



SANGGUNIANG PAMBANSA NG MGA SIMBAHAN SA PILIPINAS

National Council of Churches in the Philippines

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"SURFACE JAMES BALAOI"

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- ✦ Apostolic Catholic Church
- ✦ Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches
- ✦ Episcopal Church in the Philippines
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- Manila Community Services, Inc.
- Philippine Bible Society
- Student Christian Movement of the Philippines
- Union Church of Manila

The National Council of Churches in the Philippines reaches out in solidarity to the family and relatives of James Balao. Words can neither express sufficiently nor fathom the anxiety stemming out of the sudden disappearance of a leading member of the family and the deafening silence on his whereabouts. The agony becomes more unbearable at the thought that military or police intelligence units are involved.

The NCCP also joins the outrage of the various cause-oriented groups in the Cordilleras including that of the city and provincial governments of Baguio and Benguet, respectively, their call to surface James Balao and for a more proactive police investigation. Reports indicate that James was under surveillance by the military intelligence groups a few weeks before his disappearance.

The advocacy of James Balao in the defense of the rights of the Igorots is a well established fact. Among others, he is one of the founding pillars of the Cordillera People's Alliance that today continues to be a vanguard in the defense of ancestral domain, patrimony and the rights and dignity of indigenous people in the region. Since then he was with CPA's Research and Education Commission. He also played a key role in the drafting of the original version of the Cordillera Organic Act submitted to Congress.

Given the above there is reason to believe that James Balao is a victim of enforced disappearance. It was not very long ago when Daniel Ngaya-an, another Igorot advocate disappeared. It was not very long ago when Jonas Burgos, another advocate of human dignity disappeared. And so it is with Karen Empeño and Sherlyn Cardapan.

Our Christian mandate to respect the dignity of every person and the indigenous people's deep reverence for life in whatever form, compel us to denounce and condemn the enforced disappearance of James Balao. Our Christian mandate teaches us to pray for all sorts and conditions of people and remain vigilant against powers

and structure that breed sycophants who willingly become tools of oppression and injustice. We call on all our partners everywhere: as you have stood by us, please walk the extra mile and let your outrage be heard in this latest affront to human dignity.

As Commander-in-Chief, the President is accountable for human rights abuses perpetrated by elements of the military and the police. We urge the Government to rescind its counter insurgency strategy in the Oplan Bantay Laya (OBL). OBL has legitimized state and military repression in the name of the war against terror. OBL has reduced the role of the military and police as protectors of the people into a brutal assault pack to protect the interest of those in power at the expense of civil liberties. We recognize that extrajudicial killings have abated and the efforts of some in the military and the police. But we have here the chilling scenario that enforced disappearances have taken over extrajudicial killings to continue political repression.

There is hope for peace and justice if we all unite to seek and pursue it. There is hope when civil authorities like those in Baguio City, Benguet Province and the Mountain Province join the outrage of the people each time a person's right is violated. There is hope for the mighty to fall and the meek to be lifted up when we remain steadfast to our higher calling of declaring God's peace from the mountain tops to the plains.



Bishop NATHANAEL P. NAZARO
Chairperson
October 10, 2008



Rev. Fr. REX RB REYES, JR.
General Secretary