

September 17, 2013

September 17, 2008. Tomay, near Camp Dangwa ... the usual morning routine of mothers and their children walking to the elementary school, early bread delivery truck parks in front of Saymore's store. The quiet day was disturbed when the people witnessed the terrible abduction of James. Five men showed their inhumane cruelty to him - a kind and quite soul of a man. These evil men sneered and threatened the people with their guns, locked his jaw and shoved him in a white SUV. All he could say was, "ask these men, what have I done wrong."

Dear everyone,

James was lost to us on this day. Maybe you remember. Yes, he is the same person still missing. James Balao, our brother - the same person abducted by the military and the same man we, his family and closest friends seek to this day. Five long years of worry, unsettling emotions and feelings, anger and anguish, frustration, being threatened ourselves for trying to find him... name it...we have gone through it.

Five long years passed, to those who have him, please, have a heart and let him come back home to us. If you killed him, like what our late father said, give us back his bones so that we can give him a proper burial.

James was abducted under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and her brutal internal security policy Oplan Bantay Laya. She was heartless. Hundreds went missing like James and more than a thousand people were killed and tortured. Enemies of the State subjected to the terror of the policy are teachers, doctors, nurses, journalists, educators, agriculturists, social workers, even students, farmers, indigenous peoples - honorable men and women who have the will to serve their fellow men. These are the people who tirelessly help the people safeguard their land and rights.

It is painful to see that this violation continues to this day with no desaparecido reunited with his or her family and that to this day, the present President allows enforced disappearances under his Operation Plan Bayanihan.

Together with our family, the Cordillera Peoples Alliance, Cordillera Human Rights Alliance, Desaparecidos, various local and international groups, we continue our search for James Balao and the campaign to end enforced disappearances.

We want our brother back home. We need him and we miss him. His friends need him too and so do the people whom he had served.

We will not stop until we find him.

For justice and freedom,

Nonette Balao
Winston Balao
Joni Balao-Strugar