Engaging the UN Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review

By Marie Hilao-Enriquez

When the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was established in June 2006 (by way of UN General Assembly resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006), Karapatan was intensifying its campaign to end the spate of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and other human rights violations engendered by the Philippine government’s counter-insurgency program called Oplan Bantay Laya which was supposed to “finally end the insurgency” in the country.

Desperate to stop these violations and conscious that international pressure must be brought to bear on the Arroyo government to stop its murderous campaign, Karapatan began its engagement with the new UN human rights mechanism – the Human Rights Council, of which the Philippine government became an early member. Thus, a delegation from Karapatan attended the Council’s 2nd regular session in September 2006 in Geneva.

Alston visit

Since 2005, international human rights organizations, solidarity groups, church institutions, and even foreign governments had repeatedly expressed condemnation and concern on the alarming incidents of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearance and other human rights violations in the Philippines. Hence, the UN remained as one venue where such gross violations could be brought to the attention of the international community.

Karapatan’s objectives at the HRC 2nd session were to lobby with various foreign missions and inform them of the situation in the country, meet with the different UN mechanisms and invite them to visit the Philippines, as well as link with other human rights NGOs in Geneva to get their support in exposing the country’s human rights violations. The Karapatan delegation had separate discussions with the French and Finnish missions. A request was made to the Finnish government to urge the Arroyo government to allow the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions - Prof. Philip Alston - to visit the country to investigate.

Five months later on 10-21 February 2007, Prof. Alston and two assistants arrived in the Philippines. At the Council’s 4th regular session a month later; on March 2007, he presented his damning preliminary report and strongly denounced the killing of one of the witnesses, Siche Gandinao, who testified at a hearing he conducted in Davao City. At this Session, this author delivered an oral manifestation in support of Prof. Alston’s initial findings and
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criticized the Philippine government’s harsh and hostile attacks against the UN independent expert.

**Gearing for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**

Karapatan’s UN engagement was timely because under the newly established Council, a new mechanism was established – the Universal Periodic Review or UPR – to assess the human rights situation in each country every four years. Under the UPR, the Council is required to assess the fulfillment of the human rights obligations and commitments by all UN member states. The Philippines was one of the first 16 states reviewed in the first UPR session.

In preparation for the UPR, Philippine NGOs were required to make a five-page submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) by 20 November 2007. The OHCHR also encouraged NGOs to participate in the State consultations in making the national report wherein a “broad consultation” process was to be achieved to take in all the views of the stakeholders in the national report.

Despite the limited time, the Philippine NGOs met the deadline for their submissions. Karapatan and its member organizations focused on the violations of civil and political rights. Ibon Foundation and the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) focused on the violations of economic, social and cultural rights. The National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) made a submission on violations against church people. The Indigenous Peoples’ Rights-Monitor dealt on the violations of indigenous peoples’ rights. Church organizations in the US and in Asia were also very active in enjoining Philippine NGOs to engage the UN and participate in the UPR process. The Asia Working Group provided very strong support to a delegation of Philippine church and other NGOs that attended the UPR sessions in Geneva on April and June 2008. These were the same organizations that lobbied US Senator Barbara Boxer to convene the Senate Sub-Committee on Foreign Relations on East Asia and the Pacific on 14 March 2007 to look into the Philippine human rights situation. They also sent a submission to the OHCHR that focused on the pledges and commitments made by the Philippine government when it ran for election as a member to the HRC.

An NGO based in the US – GMA Watch – as well as other local and international NGOs also sent their submissions to the OHCHR for a total of 31 submissions for the Philippine UPR.

In preparation for the UPR, a Philippine NGO delegation attended the 7th HRC session in March 2008 composed of Atty. Edre Olalia, President of the International Association of People’s Lawyers (IAPL); the author as Secretary General of Karapatan; Ms. May Wan Dominado, daughter of missing activist Luisa Dominado; and Rev. Juliet Solis of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). Mr. Donnie Mapanao, head of Migrante-Switzerland and Ms. Trisha Garvida, a Karapatan volunteer based in Switzerland, joined them.

The delegation was able to meet with the German and Malaysian missions, which, with the Mali mission, formed the troika of facilitators for the Philippine UPR session. The Delegation also met with the Slovenian, Canadian and Norwegian missions to brief them on the Philippines’ situation and ask them to raise critical questions during the Philippine UPR the following month.

Members of the delegation also spoke during the 19 March 2008 “side event” sponsored by Amnesty International, Diakonie...
and the German Action Network Human Rights-Philippines.

The March session offered an opportunity for a meeting with the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance (WGEID). Members of the delegation accompanied Ms. May Wan Dominado to discuss the rising cases of abductions and enforced disappearance in the Philippines. The rest of the month of March was also utilized to educate and get the support of the Filipino migrants in Geneva as well as the solidarity group in Bern, Switzerland for the series of activities to be held in April for the Philippine UPR.

The Philippine UPR Watch

In time for the scheduled Philippine UPR in April 2008, the Philippine UPR Watch was formed by the following NGOs: BAYAN, NCCP, Karapatan, Bayan Muna, Desaparecidos, Hustisya, IPHR-Monitor, Ibon Foundation and GMA Watch. The group sent a delegation to Geneva to attend the Philippine UPR composed of the following: the author; Rev. Fr. Rex B. Reyes, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) as head of delegation; Rep. Teodoro Casiño, Bayan Muna representative; Atty. Olalia of the IAPL; Ms. Joan Carling, leader of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance; and Mr. Jonathan Sta. Rosa, brother of slain Pastor Isaias Sta. Rosa. Switzerland-based Mr. Mapanao and Ms. Garvida again beefed up the delegation.

The Philippine UPR Watch held its own side event at the World Council of Churches (WCC) headquarters in Geneva on 10 April 2008, a day before the Philippine government was to deliver its own UPR report. The WCC Churches Commission on International Affairs (WCC-CCIA) sponsored the event. Filipino migrants, WCC personnel, interns and visitors as well as representatives of Geneva-based NGOs and UN officers attended the side event that presented the real human rights situation in the country.

Prior to the side event, members of Migrante-Switzerland picketed at the Hotel Intercontinental where the Philippine delegation headed by General Eduardo Ermita, hosted a reception for the diplomatic community. The Filipino protesters held photos of missing persons, victims of extrajudicial killings and other placards denouncing the horrible state of human rights in the country.

