

ANG

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Editorial

## Intensify people's struggles in the face of the US-Aquino regime's political crisis

A serious political crisis is currently shaking the ruling regime as a result of disclosures regarding the direct responsibility of Benigno Aquino III and US military officials in the bloody Mamasapano operation on January 25.

Aquino's persistent shirking of his accountability and his coverups of the truth have further enraged the Filipino people and fired up their desire to oust the puppet, corruption-ridden, brutal and deceptive regime.

The Aquino regime is now scrambling to find a way out of the political crisis through a series of measures designed to prevent the truth from coming out and the use of government

funds to create diversions and prevent the people from casting blame on the US and Aquino for the deaths of more than 80 people, including 44 special police troopers, paramilitary forces, Moro fighters and civilians.

Indicating the depth of the people's anger at the ruling regime, a number of PNP Special Action Force (SAF) elements who joined the Mamasapano sortie have revealed the truth

regarding US military officers' direct



hand in training for, planning and executing the operation. These exposés reveal the Aquino government's high treason as it acted as the US military's errand boy in undertaking the mission to liquidate Zulkifli bin Hir who had a \$6 million reward on his head offered by the US State Department.

In an attempt to stop the disclosure of classified information that would pin the blame on Aquino and the US, the Filipino people were banned from viewing, and listening to, the ongoing investigation at the Senate dominated by pro-Aquino and pro-US politicians. Should such information be made public, it would certainly be "sanitized" to avoid further stoking the people's anger. Congressional hearings, on the other hand, have been indefinitely suspended out of fear that Aquino's officials would be put on the defensive by the questioning, especially by progressive legislators who are determined to ferret out the whole truth about the Mamasapano incident.

Despite the tens of millions of pesos given by Malacañang to the relatives of the slain police troopers, it has failed to stifle their complaints and grievances about the abandonment of the troops who had been besieged in the operation. The families of the slain SAF troopers are likewise in possession of a lot of information that may further point to the accountability of Aquino, his closest people and the US military.

The Aquino government continues to distort the truth about the US' role. Aquino's officials claim that "there is nothing wrong" with US military "assistance," as if it were not the US that masterminded the whole operation.

The Aquino government's persistence in covering up and distorting the truth about the bloody Mamasapano operation merely enflames the Filipino people's desire to go through all the pieces of information they have dug up and make sense of them in order to discover, above all, Aquino and the US' respon-

sibility in planning and undertaking the operation. The broad masses refuse to accept Aquino and his officials' statements and depictions of what happened. This is reflected in the demands made by members of the Catholic Church hierarchy for the Aquino government to come out with the whole truth.

Aquino's suppression of the truth about Mamasapano and his attempts at a coverup are fuelling the Filipino people's widespread anger at the ruling regime and further stoking calls by broad sectors to oust Aquino from power.

Demands for Aquino's resignation go far and strong. His severe isolation likewise emboldens his reactionary political rivals and their cohorts among the military and police top brass to join people's actions and turn their backs on the ruling regime. A number of religious leaders have also expressed solidarity with calls to form a democratic council that would take over once Aquino resigns.

The Filipino people deeply desire to oust the Aquino regime because of its corruption and brutality, its puppetry to the US and its deceptiveness. It has perpetrated myriad crimes against the people. The bloody operation in Mamasapano was but the latest in a long list of transgressions that have caused the people's suffering, oppression and repression.

We must gather the people's anger, forge their unity and unleash their power through widespread street protests. All sectors, groups and personalities who are one in their demand for accountability from Aquino for his leading role in the Mamasapano operation must be united. The patriotic forces must relentlessly expose and assail the US military for masterminding

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<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Ang Bayan</i> is published fortnightly by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines</p>	

the operation in violation of Philippine national sovereignty.

The workers and the toiling masses must strengthen their mass actions to hold the US and Aquino accountable for the bloody Mamasapano operation. More important, this demand must be closely linked to the issues of raising the minimum wage, rollbacks in metrotrain fares, prices of oil and other commodities and power and water rates and higher budgets for education, health and other social services.

This way, they can unite the broader ranks of the toiling masses for them to serve as a major force in mass actions and measures to oust Aquino from power and further advance their struggles under the post-Aquino government.

The New People's Army (NPA) must intensify armed struggle and take advantage of the turmoil within the AFP and PNP officer corps. The biggest blows must be meted on the officers and units that have been most brutal and repressive on the people and in defending the rotten Aquino regime. Let us encourage the disgruntled military and police officers and rank and file to turn their backs on the Aquino regime and join the revolutionary movement or cooperate with it.

In the coming months, all NPA commands must launch tactical offensives to contribute to the people's struggle to end Aquino's rule. This, in consonance with advancing agrarian struggles and expanding and consolidating organs of democratic people's government. The revolutionary forces must give their all in order for the protest actions and struggles against the US-Aquino regime to contribute to the all-sided advance of people's war nationwide. **AB**

## Advance the Bangsamoro struggle—*NDF-Mindanao*

The National Democratic Front (NDF)-Mindanao called on the Moro people to further consolidate their ranks and intensify their struggle for self-determination. The call was made by NDF-Mindanao spokesperson Ka Oris after the bloody clash in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on January 25.

The January 25 attack by armed troops of the Philippine National Police Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) in Barangay Tukanalipao, Mamasapano, a known Bangsamoro stronghold, was a direct affront to the right to self-determination of the Moro people.

The huge number of casualties inflicted by Moro fighters on the SAF is being exploited by a number of groups and politicians to fan the flames of anti-Moro chauvinism and cover up Aquino and the US' responsibility in the bloody operation. The passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), a bill resulting from the peace talks between the GPH and the MILF is likewise in danger of being blocked.

