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*Editorial*

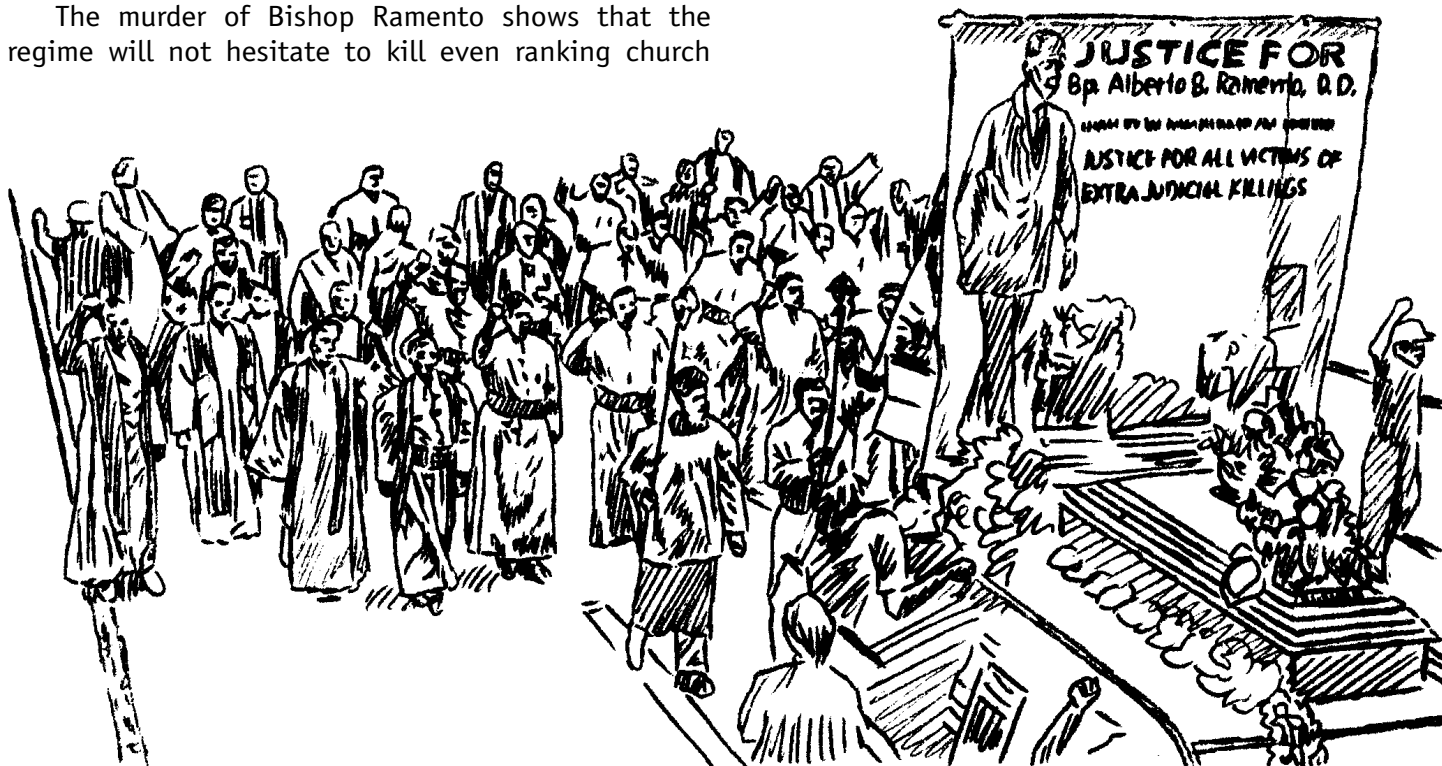
# Bishop Ramento's murder is a stark demonstration of the Arroyo regime's brutality

**T**he brutal killing last October 3 of Bishop Alberto Ramento, people's advocate and patriotic leader of the Supreme Council of Bishops of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) underscores the intensifying viciousness of the US-Arroyo regime's campaign to kill its critics and sow terror among the militant masses.

The murder of Bishop Ramento shows that the regime will not hesitate to kill even ranking church

who are revered for being ardent activists for genuine national freedom and democracy and for advancing the interests and rights of the masses, especially the poor.

The regime is well aware that the killing of Bishop Ramento will further inflame the intense anger of the broad masses. That is why it is covering up its fascist



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crime by depicting the bishop's killing as a simple case of robbery with homicide.

But the regime is mistaken in assuming that the people would blindly accept the web of lies being woven by Malacañang and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

An independent fact-finding mission composed of human rights advocates, progressive lawyers, doctors and representatives from Bishop Ramento's church was formed to study the data and circumstances surrounding the bishop's killing. The results of their thorough investigation bely the results of the PNP investigation. The independent investigation proved that the bishop's murder was premeditated, contrary to police claims that he was murdered when he resisted burglars robbing the convent.

The fact-finding mission likened Bishop Ramento's murderer to a cat toying with a mouse. Stabbing the sleeping prelate in the chest and back, he later ruthlessly watched his victim crawl to the door to call for help. The killer mercilessly toyed with and tortured the dying bishop. After Bishop Ramen-

to fell a few steps outside his bedroom door, the killer inflicted cuts on his victim's fingers and neck to make it appear that he fought off a burglar. But the investigation showed no bruises or other defensive wounds on the bishop's torso and arms, which would have been there if he truly fought back.

