

## **Action Alert:**

### **Heightened Surveillance and Harassment of Cordillera Political Activists Could Lead to More Political Killings**

Over the recent period, leaders and offices of the Cordillera Peoples' Alliance (CPA), BAYAN MUNA and other progressive organizations have conspicuously been under surveillance by suspected military elements. In October 2005, there was an attempt to break into the CPA office by unknown men who cut off the power source and telephone line, destroyed the padlock of the gate, and attempted to forcibly open the door. When one of the CPA staff sleeping in the office shouted, the men ran away. During the Christmas holidays, several suspicious vans with tinted windows were often parked outside the CPA office, and threatening phone calls were made to those guarding the CPA office urging them to leave.

In addition, many CPA, Bayan Muna and other leaders and political activists observed clear indications that they are closely monitored. Ms. Joan Carling was closely followed by a suspicious motorcycle on her way home from the CPA office at 8:00 PM in January and the lock of their house door was found tampered. Her car was broken into last February 10, while parked outside her home in the evening. Unknown persons were also observed to be monitoring her house since the night after this incident until the present. Mr. Windel Bolinget, Secretary-General of CPA and Manny Loste, Bayan Muna Cordillera Regional Coordinator and National Vice-President are also being closely monitored in their homes and offices. The wife of Mr. Amping Mangile, Vice-Chairperson of CPA, while in an isolated area, was one time almost forced to ride a suspicious van with military-looking men inside, but she resisted. There are numerous other incidents, too many to mention, that all point to a heightened surveillance and harassment of Cordillera leaders, activists and organizations. There is a now clear trend and pattern, possibly leading to the worst scenario of more political killings of activists.

While the military is expected to deny outright any military plan to liquidate Cordillera activists, the threat remains very real and serious. There have been unabated killings of activists, human rights defenders, and NGO workers in the different regions of the country since 2001, with 272 documented cases. Most of these killings took place after victims were subjected to intense surveillance by suspected military elements or their hired goons. In particular, three NGO workers in Northern Luzon were killed by suspected hired goons or paramilitary elements just last year. Romeo Sanchez, BAYAN MUNA Coordinator of the Ilocos Region was killed in Baguio City in March 9, 2005. Pepe Manegdeg, a Church worker of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines was brutally murdered with 22 gunshot wounds in San Esteban, Ilocos Sur on November 28, 2005. Albert Terredano, a Human Rights advocate and employee of the Department of Agrarian Reform was killed in Bangued, Abra, on November 29, 2005. Until now, the killers of the three are still on the loose and the family and friends of the victims helplessly wait for justice to be served.

Meanwhile, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo remains silent and complacent over the continued killings of defenseless political dissenters. In fact, the killings are part and parcel of a conscious policy of the regime to target key leaders of legal sectoral and people's organizations.

The Oplan Bantay Laya clearly lays down a policy of neutralizing leaders of suspected “front” organizations with no clear basis nor legal justification. The policy of the national government to brutally suppress those who are in progressive legal organizations and defenseless in the face of violent attempts on their lives illustrates the complete disregard for human rights by the Arroyo regime. Due process of law is clearly ignored and violated by the government in their attempt to cripple and paralyze legitimate organizations and instill fear amongst their members and followers. It is a very treacherous and cowardly policy of the Arroyo government, whose power to govern is already based on the power of the gun.

These leaders of the Cordillera mass movement are peace-loving, committed citizens fighting for social justice, peace, human rights and democracy. They have selflessly devoted their time and energy to the peoples’ movement for fundamental social transformation. They have been exposing the wanton violation of human rights and indigenous peoples’ rights, as well the economic and political policies of the Arroyo regime. They do not deserve to be harassed and treated like “criminals with a shoot to kill order” by those who claim to be the protectors of the people. Any attempt to silence Cordillera activists must be exposed and denounced as a continuing wanton violation of human rights and democracy.

We then call on our friends, partners, associates and peace-loving citizens to denounce the continued surveillance, harassment and threats on the lives of Cordillera activists. Let us resist the worsening political repression in the Philippines. We appeal for support in exerting pressure on the Philippine military and the Arroyo regime to stop political killings and respect human rights.

Write letters of concern and protest to the following: Kindly cc a copy of your letter to CPA.

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