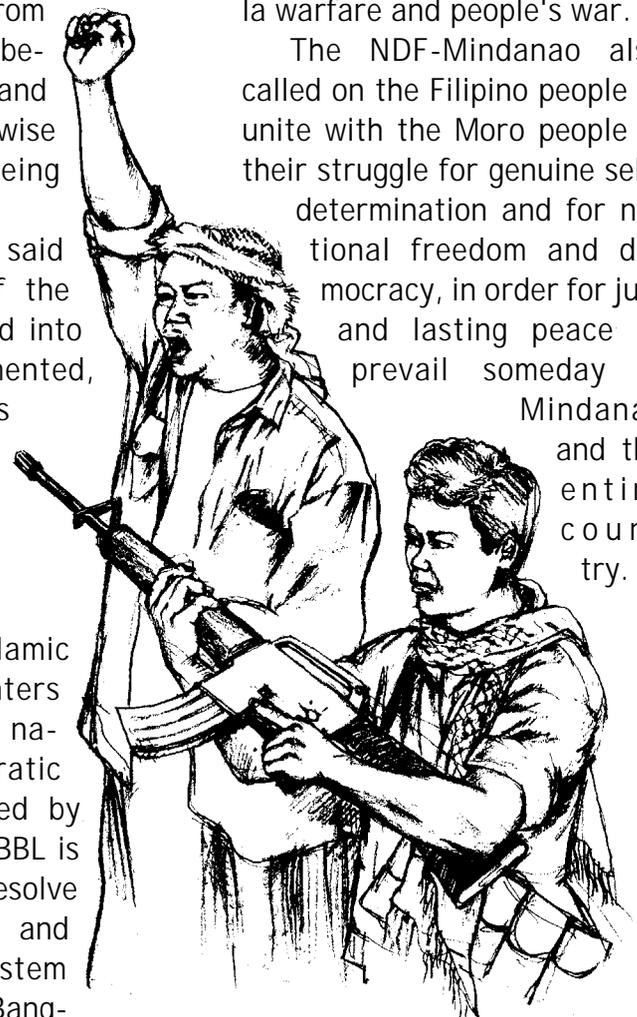
Nonetheless, said Ka Oris, even if the BBL were enacted into law and implemented, growing numbers of Moro people are expected to join the armed struggle being launched by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and the national democratic struggle embodied by the NDF, as the BBL is not designed to resolve the basic feudal and semicolonial system prevailing in the Bang-

samoro areas.

Ka Oris stressed that the NDF has a commitment to the Moro people to support their struggle for self-determination. Thus, both forces can support each other against a common enemy.

The NDF-Mindanao called on the BIFF to brace itself for the definite intensification of military attacks on its ranks. It must strengthen itself and rapidly expand its area of maneuver to overcome the AFP-PNP's encirclement campaign. The Bangsamoro areas and social terrain are fertile ground for developing expertise in guerrilla warfare and people's war.

The NDF-Mindanao also called on the Filipino people to unite with the Moro people in their struggle for genuine self-determination and for national freedom and democracy, in order for just and lasting peace to prevail someday in Mindanao and the entire country. **AB**



# Mamasapano operation sparks anger and protests against US-Aquino regime

The bloody US military operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao using local police forces has sparked widespread anger among the Filipino people.

Since the last week of January, a series of protest actions have been launched by progressive groups in Metro Manila and other areas of Luzon and Mindanao to demand accountability from the US-Aquino regime and call for its ouster.

**January 28.** Suara Bangsa-moro launched a protest action at the Cotabato City Plaza to demand justice for the civilian victims and hold Aquino and the US accountable for the bloody clash at Mamasapano.

**January 31.** The Kawagib-Moro Human Rights Alliance held a press conference to report the results of its initial investigations in Mamasapano. It said that there were a number of victims of extrajudicial killings and indiscriminate firing and that more than 1,500 people had been forced to evacuate as a result of the gunbattle. Among those killed was five-year old Sarah Panangulon who died after SAF troopers strafed her family's hut. Another civilian, Badrudin Langalan, who was chanced upon by the SAF was found bound, his body riddled with bullets and his eyes gouged out. Five civilians also chanced upon by the SAF praying at a mosque were killed after being sprayed with gunfire.

**February 3.** Members of the Promotion of Church People's Response and Kilusang Mayo Uno launched a "National Day of Mourning" through a mass at Camp Crame for the victims in

Mamasapano.

**February 4.** Hundreds of members of progressive groups allied with the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan marched from the foot of Mendiola Bridge to the US Embassy. The activity was timed to coincide with the 116th anniversary of the Filipino-American War.

They also called for the of expulsion of American troops and the abrogation of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) and other unequal military agreements with the US.

The policemen who blocked them also had black ribbons pinned to their uniforms to symbolize their sympathy with their fellow PNP officers.

**February 5.** Progressive sectors installed a giant TV screen to hold a public viewing of Aquino giving a speech in reaction to criticisms of his responsibility in Mamasapano.

**February 6.** Various youth and student groups held a nationwide protest action dubbed "Black Friday Protest" to call for Aquino's ouster for his criminal accountability in the Mamasapano incident.

Protest actions were also conducted at the University of

the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City and the Polytechnic University of the Philippines at noon. In the afternoon, students from the University of Sto. Tomas, University of Manila, San Beda College and UP Manila launched protests, as did residents at the Freedom Park in Batasan Hills, Quezon City. Demonstrations were also launched by students in Baguio City; Los Baños, Laguna; Pangasinana; and Legazpi, Albay.

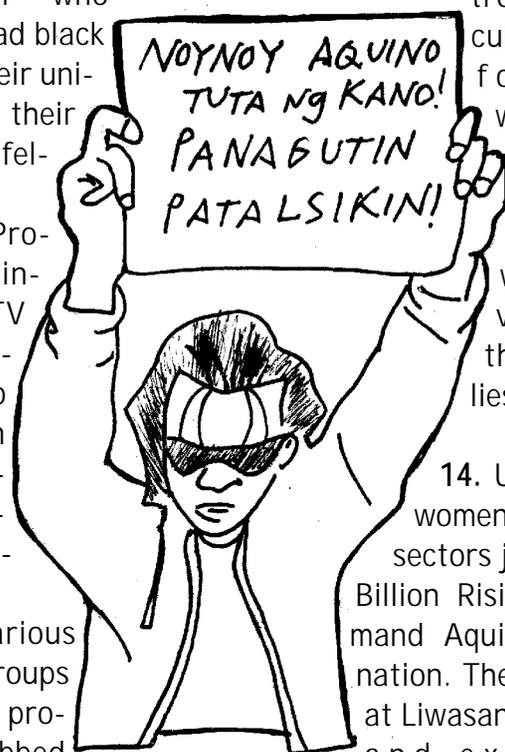
**February 8.** On the morning of Aquino's 55th birthday, members of the League of Filipino Students (LFS) and Anakbayan launched another protest action to reiterate their calls for Aquino's resignation due to his leading role in the Mamasapano operation. The protesters brought a mock black cake emblazoned with "Noynoy, Resign Now!" in yellow.

At Liwasang Bonifacio, protests were also launched calling for justice for the slain SAF

troopers. A cultural performance was presented to show solidarity with the victims and their families.

**February 14.** Up to 3,000 women and other sectors joined "One Billion Rising" to demand Aquino's resignation. They gathered at Liwasang Bonifacio and expressed

through dance their calls for truth and for accountability from everyone guilty of grave crimes against the people, from the pork barrel scandal to the bloody clash at Mamasapano. **AB**



# The US' leading role in the Mamasapano gunbattle

The leading role played by the US government in the firefight at Tukanalipao, Mamasapano, Maguindanao on January 25 has become clearer in the course of time.

