against intrusion of mining companies in their communities.

The paramilitary group of Marcos Bocales, called Task Force Gantangan during the Arroyo regime's Oplan Bantay Laya, may have changed its name into Magahat-Bagani Force. Despite the change in name however, the group continues to be armed and

used by the military to sow division and terror among the Manobo-Lumad, using a worn-out trick of divide-and-rule. In 2014 alone, the group, under the auspices of the 36th IB-PA, was responsible for the killing of Henry Alameda and Aldren

Dumaguait; the burning of the vehicle of Kahuggungan sa mga Mag-uuma sa Surigao del Sur (KAMASS) – KMP; and, the burning of the cooperative store and school in Kabuloohan, Brgy. Buhisan, San Agustin, Surigao del Sur.

Asian Human Rights Commission, 06.09.2015

Military assaults and detains civilians and implicates them in false cases in two separate incidents

Dear Friends,

The Asian Human Rights Commission regrets to inform you that eight persons were arbitrarily arrested while three men were tortured in separate incidents in Mindanao. All the victims were detained on the basis of fabricated charges. They were also accused of being rebels and members of the New People's Army (NPA).

CASE DETAILS: (Based on the documentation by Alliance for the Advancement of Peoples Rights (KARAPATAN))

Case 1

On 5 April 2015, at 8 p.m. Jovito Sr. and Emely Anlagan left for Cagayan de Oro City, together with their children aged 17, 15, 13, 11 and 6. The family were aboard a Nissan Terrano driven by their relative Charito Eslao, who was giving them a free ride. There were five other passengers on board: Charlito's brother Charito, his nephew Crisabel Eslao, Arden Jay Valendez, Daniel Ped-Ac and Jovito Jr. While on the national highway, their car was flagged down at a checkpoint by elements of the 104th Maneuver Battalion of the Philippine National Police at Alae, Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon. They were accused of being in possession of one caliber.45 pistol, one KG-9 sub-machine gun, live ammunitions, and three issues of "Ang Bayan," a publication of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

Earlier that day, at 10 a.m., Lt. Col. Nasser Lidasan, Commanding Officer of the 1st Special Forces Battalion, facilitated a barangay (village) meeting in Sil-ipon, Libona, Bukidnon. Jovito Anlagan Jr. attended the said meeting. He heard Lt. Col. Lidasan accuse the members of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) as "supporters of the New People's Army (NPA)" and the local organization of indigenous people, Kalumbay Lumad as "NPA front." Lt. Col. Lidasan also accused some residents of Sil-ipon of being "NPA supporters." He offered cash rewards to those who will surrender firearms to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

Lt. Col. Lidasan even warned there are residents of Sil-ipon who have standing cases in court with pending warrants of arrest.

Little did Jovito Jr. know that Col. Lidasan was referring to his family, until they were arrested that night. On his way home, Jovito Jr. noticed six soldiers in civilian clothes tailing him. When he arrived home, Jovito Jr. was confronted by the military, alleging he is a NPA member and convincing him to surrender. Jovito Jr. refuted their accusations. Jovito Sr. confronted the military, which ended in an argument. One of the soldiers punched Jovito Sr. in the abdomen. That evening, the Anlagan family was on the road to Cagayan de Oro City to escape from the military harassment. After their car was stopped by the military, the eight individuals were detained and falsely charged with illegal possession of firearms and ammunition, and later tagged as "captured rebels". The five minors were turned over to the Municipal Social Welfare and Development after three days of detention.

Case 2

At 8 a.m. on 14 March 2015, Henry Omandam, 19, Vergil Pitogo, 23, and Johnrey Flores, 18, were gathering "giyong" (shrubs used as soft broom) and making charcoal while waiting for the next planting season. They were farmers cultivating a piece of land in Sitio Minalong, Barangay Kahusayan, Kitaotao, Bukidnon, owned by their grandparents. When they got tired, they rested in nearby aunt's house. Some 30 elements of the Philippine Army led by Cpl. Maynard Silvestre and Cpl. Louis arrived and arrested them. They were accused of being members of the New People's Army (NPA). The military claimed the three were involved in an ambush against the military on March 10. Henry and Johnrey were hogtied facing the ground and left under the heat of the sun for an hour. They were later interrogated separately. Vergil was made to lie down facing the ground. A soldier stomped on his stomach and slapped his face. The three men were brought to Kipolot Army Patrol base and later turned over to the Quezon Municipal Police station. On March 16, they were again transferred to the Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center (PDRC) in Malaybalay City, facing fabricated charges of illegal possession of firearms, ammunitions and explosives.