The PNP will be hard pressed to convince anyone that the incident was an ordinary burglary committed by petty thieves who broke in to the bishop's room. The almost miraculous speed with which the PNP "solved" the case shows its obvious eagerness to cover up the truth. It immediately announced the "arrest" of four "thieves" and "recovered" from them the "stolen" articles—the bishop's ring and a DVD player that were stolen two weeks before the bishop was murdered.

It cannot be denied that the real motive behind the bishop's murder is the Arroyo regime's desire to silence a popular and influential critic of oppression and exploitation of the people, especially the poor. Bishop Ramento also strongly condemned military abuses, electoral fraud, the Cha-cha scheme

and the other lies and cruelty perpetrated by the regime. He fought for the interests of striking workers and other victims of killings and violence in Hacienda Luisita. He, like many other progressive priests from the IFI and other sects, was under constant surveillance and listed in the order of battle maintained by the military and its death squads. Despite this, he was unafraid and unwavering in his service to the people.

The regime assumes that by drafting a script that would depict Bishop Ramento as the victim of a common crime, it could obliterate the essence of the slain bishop's life, aspirations and struggles. The regime is mistaken if it assumes this to be an effective method of evading widespread local and international condemnation as it continues its campaign of killing and abducting activists and other outspoken critics.

Bishop Ramento's murder is proof of Gloria Arroyo's overweening arrogance. Like the worst fascists in history, she acts as if her powers are all-encompassing and that she could wrap up any atrocity with lies and make it acceptable to the Filipino people and the international community. She completely underestimates and scorns the capability and determination of the Filipino people to unearth the truth, foil her murderous and repressive campaign, and fight and overthrow her oppressive regime.

In the final analysis, Bishop Ramento's murder shows the depths of desperation to which the rotten and fascist Arroyo regime has fallen in its efforts to crush its enemies. It was the same error committed by the Marcos dictatorship. The people and history will mete the same judgment and punishment on Gloria Arroyo's brutal rule and the heinous crimes she has committed against the people. **AB**



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## Unabated military abuses

**A** Laguna activist was the latest victim of the unabated killings of progressive forces. Following are the cases of military abuses collated by *AB* for September and October.

**October 18.** Armed men shot Eduardo Millares, 50, a member of the Samahang Magkakapitbahay sa Tabing Riles (SMTR), a sister organization of Kadamay. He was killed in Barangay San Gregorio, San Pablo, Laguna while on his way to work. Millares' neighbor Victoriano Cariño, 42, was wounded in the incident. SMTR is protesting the demolition of hundreds of homes along the railroad tracks in San Pablo. Before he was killed, Millares was repeatedly harassed for several days in his home by soldiers from the 22nd IB. Despite this, police claim that Millares was a thief and that his killing was the consequence of his falling out with a criminal syndicate.

**October 9.** Six priests of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) were threatened with murder. Fr. Gilbert Garcia of the Diocese of Tarlac revealed that apart from the threatening text messages he received, three hooded men were seen loitering around his church in the morning of October 9. The diocese appointed Fr. Garcia as spokesperson on the murder of Bishop Alberto Ramento. The Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR) has reported that aside from Fr. Garcia, Fr. Terry Revollido of Pangasinan; Fr. Romeo Tagud of Negros; Fr. Marco Sulayao of Panay; Fr. Sonny Teleron of Western Mindanao; and Fr. Antonio Ablon of Cagayan de Oro were likewise threatened with murder.

**October 8.** Three hooded men hacked to death and shot Fr. Dionisio Gingging, 53, an IFI priest critical of the regime. Fr. Gingging was killed in his home in Barangay Baiao, Tago, Surigao del Sur. He was the 24th member of IFI killed since Gloria Arroyo assumed power in 2001. The police claim that Fr. Gingging was murdered because of his links to illegal logging.

**September 11.** Residents of Barangay Bagacay and Osmeña in Palapag, Northern Samar fled their homes for more than a week after 63rd IB troops hamletted Bagacay for half a day. Approximately 500 families evacuated to escape the intense abuses of the soldiers based in Barangay Burgos, Mapanas, Northern Samar. The soldiers vented their ire on the people after an encounter with the NPA in Sitio Ibaliiw, Barangay Bagacay last September 11.

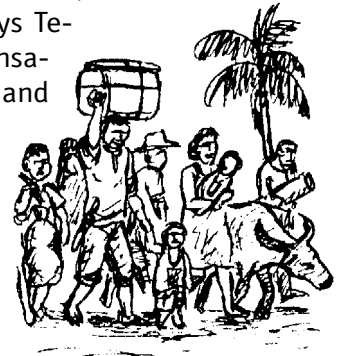
**September 8.** Elements of the 63rd IB abducted, tortured and killed Jerick Lucindo, 18, a resident of Sitio Cag-anibong, Barangay Bagacay, Palapag, Northern Samar. Lucindo was on his way home after purchasing items from a store in the Barangay Bagacay village center when he met the soldiers patrolling the road in Sitio Canunghan, Barangay Osmeña, Palapag. **AB**

## 6 Negros villages declared "no man's land"

**T**he hinterland villages of Calatrava, Negros Occidental are a virtual "no man's land" in the aftermath of the brutal operations of the 11th IB, 61st IB, 3rd Scout Ranger Company and the bandit Revolutionary Proletarian Army who are desperately pursuing NPA Red fighters.