An unnamed officer of the PNP Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) has admitted that the US government provided the needed logistics, including the money that was paid to members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) who served as guides to enable the PNP-SAF commandos to close in on their targets Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan and Abdul Basit Usman, who have combined bounties on their heads worth \$9 million from the US State Department. It was also the US that provided the funds and intelligence for the operation to neutralize Marwan.

**La Vista del Mar Beach Resort.** US forces chose and provided special training to the 84th SAF Company which served as the assault force in the operation against Marwan. The other SAF units were to serve as support forces, including the 55th SAF Company which was wiped out in Mamasapano.

The US likewise provided a training facility for the 84th SAF Company at the La Vista del Mar Beach Resort in Barangay Upper Calarian in Zamboanga City. The resort is owned by the family of Zamboanga City Rep. Celso Lobregat.

**Wikileaks reports.** The SAF officer's statements jibe with the confidential transmissions from the US Embassy to Washington, D.C from 2005 to 2010 concerning the US' major role

in the counter-terrorism campaign in the Philippines. According to the documents made available through Wikileaks, it is the US government that plans covert operations undertaken by the military, police and other Philippine security forces.

In a confidential message coded "09MANILA2271," the US Embassy in Manila endorsed approval for a \$34.1 million budget from the US government for various pieces of equipment to be used in the counter-terrorism campaign in 2010.

Nonetheless, the US Embassy has remained tight-lipped on this burning issue, which obviously tramples on Philippine sovereignty and independence. Even its puppets in the Philippines are scrambling to cover up the US' direct role in military operations in the Philippines. In fact, hearings at the Lower House of Congress have been suspended after progressive legislators delved into the US

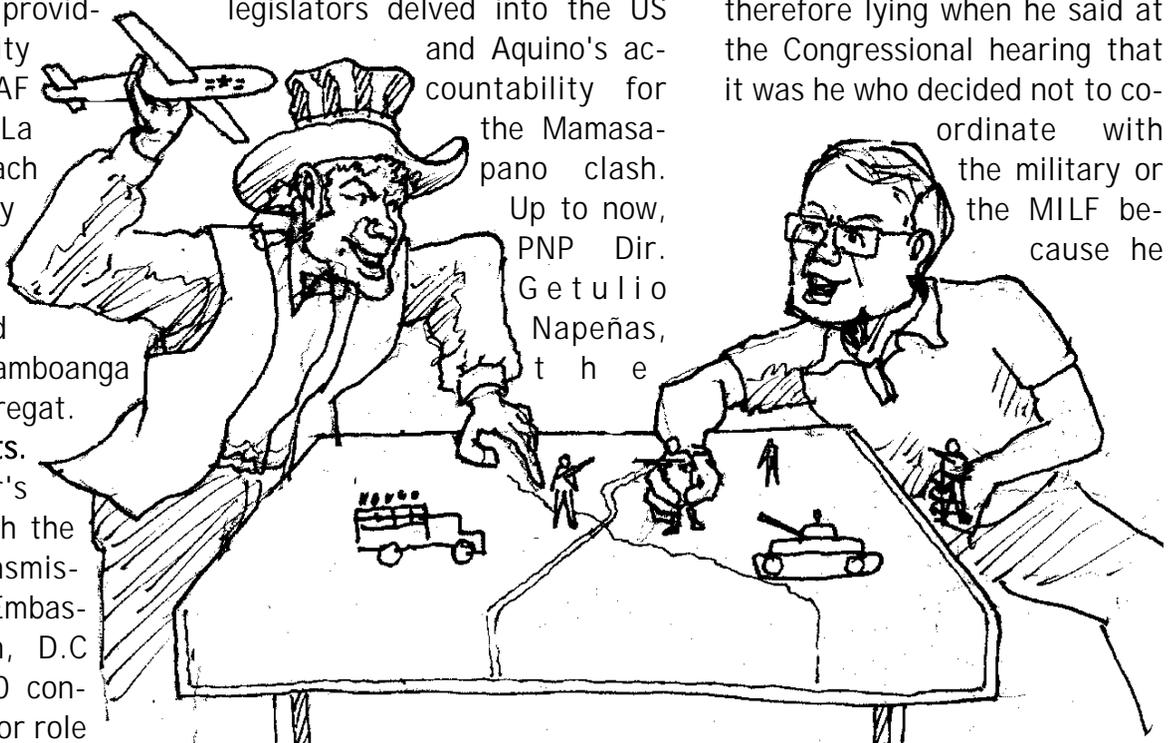
and Aquino's accountability for the Mamasapano clash. Up to now, PNP Dir. Getulio Napeñas, t h e

sacked SAF commander, persists in claiming that the US role in Mamasapano was confined to the conduct of a medical mission to evacuate SAF casualties.

The SAF officer-informant said that an American known as "Allan Konz" was the actual leader of the operation. At the time of the fighting in Mamasapano, Konz was at the 43rd SAF Company command post in Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao with PNP-SAF Director Napeñas. It was Konz who dictated the operation's every move. Also with Konz at the command post were eight civilian-clad American soldiers.

AFP officers have likewise disclosed that it was a US drone that pinpointed the location of the 84th SAF Company. A video of the Mamasapano clash viewed on the morning of January 25 by Aquino and selected US officers inside the US Drone Facility at Edwin Andrews Airbase in Zamboanga City was also taken by the drone.

**US decision.** From the beginning, the US-designed operation called for a limited role for the AFP. Whatever coordination there was, was confined to intelligence work. Napeñas was therefore lying when he said at the Congressional hearing that it was he who decided not to coordinate with the military or the MILF because he



did not trust them. In fact, he was concealing the role played by the US in the operation.

The plan, as drafted, provided for reinforcements for the SAF should contingencies arise. This would be coming from the 300 other SAF forces who were part of the mission, the mechanized unit of the Philippine Army which was located a mere three kilometers from Mamasapano and artillery support. During the actual fighting, however, the US shifted gear and gave orders to the reinforcement units to stand down.

Meanwhile, local residents interviewed during a fact-finding mission led by Gabriela Women's Party and Suara Bangsamoro on February 8-11 said a week prior to the fighting, they saw a drone (which they called a "small airplane") circling four villages of Mamasapano. It flickered in the dark and flew at a low altitude—almost hovering above rooftops. The drone flew more frequently over Barangay Tukanalipao on the night of January 24.

During the actual operation on January 25, forty-four SAF troopers were killed—nine from the 84th Company and 35 from the 55th Company. Also among those killed were the two MILF members who served as guides and 13 paramilitary elements. The MILF leadership claimed to have lost 18 fighters. Seven civilians were also killed.