ManilaStandardToday.com, 13.09.2015

Cops still clueless on Baler judge's slay

By Ferdie G. Domingo

CAMP RAVINA, Aurora—A team of police investigators looking into the Sept. 1 murder of Baler Regional Trial Court Branch 91 Judge Jude Erwin Alaba is reviewing 240 cases handled by the slain magistrate for clues on the killing.

Senior Supt. Danilo Florentino, provincial police director, said the Special Investigation Task Group (SITG), composed of 17 investigators, is now evaluating the 240 cases ranging from

drugs, land dispute, murder and other crimes being heard in his sala.

Florentino said of the 240 cases, they have gone over 140 cases.

On Thursday, PNP Chief Director-General Ricardo Marquez phoned Florentino seeking a speedy solution of the case. "The Chief PNP wants us to solve Alaba's killing as soon as possible," he said.

Eleven days into the killing, police have yet to unmask the identity of the lone gunman.

Alaba was gunned down right in the compound of the RTC in Barangay Suklayin.

He died from a single bullet wound in the chest. His wife Margarita sustained a gunshot wound in her left arm.

[...] "We need to validate the information we have with regards to the supposed suspect in Nueva Ecija as related to us by our asset," he said. [...]

Court Administrator Jose Midas Marquez said an initial review of the cases showed that Alaba was handling sensitive drug cases and some land disputes. [...]

Manila Standard Today, 17.09.2015

Armed men massacre family of five in Samar

By Florante S. Solmerin

A family of five was massacred in broad daylight Tuesday by seven armed men in fatigue uniform and bonnets in Barangay Victory, Calbayog City, Police Chief Superintendent Ernesto Salvador Tejada said Wednesday.

The victims were identified as Sonny Regulacion, 38; his wife Adelia, 42; and their children Princess Christine Joy, 5; Angel Mae, 2; and Cristina, an infant.

Sonny was reported to be a known leader of city Mayor Ronald Aquino.

Two neighbors, 38-year-old Marlene Natayangga and a seven-year-old girl, were also hit by stray bullets. They have been declared out of danger and are now recuperating at the Saint Camillus Hospital, Tejada said.

Investigators said Sonny and his family were in the house of his brother Teban when the incident happened.

"Accordingly, Sonny was outside the house and in a hammock while his family was inside the house when the armed men arrived there and without a word started to shoot at them," Tejada said, quoting from the investigation report.

Bulatlat.com, 20.09.2015

Farmer-activist couple killed in Bulacan

By Janess Ann J. Ellao and Anne Marxze D. Umil

MANILA - Motorcycle-riding gunmen shot dead a peasant activist couple yesterday, Sept. 19, in San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan.

Spouses Roger Vargas, 65, and Lucila Vargas, 60, were riding a tricycle on their way to Grotto market in Tungkong Mangga village to sell their vegetable produce when two gunmen on a motorcycle tailed them, and shot them as they were traversing Igay Road, Purok 4 in Paradise 3 village.

Roger was shot in the head, while Lucila sustained three gunshot wounds. The tricycle driver was unscathed but was traumatized, said a statement by the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP).

Both Roger and Lucila are leaders of the Nagkakaisang Mag-sasaka sa San Isidro (NAGKAISA) and active members of the Alyansa ng Magbubukid ng Bulacan - San Jose Del Monte.

KMP Secretary General Antonio Flores condemned the killing, and called on authorities for an immediate probe on the incident to bring the perpetrators to justice.

"Their brutal killing is obviously linked to their just and legitimate struggle to own the land they till," Flores said.

KMP cited reports that in the morning of Sept. 18, the couple had a confrontation with the security guards who introduced themselves as employed by Ilocos Sur Rep. Ronald Singson who

On the killing of Judge Jude Alaba: Keystone cops perpetuating impunity. Again.

The National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL) has condemned the snail-paced investigation of the Philippine National Police in the recent killing of a Baler RTC judge.

"It took the police several days to find out what the news outlets had reported on the day of the murder: that Judge Alaba acquitted an alleged NPA leader last year," said NUPL secretary-general Edre Olalia.

Baler RTC Branch 91 Judge Jude Erwin Alaba, 45, was shot dead last Sept. 1 as he arrived at the regional trial court compound in Baler, Aurora. His wife Margarita, who was with him when he was ambushed, sustained a gunshot wound on her left arm.

The police had recently said they were dropping the New People's Army (NPA) from their list of suspects. According to news reports, the police had earlier considered the NPA among the suspects because Judge Alaba had tried a case involving Delfin Pimentel, an alleged NPA leader. In that case, however, Alaba acquitted Pimentel, allegedly one of the regional leaders of the New People's Army (NPA), of charges of multiple murder and frustrated murder, filed in connection with an ambush on the military 15 years ago. This year, Alaba also dismissed the charges of illegal possession of firearms against Pimentel and his wife Imelda.