The largescale military operation was supported by two "Tora-Tora" planes and four helicopters. The bombings, strafings and violence against the people caused the forced evacuation of 2,497 resi-

dents of Barangays Telim, Malanog, Mansaka, Malatas, Cruz and Lagaan. The municipal council of Calatrava has placed the six barangays under a state of calamity.



**A c -** cording to the mayor of Calatrava, the evacuees are now crammed into barangay halls, chapels, day care centers, schools and the homes of their relatives and friends. In their haste to flee, most of them were unable to bring even the most basic necessities. Many children now suffer from cough and cold after sleeping on cold floors. The local government cannot provide them with medicine.

The military turned its ire on the people after failing to pursue the NPA. According to Karapatan-Negros, the military concocted implausible stories to cover up their abuses. A three-day fact-finding mission belied claims made by 303rd Infantry Brigade chief Col. Gregorio Fajardo that three minors arrested by the military in Barangay Telim were NPA guerrillas.

Two of those arrested are 15-year-old residents of Barangay Malanog and pupils



of the Malanog Elementary School while the third is a 17-year-old resident of Barangay Telim. The three minors, along with two other civilians, Nathaniel Alesgar, 18 and Ruel Tapio, 21, were tortured. According to reports, they were trussed up like pigs and suffocated with plastic bags for five minutes while being forced to admit that they were NPA recruits. They were later charged with illegal possession of firearms and explosives by the police.

Another resident, Gaspar Villanueva, 55, likewise complained that his house and that of his brother-in-law were forcibly turned into a command post by a platoon of the Philippine Army and RPA directing the bombing and strafing. They were prohibited from visiting the village and their farms. They were also robbed of 15 fighting cocks and other personal belongings. AB

## NPA ambushes AFP convoy in Negros

**T**wo soldiers of the 11th IB were wounded in an ambush staged by NPA guerrillas in Barangay San Isidro, Toboso, Negros Occidental in the afternoon of October 17. A convoy of soldiers was returning from a military operation in the hinterland barangays of Calatrava and Toboso when ambushed at about 4:30 p.m.

For almost two weeks, troops from Task Group North (composed of units of the 11th IB, 61st IB, 3rd Scout Ranger Company and the paramilitary Revolutionary Proletarian Army) scoured the hinterlands of Calatrava and Toboso in pursuit of an NPA platoon that attacked the ₱4.3 billion airport project in Barangay Bagtic, Silay City in the early hours of October 9. The Red fighters quickly confiscated 18 .38 cal revolvers, three shotguns and eight VHF radios from the airport guards. The NPA also blew up the computerized batching plant and cement paver of Hanjin International, a Korean firm constructing the airport, and a power generator owned by Takinaka Itochu, a Japanese company. AB

## 74th IB's RSOT policy in Bondoc Peninsula

### "No right to live"

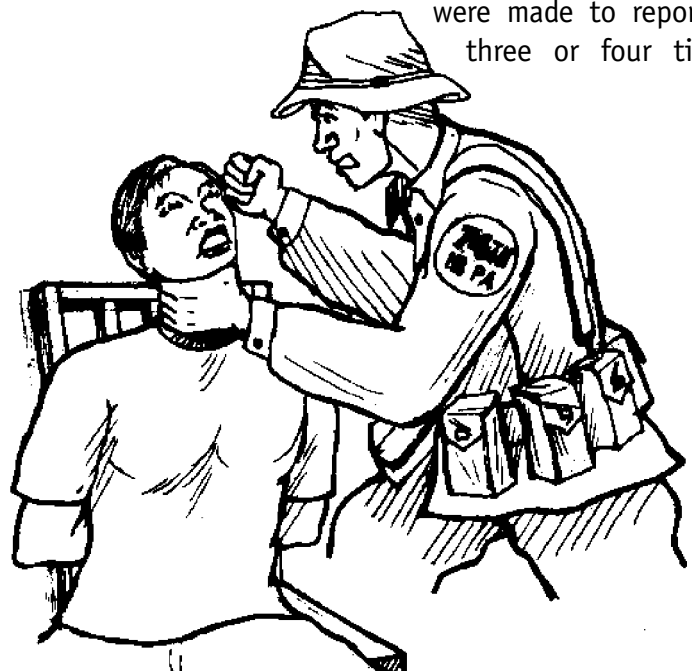
**T**he Bondoc Peninsula is under virtual martial law. Peasants are banned from going to the uplands to harvest copra and tend to their swidden farms. Those who violate the ban are accused of conspiring with the NPA. Those who are allowed into the mountains must return the same day and report to the military.

Since the 74th IB Reengineered Special Operations Team (RSOT) was deployed in the area last July 2006, it has implemented this ruthless policy in 12 barangays of General Luna and Catanauan, Quezon.