A national newspaper reported on February 5 that surviving SAF elements were ordered to extricate the American troops first from the scene of the fighting. Nonetheless, Tukanalipao residents reported helping carry the body of a slain American soldier to a green US-AID helicopter that landed in the area immediately after the gunbattle. AB

## US terrorist intervention in the Philippines

There is nothing new or surprising about current disclosures regarding the direct and leading role played by the US in the bloody clash at Mamasapano, Maguindanao. Ever since the US designated the Philippines as the "second front" in its "war on terror" in October 2001, it has widely and deeply intervened in the country's internal affairs without let-up. In connivance with the puppet government, the US has unbridledly violated Philippine sovereignty as well as international and local laws and regulations.

Since the early 2000s, the US has been invoking the specter of "terrorism" in the Philippines to justify the entry and continuing presence of its "counter-terrorist" troops in the country. The Abu Sayyaf bandit group, which was formed by former US forces who joined subversive activities in Afghanistan, was linked by the US to Al Qaeda and other groups accused of perpetrating the terrorist attack on New York City on September 11, 2001.

In 2005, the US included in its list of "terrorists" the New People's Army, the Communist Party of the Philippines and Prof. Jose Maria Sison. In 2002, the US planned on declaring the Moro Islamic Liberation Front as terrorist as well, believing that it had even broader links with Jemaah Islamiyah compared to the Abu Sayyaf, but decided to drop it from the list and attempt to entrap it into agreeing to a ceasefire of indefinite duration and engaging in peace talks.

US military intervention was massive during operations against the Abu Sayyaf which was behind the kidnapping of 20 individuals from

the Dos Palmas resort in Palawan in November 2001.

Beginning 2003, some 600-900 American soldiers under the Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines (JSOTF-P), a unit under the US Pacific Command, were stationed within Camp Navarro, a military camp of the AFP Western Mindanao Command.

In February 2002, the US sent 1,300 troops to Basilan using the mantle of Balikatan 02-1, the first joint military exercise launched in Mindanao. Among them were 160 troops from the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), the US president's so-called "private army" which he unleashes for the extrajudicial killing of individuals arbitrarily declared as terrorist as well as their civilian supporters.

To make their presence in civilian communities palatable and to cover up the brutality of their operations, the US military poured in funds for civilian and infrastructure projects. According to a report by US ambassador to the Philippines Kristie Kenney, American forces were involved in at least 255 vari-

ous civic and humanitarian projects from 2006 to 2009.

These projects included 193 road repairs and the construction of ports, clinics, schools and water systems. The US also conducted various propaganda campaigns under MIST (Military Information Support Team), disseminating photographs, writings and comic books and airing radio and television advertisements to improve the image of their troops as well as that of the AFP in Moro civilian communities.

The US likewise sent 300 engineering troops to undertake civic-military projects such as road repairs in Basilan.

Documents from the US Congress state that "Operation Balikatan" involved embedding two-man teams of American soldiers in combat operations of selected AFP companies but without being subordinate to the latter's command. "Operation Balikatan" peaked on June 7, 2002, after the US discovered Abu Sabaya's (Aidam Tilaio) Zamboanga camp, where the kidnap victims were being held.

Using "rescue operations" as cover, the US led Filipino troops in attacking the camp with the help of its surveillance and attack drones.

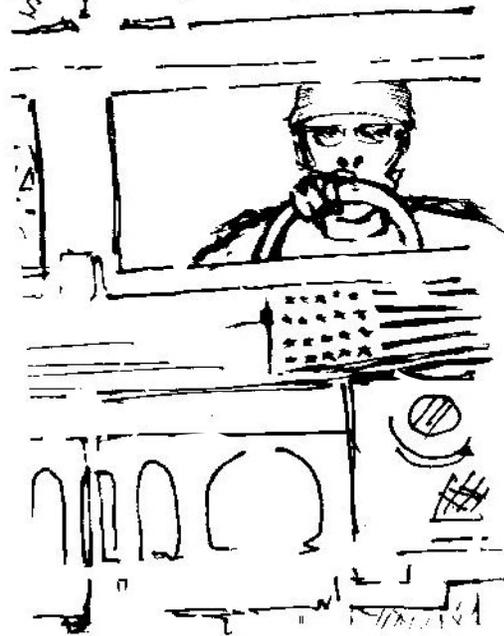
Two weeks after the bloody operation that resulted in the death of two Abu Sayyaf captives, Filipino operatives killed Abu Sabaya while he was escaping off the coast of Zamboanga City. Sabaya, who then had a \$5-million bounty on his head offered by the US, was located through his satellite phone which, unknown to him, had been supplied by the CIA. Two US Navy ships carrying a team of US Navy Seals, a branch of the JSOC, supported the operation. The US declared

"Operation Balikatan" a success in July 2002.

In February 2003, the US military sent in more troops in the face of a series of bombings in civilian centers in late 2002, which the US claimed was the handiwork of the Abu Sayyaf. Among the soldiers sent by the US to the Philippines were more than 350 special operatives in Sulu and 450 troops in Zamboanga who directly joined AFP combat operations in the area.

These troops were supported by warships bearing 1,000 soldiers from the US Marines, 1,300 from the US Navy, attack helicopters and combat planes, which were strategically positioned at the Sulu Sea. On top of this, the US brought in military equipment, including P-3 surveillance aircraft which are

used in sea warfare (and whose use no longer had anything to do



with pursuing the Abu Sayyaf).

The "rules of engagement" drafted by the US and the Philippines state that the American soldiers embedded within Philippine battalions would perform "non-combat" roles. Nonetheless, they are allowed to retaliate when shot at, a situation intrinsic to a military operation.

Aside from the more prominent operations involving American forces, the US has also been involved in smaller but more extensive operations in other parts of Mindanao. There have been at least 23 documented cases where American troops openly joined AFP combat operations in Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-tawi, Sultan Kudarat, Zamboanga and Maguindanao from 2002 to 2008 alone. Many of these operations, which were launched against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, resulted in the deaths of civilians and the destruction of their communities.

In April 2008, American troops were spotted at an AFP tactical command post in Barangay Ngan, Compostela, Compostela Valley. They were providing technical support to AFP troops who were maneuvering against the New People's Army (NPA) in the area.

Since 2010, there have been a number of instances where direct US intervention was exposed. Among them was the so-called Zamboanga Siege of September 2013 where US forces provided direction and combat support to AFP troops and a prior attempt to liquidate Marwan through the use of "smart bombs" in February 2012 in Jolo, Sulu.

AB

## Where is Meiring?

In May 2002, the Davao City Police arrested Michael Terrence Meiring, an active agent of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), after a bomb he was making exploded in his room at the Evergreen Hotel.

Contrary to his claims that a grenade had been lobbed at him, the police found two metal cases containing explosives inside his room and an identification card purporting that he was a member of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Meiring had been a frequent traveller to the Philippines for the past ten years. In 1992, he was posted with the National Bureau of Investigation in Manila.