The police has released a sketch of the suspected killer, and said they have witnesses who have heard alleged gang members discussing a plot to kill Alaba.

Olalia said the ambush - at the parking lot of the Hall of Justice in Baler, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon - highlights the ineptness of the Aquino government in protecting its citizens, much less its hardworking public servants.

"The judiciary is supposed to be one of the partners of government in seeing to it that justice is done. The ineptness with which the police is investigating this case is a clear message to the killers that they can literally get away with murder," Olalia said.

"Unlike the bogus cases that are often filed against the political prisoners, which are eventually dismissed, we call on the police to prove us wrong by catching for once the real culprits and filing a case that will stand in court."

Aldaba, a graduate of the UP College of Law, was one of the college's awardees in public service. The Supreme Court had earlier condemned the killing and asked the authorities to "take all necessary steps with all deliberate speed to do justice for Judge Alaba and his wife by fully investigating the crimes."

For its part, the NUPL shall do whatever is within its mandate and resources, including bringing this to the attention of international lawyers groups and institutions that are keenly concerned with attacks on lawyers and judges and their adverse effect on the independence of the judiciary and ultimately the so-called rule of law.

National Union of Peoples Lawyers (NUPL), 15.09.2015

Tejada said investigators were still trying to identify the suspects who fled to the mountains after they shot the victims.



claims ownership of a contested 11-hectare agricultural land in San Isidro village, San Jose Del Monte.

Before noon on that same day, residents also noticed the suspects wearing motorcycle helmets waiting near the location where the security guards were stationed.

Flores said that ironically, the killing happened while soldiers of the "peace and development teams" of the 48th Infantry Battalion were operating in Paradise 3 village.

"The presence of the military's 'peace and development teams' in the community bolstered the culture of impunity and even

emboldened the perpetrators who killed the farmer-couple," Flores said.

"Their death is also a result of the Aquino government's counter-insurgency plan Oplan Bayanihan that approves and toler-

ates the use of private armed groups as force multiplier," Flores said.

InterAksyon.com, 26.09.2015

Rights groups say Cagayan Valley IPs also suffering from military abuses

By Diego Mora

MANILA, Philippines -- The killings, forced evacuations and other atrocities suffered by Mindanao's *lumad* have been hogging the headlines for weeks but human rights groups say indigenous people in the Cagayan Valley have also been suffering from alleged abuses by the military since 2006.

A report prepared by the Cagayan chapter of the human rights group Karapatan on a recent fact-finding mission in the Zinundungan Valley showed the abuses endured by the Malaweg, Aggay and Kalinga communities in the area have worsened and intensified since January this year.

The report documented the harassment, torture and summary executions of IP leaders as well as officers of the *Timpuoyog Dagiti Mannalon nga Aggay*, or TDMA, allegedly by troops of the Army's 17th Infantry Battalion, which is under the 5th Infantry Division.

The scale of the abuses, the report said, "approaches the bloody level of human rights abuses committed against the indigenous *lumad* of Mindanao."

Residents said the military increased its presence in the Zinundungan Valley after the New People's Army captured and punished military intelligence agents and a member of the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit.

"The civilians have become the targets for revenge by the 17th IB after the NPA-Danilo Ben Command imposed the death penalty on the two military intelligence operatives of the 17th IB and their CAFGU asset," the report said.

Citing a statement from the NPA unit's spokesman, it said the intelligence agents were found to have "linked farmers and their legitimate organizations with the NPA. The NPA secured the hit list prepared by the military agents. All of those listed ended up in the 'Order of Battle' of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, with some of them killed or disappeared."

Aside from Karapatan and TDMA, the mission was joined by other people's organizations, religious and officials of Barangays Masi, San Juan and Bural in Rizal town.

Residents of the valley told the mission, held September 16 to 19, that they have been struggling for land, resources and their lives and demanding that government provide them basic services since the 1970s.

"Whenever we triumph in making our lives better, the military comes to suppress us and violate our human rights," they said.

In 2006, they said, San Juan Sangguniang Kabataan chairman Nelson Azucena was murdered by the military. In July 2011, Vicente Agbayani, a member of the Aggay tribe, was tortured and then slapped with trumped-up charges. And in 2013, troops of the 21st Infantry Battalion killed farmer-leader Ronald Beran.

"Every year, the list of those murdered, arrested, kidnapped and tortured lengthens, along with other forms of human rights violations. Until now, justice has not been rendered to the victims," the residents said.