The soldiers did not even bother following the RSOT "doctrine" of showing kindness and acting professionally to mimic the actuations and character of the NPA armed propaganda units and gain the people's support. From the very start, they bared their fangs and showed their true colors. In the few months since they began operations, the 74th IB RSOT has manhandled and terrorized numerous peasants.

Several score peasants from the barangays of Sumilang, Magsaysay, Recto, Lavidés and Villarica in General Luna and from the barangays of Sta. Maria, San Vicente Kanluran and Silangan, Tagabas Ibaba and Ilaya, Suha and Anyao in Catanauan were summoned or forcibly taken from their homes and brought to the RSOT detachment in the barangay hall or to the 74th IB headquarters in Ajos, Catanauan. They were illegally detained for more than 48 hours and subjected to intense and repeated interrogation. In some cases, peasants

were made to report up to three or four times for



more interrogation. These are clear violations of the people's human rights. At the very least, they cause serious disruptions in their livelihood activities. Even worse are the scare tactics, mauulings and filing of fabricated charges. More families have been forced to evacuate to evade the brutality and terrorism of the fascist military.

Meanwhile, there are continuing largescale AFP military operations in other towns of the Bondoc Peninsula such as San Narciso, Buenavista, Mulanay and San Andres. The free flow of travel and the people's other activities have been disrupted by the numerous checkpoints that have been set up along roads and trails. In Barangay Buenavista, San Narciso, four peasants—Jovito Marco, Domingo Devida, Mamerto Rivadulla and Medwin Hiwatig—were abducted by the military last September 10-13. Marco and Hiwatig remain missing.

The military brutality that reigns in these barangays and towns is even worse than during the period of Marcos' martial law. The military wants to project an image that all is well but it is obvious that all it has succeeded in doing is create a climate of fear among the people. Even local officials from the barangay up to the provincial level are disrespected by the AFP. Some barangay officials have even been charged with rebellion. Thus, they are unable to protect their constituents. Only strong unity and militant action by residents of the Bondoc Peninsula, the expansion of the united front and the advancement by the NPA of armed struggle can defeat the fascist terror that has engulfed the area.

AB

*An interview with Ka Filiw*

## On advancing people's war in Ilocos-Cordillera

**A**ng Bayan spoke to Simeon Naogsan Sr. (Ka Filiw), spokesperson for the Cordillera People's Democratic Front (CPDF) regarding the advances in the armed struggle in the Ilocos-Cordillera Region and the readiness of the NPA to face intensifying military attacks in the area.

**A high level of readiness for war.** Red fighters in the region maintain a high level of readiness for guerrilla warfare. Their training over the past few years works to their advantage. That is why we can say that they are in a position to intensify guerrilla warfare.

Apart from regular politico-military training, they have undergone training in special operations, health, medical and intelligence work.

There were also snipers' trainings that are suitable to, and maximize, the mountainous and

forested terrain in the region. The high mountains here provide effective concealment for snipers. A team or groups of NPA snipers can effectively pin down a company of enemy troops conducting operations.

According to Ka Filiw, NPA snipers were able to pin down large enemy formations during a battle on Mt. Mugao. Even helicopter gunships could be held at bay by snipers on high mountain peaks and ridges. In another battle last June along the Abra-Mt. Province-Ilocos Sur border, NPA snipers inflicted serious damage on a helicopter.

Alongside the training of full-time fighters is also politico-military training for units of the people's militia. These are part of their villages' defensive preparations against the military operations of the AFP Reengineered



Special Operations Team (RSOT).

NPA units continue to hone their skills in political and military work, guerrilla operations, strengthening their ties with the masses, mastering the terrain and various combat tactics and techniques.

#### **Foiling the enemy's attacks.**

The enemy cannot simultaneously deploy forces in all guerrilla fronts in the Cordillera, especially in the vast interior. The enemy troops are not used to the terrain, are too lazy to climb mountains or are too scared to venture into the forests so they remain in their camps or in comfortable places in town centers and urban areas. The harsh terrain requires the use of large enemy formations—usually battalion and brigade size—during military operations. Their presence is easily known and their movements immediately exposed to the masses and the NPA. For each successful NPA operation, the enemy counterattacks with a brigade or larger unit of troops supported by helicopter gunships and mortars. Afterwards, the enemy launches RSOT operations in the villages. These operations are mostly short-term because they are expensive, with the enemy usually reduced to throwing punches into thin air and becoming all the more demoralized.

Despite the large number of its troops, the harshness and breadth of the terrain make it difficult for the enemy to trap NPA units that time and again concentrate and disperse. Red fighters seem to suddenly appear from nowhere to strike at enemy formations and then quickly vanish into unknown directions. The Red fighters make full use of their mastery of the terrain and its resources, and their strong ties to the masses.

In fact, the NPA sees the enemy's largescale military operations as an excellent opportunity to

launch tactical offensives against isolated units. To effectively launch these tactical offensives, NPA units from adjoining areas are concentrated to gain sufficient force.

"Thus," said Ka Filiw, "we need to launch the appropriate form of tactical offensives against largescale enemy operations, as we launch tactical offensives against smaller enemy units in detachments or on RSOT operations."