The 44-strong Philippine government delegation, headed by General Ermita, as Chairman of the Presidential Human Rights Committee (PHRC), was the biggest delegation in the UNHRC. On 11 April, Ermita presented the Philippine National Report to the UNHRC. To the consternation of the Philippine UPR Watch delegation and Switzerland-based Filipinos attending the event, the report contained half-truths and outright lies. Ermita described the Philippines as a “vibrant democracy” and the government as a “human rights defender.” Forty-one countries intervened in the interactive dialogue that followed, with 17 missions asking substantive questions on extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, migrants rights, women and children’s rights and how these were being addressed by government.

WCC’s Elena Ivory (standing) speaks at the side event of the Philippine UPR Watch.
Members of the Philippine UPR Watch, together with migrant workers affiliated with Migrante-Switzerland as well as members of the Theresa Ladeli Foundation and the Bern solidarity group were aghast at the barefaced lies churned out by the Philippine government delegation. They wore buttons with “Stop the killings in the Philippines!” and “Stop enforced disappearances!” written on them. Later the group, numbering 19, joined 30 more supporters at the UN Plaza where they held a picket denouncing the atrocities committed by Philippine state security forces. The whole event was covered by the Philippine and international media and caused the Philippine government delegation an unsavory experience in Geneva.

June Session

At the UNHRC’s 8th session the following June 2008, the Philippine UPR Watch was represented in Geneva by Atty. Olalia; the author; Fr. Reyes; Mrs. Edith Burgos, mother of missing activist Jonas Burgos; and Mr. Ed Cubelo, president of Toyota-Philippines labor union. An additional Geneva-based volunteer, Dorothy Timario, joined the group. Item no. 6 of the agenda was the consideration of the Working Group’s report on the first UPR session. This time, NGOs were allowed to participate in the interactive dialogue. Another opportunity to speak was at the reporting of Prof. Alston on his visit to the Philippines, which would be tackled on item no. 3 of the agenda of the 8th session of the HRC.

With Prof. Alston presenting his full report on his visit to the Philippines, the Philippine UPR Watch took the opportunity to drumbeat the human rights issue in the country by holding another side event on 3 June entitled: “Confronting Extrajudicial Killings: Promoting Life and Human Rights (The situation in the Philippines).” It was held at room XXV of the Palais des Nations and was jointly sponsored by the WCC-CCIA, the Asian Legal Resource Center (ALRC) and the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD). Prof. Alston spoke at the said event, along with Mr. Michael Anthony of the ALRC, Ms. Judith Lichtenberg of the Lawyers Foundation, Mrs. Edith Burgos of Desaparecidos and Fr. Rex Reyes of the NCCP. NGOs and five country missions attended the event.

The forum provided an opportunity for Prof. Alston to expound on his response to the tirade of the Philippine mission on his report earlier that day. Ambassador Erlinda Basilio, head of the Philippine mission in Geneva, lambasted Prof. Alston’s report calling it “biased, highly selective and inaccurate.” She also accused the good professor as having listened to his “favorite group” which was the CPP/NPA/NDFP. Prof. Alston ignored these remarks and explained to the body that he was affirming his findings and encouraged NGOs and the civil society to continue pushing for the better observance of human rights in the country.

At the 3 June HRC plenary, this author was able to make an oral intervention during the interactive dialogue after Prof. Alston’s report. The UPR Working Group Report on the Philippines was taken up on 10 June 2008 by the HRC plenary. The Working Group Report was presented to the body. Ambassador Erlinda Basilio read the pledges and commitment that the Philippine Government promised to the assembly. Only 7 countries gave their reactions and 7 NGOs took the floor to make their interventions. Dr. Edita Burgos read the Philippine UPR Watch position at the interactive dialogue during this deliberation. The Philippine Government’s response to the recommendations given by other state parties was very disappointing and bodes ill for the human rights situation in the country. It only outlined four voluntary commitments but specifically stated that it: 1) will not allow the visit of Special rapporteurs in the country; 2) will not adopt the recommendations of the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; 3) will not strengthen the witness protection program and will just study further the Convention Against Disappearances.

The dismal response of the Government to the recommendations by other states was alarming. This meant that the policy of state-sanctioned killings would go on and more violations may be expected.

Karapatan’s engagement with the HRC and the UPR, while necessary in the face of the US-Arroyo regime’s systematic cover-up of its gross and systematic violations of human rights, will not solve the problem. It is still the peoples’ struggle to assert and defend their rights and that these rights can be enjoyed, starting with the removal of the corrupt, fascist and puppet Arroyo regime.
Victims of human rights abuses summoned the courage to testify before the public hearings and executive sessions held by the committee on human rights of the House of Representatives from April to May 2008.

The committee chaired by Rep. Lorenzo ‘Erin’ Tañada III (Quezon Province, 4th District), held on-site hearings in Lucena, Tacloban and Bohol on April 16, May 20 and 29 respectively. According to Tañada, the committee aims to conduct an in-depth investigation on human rights violations, especially on extrajudicial killings. He says he hopes that the hearings would result to a comprehensive report—a similar accomplishment by UN Special Rapporteur Philip Alston.

Tañada said they hope to craft laws against various forms of human rights abuses that would include command responsibility to check human rights violations in the country.

Karapatan lauded the House committee for its victim-centered approach to the investigation. They however expressed concern for the safety of the victims as the Congress said it could not guarantee the security of the victims who will testify.

In its campaign to secure justice for victims, human rights workers of Karapatan from its regional chapters assisted the victims. Lovella de Castro, Head of the Documentation Unit of Karapatan National Office, have attended all the on-site hearings to assist colleagues and survivor-witnesses.

In Lucena, many more victims have come out to expose the so-called “invitations” by the military to go to the latter’s camps and “clear their names.” They are farmers who could not resist what turns out to be an arrest, for fear of their lives. Some of them told legislators that they were harassed, tortured and detained for a period of time.

Lawyer Katrina Castillo, regional coordinator of Katungod - Sinirangang Bisayas told the committee that there have been 108 cases of extra-judicial killings of the 1,475 cases of human rights violations committed by the military in Eastern Visayas since Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo took office in 2001.

Castillo said that the last reported extra-judicial killing that occurred in the region involved Pastor Felicisimo Catambis of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines who was gunned down on 23 January 2008.

Linda, Catambis’ wife asked members of the committee to help her find justice for her husband’s death.

The military denied that they had involvement in the killings. Captain Allan Tiu, chief of staff of the 8th Infantry Division’s judge advocate office said that they sanctioned 150 soldiers for abuses, to show that they “do not condone any (illegal) acts within the ranks. They have not, however, shown evidence to prove their claim.

