

**THE CURRENT SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS UNDER PRESIDENT AQUINO  
PERSPECTIVES FROM A PHILIPPINE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION**

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Today, as I stand before you, the Filipino people are counting off hours to mark the 365<sup>th</sup> day of the Benigno Aquino's presidency. It was one year ago when he swore to office and said "I will dedicate my life to making our democracy reach its fullest potential..." He said he knows "what it is like to be denied justice" and "to be ignored by those in whom we placed our trust and tasked to become our advocates."

On this day, a day before President Benigno Aquino's one year in office, it would be prudent on my part to say that no substantial change has happened as far as the human rights situation in the Philippines is concerned.

President Benigno Simeon Aquino III took off where Gloria Arroyo left off. We waited for the promised reforms, nay, even a brief relief from economic policies of the previous administration that kept us in dirt poor condition. But he just continued and more actively pursued the policies of globalization and called it the PPP or the public-private partnership programs. The PPP, or simply globalization, espoused by President Aquino, entails a plan that will displace and disempower more of our already suffering fellow Filipinos as projects under this so-called PPP plans are being implemented. The urban poor or those now called belonging to the informal settlers became targets of violent evictions and demolitions, burning of communities and urban poor leaders killed or harassed. While he enjoyed a high popularity rating in his first few months in office, prices of basic commodities and services increased, even the tuition fees and health services and medicines.

Thus, despite the promise of change, state terror and violence continue to be used against those who fight or criticize such policies and programs. GMA's OPLAN BANTAY LAYA was still implemented during the first six months of the Aquino government.

With the same counter-insurgency program in place, it would not therefore be a surprise that on the fifth day after Noynoy's inaugural address, on July 5, 2010, Bayan Muna leader **Fernando Baldomero** was shot dead in front of his 12 year old son. Baldomero is the provincial chairperson of the Bayan Muna partylist and a member of Selda, an organization of former political detainees.

Four days after Baldomero's killing, on July 9, the ninth day of President Aquino in office, a 78 year old peasant leader **Pascual Guevarra**, was shot dead in his home. His 18-year old grandson, **Ronnel Vilorio** was also shot and fortunately survived the attack.

By the end of Aquino's first six months, there were already 31 victims of extrajudicial killings. There were four victims of enforced disappearance and 19 persons suffered torture; 36 of

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arbitrary arrest and detention and almost 900 individuals were forced to leave their homes and farmlands due to intense military operation.

**TABLE OF HRVs DURING THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF THE AQUINO GOVERNMENT**

*(July 1, 2010 to December 31, 2010 data as of March 31, 2011)*

<b>Violations</b>	<b>No. of victims</b>
Extrajudicial Killing	31
Enforced Disappearance	4
Torture	19
Frustrated Extrajudicial Killing	5
Illegal Arrest and Detention	36
Illegal Search	34
Violation of Domicile	45
Divestment of Property	43
Forced Evacuation	896
Threat/Harassment/Intimidation	4,314
Forced/Fake Surrender	7
Use of Civilians in Police and/or Military Operations as Guides and/or Shield	7
Use of Schools, Medical, Religious and Other Public Places for Military Purpose	1,756

**OPLAN BAYANIHAN**

PNoy as our President has chosen to be called, implemented his own version of the counter-insurgency program, now called Oplan Bayanihan, and carried it out in January of this year a supposedly new counterinsurgency plan to replace the brutal but unsuccessful Oplan Bantay Laya. Once more, the targets of both counter-insurgency plans are the leaders of organized groups vocal in their criticisms of anti-people policies of government.

Bayanihan takes after the Filipino tradition of mutual aid. According to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) it aims to mobilize the population to achieve "peace and development." Oplan Bayanihan claims to be different from the previous counterinsurgency programs especially on the respect for human rights. It boasts of being "people-centered" and focused on "peace and development" rather on war.

Based on years of experience as an activist and a human rights worker, I strongly believe that it is an oxymoron to say that a counter-insurgency program is respectful of human rights. I haven't seen any counter-insurgency program that is supposedly respectful for human rights. All the counter-insurgency programs that had been implemented from Marcos up to all the administrations after him really involved deploying a large number of state security forces in the areas suspected as rebel stronghold. And in order for them to supposedly win the hearts and minds of people, they have to exert force first.

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Likewise, the reports coming in from Karapatan member organizations and chapters are clearly saying that indeed no change has happened in the human rights situation of the country under the Aquino government.

### **Victims under Oplan Bayanihan**

Tomorrow, June 30, the progressive organizations, including human rights' advocates will march the streets to make the President account for his promise "to begin the process of providing true and complete justice for all; to strengthen the armed forces and the police, not to serve the interests of those who want to wield power with impunity but to give added protection for ordinary folk."

The ordinary folk, the people whom the President referred to as his boss, have ironically been the most victimized with the implementation of the Aquino government's Oplan Bayanihan. They have been displaced from their homes and communities, harassed, arrested and detained, tortured and killed.

Tribal chieftain of indigenous group B'laan, **Rudy Dejos**, 50, was killed, along **with his 26-yearold son, Rudyric** last February 27, 2011. Rudy's wife, Mercy Dejos, found her husband and son dead inside their house in Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur. Their bodies bore signs of torture. The 39th IBPA, led by Lt. Col. Oliver Artuz, and the Philippine National Police (PNP), spread rumors that the Dejoses were killed by members of the NPA because of a personal grudge. There was also no investigation conducted by the police on the case.