It is believed that Meiring had been planning to bomb the hotel that day to create terrorist hysteria in Davao and put the blame on the MNLF and other Moro groups. Balikatan 01-1 was then being launched, which at first was confined to the island of Basilan. (It eventually included Zamboanga, after the US had pinpointed Abu Sabaya's location).

The police were still preparing to charge him when agents from the US National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation whisked Meiring out of the hospital where he was confined after the "accident." The US agents quickly brought him back to the US despite the warrant of arrest and hold departure order that had been issued against him. In 2004, a television network was able to trace his whereabouts to Houston, Texas where he had been blissfully living with his wife, using the surname Van de Meer. AB

## The AFP's vicious attacks against Moro civilians

Various reactionary forces have been invoking the death of 44 elements of the PNP Special Action Force in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on January 25 to propagate anti-Moro chauvinism and call for all-out war against the Moro people.

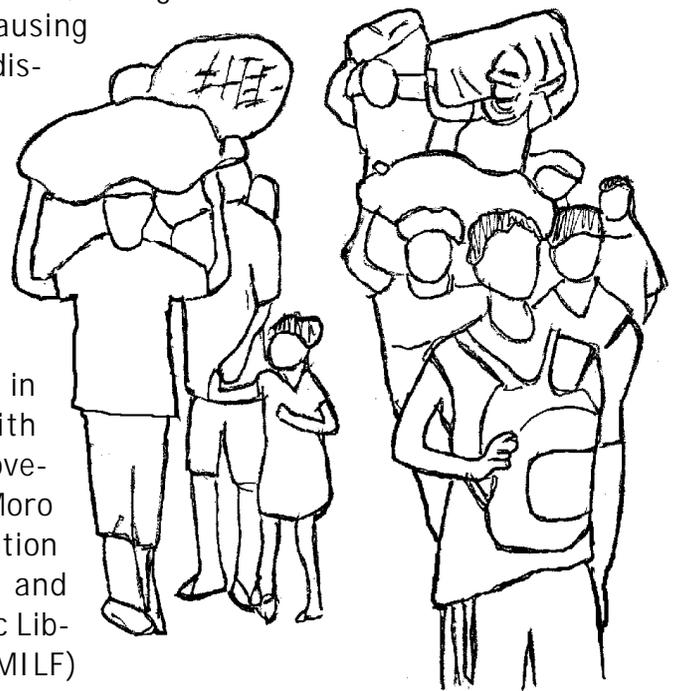
They have been spreading distorted versions of history to demonize all Moro forces as terrorists, and depict them as the masterminds behind some of the bloodiest massacres in the history of the Moro struggle.

In fact, ever since the US-Marcos dictatorship commenced the massive anti-Moro war in the 1970s, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and other state-supported forces have unhesitatingly killed or injured unarmed civilians. Every reactionary regime after Marcos used varying combinations of violence and deception to suppress the Moro people's struggle for self-determination.

Hundreds of thousands of Moro civilians have been victimized by the AFP's military campaigns. On many occasions, state forces bombed and unleashed artillery fire, killing civilians or causing their massive displacement. In many instances, soldiers mercilessly rained bullets on civilians in retaliation for losses suffered in fighting with armed Moro movements like the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

or in the process of pursuing the Abu Sayyaf and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

**Under the Marcos regime.** The most heinous attack perpetrated by the AFP in the history of suppressing the Moro struggle is the burning of Jolo City on February 7-8, 1974. At least 10,000 Muslims, Christians and Chinese residents were killed when the city burned down due to relentless AFP bombardment from land, sea and air. In pursuing MNLF forces that had occupied certain parts of Jolo City, the AFP used cannons of the Philippine Navy and jets, Tora-Tora planes and helicopter gunships of the Philippine Air Force and other AFP services. They targeted and burned down the Tulay Mosque, the Chinese Pun Tai Kung Temple, the Notre Dame Cathedral and the entire city



center. As the fire raged, 80% of Jolo City was reduced to ashes by February 8. This spurred the diaspora of tens of thousands of residents to other parts of Mindanao, to neighboring Sabah, Malaysia and to Luzon and the Visayas. Controlled by the Marcos dictatorship, the mass media suppressed the truth regarding the burning of Jolo.

Following are some of the most striking cases under the Marcos regime:

*June 1971.* Combined forces of the Philippine Constabulary and Ilaga paramilitaries attacked civilians praying in a mosque in Manili, Carmen, North Cotabato, killing 70 Moros, including women and children.

*November 1971.* Forty Moro civilians were killed in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte in the so-called Tacub Massacre.

*September 1971.* Elements of the 15th IB massacred 1,776 Moro civilians praying at the Tacbil Mosque in Malisbong, Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat. Moro girls were taken aboard a Philippine Navy ship where they were gang raped.

*October 1977.* Up to 700 Moro civilians were slaughtered by AFP soldiers in Patikul, Sulu in retaliation for the deaths of Brig. Gen. Teodulfo Bautista and 34 of his men.

*February 1981.* Up to 2,000 residents of Pata Island in Jolo, Sulu were massacred by the reactionary military after 124 soldiers under the 31st IB were killed in the island.

Throughout the 1970s until the fall of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, up to 500,000 Moros were either killed or forced to evacuate from their homes.

**US-Aquino regime 1 to US-Aquino regime 2.** Armed at-

tacks against the Moro forces waned after the MNLF entered into a ceasefire agreement with the Corason Aquino regime in 1987. In a series of deceptive maneuvers, the MNLF's surrender was effected in 1994 by the succeeding regime of Fidel Ramos, which was also able to negotiate a ceasefire with the MILF in 1996.

When the US-Estrada regime took power, however, openly armed attacks by state forces resumed against the Moro people with the revocation of the ceasefire and the declaration of all-out war against the MILF in March 2000. The Estrada government deployed 70% of the AFP's forces against the MILF to crush its known strongholds in Mindanao.

Months of relentless attacks led to the forcible displacement anew of 500,000 Moro people who were cramped in evacuation centers in Cotabato, Maguindanao, Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur. Thousands of civilians were killed, including those victimized by the AFP's bombing and artillery attacks which it conducted without letup. Not

a few fell victim to other human rights violations like ex-

trajudicial killing, illegal arrest, harassment, torture, food blockades, arson and other transgressions common to military operations.

To keep the Moro people divided, the Estrada regime used MNLF integrees in the AFP to attack the MILF. It also formed vigilante groups to stoke religious and other differences.

Under the US-Arroyo regime, which took over after the Estrada government, AFP attacks against Moro communities intensified in 2008, after MILF armed resistance resumed due to a Supreme Court decision declaring the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MoA-AD) illegal. The MILF and the Arroyo government had signed the MoA-Ad as part of the peace process they had begun anew. It was in this period that the number of displaced persons in Moro areas reached unprecedented heights. In 2008, the Philippines was second among countries with the most number of evacuees worldwide (600,000), according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, a non-government organization under the Norwegian Refugee Council.