LEFT: Legislators Satur Ocampo, Erin Tañada and Edno Joson listen to the testimony of Armand Albarillo whose parents were killed by soldiers. (Photo courtesy of Bayan Muna)
Mothers continue to search for their loved ones

Lolita Robiños and Fe Supan, mothers of enforced disappearance victims Romulos Robiños, 24, and Ryan Supan, 20, have pledged to continue searching for their loved ones after failing to find them during a recent inspection of military camps as ordered by the Court of Appeals (CA).

The CA granted on 5 June this year a Writ of Amparo in favor Robiños and Supan who were separately abducted on the night of 17 November 2006 in Angeles City and Mexico, Pampanga, respectively. Both mothers witnessed soldiers of the Philippine Army’s 69th Infantry Battalion abduct their sons. This was the third inspection order issued by Justice Martin Villarama of the Former Special 5th Division of the CA. The last two orders were issued 29 November 2007 and 18 March 2008.

Acting on the Court order, a team composed of the petitioners, officials of the Commission on Human Rights – Central Luzon, members of Karapatan and Desaparecidos inspected the places covered by the Inspection Order as agreed by the petitioners and respondents last June 24-26. Specified by the court order to be inspected were the Commanding General Quarters, the grotto and its surrounding structures of the 7th Infantry Division, Philippine Army, Fort Magsaysay, Palayan City, Nueva Ecija; The detention facilities of Camp Tecson, Brgy. Tartaro, San Miguel Bulacan; and the Alpha Company Detachment of the 24th Infantry Battalion, Philippine Army, Brgy. Duale, Limay, Bataan.

On 24 June 2008, the team inspected Camp Tecson, home of the Army’s First Scout Ranger Regiment, Special Forces Command (SOCOM). At first, the team encountered hostile reactions from the Chief of Staff, Lt. Col. Eduardo Davalan, saying that they were not informed about the inspection order. The team through CHR-CL investigator, Atty. Danilo Valdez, asserted that the order must be implemented and if there were problems on the part of the respondents they have to resolve these within themselves. Lt.Col. Davalan, after talking to his higher officer, accompanied the team in searching the structures perceived to be used for detention of persons arrested by the military. The team was allowed to enter almost all the structures surrounding the camp except a single detached building supposedly under repair.

On 25 June, the team went to Fort Magsaysay and was received by the Commanding General, Major General Ralph Villanueva, who reprimanded first Lt. Col. Hermilio Barrios of the JAGO because according to him he was not informed about the inspection order. Villanueva eventually instructed Barrios and camp commander Lt.Col. Rogelio Boac, as well as his chief of staff Col. Leonido Bongcawil, to bring the team to the Camp chapel and other places that were not the ones specified in the court order.

On 26 June, the team went to Brgy. Duale, Limay, Bataan, the location of the military detachment belong to the Alpha Company, 24IBPA. Lt. Col Philip Lapinid, the Commanding Officer of the 24IBPA received the group. The team was allowed to check the entire premises. Later on, Col. Jose Mabanta, the commander of the 703rd Infantry Brigade, 7th Infantry Division, Philippine Army, arrived and promised to do everything to help the petitioners.

Despite the court’s actions, the families of the victims remain unsatisfied. During the first inspection, the petitioners filed a motion to cite the CHR-CL for contempt for not properly coordinating with the petitioners in effecting the court order. During the second inspection, the petitioners filed another motion to cite the officers of the AFP for contempt for not following the court order.
The Committees on Justice and Civil, Political and Human Rights of the Philippine House of Representatives jointly convened on 13 February 2008 a technical working group (TWG) to thresh out proposals on the Anti-Torture bills filed in Congress.

Members of the TWG composed of legislative staff, representatives of human rights organizations, the military, police and government agencies have met five times prior to, to discuss and consolidate the proposed bills on anti-torture.

On 18 Jun 1986, the Philippine government ratified the International Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Since then, no law has been passed to criminalize torture.

Four proposed bills against torture are pending in the lower chamber of parliament. The proposed bills of representatives Salvador Escudero III (1st District of Sorsogon), Satur Ocampo (Bayan Muna Partylist), Edcel Lagman (1st District of Albay) and Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel (Akbayan Partylist) were scrutinized and discussed by the working group.

Karapatan, with a host of human rights organizations participating in the TWG, expressed support for the immediate enactment of a law that would prohibit torture and punish its perpetrators. A common position reiterated by human rights groups is for the law to be clear-cut in ensuring that state security forces will be made to account for their transgressions on human rights, in this case, torture. They supported the bills that exclude non-state actors. The version of three proponents, namely Ocampo, Lagman and Escudero III did not include non-state agents in the law since many laws already cover atrocities that would be committed by these actors.

On the other hand, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Department of National Defense, National Bureau of Investigation, Philippine National Police, the police-led Task Force Usig, Public Attorneys Office, National Security Council, and Commission on Human Rights supported the version of Hontiveros-Baraquel to include non-state actors to be made accountable for crimes of torture.


Another contentious issue is the inclusion of the “Order of Battle or OB” in Section 5 regarding Freedom from Non-Derogability Rights. Karapatan asserted that a separate paragraph that provides for the inclusion of OB as not a legal justification to commit such acts of torture should be included. Moreover, Karapatan cited one of the recommendations of UN Special Rapporteur Prof. Alston on his full report on the extrajudicial killings in the country that “an order of battle should be made public.” Karapatan explained that the wisdom of including the OB in the consolidated bill emanates from the reports and documentation of torture cases that the organization has encountered.

The proposed bills also talk about criminal and administrative responsibility of state security forces and their agents. Karapatan supported the proposal to hold the superior or immediate officer of the state security agents criminally liable under the principle of command responsibility.

Karapatan said that the ultimate reason for asserting criminal liability of state agents is for deterrence and not merely to penalize perpetrators.

The result of the TWG that ended on 25 June will be decided by the Committee on Justice when Congress resumes from its sine die adjournment. (With a report from Ruth Cervantes)
``Have you ever walked at night with your wife who had just given birth and your ten-day-old baby in tow to get away from the military? Have you ever left home not knowing where to go and what lies ahead of you?''

Neil Dollente spoke from experience at the opening of the monthly gathering held by HUSTISYA!, Desaparecidos, Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace (EMJP) and Selda, the organization of former political prisoners. The gathering was held on World Refugee Day, 21 June 2008. Dollente is a refugee himself.