**Quickly responding to the call for intensified tactical offensives.** The Ilocos-Cordillera region quickly responded to the call of the Central Committee last year to intensify tactical offensives as part of the effort to oust the Arroyo regime. Upon receiving the call, the regional Party committee immediately planned coordinated military actions for NPA units in adjoining guerrilla fronts. They determined targets for annihilative as well as attritive tactical offensives.

In recent battles against brigade-size enemy operations, these coordinated plans were successfully implemented by composite NPA units from adjoining provinces and fronts.

**Victorious tactical offensives.** The Ilocos-Cordillera region logged 28 tactical offensives from 2005 up to mid-2006 resulting in the seizure of 61 high-powered enemy firearms. About 50 enemy troops were killed and 23 were wounded. On the other hand, ten Red fighters lost their lives and seven were wounded. The NPA lost ten firearms.

Six tactical offensives were noteworthy—the offensive in Barangay Tiempo, Tubo, Abra on June 8, 2005; in Bessang Pass, Ilocos Sur on June 19, 2005; along the Abra-Mountain Province-Ilocos



**Red fighters seem to suddenly appear from nowhere to strike at enemy formations and then quickly vanish into unknown directions.**

Sur boundary on June 9-21, 2005 and again on March 15-24, 2006; in Barangay Cabiten, Mankayan, Benguet where Red fighters overran a 54th IB-CAFGU detachment last February; and along the Abra-Mountain Province boundary last July 7. Thirty-one firearms were seized in Tiempo and 29 among these were high-powered rifles. In Cabiten, 23 high-powered rifles were likewise seized aside from several pistols.

Ka Filiw noted several significant lessons in the NPA's recent tactical offensives: "Firstly, the strong ties between the NPA and the masses is very crucial. Without the broad, consolidated and firm mass base in our areas of operations in the Cordillera, the Party and the NPA would not have achieved those victories. Without this mass base, we could not have withstood the recent attacks of two enemy brigades along the Abra-Ilocos Sur-Mountain Province boundary. At that time, the masses provided the NPA with valuable information, food and other forms of support. Local units of the people's militia formed our blocking forces."

"Secondly, it is important that we have sufficient training, both basic politico-military and special trainings."

"Thirdly, we must have mastery of the terrain—to effectively utilize its advantages while being well aware of its possible disadvantages." AB

# Arroyo regime wants to derail MILF-GRP Peace Talks

**T**he Arroyo regime is responsible for the collapse of the peace talks. This was the announcement of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) leadership after the 13th exploratory talks with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines collapsed on September 7.

When the negotiations began in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the MILF expected the GRP to seriously settle the issue of territory asserted by the Moro people over their ancestral lands and covered by the "advanced autonomy" of the Bangsamoro. This issue has been the biggest obstacle to a settlement between the two parties. This is also the key issue in the Moro people's struggle for self-determination.

In May, the GRP expressed initial agreement with the concept, governance, sharing of resources and delineation of the scope of ancestral lands that will be considered as the territory under a Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE). The GRP agreed that the BJE will cover the five provinces of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), a city and 613 other barangays outside of the ARMM where majority of residents were Moro. The regime promised to grant these territories unconditionally, in accordance with the Agreement of Peace signed by the MILF and the Arroyo government in Tripoli, Libya in 2001 that recognized the historical and legitimate rights of the Bangsamoro to their ancestral lands and own territory. The MILF also asserted the extension of its coverage to at least a thousand more barangays where majority of the population were

Bangsamoro. They also said that the scattered and separated lands under the current ARMM should also be made contiguous. For the MILF, genuine autonomy cannot be realized if it does not cover a whole contiguous territory. It therefore asserted that ARMM's current coverage be expanded.

In September, however, the GRP panel declared that it had no authority to negotiate regarding the territories outside of the ARMM's coverage because this was allegedly unconstitutional. The GRP also claimed that the Moro were not the majority in the contested barangays and that a referendum must be held to determine if the people living in the additional territories were in favor of being placed under the autonomous Bangsamoro region.

In a "resolution," the Arroyo regime tried to persuade the MILF to support Charter Change ("Cha-cha") instead.

All the Arroyo regime's actions are meant to shut all the doors for the further advancement of the peace talks. The MILF was thus forced to withdraw from the talks and prepare for a return to the path of armed struggle. It could no longer stomach the regime's ploys and deceitfulness. Even the Malaysian representatives serving as facilitators to the talks threatened to withdraw. They said that as long as the Arroyo regime does not grant them the authority to negotiate, the talks will remain useless and void of direction.

The reactionary regime's betrayal, denial and blatant violation of the Moro people's aspirations is nothing new to the MILF. The Arroyo regime merely showed again

its lack of sincerity and determination to peacefully resolve the issues faced by the Bangsamoro. Its moves such as attempting to get the MILF's support for Cha-cha has shown to the MILF how the regime uses the peace talks for its own vested interests. It is an insult to a revolutionary organization like the MILF to be subsumed by the republic's constitution and to pin their hopes for the recognition of their rights under this, the MILF said.

