



International Youth Solidarity Mission Statement 28 June 2007, Philippines

We, the participants of the International Youth Solidarity Mission (IYSM), representing 15 Asia-Pacific countries¹, held a human rights workshop and subsequently conducted fact-finding missions in the regions of Central Luzon and Bicol from 23-26 June 2007. Our aim was to express solidarity and support for the victims and their families, as well as to conduct actual investigation, documentation and reportage of human rights violations in the Philippines to the international community, especially in the case of youth and student victims.

We would like to recognise the ongoing work of youth and student activists in the Philippines, as defenders of human rights who are persevering in the face of harassment and severe threat to their lives. We also honour and pay homage to those who have given up their lives in the fight for human rights, and hope that their sacrifice will be a beacon of light in these troubled days.

The IYSM teams went to the Bicol and Central Luzon regions and met with the survivors, families of victims, student and youth activists, a human rights NGO, religious leaders, officials of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). We also studied documents of human rights violations and tried to conduct a search of the military camp in Balanga, Bataan.

We are extremely alarmed at and very strongly condemn the rate of extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances in the Philippines, and particularly of youth and student activists, as well as the suppression of progressive social movements. Apart from our overall observation, our findings refer to in-depth examination of the cases of Sherlyn Cadapan, Karen Empeno, Juancho Sanchez, Roberto Bagasbas, Ronilo Brezuela and Farly Alcantara II.

From our expedition it is clear to us that most, if not all, the extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances of youth activists are coordinated by the AFP and state agents. We found insufficient action on the part of the PNP, who have neglected to follow up on cases of human rights violations and also have interfered with the justice process by failing to keep correct documentation, such as preservation of crime scenes, custody of evidence, photo documentation and full autopsy reporting. Government bodies, including the Melo Commission, Task Force USIG and the Special Court set up by the Supreme Court, have had no significant effect on the rate of youth targeting. They have neither prevented further violations nor assisted in serving justice to any of the victims and their families. Rather, these serve as mere appeasement to the international community's demand for action regarding the growing numbers of extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances. One human rights group has documented that the number of youth killed from 2001 to date is 21 with an additional 53 minors, and that youth disappearances stand at 8, plus 4 minors.

¹ The following countries were represented: Australia, Bangladesh, Burma(Myanmar), Cambodia, East Timor, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand.

There is a lack of real and effective victim and witness protection programs. We also observed an extreme lack of confidence in the existing government mechanisms for protection of human rights on the behalf of victims' family members, witnesses, Human Rights groups and student activists. During the IYSM we faced difficulties due to witness and family members of victim's fear of further harassment and threats from state agents if they were to speak out. Even the IYSM in the Bicol region encountered security issues in the form of police intimidation and surveillance.

In addition, we express our grave concern regarding the Human Security Act due to be implemented on July 14th, the increased militarisation of urban areas and in universities, and vilification of progressive youth groups as "enemies of the state" by the AFP, as these could further aggravate the human rights violations.

We call on the Philippines government under President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to:

- Immediately stop the extra judicial killings and enforced disappearances in the Philippines, in particular of young activists. We demand justice for the victims and their families, and prompt resolution of the cases pending in court, such as those of Sherlyn Cadapan and Karen Empeno and specially the cases that have not received media attention such as the cases of Ronald Intal
- Recognise the right of Human Rights groups and families to search military camps and secret detention centres for abducted persons.
- Ensure ongoing security for victims, their families and witnesses.
- Act in accordance with its constitutional mandate and exercise political will to reign in the military and police action effectively.
- End the criminalization of progressive movements and groups who hold dissenting views from the government, and the labelling of them as "communist front organizations" and "enemies of the state".

We ask for honesty and integrity on the part of the PNP and Commission on Human Rights, to live up to their mandate and carry out independent investigations of reported human rights violations.

We recognise that governments have the right to address acts of terrorism, however any such actions should be according to international human rights and humanitarian law. We affirm that if someone has done something wrong, they can be dealt with according to the rule of law but not by extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances.

We affirm the UN Declaration on human rights defenders, which in Article 1 states that all people have the right to work for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This should not lead to the persecution of those involved. The rights of all human rights defenders should be recognised by the government institutions. This should be addressed by the Philippine government, which is a member of the UN Human Rights Council and has an obligation to act in accordance with the international human rights treaties that it has ratified.

Finally we commit ourselves to continue to support the efforts of Human Rights groups, victims and their families and call on the all Filipino peoples and the international community to support their work, in particular the work of youth activists in the Philippines.

Long live international solidarity!

Convening Organizations:
World Student Christian Federation – Asia Pacific
Student Christian Movement of the Philippines
TANGGULAN Youth Network for Civil Liberties and Human Rights