The mission documented human rights violations allegedly committed by the 17th IB against know farmer-leaders and

residents in Barangays Masi, Bural and San Juan in Rizal, and in Barangay Lipatan, Sto. Nino.

Among the other human rights violations blamed on the 17th IB that the mission documented were:

Kidnapping, illegal arrest and torture of Aggay leader Mendo Bisiotan and fellow Aggay Marlon Baganay and the elderly Orlando Duruin in Sitio Daligan, Barangay San Juan in the early morning of July 20, 2015. The three were tied with a rope and paraded before barangay residents before disappearing for three days and presented to the media after they were charged with illegal possession of firearms and explosives and rebellion.

Harassment, intimidation and threats to the lives of farmer-leaders, among them Steward Garon of Barangay Masi, Eling Azucena of Barangay Bural, Rafael Guimay of Barangay Masi and MFA, Felipe Bisiotan of Barangay San Juan, Ambona Bato-lan of Barangay Masi and TDMA, as well as Aris Infante, Raul Ladino, Lina Ladino and Edward Callueng of Barangay Lipatan and LFO.

Filing of trumped-charges like three counts of kidnapping with homicide against civilians Boy Garon, Jun-Jun Bayaua, Rexon Batulan, Rafael Guimay, Mario Gregorio, Elyong Balisi, Isot Simangan, Rowena Battad, Celso Manglallan, Titing Baloran, Eling Asucena and Rogel Asucena.

Violations of Aggay human rights like the illegal search and ransacking of five houses while the farmers were sleeping, threatening civilians with high-powered firearms as they were being interrogated, accusing everyone with membership in the NPA, theft of air guns used by residents for hunting game, pots, lighters and household items, and destroying crops, throwing away palay, monggo and corn after they forced the people to scamper away by firing their guns.

Abuse of the rights of women and children, with the wife of Mendo Bisiotan being kicked by soldiers after she came to help her husband who was being tortured and forced to admit that he was an NPA member and the son of Marlon Baganay being held by the collar and thrown out of a military vehicle as he tried to join his father, whom the troopers brought to a camp.

Establishment of camps by the 17th IB in barangay halls, health centers and private houses in Barangay Masi, San Juan and Bural.

Deployment of members of the Peace and Development Teams in the centers of Barangays Masi, Bural and San Juan to act as psywar (psychological warfare) units in the villages, with troops watching all the residents whom they also barred from congregating, with menfolk being subjected to intense surveillance.

Protection of Boog Bisiotan, known to the residents as a "criminal on the loose" who also poses as a "rebel-returnee" accused of raping and killing his own aunt, Toyang Bisiotan Cepedan, and acting as a spy and guide for the military in Zinundungan Valley.

Intensified military operations have spread terror, threats and peril to the people of the valley.

Rappler.com, 01.10.2015

Another Lumad leader killed in Mindanao

By Karlos Manlupig

DAVAO CITY, Philippines - Even as the recent cases of attacks against the Lumad in Mindanao remain unresolved, another

leader of the indigenous people was killed by armed men in Agusan del Sur on Monday, September 28.

The Rural Missionaries of the Philippines identified the victim as 44-year-old Lito Abion of Lumad organization Tagdumahan.

Abion was gunned down by 3 motorcycle-riding men in the village of Doña Flavia in San Luis town at around midnight Monday.

The incident is the latest in a [spate of Lumad killings](#), which had sparked calls for a government probe on the attacks, the latest from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

Acting on Palace orders, the Department of Justice formed a [16-member fact-finding team to probe the attacks](#) against Lumads in Mindanao, composed of members of the National Prosecution Service (NPS) and the National Bureau of Investigation, with NBI Deputy Director Edmundo Arugay, as overall team head.

UPDATES ON CASES OF HR VIOLATIONS

Bulatlat.com, 05.09.2015

Progressive seek writ of amparo, habeas data over harassment cases

By Janess Ann J. Ellao

MANILA – Ten progressive activists from health, labor, migrant workers and youth groups filed a petition for a writ of amparo before the Supreme Court, seeking protection from the harassments, threats and surveillance perpetrated against them by suspected military agents.

In their petition filed on Sept. 3, activists asked the court to issue a Temporary Protection Order (TPO) not just for them, but also their families. They also asked the Supreme Court to issue a writ of habeas data, which would compel the respondents to divulge, and destroy all information they gathered which may be used against the respondents.

The petitioners are leaders and organizers of members and affiliate organizations of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan), namely, the Health Alliance for Democracy (HEAD), Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP), and Migrante International.

Named respondents were President Aquino, Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Hernando Iriberry, AFP deputy commander for intelligence Maj. Gen. Virgilio Hernandez, Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines chief Brig. Gen. Arnold Quiapo, Philippine National Police chief Ricardo Marquez and PNP NCR chief Police Supt. Joel Pagdilao.