World Refugee Day was declared by the United Nations in December 2000 when the General Assembly adopted a resolution “recognizing that 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees”. According to the United Nations, “World Refugee Day is also a time to acknowledge the far larger number of persons who live as refugees in their own countries, these are people forced from their homes by conflict, ethnic strife, and egregious human rights abuses. Because they are often persecuted by their own government and have no international agency to turn to, IDPs [internally displaced persons] are generally in more desperate straits than refugees.”

The Philippines has its share of refugees. Since Gloria Macapagal Arroyo assumed power in 2001, 157 cases of forced evacuation has been documented by Karapatan. Some 140,053 persons have been turned to internal refugees, but many more are unaccounted for, including families of victims of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings who have sought refuge in other parts of the country.

The gathering brought together families of victims of human rights violations and refugees whose lives are at risk.

Antonio Flores, Chairperson of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas-Southern Mindanao Region (KMP-SMR) recounted how he escaped from his assassins. Two unidentified men tried to kill him sometime in July 2006 in Davao City. He narrowly escaped the motorcycle-riding assassins and prevented them from shooting him by driving his tricycle in between cars near a shopping mall. The KMP-SMR had since transferred him to another place to safeguard his life. Flores was outraged over the killing of his colleague and KMP-SMR Secretary General Celso Pojas who was gunned down by military death squads on 15 May 2008. He said that “for as long as GMA is President we refugees cannot return home. So what we must do is to carry on the struggle and Oust Gloria."

Karl Labagal, a member of the Friends of Samar and Leyte narrated how he found out that he was included in the list of military targets for neutralization in Eastern Visayas. During the tour of duty of Gen. Jovito Palparan, Jr. in Eastern Visayas in 2005, the Katungod Sinirangang Bisayas has documented 520 cases of human rights violations. Labagal also said that “Intense militarization, threats and harassment on the people have led to forced evacuation of his kababayans, many of them moved to nearby provinces to as far as Metro Manila.”

Ten-year-old Liezl Carandang could not help but cry when she told her story. She said she missed her friends and playmates. Carandang’s family is among those forced...continued on page 13

...continued on page 13

AWAY FROM HOME. (L) Ten-year-old Liezl said she misses her friends. (R) Surigao folk evacuates during military operations in this November 2007 photo

Victims of human rights violations commemorate World Refugee Day
by Walkie Miraña

Vol. 4, No. 2

FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

[Image: Away from home. Ten-year-old Liezl said she misses her friends. Surigao folk evacuates during military operations in this November 2007 photo]
A different kind of Santacruzan was held on 17 May 2008 by families of victims of human rights violations to highlight their crusade for justice. The traditional Santacruzan is held in commemoration of Queen Helena's crusade in finding Christ's cross.

"Just like Reyna Elena, we are on a crusade for peace and justice, but unlike her, we do not have our sons or daughters by our side," said Evangeline Hernandez, convener of Hustisya. "Our daughters and sons have either been killed or disappeared under the watch of a cruel government and justice eludes us until now," Hernandez continued.

Hernandez' daughter, Benjaline, was killed by state security forces while doing human rights work in 2002. Six years have passed but their case in court has not prospered and those responsible for Benjaline's death are being coddled by their superiors in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

There was no Reyna Elena or Reyna Emperatriz in Hustisya's version of Santacruzan, yet there were Queens who bear the symbols of Light, Struggle, Freedom, Justice and Democracy.

"What we need is a 'queen' who will stand for all these virtues that we want to reign in this country," Hernandez said at the Peace Bell shrine in Quezon Memorial Circle where the procession ended.

The 'queens' were not dressed in fabulous gowns and the children were not adorned with wings and halos. The 'sagalas' only wore simple white clothing while holding symbols of their calls.

Some of the children carried toys, books, rice and soil, symbols of their rights as children to play, study, be taken care of and nourished. Eight other kids formed an acrostic of the word HUSTISYA (justice). They are the children who were displaced by massive military operations in the provinces of Southern Tagalog.

Mrs. Linda Cadapan, mother of missing activist Sherlyn Cadapan, carried a lit torch, symbol of their ardent desire to light the way so the disappeared will find their way home.

"My daughter's name is among the 193 victims of enforced disappearance that Mrs. Arroyo is duty-bound to return to our embrace. It is simply unacceptable that the Commander-in-Chief is doing nothing to surface those who were abducted by her subordinates," said Mrs. Cadapan.

The Peace Bell was struck thrice to commence the ecumenical service that was led by Rev. Dionito Cabillas, Karapatan Alliance officer and priest of Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI). The procession and service were attended by families of victims of human rights violations, church people, and human rights and peace advocates.

This is the third gathering of families of victims of human rights violations this year. "We will continue to advance human rights and work towards achieving justice," concludes Mrs. Hernandez.
Human rights lawyer extolled as ‘people’s lawyer’ for defending the poor and oppressed

by Ruth Cervantes

He was a known defender of the oppressed – martial law victims, distressed Filipino migrant workers, farmers, urban poor, political dissidents. And for that, human rights lawyer and UN ad litem judge Romeo T. Capulong has been extolled as the “people’s lawyer” (Abogado ng Sambayanan).

In a tribute given by colleagues and friends on April 4, 2008 at the Quezon City Sports Club, RTC, as he is fondly called received accolades from people coming from a cross section of Philippine politics.

Dr. Carol Araullo, BAYAN Chairperson said “There are many adjectives one can use to describe Judge Capulong, to which there would hardly be a dissenting opinion. He would universally be hailed as abogadong de campanilla, a lawyer’s lawyer. He is highly respected by both adversaries and allies in the legal profession as well as in the political arena. He is esteemed and loved by his clients, both paying and, especially, pro bono.”

Former Ombudsman Aniano Desierto gave his testimony for his classmate, “He’s my idol. I can’t do what he has done,” Desierto said.

National Artist for Literature Bienvenido Lumbera, Tarlac Representative Jose Yap, Nueva Ecija Vice Governor Edward Thomas Jason, former Transportation under-secretary Josie Lichauco and former IBP chairman Jose Grapilon were among the many luminaries who flocked to the Quezon City Sports Club to honour the man.

Bayan Muna Representatives Satur Ocampo and Teodoro Casiño, Gabriela Women’s Partylist Representative Liza Maza, former congressman Rafael Mariano and Joel Virador delivered a poem in praise of RTC.