By May 2009, the number of persons forced to evacuate had ballooned to 750,000 in various Mindanao provinces due to the AFP's pursuit operations



against the MILF. At least 50 civilians were killed in these operations, including four children in Datu Piang, Maguindanao who were slain on September 8, 2008 in an air strike by the Philippine Air Force. The children were then aboard a dugout canoe with their parents and were on their way to an evacuation center when they were strafed by the AFP combat plane.

In the first half of May 2009, close to 30,000 people evacuated from Datu Piang when the AFP conducted non-stop air bombardment and unleashed mortar fire on alleged MILF camps. Worse, the military blocked humanitarian organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross from delivering food to the evacuees.

Meanwhile, civilians were also indiscriminately killed amid AFP pursuit operations against Abu Sayyaf bandits under the Arroyo government. On February 4, 2008, seven people, including two children, two teenagers and a soldier on furlough were killed by attacking elements of the Philippine Marines in Ipil, Maimbung, Sulu. The victims were simple seaweed

farmers, with some of them shot while they were already aboard boats to escape the firing. The children were shot in the head. In spite of this, the AFP absolved the Marines of any wrongdoing, contrary to the results of investigations conducted by other groups, including the Commission on Human Rights.

Under the regime of Benigno Aquino III, the Government of the Philippines (GPH) resumed talks with the MILF and signed the Framework Agreement in October 2012, with intensive negotiations beginning in July 2013. This angered the MNLF under Nur Misuari because a new accord would supersede its 1994 agreement with the GPH.

In September 2013, some 250 MNLF forces arrived in Zamboanga City to rally against the peace agreement being forged by the MILF and the Aquino government. The Zamboanga Siege occurred when 5,000 AFP and PNP forces swooped down on the MNLF, sparking a 20-day battle. The AFP used high-powered firearms, helicopters and armored personnel carriers, and rained bombs and bullets on Zamboanga City's coastal villages. The AFP attacks caused the displacement of 120,000 people and the destruction of some 10,000 houses. Twelve civilians were also killed and 75 Moros wounded.

The civilians' suffering did not end with the Zamboanga Siege. By December 2014, there were 35,000 refugees still languishing in cramped and unsanitary evacuation centers due to the Aquino

no government's refusal to allow them to return to their communities. Close to 200 of them have died from various ailments. Prostitution, the illegal drug trade and other crimes have become rampant in the evacuation centers because of the lack of livelihood.

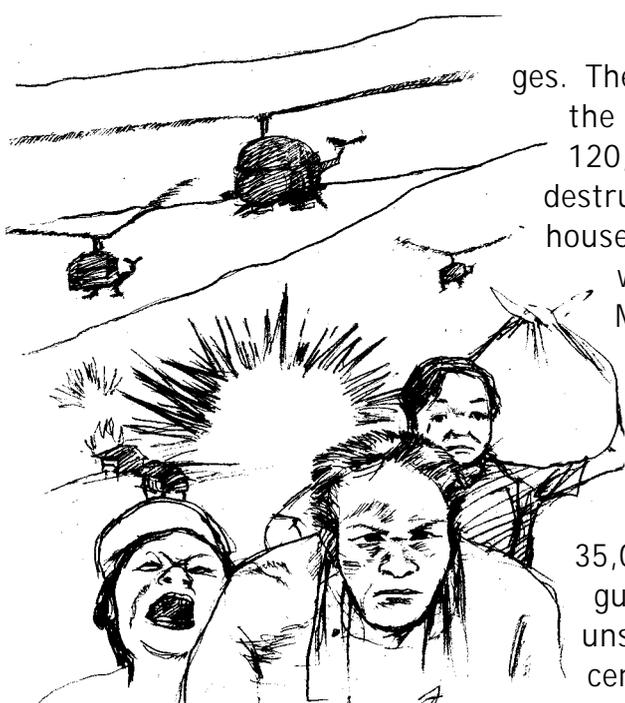
The signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro by the MILF and the Aquino government on January 24, 2014 was taken by the AFP as a signal to concentrate its attacks on the BIFF. The BIFF was formed in 2008 when Moro forces who did not believe that the aspirations of the Bangsamoro could be achieved by the MILF-GPH agreement broke away from the MILF.

From January 27 to February 2, 2014, the AFP launched Operation Darkhorse and relentlessly attacked various areas in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), Western Mindanao and Central Mindanao believed to be BIFF strongholds. Up to 48,200 Moro people were forced to flee because of continuous AFP air strikes and artillery fire on civilian communities.

When the AFP resumed pursuit operations against the BIFF in November 2014, up to 400 people were forced to evacuate in North Cotabato.

By the end of 2014, there were 44,000 evacuees in the ARMM; 38,200 in Western Mindanao; and 9,300 in Central Mindanao due to AFP military operations against the BIFF.

Currently, the AFP is using the MILF as its proxy in pursuing the BIFF. Since February 13, up to 15,000 persons have evacuated from six barangays in Pikit, North Cotabato and two barangays in Pagalungan, Maguindanao due to clashes



# Civilian shot, wounded by soldiers

**A** civilian suffered a gunshot wound to the arm after soldiers strafed a group of foreign tourists who were birdwatching at a mountainous area in Barangay Dalwangan, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, at around 8 a.m. of February 13.

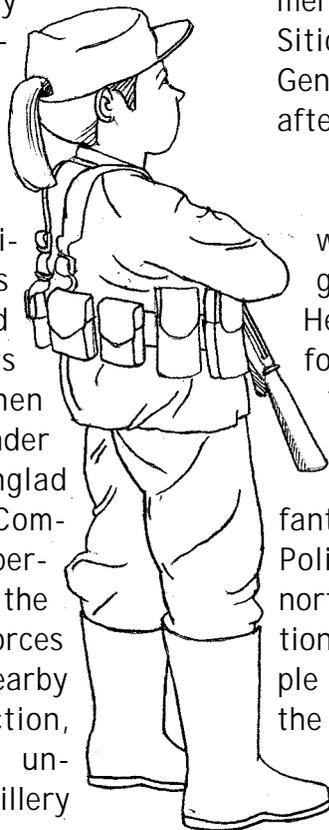
The civilian, who was identified as Carlito Gayamara was guiding seven foreigners in a forested area of Mt. Kitanglad. Despite their cries that they were civilians, the military continued strafing them for more than ten minutes.

The soldiers did not even help bring Gayamara to hospital, and left him to shoulder his medical expenses. Worse, to evade responsibility, they claimed that Gayamara was hit in the crossfire between the AFP and the New People's Army (NPA). In fact, no unit of the NPA was in that area at the time.