For the past months, progressives have assailed the harassment, threats, and surveillance, which intensified this year. In their petition, activists said respondents and their agents violated their rights to life, liberty and security.

The Writ of Amparo is a legal remedy for the protection of victims of human rights violations, including threats. This goes hand-in-hand with the writ of habeas data that may be sought for a person to release and even destroy personal information being held that threatens one's life and security and violates the right to privacy.

Harassment of Aquino's vocal critics

"In the instant case, the pattern is clear: Petitioners are harassed not for their individual actions, but for being members of militant organizations which are known to be vocal critics of the Aquino administration," the petition read.

Petitioners observed a "pattern," in which suspected state agents make threats through text messages, brand them as members of the underground movement and then urge them to "cooperate" with the military in "ambiguous" ways. The progressives detailed the harassments by men suspected to be state security forces. In these harassments, even medical practitioners who are members of the Health Alliance for Democracy (HEAD) were not spared. Last June, [Dr. Darby Santiago](#), [HEAD chairperson](#), received threats via text message. One

According to local groups and the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP), the militia group Magahat Bagani Force – believed to be backed by the military – is the alleged perpetrator of [crimes against Lumads](#).

About 2,970 internally displaced residents from the towns of Lianga, Marihatag, San Agustin, San Miguel, and Tago are staying at a sports complex in Tandag City, Surigao del Sur, following a violent rampage reportedly committed by paramilitary groups and the ongoing military operations in the area.

Senator Teofisto Guingona III was in Tandag City on Thursday, October 1, to lead an on-site Senate investigation.

Majority of the displaced Lumads fled their community in the village of Diatagon after the Magahat-Bagani allegedly killed Emerito "Emok" Samarca, Dionel Campus, and Aurelio Sinzo on September 1. [...]

read, "*Isang bala ka lang. Ingat ka doc.*" [You are ob'nly one bullet. Take care doc.]

Other text messages called Santiago "a doctor of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army in Northern Luzon."

Imelda Gerali, of the Samahang Operasyong Sagip Inc. and also a member of HEAD, reported being hounded by suspected intelligence officers, who would wait for her at their office gate, and throw dagger looks at her.

Harassment of activists at homes, offices and public vehicles

The petitioners listed incidents of harassment at their offices and homes, and even in public vehicles. Suspected state agents would approach the activists in the guise of "offering help," in exchange for quitting their work in their organization. The offer also came with a threat if they carry on with their activism.

Rebecca Abelong, a member of the Kilusang Mayo Uno national council, was approached by men who introduced themselves as members of "Guardian," and asked information about her in their village office. The incident happened right after she attended a protest in front of the Chinese Embassy on July 7.

Another labor rights activist, Neil Ambion, KMU media liason, said two men who identified themselves as members of the National Bureau of Investigation blocked his way as he was going up the stairs to a train station. The two men attempted to force him to come with them to talk about his "security," but eventually left when fellow passengers started to take notice.

Another [KMU member Renato Asa](#), the labor group's Public Information Department secretary, noticed a man sitting outside his house. Wary of the harassments against fellow activists, he asked the man if he is a soldier. The man admitted he is a soldier and offered "help" to Asa. He handed him a piece of paper with a cellphone number.

Two men who also introduced themselves as soldiers harassed Loreto Victoriano, an education and research staff of KMU.

It was also a soldier who harassed Josephine Carlos Betana, a member of Migrante International in Bagong Silang, Caloocan in September 2014. The man also offered "help" to Betana.

In February this year, a man attempted to enter the KMU office, claiming that he needed to hand a solicitation letter from village officials. KMU staff Maritess Garte verified from village officials that they were not asking for donations.

Suspected military agents also knocked on Kabataan Partylist's office, looking for a certain "Ka Tonyo."

In April, Garte experienced harassment from a man sporting a military hair cut while riding a jeepney.

Elaborate information-gathering, surveillance

It was a more elaborate case for youth activist Lovely Carbon,

National Union of Students of the Philippines secretary general, who received messages from a certain Nelson Velasco who offered to give her a "part-time job" for Global Research and Management Center (GMRC). When they met at a fastfood chain in Quezon City, she was tasked to write reports on "current relevant issues" for a publication.

One of her first assignment was to write a report on President Aquino's State of the Nation Address (SONA). But when she submitted her report, she was asked to write more on the "planning part" and the "preparation" being made by protesters for the SONA. She was also tasked to write a report on the plans of the International League of Peoples' Struggles (ILPS) on the

Bulatlat.com, 08.09.2015

Andrea Rosal vows to fight back

By Ronalyn V. Olea

MANILA - [...] Andrea believes that her being the daughter of Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal, the late spokesman of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), is the only reason why she was arrested and detained.