The MILF also realized that the Arroyo regime merely used the talks as a counter-insurgency tactic. Together with the regime's maneuvers in the peace talks, it launched a campaign to destroy and weaken MILF forces that has included labeling the MILF as a terrorist organization, associating it with the Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah bandit groups, and blaming it for the bombings in populated areas in Mindanao and Luzon.

The MILF, Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), mass organizations and Moro people are prepared to rekindle their armed struggle against the reactionary Philippine government in response to its deception and continuing violence against them. In fact, the MILF and its forces and supporters have long been prepared exactly for such a possibility. They said that although the peace process is important, they cannot sign an agreement that is prejudicial to the Bangsamoro's rights and welfare. **AB**



# A history of sabotage

**T**he reactionary government, particularly the Arroyo regime, continues to display its lack of interest in achieving genuine peace for the Moro people. Its only interest is to disarm the MILF and effect its surrender.

**From the beginning.** The peace talks began in 1997 under the Ramos regime. Major agreements were arrived at in two years, such as the General Agreement for Cessation of Hostilities (1997), General Framework of Agreement of Intent (1998) and an agreement to open formal negotiations (1999).

The GRP has since proceeded to set up all sorts of obstacles at every turn of the negotiations. No less than the opening of the formal negotiations was marked by renewed and much bigger military operations by the AFP in MILF territories. From 17 battalions directed against the MILF in 1999, the AFP added the 25th, 39th and 40th IB, Philippine Marines and Scout Rangers of the 6th Infantry Division based in Maguindanao; the 41st and 81st IB under the 4th ID based in Cagayan de Oro City; and a contingent from the 301st Brigade under the 3rd ID based in the Visayas.

**Total War I.** In 2000, then president Joseph Estrada ordered the AFP to attack Camp Abubakar, the main headquarters of the MILF, despite a ceasefire agreement at that time and even right after the GRP agreed to the withdrawal of MILF forces from its territories. The peace talks collapsed even before it could take off. In the following months, the AFP relentlessly attacked MILF territories.

More than 400,000 Moro people were forced to evacuate from their communities as a result of the regime's total war against the MILF.

The MILF thus declared a jihad or "holy war" against the Estrada regime in September 2000. The jihad was at its height when Estrada was ousted in January 2001.

**Peace talks.** In 2001, the MILF and the Arroyo regime agreed to resume formal talks. The MILF declared a suspension of military operations. In June, the MILF-GRP Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001 was signed in Tripoli, Libya. The agreement contained the substantive agenda for the negotiations which included 1) security and ceasefire; 2) rehabilitation and development of areas destroyed by militarization; and 3) ancestral lands.

Agreements were reached on the first two items in the agenda. Since then, however, no agreement has been reached on the issue of ancestral lands, the core issue of the Moro people's struggle. Since 2003, the Arroyo regime has used all means to delay discussion on or abandon the issue altogether, while at the same time trying to avoid the nullification of earlier agreements, especially that on ceasefire.

**Total War II.** Even before the third agenda could be taken up in February 2003, the regime poured hundreds of troops around Liguasan Marsh. From there, the AFP launched large-scale operations in the villages of Cotabato and Maguindanao. The AFP continuously added more troops in Pikit, North Cotabato

until the first week of February.

On February 11, despite a ceasefire agreement and the formal talks scheduled that day, AFP forces started indiscriminately bombing a wide area in Rajahmuda ang Buliok in Pikit town. About 20,000 Moro civilians were forced to evacuate. Scores were killed and many more were wounded.

To further sabotage the talks, the Arroyo regime ordered the bombing of Sasa Wharf and the Davao International Airport on April 2003 (as attested to by the soldiers who joined the Oakwood Mutiny). The Arroyo regime accused the MILF of undertaking the bombing, and then declared total war against it. It also filed trumped-up charges against MILF officials and released a warrant for the arrest of then chairman Hashim Salamat and the entire Central Committee. The formal talks collapsed once more.

**Ancestral lands.** In December 2004, an International Monitoring Team composed of representatives from member-countries of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) arrived in the Philippines. This prompted the AFP to minimize its violations of the ceasefire agreement and the Moro people's human rights. It also paved the way for the talks on the issue of Moro ancestral lands.

The talks have gone nowhere since then due to the GRP's hard-line stance on the issue of ancestral lands. Malacañang trumpeted every minor advance in the talks as a "major breakthrough." The truth about the collapse of the talks, however, came out after the 13th exploratory talks on September 7. AB



## Arroyo regime behind Mindanao bombings

In another attempt to demonize and weaken the MILF leadership, Chairman Ebrahim Al Haj Murad and MILF commanders were charged with murder in October for the series of bombings in Tacurong, Sultan Kudarat; Makilala, North Cotabato; and Cotabato City this month that killed six people and injured 36 others.

Murad and other officials were charged despite a statement from the government panel negotiating with the MILF that they see no evidence of the MILF's culpability in the bombings. They likewise said that the accusations were "unjust" and irresponsible. MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu also asserted that the MILF did not have anything to do with the bombings. He even offered to help the regime capture the culprits. Still, militarists in Mindanao, headed by North Cotabato Gov. Emmanuel Piñol and Chief Supt. German Doria, PNP chief for Central Mindanao, are determined to pursue the charges to discredit the MILF within and outside the country, especially among its supporters in the OIC.

