



International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines

<http://www.humanrightphilippines.net/>

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Australian Chapter: Australian Council of Trade Unions; Justice & International Mission Unit, Uniting Church in Australia, Victoria & Tasmania; Maritime Union of Australia, Victorian Branch; SEARCH Foundation; Philippines Australia Union Link; Action for Peace & Development in the Philippines, Migrante Australia

February 9, 2017,

H.E. Rodrigo Duterte
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Condemn political killings of 4 leaders in January 2017

Dear Excellency,

We write to vigorously protest and condemn the political murders of four farmers – Venie Diamante, Veronico Delamante, Alexander Ceballos, and Wencislao Pacquiao –who have been killed this last January 2017. Two of them were indigenous leaders in Mindanao.

Your government has replaced the obnoxious and deadly Oplan Bayanihan counter-insurgency program with Oplan Kapayapaan, but there is no change to the attacks targeting land and environmental activists, perpetrated by private armies of landed families and mining firms complicit or in connivance with State security forces.

These latest killings of four farmer leaders also reflect the ongoing dominance of big landlords and businesses in the Philippines and their use of violence against peasants struggling for genuine agrarian reform. The killings occurred before and during the third round of formal peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), when both Parties started to tackle the crafting of an agreement on socio-economic reforms including genuine agrarian reform and rural development. It seems that these tactics have now succeeded in ending the current peace talks process, and we urge your government to seriously reconsider this development and take urgent action to restore the peace talks.

Your government can restore the path to genuine peace and progress by condemning these latest political killings and taking action to end the prevailing climate of impunity. Comprehensive reforms and fundamental change to solve the root causes of injustice, landlessness and poverty in the country must remain our common goal.

Background

On January 5, 2017, around 4pm, **Venie Diamante**, 43, a T'boli and municipal tribal chieftain, was brutally killed by an unnamed assailant on board a motorcycle while on his way home from Koronadal City. Diamante was already near his residence in Sitio Lambusong, Brgy. Puti, Norala, South Cotabato, when the gunman opened fire, inflicting eight (8) gunshot wounds. He was left on the side of the road.

On the morning of the next day, January 6, 2017, the regional police arrived to investigate the incident. Residents from the community attested that Diamante was a good person and a respected tribal leader. The police then showed a petition to survey the area which is part of

the T'boli ancestral domain, a move that Diamante strongly advocated against. The objective of this conflict in recent years has been to displace the people and to pave the way for the entry of palm oil plantations in the area.

Weeks later, on January 20, 2017, two activists in Surigao del Norte and in Negros Occidental were killed.

Katribu regional partylist coordinator **Veronico Delamente**, 27, a Lumad-Mamanwa and member of Kahugpungan sa Lumadnong Organisasyon (KASALO) in the CARAGA region, was shot by two unnamed assailants in Punta Naga, Brgy. Cagdianao, Claver, Surigao del Norte. Delamente, along with other council members of *Asosasyon sa Madajaw na Panaghiusa sa Tribung Mamanwa sa Tag-anito ug Urbizondo* (AMPANTRIMTU), an organization recognized by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), were invited for an emergency meeting with the NCIP with regard to an indigenous people survey to approve the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) proposal of the Platinum Group Metals Corp (PGMC) to expand their mining operations. Delamente had earlier rejected the FPIC proposal.

On the noon of January 20, two men on board a motorcycle – the driver wearing a hoodie with his face partially covered by a handkerchief while the person on the passenger seat was wearing a bonnet and a black jacket with the words 'CIDG' printed in the back – were seen in the area. By 12:37pm, while Delamente and the others were waiting in the Punta Naga gym, the motorcycle returned to the gym whereby the man in the passenger seat got off and fired his Uzi at Delamente. Delamente was hit, fell down, and was trying to crawl away when the gunman caught him by the hair and shot him at close range. The gunman also fired at **Joel Buklas**, 42, also a council member of AMPANTRIMTU who was against the PGMC FPIC proposal. Buklas was able to escape but **Lovely Delamente**, Veronico Delamente's 4-year-old niece, was hit. After having shot Delamente, the gunman shouted out that he will finish all of Delamente's siblings, before finally leaving. Delamente and Lovely were rushed to the Miranda Hospital. Delamente died after 5 minutes of attempts to revive him.

