

## **A SUMMARY OF THE GENERAL HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION of NORTHERN LUZON<sup>1</sup>**

The Northern Luzon comprises the regions of the Cagayan Valley, Cordillera, Pangasinan and Ilocos. However, for this Congressional Inquiry the cases of human rights violations for presentations and submissions exclude Pangasinan. We shall also limit the cases to the period of January 2001-present.

Coordinating with the Committee on Human Rights in this endeavor are the Ilocos Human Rights Advocates (IHRA), the KARAPATAN chapter for Cagayan Valley and the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) and the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance (CHRA).

All shall present and submit cases of extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances in their respective regions. A look at the victims of this kind of violations shall indicate a common profile i.e. they are members or leaders of progressive organizations of peasants and indigenous peoples, and/or militant multi-sectoral formations such as BAYAN and the CPA, or progressive party lists such as BAYAN MUNA. Common too is that they have figured prominently in campaigns and issues critical and opposing government such as mining incursions into their villages; peasant concerns such as lowering usury rates and rent, and higher farm gate prices of agricultural products; or against militarization.

We shall substantiate this position with the case on the persecution of the CPA. Here we shall present a chronology of events that shall be evidence to a systematic attack against the people's movement in the Cordillera. The chronology illustrates threats, harassments, intimidations and killings of its members and leaders; and later confirmed in an AFP Order of Battle list that it got hold of.

The victims here are not only the persons killed, disappeared or harassed. The families of the direct victims – the orphaned children, the widows or widowers, or

---

<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Beverly L. Longid, Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) with reports from the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance (CHRA), Ilocos Human Rights Advocates (IHRA) and KARAPATAN-Cagayan Valley for the Northern Luzon Human Rights Congressional Inquiry, March 12-13, 2009, City Hall Multi-Purpose Building, Baguio City.

elderly parents burying their children are also victims in these atrocities. Some are here today to provide us some of the particular impacts on them.

We shall also discuss cases that are particular or prevalent in the respective regions.

The IHRA shall present cases of fake and/or forced surrender of local leaders whose names allegedly are in a military and police 'Order of Battle' (OB) list where prior to such "surrenders" they have been persistently harassed, vilified, intimidated and threatened by military and police forces. They shall also share with us how the military openly tags progressive party lists such as BAYAN MUNA and ANAKPAWIS as front organizations of the CPP-NPA-NDFP, where community infrastructure projects initiated by said party lists are stated as support to the said revolutionary organizations. Thus, members of these progressive party lists are subjects to continuous threats, harassments and intimidation.

We shall show you how victims or targets have to always be on the alert and look behind their backs, the agony of not being free and secure to walk and go about one's daily chores.

KARAPATAN-Cagayan shall highlight the case of the poor peasant community Baggao and how being a member and leader of KAGIMUNGAN serves as death warrant. KAGIMUNGAN is a local peasant organization in Cagayan where in succession military elements have killed or were frustrated to kill its leaders – one after the other.

The CHRA shall present the conduct of counter-insurgency combat operations in the Cordillera and its particular impact on indigenous peoples. Where economic livelihood is disrupted, and communal lands and water source are destroyed. Tribal conflicts escalate when during encounters between government troops and red fighters involving forces that belong to a tribe -- the death of a soldier belonging to a tribe becomes the accountability of the tribe, which the guerilla belongs to. Not to mention the cost of rituals that indigenous communities need to perform.

In a number of instances, military forces have killed civilian farmer-hunters during military operations and later justified that they are guerilla fighters. As if the life of a guerilla is less valuable. Unfortunately, the military or the state perpetrators take advantage of the vulnerabilities of the victim or their family, i.e. dire economic situation of the victims, their frustration and lack of understanding on the slow legal justice system, families have entered into settlement with the military unit and/or personnel involved in the killing. In fact, in one case where a commanding officer of a company involved in a killing despite being charged in court and a subsequent arrest warrant being issued, was even promoted as battalion spokesperson.

We shall show that militarization is not simply limited to indiscriminate bombings and shelling of forestlands and mountains, and ground combat operations. We shall describe so-called civil-military operations to “win the hearts and minds” of the people that seemingly are harmless but are equally dangerous as combat operations. This includes the constant viewing of ‘Knowing Thy Enemy’ a black propaganda tagging personalities as communist terrorist. Military encampments in villages that include occupying residential houses through lies that those soldiers shall only rest for a day and taking advantage of our culture of hospitality. One day turns into one week. One week to a month. A month becomes indefinite wherein the village serves as a virtual shield for the soldiers. In the process, the military conducts a census on the identity of the villagers, restricts the mobility of the villagers by forcing village leaders to report daily to the military commanding officer or detachments/posts that conduct searches, and the like. The presence of armed soldiers in the communities creates an atmosphere of fear and dread.

Needing further documentation is the actual conduct of intelligence operations against so-called targets. This is quite difficult given that such are surreptitious and covert. Of course, it is undeniable that the military form Barrio Intelligence Networks (BIN) or in the case of Ilocos, the Alliance of the Defenders of Democracy (ADD) that spy on their village mates. Initially, this causes division in the community.