Rudy is the **Vice-Chairperson of Zone-1 Farmers Association (Zofa) in Sta. Cruz. Zofa which is affiliated with the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP, national movement of peasants).**

Since June last year, the Dejoses were subjected to threats and harassment by members of the 39th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army. In their community, it is common for the soldiers to discourage the farmers in the village from forming Zofa. The soldiers are angered when farmers affiliate their local organization with the KMP. Also, the residents are required to take part in the Barangay Defense System organized by the military.

On March 9, another **peasant leader, Bonifacio Labasan**, was shot dead on his way to a relative's house in Bgy. San Mateo, Isabela Province. Labasan and his daughter, Lani Miguel, were riding his motorcycle, when another motorcycle with two men aboard overtook them. The men forced Labasan to go with them and when Labasan refused, one of the men shot him on the torso. Lani's appealed for her father's life but instead of heeding her pleas, the man shot Labasan on the head.

Labasan was the **chairperson of Danggayon Dagiti Mannalon iti Isabela (Dagami)**, a farmers' organization in Isabela. It is a local affiliate of KMP.

Children are not spared either. On January 5, 2011, soldiers along with some members of the Civilian Armed Geographical Unit (CAFGU) barged into the **residence of Manuelito and Annabelle Loreno in Bgy. Binulusan Grande, Calinog, Iloilo**. The soldiers said they were after members of the New People's Army (NPA) but were actually pointing their M-14 rifles at

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Annabelle and her five daughters, whose ages range from three to 14 years. They ordered the family to stay put or they would be shot.

The eldest daughter scampered away crying and hit her head against the wall. Annabelle demanded that the soldiers point their guns away from her and the children. The Loreno children were traumatized by the incident. The eldest daughter, for example, later exhibited abnormal behavior due to "anxiety reaction." She was seen to have tied a younger sister's hand and placed another younger sister inside a sack while laughing. She has sudden laughing bouts without provocation.

The above mentioned incidents happened under the Aquino government but they actually exhibit the same patterns and characteristics of the forms used during the period of the OBL.

Killers aboard motorcycles, leaders of peasant organizations killed, and in front of their children; soldiers looking for members of the NPA but were actually turning their guns against the unarmed population; soldiers campaigning against people's organizations that they brand as leftist organizations or fronts.

**INSERT TABLE OF VICTIMS PER ORGANIZATION ( July 2010 – March 2011)**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Extrajudicial Killings victims</b>	<b>Enforced Disappearance victims</b>
Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP)	12	0
Bayan Muna	5	0
Anakpawis Partylist	1	0
Katribu Partylist	3	0
ACT Teachers Partylist	1	0
Kabataan Partylist	0	1
COURAGE	1	0
Others	4	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>

The Aquino government cannot brag about working for peace and development as Oplan Bayanihan's centerpiece. For how can one talk of development when it continues to conduct military operations against people and organizations who, because of government's neglect and lack of basic social services, took the initiative to develop their communities and ensure the education of their children.

On March 11, 2011, the **Center for Lumad Advocacy and Services, Inc. (CLANS)**, reported that the military had setup a hamlet in their community to monitor and limit the movement of villagers in and out of the village in **Malapatan, Sarangani Province**.

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Earlier, **three teachers and 30 students of the B'laan Literacy School and Learning Center (BLSLC)** were harassed by members of the CAFGU and the 73rd IBPA.

A 17-year old apprentice teacher-apprentice recalled that their group was on their way to a silt basin for tree-planting when soldiers waylaid them and asked them about the school and the children's activities. The teachers answered some of the soldiers' questions politely but asked them to proceed to their staff house and talk with the school officials instead. Some children who got to the silt basin reported that they saw soldiers threw small stones in their direction.

Also in March, a BLSLC student reported to his teacher that soldiers took a photograph of him after he was forced to hold a gun and wear an ammunitions vest.

Since November 2010, the BLSLC, founded by the B'laan tribe through the CLANS, has been the subject of threats and false accusations by elements of the CAFGU and 73rd IBPA. Soldiers led by a certain Sgt. Jake Geron spread rumors that the alternative learning school is a training center for the NPA. The military's constant visits to the school, interrogation of teachers and school personnel, and harassment of students and parents have terrorized the villagers, specially the children. In fact the school was forced to suspend classes and postpone graduation ceremonies for the school year 2010-2011.

It may be recalled that under the GMA regime's OBL, the same thing happened to the schools put up by the Manobo tribes, through the ALCADDEV and TRIFPPS in Lianga Surigao del Sur. The same military operations were conducted against the civilian population, branding the school as NPA training ground. The military operations in the area resulted to several evacuation of the Manobo tribes from their ancestral lands.

These are just some of the violations that continue to happen even under the so-called righteous path of the Aquino government. While this government adds up to the cases of human rights violations, it has yet to render justice to the victims of human rights violations under the past regime. To date, GMA and her generals remain scot free from the crimes they have committed against the Filipino people.

We have taken up the initiative to file court cases against GMA specifically on the case of the imprisonment of the Morong 43, the Cadapan-Empeño and Jonas Burgos disappearances. There will be more to come because the people's call to punish GMA and end impunity in this country remains to fall on deaf ears.

It would do well for President Aquino to really implement and adhere to the human rights conventions and treaties his government enters into like signing the Statute of Rome (but not signing the Convention against Enforced disappearance and up to now not seeing to it that the OPCAT must be signed by the Senate as this was already promised by the past administration during the Philippine UPR in 2008). Signing important UN documents does not a human rights advocate make; nor pronouncing human rights conventions and treaties.

The problem really lies on what kind of peace and development this government means when it says "we would like to win the peace, not to wage war." These are but portent of things to come in the five years of the Aquino government, until and unless the Aquino government acts

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now to sincerely address the root causes of insurgency and punish those who committed crimes against the people, in the past and under his own rule.###