Jose Ma. Sison and Luis Jalandoni, revolutionary leaders who are both in exile in The Netherlands delivered their tributes via recorded messages.

Sison said in Filipino that the tribute is another opportunity to extol Capulong’s brilliant record in defending human rights, “Pagkakataon ito upang muli nating ipagbunyi ang kanyang maningning na rekord bilang tagapagtanggol ng bayan at upang parangalan at pasalamatan siya sa kanyang pantas, masugid at matagumpay na pagtatanggol ng mga karapatan tao, laluna ng mga pambansa at demokratikong karapatan ng sambayananang Filipino.”

Solidarity messages from international organizations poured in, one message from the Philippine Australia Solidarity Association (PASA) read: “We admire your sacrifices and your contribution to the Filipino struggle for justice, peace and their rights for a safe and decent life. Your tireless effort in defending other Filipino champions of the masses such as Prof. Jose Maria Sison, Rep. Satur Ocampo and Rep. Crispin Beltran in their fight against the many fabricated criminal charges by the Arroyo government help increase our resolve to continue to fight for those who are being persecuted.”

The International Association of People’s Lawyers (IAPL) saluted RTC and stressed that he is deserving of being given the first-ever Eminent Person award by the IAPL.

“He has used his excellence as a jurist in the fight for justice on the side of the oppressed,” the IAPL said, adding that “he is a role model for people’s lawyers everywhere. And because he is deeply touched and moved by the suffering and struggling people, he is a fierce fighter for justice, one who is using all his skills and expertise as a lawyer to uphold and defend the people’s rights.”

Children from Kanlungan, a home for refugees greeted RTC with songs that touched everyone’s heart. A video on the life and work of RTC “Abogado ng Sambayanan,” produced by the multi-awarded Kodao productions was shown during the two-hour program.
Atty. Robert Swift grilled by Selda
By Thaddeus Ifurung

In a forum attended by class suit members and victims of Marcos’ martial law held last 6 May 2008, at the Bantayog ng mga Bayani in Quezon City, Selda members questioned Atty. Robert Swift the American lead counsel for the Marcos’ victims on matters concerning his several claims.

Foremost of these is his announcement of a reduced number of claimants from the original 9,539 down to 7,500. When asked by members of Selda to give clarity with regard to the issue, Atty. Swift was evasive and failed to produce the new lists of litigants or any document that would explain the reduction of the number of claimants. The exchanges between Swift and members of Selda was discontinued and cut short.

Another point Selda raised was the premature declaration of possible victory over the litigation of Marcos assets in the Merrill Lynch account which was still being decided on at the US Supreme Court; giving false hopes to the victims without yet waiting the final judgement of the court. According to Atty. Swift, a favorable result will facilitate the first distribution of US$2,000 compensation package to the victims. Before the May 6 forum there were confusions within the ranks of class suit members regarding the supposed distribution.

High hopes were dampened when on June 12, the US Supreme Court dismissed the case and ruled that the California appellate court erred in allowing 9,539 victims of human rights violations during the Marcos’ years to file a lawsuit to recover the Merrill Lynch account set up by the dictator in 1972.

Meanwhile, the unavoidable confrontation between Atty. Swift and litigants who are members of Selda was brought about by a long period of non-communication between the two since the middle of the 1990s. Since then the counsel failed to establish consultations with Selda members every time he visited the country.

INTERNATIONAL [HR] NEWS

Campaigners for human rights bare new Burma ‘Dirty List’

Campaigners for human rights in Burma bared on 3 July 2008 a new ‘Dirty List’ exposing companies that are directly or indirectly helping finance Burma’s brutal military dictatorship.

The Burma Campaign UK said a total of 154 companies featured on the new list should be named and shamed. “Every single day foreign companies give millions of dollars to the regime; allowing them to buy the bullets, guns and supplies for the army that keeps them in power,” the group said in an email message obtained by FHR from the non-government organization Asia Pacific forum on Women Law and Development (APWLD).

“In an age where companies like to claim they behave ethically, this list exposes those corporations for whom corporate responsibility is just a hollow public relations exercise,” said Johnny Chatterton, Campaigns Officer of the Burma Campaign UK. “If you are serious about ethics, you don’t fund dictatorships that rape five-year-old girls, shoot at peaceful protestors and leave storm victims to die.”

The group urged people to write to the companies to tell them why they must stop funding the Burmese regime.

BBC Worldwide, Toyota and Qantas are among the 50 new companies that have been added to the ‘Dirty List’ published today by the Burma Campaign UK. The ‘Dirty List’ may be viewed at http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/dirty_list/dirty_list_details.html

The new companies added to the list are the result of new information and an influx of new investments in Burma’s gas sector. Some 30 companies on the list are in the tourism sector and 33 companies are in the oil & gas sector.

Since the first ‘Dirty List’ was launched 6 years ago, over 100 companies have withdrawn from Burma including PwC, Rolls Royce, DHL, Swiss Re and Willis because of the pressure applied by the international community. The Burma Campaign UK said, “This has deprived the regime of millions of dollars.”

The Burmese junta allocate most of its budget on military spending rather than on health and education combined. It has the 4th highest child mortality rate in the world.
Sri Lanka’s lost bid for UNHRC seat, a victory for human rights

GENEVA – Domestic and international human rights advocates who had opposed Sri Lanka’s re-election to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in May said the vote was a victory for human rights standards and for victims of abuse in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka lost its bid for a second term at the UNHRC in the 21 May 2008 elections of the UN General Assembly.

The UN General Assembly elected 15 States to serve three-year terms starting June on the Human Rights Council. Sri Lanka failed to win the elections with 101 votes as did Timor Leste with 92 votes. Japan, Bahrain, South Korea and Pakistan were elected as Asian representatives to the 47- member council.

“We applaud UN members for rejecting an abusive state which has used its position on the Human Rights Council not to promote human rights, but to protect itself and other violator states from scrutiny,” said Steve Crawshaw, UN Advocacy Director at Human Rights Watch and spokesman for the NGO Coalition for an Effective Human Rights Council [http://www.hrw.org/effectiveHRC].

International and Asian human rights organizations including Karapatan, supported human rights groups in Sri Lanka that appealed to UN members to reject Sri Lanka’s candidacy because of wanton human rights violations in the South Asian island.

