

September 17, 2013

WE CONTINUE TO SEARCH FOR JAMES BALAO AND FOR JUSTICE

James Balao, founding member of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance was abducted in Tomay, La Trinidad last September 17, 2008. State security forces took him as he was trying to get home. He remains a desaparecido up to this day.

His enforced disappearance was part of the implementation of the national internal security policy Oplan Bantay Laya (Freedomwatch) under then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's regime. He is among the more than 200 men and women – parents, sons and daughters – taken away from their families and work, denied their rights, and denied the people knowledge and access on their welfare and whereabouts. The reason for this is that they are critical of the government's policies that contradict human rights and the people's dignity. The unjust cost of their political dissent is the denial of their rights.

Before James was silenced by his abductors, James pleaded to the onlookers, "Saludsuden yo man dagitoy nu ania ti basol ko? (Please ask them what I have done wrong?). James did nothing wrong but be with the people in the assertion of their human rights and dignity. Nobody should be subjected to this grave violation and placed outside the protection of human rights and the law.

It has been five long painful years of searching for James. Misinformation about his whereabouts to deliberately derail the search has compounded the level of anxiety from not knowing where he is and in what state he is. His parents both died in 2010 without seeing him. His family and colleagues have been subjected to surveillance, threats and harassments in the search for him.

In spite of the difficulties, the persistence of the Balao family, his friends, colleagues and human rights groups and the support from various local, national and international groups has been unwavering. It is a source of strength.

The task remains. The search must continue.

Last April, Judge Jennifer Humiding of the Benguet Regional Trial Court Branch 63 issued a report to the Supreme Court regarding the investigation of the case of James Balao. The report is part of the continuing case regarding the Petition for the Writ of Amparo for James filed in 2008. Judge Humiding recommended for the following:

1. “The incumbent chief of staff of the AFP and the director general of the Philippine National Police to directly and personally monitor the efforts of the SITFG-Balao until its conclusion.”
2. The conduct of parallel investigation by the National Bureau of Investigation and the Commission on Human Rights. These parallel investigations are expected to provide a system of check and balance to the investigation being conducted by the AFP and PNP.
3. “All the concerned officers and authorities shall make available all documents they have on JAMES BALAO and make accessible all the officers who had anything to do with the abduction, or who had knowledge of the abduction; as well as to be granted access to camps and safehouses that could give leads to the whereabouts of JAMES BALAO.”
4. Regular reports regarding the investigation should be submitted to the Supreme Court.

This report comes from findings that not enough was done by the State to locate James – a clear portrayal of impunity in this country.

We vow to persist in the campaign and the search. If he is alive, we hope that he will receive news that we continue the search for him. This will provide him strength and hope wherever he is being kept or detained. If he is not, his family has every right to have him and to closure. Only our collective efforts will lead us to him and to justice.

**SURFACE JAMES BALAO!
STOP ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES!**

For reference:

Atty. Jennifer Asuncion
Vice Chairperson
Mobile number: 09175553118

Jude Baggo
Secretary General
Mobile number: 09189199007