Andrea feels vindicated now that all the charges filed against her had been dismissed. On the evening of Sept. 7, she was released from prison.

Speaking before the media, Sept. 8, Andrea vowed to continue fighting for justice. "There are many more political prisoners like me. They should be set free," she said.

Trumped-up

Ma. Kristina Conti, one of Andrea's lawyers, said all the three criminal charges - two kidnapping with murder cases and murder - had been junked due to lack of probable cause.

Andrea, then seven months pregnant, was arrested on March 27, 2014 in Caloocan City. She was detained at Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig City.

In July 2014, Pasig Regional Trial Court Branch 226 [dismissed the kidnapping and murder charges](#) against Andrea.

Last month, the Mauban Regional Trial Court granted the motion to junk the complaint filed against Andrea.

"Not only was there no evidence against Andrea, there is no reason for her to be included in the said cases in the first place," Conti said during the press conference.

The young lawyer added that not one among the witnesses could testify on Andrea's alleged participation in the said incidents of kidnapping and murder.

Fighting back

Andrea said she would file charges against all those involved in the filing of the false charges, in her arrest and detention. [...]

While in detention, Andrea gave birth to her first child on May 17. Baby Diona Andrea died the following day due to lack of oxygen in her blood.

[...] "If I was immediately brought to the hospital, my baby would not have died." she said.

Andrea [was not allowed by the court to attend her daughter's](#)

upcoming APEC summit in the country.

Later, Carbon learned through a fellow youth activist that Velasco and GMRC were involved in gathering information from student activists at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. Jessica Ferrera, the current student regent in PUP, also experienced harassment when her father was told by a man that he would help to have him hospitalized "if your daughter would help us."

Petitioners said the pattern in these cases show that "their lives, security and liberty are under threat," and that these were carried out under the government's counterinsurgency plan, Oplan Bayanihan.

[funeral](#) in Ibaan, Batangas. She was only granted three hours to visit the wake of her newborn.

After the death of her daughter, [Andrea filed contempt charges against jail authorities](#) and the resident doctor of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology-National Capital Region.

Just like what happened to her, Andrea said the poor inmates do not get proper medical attention. She said some of them have also died while in detention. The rich, she said, are given special treatment.

She talked about the overcrowded detention cells, the lack of water supply, the low quality of food, among others.

Meanwhile, Cristina Palabay, Karapatan secretary general, said the release of Andrea is a slap on the face of President Benigno Aquino III. Palabay criticized the Aquino administration's practice of filing of trumped-up charges against perceived enemies of the state.

Palabay also lambasted the military for using what she calls as "professional witnesses" against activists. In Andrea's case, Erwin Rosales, a self-proclaimed rebel returnee, testified against Andrea. Rosales also testified against security guard Rolly Panesa and Tirso Alcantara, consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

Free all political prisoners

Andrea said she would work for the release of political prisoners, now numbering 537 according to human rights group Karapatan.

"If the government could release Enrile, why not the political prisoners? They are not criminals," Andrea said.

Senator Juan Ponce Enrile, charged with plunder, has been granted bail. The Supreme Court cited humanitarian considerations in issuing a ruling in favor of Enrile.

Palabay said there are ailing and old political prisoners whose health conditions are worse than Enrile.

Andrea called on the public to support the campaign for the release of all political prisoners. [...]

Asian Human Rights Commission, 09.09.2015

Two university students incarcerated a year ago in Central Luzon

Dear Friends,

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) writes to inform you of the arbitrary arrest and detention of two university students in Central Luzon over a year ago. The victims were conducting research when the military illegally arrested them. They were interrogated about the whereabouts of the New People's Army (NPA) and its firearms, and forced to confess to being its members.

CASE DETAILS: (Based on the documentation by Alliance for the Advancement of Peoples Rights (KARAPATAN) and Auckland Philippine Solidarity (APS))

On 9 August 2014, Gerald Salonga and Guiller Cadano were

staying in their host's house to finalize their research papers for the Farmers Alliance in Central Luzon. At 1pm, Gerald and Guiller were watching a DVD film with their host when they heard someone shout "Raid!" Immediately after, soldiers forcibly entered the house and held the two at gunpoint. Gerald and Guiller were ordered to lie face down while they were blindfolded and their wrists tightly cuffed behind their backs. Gerald was able to read patches of scout ranger, 3rd IB and 7th ID on the soldiers' uniform before he was blindfolded.