The soldiers indiscriminately rained bullets on the tourists

because they were demoralized due to a recent harassment operation by the NPA.

Two days prior, two soldiers were killed and five others wounded when Red fighters under the Mt. Kitanglad Subregional Command sniped operating troops of the AFP Special Forces Battalion in a nearby area. In reaction, the military unleashed 12 artillery



shells on an area considered sacred by the Lumad. More than 40 families were forced to flee towards Barangay Kibenton, Impasug-ong.

Meanwhile, an M14 rifle and rounds of ammunition were seized from a soldier of the 59th IB who was meted punishment in a sparrow operation in Sitio Tamala, San Marcelino, General Nakar, Quezon in the afternoon of February 8.

The soldier who was identified as Ben Floro was assigned to the Intelligence Section of the 59th IB. He was part of the combined forces of the 59th, 1st and 16th IB who continually conduct military operations in the towns of Infanta, General Nakar and the Polillo Group of Islands in northern Quezon. Their operations wreak havoc on the people in these areas, especially the Dumagat and Remontado natives and the peasants and fisherfolk. **AB**

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## Soldier killed in NPA harassment operation in Samar

**A** soldier was killed and several others wounded in harassment operations conducted by the New People's Army (NPA) in response to massive AFP military operations in Samar province this February.

According to initial reports, the NPA Jorge Bolito Command (JBC) harassed operating enemy troops in Sitio Burabod, Barangay Mabini in Basey town, killing a sergeant from the Division Reconnaissance Company (DRC) and wounding another enemy soldier. Earlier, on February 12, Red fighters from the JBC harassed soldiers on operation in Sitio Bagti, Barangay Mabini, wounding a still undetermined number of enemy soldiers. The comrades suffered zero casualties during these fire-fights.

The tactical offensives are the NPA's response to complaints by the people against the US-Aquino regime's militarization at a time when

they are still recovering from calamity. Up to six columns of the 87th IB and 82nd DRC are currently conducting operations in Basey town, affecting the barangays of Mabini, Manlilina, Rizal and other interior villages. The soldiers have been camping out inside the village, which is prohibited by international humanitarian law and the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law or CARHRIHL. The military has also been restricting the people's movements, thereby affecting their farming activities.

Hundreds of residents organizedly evacuated and headed to the Basey municipal hall to make their anger known to the local government. They likewise called for the release of Elpidio Romanca and Artemio Estueta, both farmers who have been illegally arrested despite the absence of cases filed against them. (See related article on p. 13) **AB**

# Oil prices soar despite low prices in the international market

In solidarity with the Filipino people, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) condemned the huge back to back hikes in the prices of petroleum products this February. This was done despite the global oversupply of crude oil, the continuing surplus production and the low prices of crude oil prevailing on the whole in the international market.

On February 10 and 17, prices of petroleum products soared twice. Gasoline prices shot up by ₱3.65 per liter, diesel by ₱3.45 and kerosene by ₱2.15. Oil companies invoked the rising prices of crude oil in the international market despite the fact that their oil stocks had been purchased early on at cheaper prices.

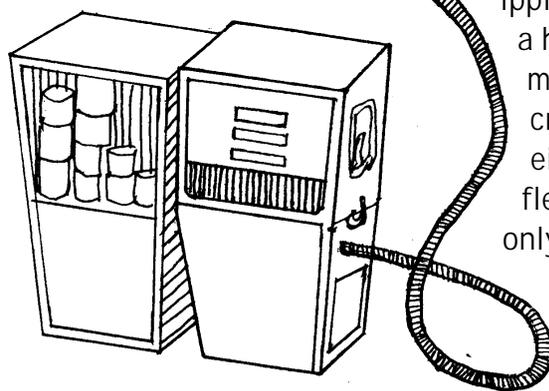
Crude oil prices in the international market have been on a generally downward spiral for about eight months now. The current price of crude oil which stands at \$52-55 per barrel is only 50% of its price of \$108 per barrel in June 2014. Prices fell to \$45.50 per barrel beginning last January.

Even before prices were jacked up recently, local market prices of petroleum products should already have been reduced by ₱2.00 more.

According to the International Energy Agency and other oil industry experts, crude oil prices will likely continue their downward trend towards less than \$60 per barrel. No decisive measures have been taken to reduce crude oil production, supply continues to outstrip demand, and the dollar remains stable.

Despite pressure from the US and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Russia remains un-

fazed and has not reduced production. Crude oil prices may even be further reduced due to their volatility. There is an existing oversupply similar to the situation prevailing in 1998 when crude oil prices plum-



meted to \$11 per barrel. Should crude oil prices rise, they will likely do so only slightly in late 2015.

Call for bigger rollbacks in the prices of petroleum products. The overall reductions in the prices of petroleum products in the local market these past months have been sorely inadequate. Thus, implementing a new series of oil price hikes would be baseless.

The small increase in crude oil prices and projections of a possible price recovery were immediately invoked by local subsidiaries of foreign oil companies (especially the Big 3—Pilipinas Shell, Chevron Philippines and Petron) to effect a huge price hike. If the estimated 50% reduction in crude oil prices in the past eight months is to be reflected, diesel should cost only ₱22-23 per liter and gasoline, ₱27-28 per liter.

The amount that the oil monopolies fail to shave off from the pri-

## US oil refinery workers strike

Up to 4,000 workers in more than nine oil refineries in California, Kentucky, Texas, Washington and Ohio in the US struck on February 1. The refineries are owned by British Petroleum-Shell in the US and comprise 15% of the US' entire capacity.

The strike led by United Steelworkers was sparked by the companies' arrogant abandonment of the workers in the middle of negotiations. The workers were demanding a wage hike and the implementation of policies to protect workers' health.

The US strike was among the factors cited in the rise in oil prices.

AB

ces of petroleum products is added to their superprofits.

The whole time Aquino has been in power, he has advocated oil price hikes and retained the Oil Deregulation Law, despite strong calls for its abrogation. He has feigned helplessness in the face of the Big 3's dictates regarding local oil prices. He has also retained the 12% value-added tax on petroleum products.

**Power rate hike.** Despite the continually dwindling oil prices these past eight months, the Manila Electric Company imposed a power rate hike of up to 84 centavos per kilowatt-hour (kWh) this February. This is equivalent to an additional ₱167.85 in the electric bills of average consumers using 200 kWh monthly.

In this regard, various progressive group launched a series of protests at the Meralco offices in Southern Tagalog and Metro Manila. The protests were held in Sta. Rosa, Laguna and Taytay, Rizal on January 27; at the Meralco office in Pasig City on January 28; and in Calamba, Laguna and Antipolo City on February 3. Other mass actions were held in Calamba and in Cainta, Rizal on February 10, coinciding with the One Billion Rising protest. **AB**

## 4 persons illegally detained

Two farmers and two minority women were illegally arrested by the military and remain in detention.