The charges are meant to weaken the MILF's bargaining position and force it to sign a final agreement designed by the government. This is also the militarists' method of demonizing the MILF in the eyes of the organizations, institutions and personalities supporting the peace process. Piñol is a rabid opponent of the GRP-MILF negotiations who whips up militarist sentiments and advocates a militarist approach within the regime and among its armed minions. He and his ilk have long been looking for ways to derail the peace process and push through with military attacks on the MILF.

Statements by members of the GRP panel are negated by those of other cabinet members like Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita who denied that the regime has anything to do with the filing of charges against the MILF (it was relatives of the Tacurong bombing victims who actually filed formal charges). At the same time, however, Ermita ordered an investigation of Piñol and Doria's allegations that MNLF and MILF members conspired with the groups responsible for the bombings. AB

## Jacked up power rates at WESM

The Wholesale Electricity Spot Market (WESM) was established by the government in June pursuant to the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001 (EPIRA) to speed up the process of privatizing electricity services in the Philippines. WESM was also meant to serve as a public market for electricity allegedly to stabilize and reduce the price of electricity.

To the detriment of the people, the opposite has happened. In October, reports were rife that big bureaucrats have been intentionally jacking up electricity prices in WESM for their own interest.

Distributors, including the Manila Electric Company (Meralco) and other independent power producers (IPP) with production shortfalls buy additional electricity from WESM. They buy power mainly from the government which owns the National Power Corporation, and from IPPs.

WESM is run like the stock exchange. But because the Power Sector Assets Liabilities and Management Corporation (PSALM) controls a huge part of the electricity produced (50% of total WESM sales), it effectively monopolizes the public market for electricity. PSALM is a government agency formed by Malacañang pursuant to the EPIRA, to manage the privatization of Napocor and its 31 plants. It is also charged with selling electricity produced by these entities. Using PSALM's monopoly, its big bureaucrat managers have been able to manipulate and raise the prices of electricity in WESM for their and their ilk's own benefit.

Ever since WESM started operations in June, electricity prices have become unstable and have skyrocketed instead of stabilizing and going down. The usual cost of electricity rapidly increased (75%)—from ₱2.788 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) during WESM's first month of operation, to ₱4.853 per kWh in its third month (August 26-September 25). In the past two months, it increased further by 250% at ₱6.80 per kWh in the WESM.

The Philippine Electricity Market Corp. (PEMC) has begun investigating PSALM. It is the PEMC that manages, operates and monitors WESM. The PEMC said that there can be no other reason for the sudden rise in the cost of electricity in the public market except deliberate price manipulation, because in the past three months since WESM was established, there have been no significant changes in the supply and de-

mand for electricity.

Meanwhile, in a desperate attempt to appear benevolent, Gloria Arroyo ordered an investigation into the sudden jackup of electricity prices in the WESM. Ironically, she chose as investigators Finance Secretary Margarito Teves who is PSALM chairman, and Justice Sec. Raul Gonzalez and Trade and Industry Sec. Peter Favila who are ex-officio members of the PSALM's Board of Directors. **AB**

## EPIRA

**R**epublic Act 9136 or the Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA) of 2001 provides for the deregulation of the power industry and the privatization of the National Power Corporation (Napocor). The EPIRA stipulates that operations for the production and distribution of electricity would no longer be considered a public utility. EPIRA likewise circumvents the provision in the reactionary constitution disallowing foreign ownership of public utilities.

EPIRA uses such terms as "reforms" and "restructuring" to hide its real objective of implementing the deregulation and privatization of all electricity services. One of its reforms calls for the establishment of the WESM ostensibly to reflect the real cost of electricity.

Gloria Arroyo railroaded the passage of this law to comply with conditions set by the International Monetary Fund and imperialist banks for continued access to credit.

*(For a more detailed discussion, please refer to the primer on EPIRA published by the CPP Information Bureau in June 2001.)* **AB**



## NEWS

### CPP raps largescale US-AFP military exercises

THE Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) strongly denounced the Talon Vision and Amphibious Landing Exercises (Phiblex), a massive joint military exercise involving US soldiers and troops from the Armed Forces of the Philippines that began on October 16 and will end on October 31. This is a "continuing violation of Philippine independence and sovereignty," the CPP said. The CPP also warned against the US' use of Philippine territory as a "launching pad or support base for wars of aggression against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)." After the Vietnam war, the US once again used the Philippines as a launching pad for its occupation of Iraq in 1989-1990 and in 2003.

The CPP also warned against the growing number of American troops deployed in joint military exercises in the Philippines that "conditions the minds of the peo-

ple to accept the ever increasing and continuing US military intervention here and in other countries." The CPP charged the US with using the joint military exercises as camouflage to hide the direct involvement of US troops in combat operations and espionage, information gathering and direct familiarization in areas where revolutionary forces presumably operate.

A total of 5,700 US Marines and 1,300 AFP troopers from the Philippine Army, Philippine Navy and Philippine Air Force are participating in Talon Vision and Phiblex. The US forces are from the 3rd Expeditionary Brigade based in Okinawa, Japan and the Essex Expeditionary Strike Group based in Sasebo, Japan. The exercises are being conducted in Clark Field, Angeles City and Floridablanca, Pampanga; Ternate, Cavite; Subic, Zambales; Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija; and Palawan.