Gerald and Guiller were dragged into separate vehicles. The soldiers put earphones on Gerald inside the vehicle, while threatening to hurt him and ordering him to cooperate. Gerald

was taken to an undisclosed location and was forced to admit, out of fear, that he and Guiller had firearms. The military asked Gerald several questions, such as where are the New People's Army (NPA) and where are their firearms deposited. Later, Gerald's interrogators brought him to another place, where his blindfold was removed and he was photographed with firearms, papers and bullets in front of him. In another vehicle, military officers accused Guiller of being an NPA member and asked for his firearms. One of his captors told him they found a gun inside his bag, although Guiller knew his bag only contained his clothes, toiletries, a portable speaker, wallet, cell phone, pen and writing pads and several identification cards including his University of the Philippines identification card. His belongings were taken from him. Fearing for his life, he was forced to admit that he is an NPA member. Guiller did not know where his captors took him. He was also interrogated about the NPA's activities in Carranglan and Nueva Ecija. He was asked who the recruiters were and about the guns he supposedly used. Fearing torture or death, Guiller made up answers to tell the military. About 10 hours later, Gerald and Guiller were brought to the Provincial Public Safety Company (PPSC) headquarters of the Philippine National Police (PNP) in Cabanatuan City, where their blindfolds were removed. At 4 a.m. on August 10, the two

were brought to the General Hospital in barangay Daang Sarile, Cabanatuan City for a medical check-up. Guiller's boils were also treated. They were returned to the jail afterwards. In the morning of August 10, their families, accompanied by members of Karapatan-Central Luzon Quick Reaction Team (QRT) proceeded to the PPSC Jail. Only their families were allowed to see them. Guiller Cadano and Gerald Salonga were arrested without any warrants. Although police officials and those from the 3rd Infantry Battalion and 7th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army claimed in their affidavits that standing arrest warrants were issued by the Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 39 in San Jose City for murder; and RTC branch 38 for attempted murder, that warrant was in fact issued against a certain Ely Agbaliw Taray. The warrant was supposed to be served in Barangay Padilla, Carranglan town, but upon reaching the area, the PNP and the AFP instead arrested Cadano and Salonga. Later in the morning of August 10, Cadano and Salonga were brought to the house of a certain Prosecutor Edwin S. Bonifacio for inquest. It was only then that the two were charged with illegal possession of firearms and explosives (Violations of RA 10591 and 9516). Cadano and Salonga are two of over 500 political prisoners facing trumped-up charges.

Rappler.com, 21.09.2015

Reyes brothers arrested in Thailand - DOJ

MANILA, Philippines (3rd UPDATE) - Two former Palawan officials implicated in the murder of broadcast journalist Gerry Ortega were captured in Thailand on Sunday, September 20, Justice Secretary Leila de Lima confirmed on Monday, September 21.

Joel Reyes, the former governor of Palawan island, and his brother Mario, former Coron mayor, were detained on the Thai holiday island of Phuket on Sunday, Communications Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr said.

The Reyes brothers are facing murder charges over the 2011 death of Gerry Ortega, a prominent Palawan environment activist who had also used a radio show he hosted to frequently accuse the Reyes brothers of massive graft.

The Reyes brothers went missing in early 2012 after an arrest warrant was issued for them, and had not been seen since.

In a text message to reporters, De Lima said that according to the Bureau of Immigration, Interpol-Manila has confirmed information regarding the "arrest of the Reyes brothers and their impending deportation" to the Philippines.

The two had a P2-million bounty for their capture.

Ortega's daughter: 'Long fight'

In a phone interview with Rappler, Ortega's daughter, Michaela, said her family "did not expect this to happen" this week.

"It's a welcome surprise," Michaela said.

Still, her family keeps "a guarded sense of hope."

"Priorities have shifted," she added. The Ortega family, for one, wants to ensure that the Reyes brothers "get home without special treatment."

Michaela said, "It's going to be a long fight."

Ortega's widow, Patty, told Agence France-Presse: "We still feel anxiety. Our judicial system is not that fast. We know our opponents have a lot of advantages. They have money, influence.

PEACE PROCESS

ManilaStandardToday.com, 09.09.2015

BBL running out of time, Noy says

By Sandy Araneta, Francisco Tuyay

THE Palace said Tuesday time is running out for the passage of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law, the centerpiece of the Aquino administration's peace efforts in Mindanao.

They slipped through immigration. So it is not far from our thoughts that something else might happen."

Coloma for his part said: "The arrest of the long wanted Reyes brothers provides an opportunity for pursuing the ends of justice. We acknowledge the efforts of Interpol and Thai authorities in making this possible."

Philippines' 'culture of impunity'

According to a police source, the Reyes brothers were captured in Phuket, Thailand by immigration officers for overstaying.

