

Letter to the Editor:

From: Community Health Education, Services and Training in the Cordillera Region (CHESTCORE)

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CHESTCORE denounces CHR-CAR for termination of its Human Rights Violation Cases

The Community Health Education, Services and Training in the Cordillera Region (CHESTCORE) strongly denounces the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) – CAR for declaring “closed and terminated” nine cases of threat, harassment and intimidation raised on Motion for Reconsideration after the cases’ dismissal in 2011.

The CHR-CAR, in insisting to confine human rights within a purely legal framework, totally disregarded the fact that we were placed under surveillance and even to the point that we received death threats. It also downplayed the dangers of its declaration of certain communities as “red areas” and the vilification of development workers like us, continuously making us open targets of human rights violations. It negated the human rights context of Cordillera communities who are eking out their survival and sacrificing lives in their continuing historical struggle to defend land and resources against development aggression pushed by the state. The CHR-CAR totally lost track of all of the very bases of its creation and of its mandate. It has become inutile.

This CHR-CAR decision comes at a time when community health workers are raging against a systematic attack on their colleagues. The most recent is the brutal killing last July 3, 2012 of Willem Geertman, Dutch executive director of Alay Bayan, Inc. (ABI) and a beloved friend of CBHPs (community-based health programs) who not only led the setting up of a health program to empower the Hacienda Luisita farmers but also figured staunchly in numerous anti-large-scale mining campaigns in Central Luzon. In 2006, Dr. Chandu Claver and family were ambushed in Kalinga, Cordillera. Dr. Claver survived the attack but his wife died of fatal gunshot wounds. In 2009, two doctors were also killed followed by a slay attempt on Ronald Capitanea, a community health worker in Negros Occidental in 2010. Early in February 2010, forty-three (43) health workers were illegally arrested, detained, and tortured for 10 months before being released as a result of intensive legal and political pressure on the Aquino government. In November 2010, Leonard Co, the country’s most famous botanist, was killed in Kananga, Leyte, in a gunfire believed to be from elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), as attested by witnesses and evidence. We raise our fists in protest and demand for justice for our colleagues.

The Philippine government has been questioned in the recent United Nations Universal Periodic Review for its failure to eliminate extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances despite being party to human rights instruments and international conventions. The decision of the CHR-CAR is yet another example of this failure.

In nailing to finality its dismissal of our cases, the CHR-CAR showed its true color because it coddled our human rights violators. Its decision further reinforces the culture of impunity tolerated by the Aquino administration and is paving a smoother implementation of the government’s maliciously deceptive “peace and development” program posed by Oplan Bayanihan (OpBay). It is strengthening OpBay as the state military’s and their agents’ blanket protection in guarding big and foreign business interests that are devastating and plundering our patrimony and adversely affecting the health and lives of the majority of our people.

The CHR-CAR leaves us to our own recourse in the protection and assertion of our rights.

We now rise, together with our communities, as we strengthen our ranks to further pursue our struggle to:

Assert that CHR-CAR fulfill its true mandate to protect people’s rights!
Assert the people’s right to health!

Stop vilification! End political persecution!
End impunity!
Expose and oppose Oplan Bayanihan!