### KMP demands palay price hike

A PICKET by the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas in front of the Department of Agriculture in the first week of October has prompted the latter to promise a P5/kilo hike in the price of palay that the National Food Authority will be buying from peasants this harvest season. Peasants have a longstanding demand to raise the price of palay from P7-9/kilo to P12-15/kilo to alleviate the grave poverty of millions of peasants nationwide.

Peasants' incomes have

been severely reduced because of the low prices imposed by merchants who buy palay from peasants desperate to sell their meager harvests salvaged from the disaster wrought by typhoon Milenyo on their ricefields. Greedy merchants have reduced their buying prices to as low as P4-8/kilo.

An estimated P162 million worth of rice harvests were destroyed by the storm in Bicol, Southern Tagalog and Central Luzon alone. At least P40,000 is needed by each peasant to be able to start planting again.

## Court of appeals stays Mayor Binay's suspension

A MALACAÑANG plot to oust Mayor Jejomar Binay of Makati City has been delayed after the Court of Appeals released on October 19 a temporary restraining order preventing the implementation of his suspension for 60 days. Malacañang ordered Binay's suspension based on trumped-up charges by a political rival that he was maintaining "ghost employees." Also included in the suspension order were the vice mayor and entire Makati city council.

Malacañang's machinations were geared towards grabbing the opposition's bailiwick in Metro Manila, weaken its political enemy before the elections and take over the P8 billion annual income of Makati City.

Binay, head of the United Opposition, is one of the leaders of the anti-Arroyo opposition. Under his administration, Makati has become a center for protest actions, especially because pro-Arroyo mayors in Metro Manila suppress rallies and demonstrations.

Malacañang was so determined to forcibly eject Binay from his post that it sent 1,500 troops from the PNP, Philippine Army, Philippine Navy and Philippine Air Force. The troops were rendered helpless, however, when around 5,000 allies, friends, acquaintances and people from Makati and other municipalities came in droves to rally support for Binay. Among those who also expressed support for Binay were Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo, former Vice Pres. Teofisto Guingona, former Pres. Corazon Aquino, Susan Roces and Catholic bishops.

Earlier, Malacañang suspended Mayor Wenceslao "Peewee" Trinidad, oppositionist mayor of Pasay City and practically the entire city council on the basis of purported anomalies in the garbage collection contract.

## Arroyo impotent in solving killings—Senate

THE Senate lambasted the Arroyo regime for its failure to give justice to activists, journalists, and judges killed in the country. In a 16-page statement released together with a joint report of the Senate committee on public order and illegal drugs, justice and human rights and public information and mass media, the Senate said that despite the fact that not a few soldiers and many hired killers were involved in the killings occurring throughout the country, the government has done nothing to solve them.

The statement and report were signed not only by oppositionist senators but also by Arroyo's partymates in the Senate such as Sen. Ralph Recto, Richard Gordon, Manuel "Lito" Lapid, Senate Speaker Pro Tempore Juan Flavio, Pia Cayetano and Majority Floor Leader Francis Pangilinan.

## Worldwide pressure on the Arroyo regime heightens

PRESSURE from lawyers and lawmakers from various countries against the Arroyo regime's relentless suppression and assassination of critics and oppositionists continues to intensify.

The International Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL) has demanded the immediate release of Rep. Crispin Beltran of the Anakpawis party in its third congress on October 12-14 in Davao City. It also demanded the junking of the anti-terror bill; withdrawal of all American troops in Mindanao; revival of the peace negotiations between the NDFP and GRP; respect for the rights of indigenous peoples; and a stop to extrajudicial killings and other acts of state violence.

The IAPL was formed in December 2000 by lawyers, judges, law students, legal and paralegal workers from Afghanistan, Belgium, Colombia, Greece, India, Nepal, The Netherlands, the Philippines and Turkey. The latest additions to its membership are Brazil and the United Kingdom. Several guests representing Canada, Congo, Cuba, Germany and Spain attended as observers.

Meanwhile, in a meeting of the Parliamentarians' Caucus on Human Rights in the Philippines on October 20, Sen. Ana Consuelo "Jamby" Madrigal also called on other countries to pressure the Arroyo regime to stop the passage of the anti-terror bill and the series of political assassinations and abductions. She said that human rights violations will worsen if the anti-terror bill is passed.

Earlier, the Governing Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in its plenary meeting on October 19 demanded the immediate release of Ka Bel. The IPU is an international association of lawmakers from various parts of the world. It held its 115th assembly in Geneva, Switzerland in October.

The IPU also expressed alarm over the rebellion charges against Ka Bel, Ka Satur Ocampo and their fellow progressive lawmakers Teodoro Casiño, Joel Virador, Rafael Mariano and Liza Maza. The Arroyo regime's treatment of rebellion as a "continuing crime" is, said the IPU, in violation of international standards. It also condemned the Arroyo government's attempt to criminalize and illegalize legitimate parties such as Bayan Muna and Anakpawis that participated in the elections in 2002 and 2004, and the attempt to block the travel abroad of Ocampo despite court approval.