The intelligence source said the Reyes brothers have been in Thailand for several years now. Travel records of the two showed they went to Thailand in 2012 but did not book a return flight.

The Reyes' brothers passports had been [revoked](#) by the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs as early as September 2012. In 2011, Ortega was shot in the head at point-blank range while shopping in the capital of Palawan, an island known as the Philippines' last environmental frontier but which has suffered from illegal logging, mining, and overfishing.

The gunman was caught trying to flee the scene and police said his weapon was owned by one of Joel Reyes's lawyers.

Aside from alleged environmental crimes, Ortega had accused Joel Reyes of syphoning off millions of dollars in revenues from a gasfield off the coast of Palawan when he was governor.

The brothers' escape reinforced the Philippines' reputation for having a "culture of impunity," with powerful men free to kill or intimidate political opponents, journalists, and other critics without any punishment.

At least 168 journalists or media workers have been killed since the restoration of democracy in the Philippines in 1986, but only 13 cases have seen murder convictions, according to local press groups.

"Communication with leaders of Congress on the timely passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law continues. We understand that time is running out to achieve this objective, but we need to

acknowledge the importance of upholding the peace process," said Communications Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr.

As part of the peace process, Aquino recently created a national task force for the disbandment of private armed groups in areas of the proposed Bangsamoro and adjacent regions.

The task force included representatives from the military, the Justice Department, the police and various law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and the head of the government negotiating panel with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The task force will be in charge of formulating policy, planning and implementing a program to disband private armed groups.

In an interview on state-run PTV-4, Aquino said he did not believe war would break out if the BBL is not approved.

"I don't submit to the premise that war will break out. I don't think there is any interest from the major players to re-engage in a bloody conflict," he said.

"Having said that, there will be the spoilers who will want to exploit the current difficulties to show that their avowed aims of gaining what they want through violent means is the only way to go about it. So those of us who are advocating peace should really even redouble our efforts to thwart these groups who would want us to branch again into really a pointless conflict. So, who should be blamed? I think I'll leave that up to the Filipino people who will have an opportunity in next year's elections," Aquino said.

Still, the President said he was confident the bill would be passed soon.

"I did ask recently both the Senate President and the Speaker of the House and they both laid out, shall we say, some of the difficulties currently in passing the BBL but they both expressed confidence that the BBL will be passed," said Aquino.

"So, on the Executive's portion, we would want to continue the engagement of our dialogue partners, specifically the MILF... we want the population in general in this region to experience the so-called peace dividends arising from this agreement," Aquino said.

"So even absent the Bangsamoro law, we are hoping that Congress will support the initiatives that will shower these people with the peace dividends and get them further engaged in the process," he added.

Aquino also said the government will continue to lobby members of Congress to pass the law during their watch and pass it at the earliest possible time.

The Moro National Liberation Front under Nur Misuari on Tuesday rejected the position of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in favor of the BBL, and accused it of conspiring with the government to pass an illegal law.

At the close of the Tripatite Review Process, most of the MNLF delegation privately expressed opposition to OIC Ambassador Sayed Kasem El-Masry over its supposed affirmation to the BBL. "Despite the amendments of some senators we find also that the government and leaders of Congress are optimistic that we are going to have a strong version not a diluted version of the BBL," Sayed said.

The government panel, through Jose Lorena, acknowledged that the BBL is facing some challenges and that many amendments have been introduced.

"Nevertheless the government is confident that in the plenary session and bicameral meeting of the two houses, the BBL would reflect the original BBL," he said.

The TRP adjourned with an assurance from the OIC that the three unresolved provisions of the MNLF's peace agreement with the government in 1996 would be tackled in the ministerial meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in November.

Talking to his emissary through a cell phone, Misuari conveyed a message of disgust after Sayed came out with a position insisting that the Philippine government had already fulfilled its obligations to the 1996 final peace agreement and the BBL is a partial implementation of it.

"Misuari was terribly mad at the OIC position," said MNLF spokesman Absalom Cerveza on the sidelines of the TRP meeting.

Misuari also said Cerveza was insulted twice during the two-day meeting after the OIC refused to recognize him as part of the MNLF delegation.

Sayed said the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro is a partial implementation of the MNLF peace agreements, since it covers partial territories embodied in both MNLF agreements.

However, Sayed also gave importance to the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, which led to the 1996 final peace agreement, and insisted that both be linked to the BBL.

Sayed urged all parties to redouble their efforts to reach a consensus on the convergence of the two peace tracks—the MNLF and MILF peace accords.

But Cerveza said the negative outcome of the TRP meeting might trigger a resumption of hostilities in Mindanao.