



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, INDIGENOUS VOICES

Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo
President

Republic of the Philippines
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Malacañang Palace Compound
J.P. Laurel St., San Miguel Manila

Hon. Avelino J Cruz, Jr
Secretary

Department of National Defense
Rm. 301, DND Building Camp Genereal Emilio F. Aguinaldo
1110 Quezon City
Philippines

3 August 2006
Baguio City

Dear President Macapagal-Arroyo and Secretary Avelino Cruz,


I am writing to express my grave concern over the unabated political killings here in the Philippines, especially the recent killing and attempted assassination of key leaders of indigenous peoples' organizations and members of their families here in the Cordillera.

The attempted assassination of Dr. Constancio Claver, M.D. in Tabuk, Kalinga which resulted in the death of his wife, Alice-Omengan Claver and wounding of a bystander, Janet Ewag is the most recent incident which took place in 31 July 2006. This happened just two months after the killing of Rafael Markus Bangit, (8 June 2006) which up to now remains unsolved. To date there are 73 indigenous persons subjected to extrajudicial killings since 2005. Up to now not a single perpetrator has been identified and brought to justice.

On this same day that Dr. Claver was shot, two other political killings happened. The League of Filipino Students provincial spokesman Rei Mon Guran was slain in Sorsogon province and Tanod tabloid photojournalist Prudencio Melendres, was killed in Malabon. The total number of political killings for just a period of one year is 705 people and there is a total of 182 enforced disappearances.



United Nations




I condemn in the strongest terms those who are responsible for the attempted assassination and killing of these esteemed colleagues who have dedicated their lives to the defense and promotion of indigenous peoples' human rights. I call on your government to conduct a full investigation of these cases and bring the perpetrators to justice. The government is the body which should guarantee the basic right to life of its citizens and therefore it should exert all efforts to stop extrajudicial political killings. The fact that the government has not apprehended even just one of the perpetrators is appalling. It is either the Police Force is totally incompetent or the perpetrators come from their ranks and, thus, are given protection. If your government cannot even ensure the basic right to life of your citizens, then you are failing in your responsibility and your obligations to international human rights law.


It is ironical to see the continuing gross violations of human rights happening almost on a daily basis, while the Philippine government claims with pride that it was elected as a member of the Human Rights Council and that it has an Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act. It is also ironical that the attempted assassination of Claver and killing of Alice Omengan Claver and Markus Bangit happened at a time that the Second Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples has been launched and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has been adopted by the Human Rights Council (despite the abstention of the Philippines). The Philippines signed on to the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances at the same time.

Mrs. President, you announced yesterday that you are giving 10 weeks to the Department of Justice and the Philippine National Police to jail suspects of at least 10 killings.. While this is a welcome move I hope it will not just result to coming up with fall guys and getting the perpetrators off the hook. In addition to the Task Force Usig of the Philippine National Police, I believe a truly independent body with members who have integrity and possess impeccable reputations should be composed to investigate these cases. In relation to the Claver case and the killing of Markus Bangit you should heed the demand to thoroughly investigate PNP- Kalinga Provincial Director, Pedro Geronimo Ramos, for his possible role in these dastardly acts. He should be removed from his post while the investigation is going on.

It is also timely for your government to invite Professor Rodolfo Stavenhagen, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People to conduct a follow up visit to see how his recommendations from his 2003 visit were implemented. I also request that you invite Dr. Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial and Summary Executions.

I look forward to seeing justice for Dr. Constancio Claver, Alice Omengan-Claver and Rafael Markus Bangit and their families and all other indigenous leaders and activists who have been killed and displaced from their communities. I also look forward to seeing an independent and effective investigation body to look into these killings and come up with recommendations on how best to stop similar incidents from happening in the future. The United Nations Permanent Forum will be closely monitoring the developments and we hope we can receive updates from the relevant authorities.





Yours sincerely,



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