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Statement on the Massacre and Unjust Arrests of Tumandok leaders in Panay

In the early morning hours of Wednesday, December 30, the annual memorial day of Rizal's execution, nine Tumandok leaders from six Barangays in the upland areas of Calinog and Tapaz on Panay island were massacred in their homes during a joint operation of the Philippine Army and the Philippine National Police. Among the killed indigenous leaders were TUMANDUK chair and Barangay councilor Rey Giganto, and his co-councilors Reynaldo Katipunan and Mario Aguirre. More than 15 indigenous people were arrested and some of them reportedly tortured. Among them the former Barangay Capitan of Barangay Lahug and wife of Mario Aguirre, Marivic Aguirre.

According to the "security forces" those killed had tried to fight back while the Police was serving search warrants. A narrative well known from countless so-called anti-drug operations in which thousands suspected drug users or drug dealers were killed without consideration. Witnesses of the recent massacre expose that the victims were killed while sleeping or in front of their homes and their families.

Many of those killed or arrested are known as staunch critics of the Jalaur Mega Dam project or Panay River Basin Project to be implemented in indigenous people's ancestral domain. The project endangers the existence of at least 17 Barangays. The Tumandok leaders are well known by the local and regional authorities for entering countless dialogues and open forms of protest, yet they were accused to be front organizations and members of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed group New People's Army (NPA). Due to their open and public resistance to the so-called development project, the Tumandok leaders have long been red-tagged, harassed, and threatened by state "security forces" and the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC).

The **philippinenbuero** is shocked and outraged about yet another brutal massacre and demands swift, thorough, and independent investigations and that the perpetrators are held accountable for this bloodshed!

We demand justice for the nine indigenous leaders and the immediate release of the unjustly arrested!

End political killings in the Philippines Now!