On the evening of the same day, around 8pm, **Alexander Ceballos**, 54, regional council member and district area coordinator of the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) was gunned down by two unnamed assailants near his house in Purok Tangke, Brgy. Pandanon Silos, Murcia, Negros Occidental. Ceballos was rushed to the Sanitarium Hospital in Bacolod City but was declared dead-on-arrival.

Ceballos and his family has long been the target of threats and intimidation by the Dela Cruz clan, a political clan who have controlled the town of Salvador Benedicto for more than 20 years. Ceballos' involvement in organizing and mobilizing farmers to uphold and defend their rights had earned him the ire of the Dela Cruz family. On July 17, 2015, Alexander Ceballos' son, **Ariel Ceballos**, survived an ambush when armed gunmen indiscriminately fired at the vehicle they were in. His fellow farmers suspected that Alexander was the original target. More recently, in a dialogue between the farmers, the provincial office of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), and the Dela Cruz family represented by Nehemias Dela Cruz Jr., the latter openly threatened Alexander and Ariel Ceballos with charges to be filed in court and vowed to retrieve all the lands already distributed to the farmers from the Dela Cruz clan.

On January 28, 2017, **Quilina Ceballos**, wife of Alexander Ceballos, received a death threat via text message. It stated: 'You, your companions, and your two children's place in the cemetery is ready.' Quilina Ceballos received the threats while still mourning her husband.

In a separate incident on January 25, 2017, another farmer from Negros Occidental, **Wencislao Pacquiao**, 48, member of the San Benito Farmers Association- Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), was shot while doing work in the designated land cultivation area (LCA). He was with **Rebeco Pabuaya**, another farmer from the same organization. Around 9 in the morning, Pacquiao was approached by a gunman and was shot in the back. He was hit in the thigh and still managed to run but was pursued by the shooter and sustained

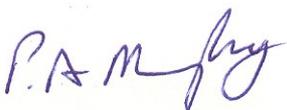
more shots. Pacquiao sustained five (5) gunshot wounds. Pabuaya was also targeted but because he was working in the lower part of the LCA, he managed to escape. Pacquiao was shot at close range and was clearly targeted by the shooter.

There had been an attempt on Pacquiao's life in 2015. His residence was strafed by the goons of then-barangay captain Nonoy Hullesa. Nonoy Hullesa is the brother of Agustilo Hullesa, the leaser of the land that farmers from San Benito are currently cultivating. In 2014, the DAR acquired the land from Angelina Bruce Laguda through the Voluntary Offer to Sell (VOS), but the department awarded Certificate of Land Ownership Awards (CLOAs) to questionable beneficiaries. Pacquiao and several farmers filed a case against DAR for conniving with Agustilo Hullesa in distributing CLOAs to 'dummy beneficiaries'. The land distributed to these dummy beneficiaries are now under the control of Agustilo Hullesa, who uses the land for leasing. The long-standing case has yet to be resolved.

We call on your government to:

1. Immediately appoint an independent body to investigate the separate incidents
2. Prosecute any identified perpetrators, including from landed elites, mining firms and hired goons under the protection of said landlords and corporations
3. End the continued harassment and intimidation of Lumads in and out of their communities
4. Protect peasant activists and environmental defenders with regard to their work in the defense of land and the environment
5. Direct the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) to look into the petition filed by Wencislao Pacquiao and other farmers regarding the questionable awarding of CLOAs, and to resolve all agrarian cases in favour of peasants
6. Direct the intervention of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in cases where threat, harassment, and intimidation is used to coerce tribal leaders and communities to agree to mining ventures;
7. End the counter-insurgency programs like Oplan Bayanihan and Oplan Kapayapaan;
8. Pursue your government's commitment to a Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (CASER) that comprehensively tackles the deeply-rooted feudal relations in the country, and move towards free land distribution of monopolized lands;
9. Pursue your government's commitment to the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) which includes the right of peasants, indigenous communities, and environmental protection; and
10. Adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all the major Human Rights instruments to which the Republic of the Philippines is a party and signatory.

Yours sincerely,



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Cc

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