“We appeal to you to consider withholding support for Sri Lanka’s re-election this year. By doing so, your government will send a strong message to the Government of Sri Lanka that it must reform its practices if it wants to continue as an equal partner in international institutions such as the UN. Technical assistance without political will cannot result in effective change in the human rights situation in Sri Lanka,” said human rights groups in a letter dated 28 April 2008 addressed to the UN.

“The rejection of Sri Lanka after a global campaign lends vital support to the victims of abuse, and sends a strong message to the government of Sri Lanka,” said Michael Anthony, program coordinator of the Asian Human Rights Commission in Hong Kong.

Anthony said “We hope this result will open a new international dialogue with Sri Lanka that encourages the government to put an end to rampant violations by its security forces, and accept the assistance of human rights monitors from the United Nations.”

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is also accused of committing grave human rights abuses. “But this does not justify government abuses, and the people of Sri Lanka would benefit greatly from UN monitoring of both sides to the conflict,” Anthony emphasized.

Victims of human rights violations commemorate...

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to leave their homes during military operations in General Luna town in Quezon in November 2007. As an endnote to her sharing she sang the song “kanlungan” which was composed at the Kanlungan center where they stayed when they were forced to flee their homes. Her call to everyone was “mga kasama, mga kapatid, magkaisa tagumpay ay kamin.”

Karapatan’s Father Dionito Cabillas, IFI, joined the call of the victims and their supporters to stop the implementation of Oplan Bantay Laya and to remove Arroyo from power, echoing the sentiments of the victims, “Only when Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is ousted can we refugees go back home.”

STOP ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES
Surface the Victims, NOW!
Excerpts from tributes to Ka Bel

On 20 May 2008, Crispin “Ka Bel” Beltran, labor leader, human rights defender and national icon passed away due to a terrible accident. All over the world and all throughout the country, people, together with his bereaved family, mourned his untimely demise.

In celebration of his life of service and in mourning his death, FHR is printing excerpts of the many messages and tributes to Ka Bel, the Filipino working class hero.

We cannot stress enough that Ka Bel was first and foremost, a staunch human rights defender who sought to promote and protect the Filipino people’s civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

He fought for justice for the victims of human rights violations of every regime even as he had always become the victim of such in doing so. But he persisted to take up the cudgels for the powerless and the voiceless in society without asking for anything in return.

Above all, Ka Bel’s humanity is exhibited in his ardent participation in the national democratic struggle, the victory of which means the realization of people’s rights to genuine freedom and democracy.

Marie Hilao-Enriquez, Secretary General, Karapatan

His life puts to shame many of our brethren in politics and in religion who claim to love and serve the poor.

Of Ka Bel, it can truly be said that he was of the poor, stood by the poor and was for the poor.

To Ka Bel: You are a martyr to the cause of the poor. You belong to them and only they can rightfully claim you as their very own...may the example of your life now as torchbearer give faith to our people that all is not lost in this country and that there is hope for the better as your life has.

Sen. Aquilino ‘Nene’ Pimentel

He lived and worked from day to day always with meaningful intent, with purpose, with the aim to protect and defend those he cared for and loved the most. And that purpose extended (oh how it did reach outward and forward like an undeniable force of nature!) beyond his family — he embraced the working class, the Filipino people, and even the poor and oppressed of other nations.

Ina Alleco Silverio

Journalist and Ka Bel’s Former Chief of Staff

The Philippines has lost a great man who was a much finer leader than any of the Presidents who make it their mission to oppress, exploit, assault, abduct, torture, imprison, frame and murder workers and the poor. The world has lost one of the finest exponents of genuine grassroots activism and leadership, a man who lived what he preached, namely to be at one with the people and to serve the people. His friends and comrades in New Zealand have lost a mate, one who exemplified working class internationalism and whose courage and principled militancy made him an inspiration to all who had the privilege of knowing him.

Murray Horton, Secretary, Philippines Solidarity Network of Aotearoa

I mourn the passing of a giant in the present Congress of the Philippines. Ka Crispin Beltran or simply Ka Bel worked not only for the workers and the poor, he was a worker and poor unto the end! I saw, heard and touched his ardent passion and devotion to the poor and the workers. Ka Bel had always the spark of hope in his Heart and eyes and a smile in his face in facing the harsh realities of a long struggle.

Fr. Jun Mercado, OMI

We honor Ka Bel, and vow to further strengthen our solidarity with the national democratic struggle and the people of the Philippines. His memory lives on in struggles internationally for self-determination, national liberation and democracy. Ka Bel will forever be remembered, as one of the world’s foremost labor union leaders and working
class Filipino anti-imperialist and we will continue to hold the banners of struggle high in our common cause to free the land and to free the people!

Long live Ka Bel!
Long live International Solidarity!
Free the Land!

Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (USA)

We, as the revolutionary youth of Turkey struggling for the New Democratic Revolution, are promising Comrade Crispin Beltran to carry the red flag he passes to us and continue our fight until the final victory.

His name will not be forgotten by the oppressed peoples of the world.

New Democratic Youth (Turkey)

We have lost a great and formidable friend in the struggle. He fought with such conviction and determination. The least I can do is to continue the struggle for liberation especially of the workers.

Irene Fernandez, Malaysia

Ka Bel will be alive forever in our minds. He lives in the hearts of people who suffer from imperialist rule and fight back in pursuit of genuine freedom, social justice, and democracy.

May Ka Bel in heaven always share courage with us!
We overcome deep sorrow to keep on our struggle until the victory.

Allied Labor Unions of Independence (Japan)

We cherish the memory of Ka Bel in our hearts. He will continue to be an example in so many people's efforts, in so many different places in the world, to arouse, organize and mobilize the workers and the people for national and social liberation.

Bert De Belder, Belgium

He established a tradition of uncompromising militancy and devotion to the working class.
Ka Bel was against imperialist war and he was for the unity of working people across borders.
He was a political and industrial leader in the Philippines workers' movement, and he was known and respected by many unions, workers' parties, and labour movement organisations across the world.
Farewell Ka Bel, we continue the struggle for the rights of all workers.

Manrico Moro , Australia Asia Worker Links

We share the grief of the working class and the oppressed peoples of the Philippines and the world. But we are consoled and inspired by his great achievements as a labor leader, as a patriot in the service of the Filipino people, and as an internationalist fighting for the accomplishment of the historic mission of the working class and the national and social liberation of all oppressed peoples.

Ka Bel brought into the ILPS and the anti-imperialist and democratic movement of the people of the world the great benefits and high prestige of his statesmanship, his accomplishments as leader of the working class and the people, his fearless dedication to their revolutionary cause and incessant struggle against monopoly capitalism and all reaction.