The three regions are highly militarized with the presence of armed soldiers in communities that the military claims to be revolutionary strongholds. The Operation

Plan Bantay Laya (OBL) that government launched in January 2002 to end the 'insurgency' by 2010 resulted to a spate of extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, illegal arrests and detention, trump-up charges, and other gross human rights violations. Its extension in 2006 continued and intensified the State's attack on people's civil and political rights.

The OBL as a counter-insurgency program under the present dispensation not only targets the CPP-NPA-NDFP but also includes members and officers of legal militant organizations that the State identifies as front organizations of the said revolutionary organizations. Thus, civil society organizations are targets of intelligence operations and neutralization and priority targets for execution are in the so-called 'Order of Battle.'

However, the soldiers are not only in the communities for counter-insurgency operations. They also serve as security forces of corporate interests and projects that plunder the natural resources in the three regions.

Northern Luzon as elsewhere in the country is largely a peasant population with the Cordillera predominantly populated by indigenous peoples or Igorots. Mining firms, energy plants, commercial plantations, agro-industrial centers, and the like encroach into peasant and ancestral lands. All these threaten the regions' resource base, deprive the local people with their main source of livelihood and dislocate entire villages.

Instruments to this onslaught are State security forces – mainly the military and police – and possibly armed goons of warlords. They also serve as forces to ensure the implementation of destructive government projects such as mining in the three regions and to quell any opposition to these destructive interests.

## DEPLOYMENT of MILITARY FORCES

Northern Luzon is a highly militarized area. The 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (ID) or the Star Division of the Armed Forces of the Philippines-Philippine Army (AFP-PA) based at Camp Melchor F. Dela Cruz in Gamu, Isabela, remains to cover as its area

of responsibility and operation the Cordillera, Cagayan and Ilocos regions. It is currently under the command of Maj. Gen. NESTOR Z. OCHOA. The 5<sup>th</sup> ID is directly under the command of the Northern Luzon Command (NOLCOM) based at Camp Servillano S. Aquino in Tarlac City headed by Maj. Gen. ISAGANI C. CACHUELA.

The 5<sup>th</sup> ID maintains three (3) Infantry Brigades (BDE), namely, the 501st (Valiant), 502nd (Liberator) and 503rd (Justice and Peace) BDEs.

The 501st BDE under the command of Col. REMIGIO DE VERA operates in the provinces of Kalinga, Apayao, Cagayan, Quirino and Isabela and commands the 17<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalions. Its headquarters is in Calanan, Tabuk.

The 502nd BDE operates in the provinces of Mountain Province, Ifugao, Nueva Vizcaya and parts of Benguet and commands the 45<sup>th</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> IB.

The 503rd BDE under the command of Col. ESSEL SORIANO that operates in the provinces of Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, Abra and parts of Benguet, and commands the 41<sup>st</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> IB. Its headquarters is in Lagangilang, Abra.

The 77<sup>th</sup> IB (Cadre) that served in Mindanao (1999-2001) in the hunt to destroy the Abu Sayyaf group is under the direct command of the Division. Its Alpha-Foxtrot Companies are currently deployed in the 501st BDE areas.

“The mission of the 5th Infantry Division is to conduct internal security operations in the Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, and Cordillera Administrative Regions to destroy the communist terrorists and other threat groups xxx.”<sup>2</sup> Such mission, as you shall later hear from the testimonies of victims and witnesses, and read from the submissions, presents a bloody trail of violations and causes much fear among the affected communities.

---

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.army.mil.ph/Army\\_Sites/INFANTRY%20DIVISIONS/5ID\\_latest/index.htm](http://www.army.mil.ph/Army_Sites/INFANTRY%20DIVISIONS/5ID_latest/index.htm)

We hope that with this Congressional Inquiry the wider public gets to be informed of the real state of human rights in the three regions and with that more public outcry. The situation of Northern Luzon is much the same as other regions in the country.

We recommend continuous legislative intervention through similar actions on cases and issues of human rights. Human rights should get more attention and bring the cases to the core that these violations are state-sanctioned and perpetrated. It also our hope that this Inquiry shall assist in bringing to justice the perpetrators of the above stated violations and break the prevailing climate of impunity in Northern Luzon and the rest of the country.

Punitive actions against perpetrators should likewise be reviewed and recommended. In cases involving the police and armed forces, the chain of command should be made accountable. It is also our hope that with the Committee's actions, Congress shall finally enact into law the bills against enforced disappearances, extra-judicial killings, tortures and command responsibility.

However, it is with great irritation that funds for this inquiry are very much limited when the scared and threatened participants who have to leave their economic livelihoods for three days at the least – risk their safety and security in order to have an audience with the Committee. This is enraging when we know of the fact of graft and corruption such as the Euro Generals, on rigging of public works project biddings.

Nonetheless, in behalf of all the organizations and communities present here – our heartfelt gratitude in finding time to listen to our stories. Agyaman kami amin kadakayo!

---

---