

June 12, 2013

503rd Infantry Brigade Military Operations in Malibcong, Abra Violate the People's Rights

In a statement released last May 31, the Abra Human Rights Movement (AHRM) and the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance (CHRA) relayed that during the airstrikes conducted by the 503rd Infantry Brigade in certain barangays in Malibcong, 2 minors were almost hurt.

We stand by this information that came firsthand from the community and was validated during a fact-finding mission conducted in the area last June 4-7 by the Innabuyog-Gabriela and the Abra Human Rights Movement, the chapter of Cordillera Human Rights Alliance in the province.

The community is still reeling from the impact of the indiscriminate bombings that took place and the ongoing military pursuit operations against the New People's Army (NPA) in the area. The bombs were dropped very near the residential areas (150 – 200 meters from the residences).

Two bombs were dropped near Barangay Duldulao.

A bomb was dropped near Barangay Lat-ey, sitio Alligang but did not explode which puts the residents in grave danger.

In the same barangay, a bomb was dropped and exploded approximately 40 meters from where the two minors were close to and 120 meters away from the ricefield of Mr. Rommel Teneza who was tilling his land at that time. This was also 170 meters from the micro-hydroelectric power plant, the community's main source of power. Elders rushed to secure the two children immediately after the explosions occurred.

The airstrikes have caused profound stress on the community especially the two minors who were almost hurt. During the fact-finding mission, the mother of the 17-year old child lamented that her child does not want to go to school because of her fear of soldiers. A military detachment of the 41st Infantry Battalion is located near her school, the Mataragan National High School. The elders also expressed fear, as the military operations are still ongoing, especially for children who walk quite a distance to school everyday.

Children and elders in the community stated that they are easily startled and alarmed by loud sounds. Some of them have reported that they could not eat and sleep well after the incident. Their movements especially going to the pasturelands, grazing fields and swidden farms (uma) are now limited.

The statement released by the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita “Ging” Deles in response to the incident was to insinuate that the two minors were “child soldiers”. This was from a statement of Malibcong Mayor Benito Bacuyag that if there were children casualties in the incident, they might be “child soldiers”. If children were wounded by the indiscriminate bombings, would the labeling justify the act? CHRA deems this statement as irresponsible and insensitive from an authority working for the peace process. The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) should have called for an immediate investigation and should refrain from issuing baseless statements that would not help in easing the situation of the affected communities who now live in fear.

The community held meetings regarding the incident and has come up with a statement calling for the sincere implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) and the resumption of the peace talks. They have also decided to file complaints against the 503rd Infantry Brigade to hold them accountable for their violations. The CHRA strongly supports the people of Malibcong on this. It is not the first time that they have experienced being subjected to airstrikes. In February 1-4, 2010, the residents of the Bangilo and Mataragan Districts in Malibcong, Abra were subjected to indiscriminate bombings that disrupted the classes of children and the people’s economic activities, and had affected the communities especially the children and the elderly.

We call for the stop to the military operations in Malibcong, Abra and reiterate our call to the Aquino government to stop Oplan Bayanihan, the military’s counter-insurgency plan that has harmed the civilians through the relentless militarization of communities. Sincere efforts towards just and lasting peace should be put in place and as a priority by the government.#

STOP THE MILITARIZATION OF COMMUNITIES!
HOLD THE 503RD Infantry Brigade ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS!
SCRAP OPLAN BAYANIHAN!
RESPECT THE CARHRIHL!
RESUME THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS!

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