Prof. Jose Maria Sison
Chairperson, International Coordinating Committee, International League of Peoples' Struggle

Let us in the democratic mass movement express ourselves clearly and emphatically. Ka Bel was an uncompromising, untiring fighter for freedom, justice and fundamental reforms. He has left us a legacy that serves as an inspiration to generations of activists and the toiling, struggling masses he so loved and whom he served to his last breath.

We celebrate his life by affirming the progressive, nay -- revolutionary, principles and national democratic program he fought for. As the marchers who accompanied his hearse to the Iglesia Filipina Independiente Cathedral shouted resolutely, "Ka Bel, tuloy ang laban!"

Dr. Carol Araullo
BAYAN Chairperson
Apostasy, this was how Antonio Zumel described Retired Navy Captain Danilo “Ka Dan” Vizmanos’ political transformation. From a staunch believer and fanatic of US General Douglas McArthur, Ka Dan turned 180 degrees to become a follower of the unwavering revolutionary, China’s Chairman Mao Tse Tung.

In salute to Ka Dan’s greatness as a leader and propagandist, the people’s movement led by the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN), the Samahan ng mga Ex-detainees Laban sa Detensyon at para sa Amnestiya (Selda), together with Kodao productions, held a cultural program entitled “Paglalayag sa Agos ng Pakikibaka ni Ret. Navy Capt. Danilo ‘Ka Dan’ Vizmanos” on 05 May 2008 at the University of Makati Auditorium.

In his speech, Ka Satur said that Ka Dan’s transformation was mainly brought about by his open-mindedness. “Ang panimulang pagkakamulat pampulitika ni Ka Dan sa mga katotohanang sosyo-politikal at militar sa ating bayan at paninidigan ay pangunahing bunga ng kaniyang sariling pananaliksik at pagususurin,” he said. (Ka Dan’s political consciousness on social realities and the standpoint he took was a product of his own research and analysis)

For her part, Karapatan Secretary General Marie Hilao-Enriquez praised Ka Dan’s exemplary behavior.
in detention. “He did not raise his voice to be heard. He did not ask for special treatment from fellow political detainees on account of being senior, a former military man, or his previous position. Like everyone else, he fulfills his task in cooking, cleaning and production work.”

According to Hilao-Enriquez, Ka Dan, one of Selda's founders and later President, played a key role in the filing of the historic class action suit against the dictator Marcos and ensured the group’s progressive line during the time of intense disorientation in the people’s movement. “At this time of confusion, the great leaders of Selda, that included Ka Dan, Doc Prudente and Dean Armando Malay made it clear where the organization must stand. Selda should remain critical and vigilant against the government's attacks on human rights,” said the veteran human rights activist.

In a recorded tribute sent from The Netherlands, Filipino revolutionary leader in exile Jose Maria Sison said that Ka Dan, inspite of the highest positions attained in organizations, has always been humble in his ways, serving the people and working with comrades. “We and all his countrymen take pride in Ka Dan Vizmanos, great hero and true soldier of the people,” added Sison who worked with Ka Dan in Selda and the now defunct Partido ng Bayan.

Ka Dan also served as President of the Philippine-Cuba Friendship Association and of BAYAN (1994-1998) and was a Board member of IBON Foundation.

**Songs of Love and Struggle**

The tribute was given additional flavor by different cultural presentations. Ka Dan's grandchildren surprised their lolo with a warm and touching rendition of his favorite love song “Gaano Ko Ikaw Kamahal” (How much I love you), which left everyone teary-eyed, including the school security guards.

Fellow detainee Bonifacio Ilagan, Mong Palatino of Kabataan Partylist, and Aya Santos of Desaparecidos read the poem “He Bears the Flag of the People’s Struggle” written for Ka Dan by Ms. Ruth De Leon.

Last but not the least was the surprise “harana” (serenade) by leaders of the mass movement, including Carol Araullo of BAYAN, Rafael Mariano of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), Elmer Labog of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), Nathaniel Santiago of Bayan Muna, Rey Casambre of the International League of People’s Struggle (ILPS), Ferdie Gaite of the Confederation for the Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE), Dr. Beng Rivera of the Health Alliance for Democracy (HEAD), Ruth Cervantes of Karapatan, Gani Tapang of AGHAM and Clemente Bautista of Kalikasan People's Network. They were joined in the singing by the People's Chorale.

The program would not have been complete without Ka Dan's words of wisdom. His last words were “Tuloy ang pakikibaka. Ilong mga nagaharan-haran ngayon ay pansamantala lamang. Maski si Gloria, may oras din siya. Ngunit hindi lang si Gloria ang tinitingnan ko, beyond Gloria. Yung mismong sistema ng pamamahala. Ang nangyari sa Cuba, Vietnam at China dapat yan ang mangyari sa Pilipinas.” (The struggle continues. The time of those who lord over the land is but temporary. Even Gloria's end will come. But I am looking beyond Gloria, it is the system of governance itself that must change. What happened to Cuba, Vietnam and China must be achieved in the Philippines).

**Ka Dan passes away**

On 23 June 2008, Ka Dan peacefully passed away after a prolonged bout with prostate cancer and other illnesses. He was 79.

Ka Dan had left this world with a legacy to the Filipino people and his life's lessons will be learned and remembered by future generations of Filipinos from the books he authored — “Through the Eye of the Storm,” “Martial Law Diary” and “A Matter of Conviction.”

During his funeral, Ka Dan's eldest son, Danilo Jr. described his father as a positive thinker, “He believes that somehow, there's no other way but forward.”

He is hopeful that his father's aspiration would all come true.
Shortchanging the new writs

By Atty. Rex J.M.A. Fernandez

What is happening to the Writ of Amparo and Writ of Habeas Data?

There seems to be a recent trend of petitions for the Writ of Amparo being delayed or dismissed by the Court of Appeals (CA) or, when granted, being ignored and undermined by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

The first petition for the Writ, filed on October 24, 2007 for missing student activists Sherlyn Cadapan, Karen Empeno and farmer Manuel Merino is still pending after almost a year. The CA division sitting on the case is the same division that dismissed an earlier habeas corpus petition for the three missing persons.

The CA’s decision granting Lolita Robinos a temporary protection order and for the inspection of places and production of documents, while favorable to the petitioner, was eventually left without force and effect when the AFP limited the inspection areas and refused to produce the requested documents.