**Samar.** Elpidio Romanca and Artemio Estueta, both civilian residents of Barangay Mabini, Basey, Samar were arrested by soldiers of the 87th IB in November last year and this January.

Romanca is a former member of the New People's Army (NPA) who was continually harassed by the military despite having returned to civilian life. As a survivor of typhoon Yolanda, he is a beneficiary of the International Committee of the Red Cross. In spite of his civilian status, he was pursued, wounded and arrested by soldiers on November 17 in Sitio Bagti, Barangay Mabini.

Estueta, 68, was illegally arrested by soldiers in Sitio Burabod, Mabini on January 31. Despite his advanced age, three truckloads of soldiers came to arrest him. He was one of the community leaders who spoke out against the Aquino regime's criminal negligence when typhoon Yolanda struck. He is also an advocate of genuine agrarian reform and a critic of the Aquino government's failure to implement it.

Neither Romanca nor Estueta has been surfaced by the AFP.

**Quezon.** Marites Marquez, 43 and her cousin Rosario Loreto, 37, remain in detention in Lucena City despite an order by the Department of Justice (DOJ) to release them due to the illegality of their arrest.

The cousins, who are both members of the Dumagat tribe and residents of Barangay Umiray, General Nakar, Quezon are accused of being involved in the alleged abduction by the New People's Army of Lino Hernandez, a retired soldier, in Barangay Tinucan, Tanay, Rizal on September 26.

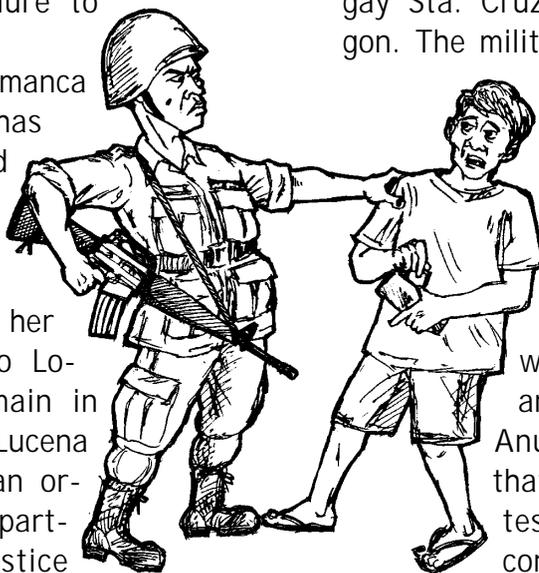
The victims were arbitrarily picked up when they were chanced upon by combined forces of the 16th and 59th IB who were conducting military operations.

On January 7, the DOJ ordered a reinvestigation of the case because their arrest has been proven to be illegal due to the absence of an arrest warrant.

**Sorsogon.** The military has been intimidating Elena Gacos Estañol, a village councilor of Barangay San Jose, Bulusan, Sorsogon who is the sole witness in the abduction of Edwin Anuran, a former NPA member who has yet to be surfaced by his military abductors.

Estañol and Anuran were both abducted on January 30 in Barangay Sta. Cruz, Casiguran, Sorsogon. The military held Estañol for

almost 24 hours before releasing her. As the lone witness to the abduction, she can prove that it was reactionary government troops who abducted them and continue to detain Anuran. Estañol said that she is hesitant to testify in the habeas corpus case that Anuran's family wants to file because the military has been threatening her and her family. **AB**



## **Yolanda survivors stage protests**

SOME 2,000 victims of super-typhoon Yolanda trooped to the Samar provincial capitol in Catbalogan City to demand the implementation of relief and rehabilitation programs by the Aquino government which they have long been awaiting. Led by People Surge, an alliance of typhoon survivors, the protesters said that during their long wait, the number of deaths has even grown due to typhoons Ruby and Senyang.

In Catarman, Northern Samar, some 2,000 members of People Surge had earlier launched a protest rally in late January. The vice governor was forced to meet with them after the provincial governor hid himself from the victims. The Yolanda survivors said that despite the promises made to them by the government, they have yet to receive such assistance.

Meanwhile, in Iloilo City, members of Paghugpong sang mga Mangunguma sa Panay kag Guimaras (PAMANGGAS) camped out in front of the office of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)-6 on February 16-20 to demand financial assistance from the government for Yolanda victims without conditions.

They are up against DSWD Memorandum Circular No. 24 Series of 2014 which delimits the recipients of assistance. The memorandum excludes families earning ₱15,000 or higher per month and those living within the 40-meter danger zone. The latter are also being evicted. In January, a series of protests against the memorandum circular were launched by Rise Up-Aklan in Kalibo and Hugpong Capiznon in Roxas City.

## **PCMC wins right to land**

OFFICERS, employees, patients and supporters of the Philippine Children's Medical Center (PCMC) succeeded in asserting their right to obtain the title to the land on which the hospital stands, which they have long been asking from the government. In a Memorandum of Agreement signed on February 5 by representatives of the PCMC, National Housing Authority and the Department of Health, the 3.7-hectare lot was awarded to what is considered the biggest public children's hospital in the country.

Last year, the hospital was served an eviction notice to pave the way for the Quezon City Central Business District project which would have displaced more than 300 employees and 55,000 patients. Since then, the hospital has launched mass actions to fight the eviction. It has also demanded that the Aquino government provide bigger budgets for public hospitals and put a stop to all forms of privatization of social services.

The PCMC was built in 1980 to serve as the central hospital for indigent children. Most of its patients suffer from serious illnesses like leukemia, kidney diseases and cancer. In 1986, it was subjected to corporatization and suffered gradual budget cuts. In October 2014, it received only ₱26 million in subsidies, which is lower than the ₱43 million it received in February of the same year.

## **GMA 7's violation of employees' rights to be probed**

GABRIELA Women's Party Rep. Emmi de Jesus filed a resolution at the Lower House of Congress to investigate violations of labor law by the GMA 7 management. On February 10, representatives of the Talent Association of GMA (TAG) went to Congress to seek help after many of them were fired from their jobs. Some of them had been working for the company for more than ten years but have not been conferred regular status.

In December, 52 TAG members no longer had their work contracts renewed and did not receive their salaries. They also complained about the lack of benefits from the Social Security System (SSS), Pag-Ibig and Philhealth. They also do not enjoy sick leaves, maternity leaves and holiday pay and are not provided medical services by the company.

According to De Jesus, this is a form of labor contractualization and repression against the GMA 7 workers. She said that media workers must enjoy proper and decent livelihoods since they play a big role in providing news and information to the people. De Jesus also assailed the Aquino regime for its failure to protect workers and for the continuously worsening contractualization in the country.