The AFP is now using “voluntary custody” as a ploy to prevent the release of those they abducted in the first place. This was evident in the case of Maria Gumanoy, whose abducted daughters were allowed by the CA to remain in military custody despite the obvious atmosphere of cajolery, fear, force and threats attending their claim of voluntary custody.

In the Francisco Saez case, the first petition for the Writ of Habeas Data, the court dismissed the case despite the fact that there was positive evidence and a declaration that he was threatened.

What are the other threats to the new writs?

The Writs of Amparo and Habeas Data are intertwined with the concept of executive privilege since the writs are tools that can open up the Executive to the light of public transparency. Executive privilege, on the other hand, is designed to keep people in the dark.

Unfortunately, two recent decisions of the Supreme Court (SC) about executive privilege – on the NBN-ZTE Senate hearings and the JPEPA – bespeak of the High Court’s predilection to strengthen executive privilege, thereby endangering Amparo and Habeas Data.

In the end, executive privilege might be used to cause the writs to be ineffective and inutile, turning them into one of those judicial remedies with no effective force to reckon against extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

What can be done?

The legal battle for transparency must be continually waged.

The writs of Amparo and Habeas Data are still very strong remedies especially in the hands of good judges and justices of the courts. They should be continually used and their limits tested in the interest of justice.

It should be remembered also that justice could only be achieved through the people’s resolute struggle inside and outside the courts. Along with better legal tactics, human rights advocates should also create the necessary public opinion in favor of the writs and the victims whose rights these remedies are supposed to protect, and against the violators of human rights and the judicial system that has become an instrument for the denial of these rights.

FHR
On the morning of May 1, 1898, the water of Manila Bay and Bacoor Bay was enshrouded with the clouds of war – a battle between the forces of a newly-rising empire and an aged, weakened one. The fight was over in a few hours, and as the smoke cleared, the steel naval forces of the Americans led by Commodore George Dewey emerged victorious over the outgunned and obsolete Spanish fleet commanded by Rear Admiral Patricio Montojo.

It was the first and major score for the US in the Spanish-American War. Hostilities broke out when the Americans took interest in Spain’s colonies, namely Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippine Islands. The Manila Bay battle also set the scene for Spain’s defeat in subsequent battles in Latin America, and eventually, its surrender and sale of territories to the US later in the year in the Treaty of Paris.

In spite of his triumph, Dewey wrote to Washington that he could not as yet capture Manila, and would need a reinforcement of 5,000 men. Indeed, the American forces had to face not only the remnants of the Spaniards, but mainly the Katipuneros, the Filipino revolutionaries who had already routed the Spanish colonial forces in most fronts.

The Katipuneros were, however, being misled by come-backing leader Emilio Aguinaldo who believed that the American forces were the revolutionaries’ allies. Earlier in 1898, an American emissary began talks with Aguinaldo in Hong Kong, where he, along with a handful of Katipunan leaders, went on self-exile after surrendering to Spain in exchange for P800,000. Believing that the American government supported Philippine independence, Aguinaldo went back to the Philippines and reassumed leadership of the revolution.

Aguinaldo, although unaware of the negotiations between the two colonizers, also managed to play according to script, and declared Philippine independence on 12 June 1898, “under the protection of the powerful and humanitarian North American nation.”

Three months after the May battle, a second “clash” was fought – the mock battle of Manila Bay on 24 August, 1898, when the Spaniards’ white flag of surrender was hoisted after only a few shots from the US side. The “battle” was staged so that the Spanish colonial forces can save face by being “defeated” by another colonial power.

The US “granted” independence to Cuba, and at the same time retained its influence as it imposed heavy restrictions on its new government. As for the Philippine Islands, the US decided to take over where the Spaniards left off, and implemented “benevolent assimilation.” Subsequent events led to the Philippine-American War in 1899, as Filipino revolutionaries carried on the fight against colonizers, this time, the Americans.

Today, the US maintains its interests in the country, its private companies being the biggest investors in the Philippines. The US government also remains to be the closest ally of the Arroyo regime, which is effectively under the American government’s influence in making policies and programs.
Salvaging
By Rolando B. Tolentino

The Canadian novelist used this word in the novel Handmaiden's Tale. The meaning is the same—summary killings.
The word is peculiar. No one is being placed in a safe place. Nothing is being saved.

In San Pablo, Isabela, police recovered the cadavers of four men, suspected to be victims of salvaging. The last time they were seen alive was before they parted ways after a drinking spree. All of them boarded the tricycle of one of the victims. The victims’ tricycle was found in Barangay Camasi, Peñablanca, Cagayan.

According to Karapatan, some 3,333 people were victims of human rights violations for the first six months of 2008.
The word is peculiar. Until today, 30 years after the Marcos dictatorship, the term is still being used as if it had not been tainted by rust or outgrown by mildew.

(Note: Tolentino’s prose written in Filipino. The author approved the translation provided by Ruth Cervantes)

About the author
Rolando B. Tolentino is an activist, professor, poet and multi-awarded writer from Palanca to the National Book Award to the Saint Louis Poetry Center. He earned his doctorate degree in Film, Literature and Culture at the University of Southern California in 1997 and is currently teaching Film at the College of Mass Communications of the University of the Philippines. Tolentino is a member of CONTEND (Congress of Teachers/Educators for Nationalism and Democracy).

About the artwork
Art critic Lisa Ito writes: “Daet Massacre by Social Realist painter Gene de Loyola attests to the chilling similarities between incidents during Martial Law and today. De Loyola depicts a scene from a massacre of unarmed protesters in Daet, Camarines Norte in 1981, shortly after the ‘paper lifting’ of Martial Law of that same year. Shot at by police forces at the height of the dispersal, the protesters, with the dead and injured in their ranks, are depicted against a blood-red backdrop, with one bearing a placard calling for the boycott of an impending election believed to be fraudulent. Nearly twenty-five years later, this scene would be re-enacted in the bloody dispersals of activists calling for President Arroyo’s ouster in Bicol and in the massacre of striking sugar mill and farm workers in Hacienda Luisita on November 16, 2004.”

The Gawad Artista ng Bayan was conferred to him by the Pacheco Artists Program in 2006 and the prestigious Huwarang Pilipino Award for the Arts in 2003 was presented by Radyo ng Bayan in cooperation with Huwarang Pilipino Foundation for his contributions to the art industry.

Editor’s note: We’ll exhibit your artwork here. Please send us photos, illustrations, paintings, and other work of graphic art in digital image via e-mail. They should be on human rights.