Less than a week after the euphoria brought about by the visit of Pope Francis to the Philippines, on January 16-19, the Filipinos were shaken by another of President BS Aquino’s fiasco, the Mamasapano botched military operation.

The ill-planned and executed military operation, which killed 44 of Aquino’s own Special Action Force (SAF), 18 fighters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and seven civilians, was easily turned by the US-Aquino regime to a game of lies and blames. The people plumbed the depths of lies and diversionary tactics that flooded the country as BS Aquino tried to hide his puppetry to the US, his inept leadership, and the favors and protection he gives his bosom buddy, the suspended chief of Philippine National Police Gen. Allan Purisima.

BS Aquino could not escape responsibility over the Mamasapano incident because even the Board of Inquiry’s report, wanting as it is, pointed at him as commander in chief who approved Oplan Exodus. The report showed how BS Aquino violated the chain of command by retaining Gen. Purisima at the helm of the operation despite charges of corruption and subsequent suspension order by the Ombudsman. BS Aquino acted on behalf of the US’s interest on Marwan, and received funding and information in exchange.

What followed were a resounding cry for truth and accountability and a renewed call for Noynoy Aquino’s resignation/ouster from office as the country recalled and enumerated similar tragic events, policies and actions the BS Aquino government was responsible for but flouted. Simultaneously, BS Aquino took on the “business as usual” stance—even taking great pleasure in boasting of his so-called economic growth and infrastructure development.
Civilian victims of the Mamasapano fiasco

The reports of both the PNP Board of Inquiry and the Senate on the Mamasapano incident obviously skipped the seven civilian casualties and the hundreds of residents displaced during the military operation. They, too, were victims of the US-Aquino’s botched Oplan Wolverine/Exodus. They, too, should figure in in BS Aquino’s accountability. Reports from Kawaghi Human Rights Alliance for the Advancement of Moro Human Rights (Kawaghi) said at around 4:00 a.m. of January 25, after the early morning prayer, Badrudin Langalan, 18, left for Crossing Towakanipao, a community along the national highway of Mamasapano, to charge his mobile phone. Riding a bicycle, he had to pass through a wooden bridge connecting his community and those along the highway. At the time, the PNP-SAF was stationed on the bridge.

After an hour, at around 5 a.m., Badrudin’s wife, Sarah Lawani, 18, heard gunfire and bomb explosion from the direction of the wooden bridge. Immediately, she and along with the rest of the residents, evacuated to another barangay.

Around lunchtime, when there were no more sounds of guns and bombs, Sarah and the other residents returned to their community. Sarah saw her husband Badrudin huddled near the wooden bridge at Bgy. Towakanipao, together with the rest of the bodies of PNP-SAF. His head bashed and his body bruised. A witness told Sarah the PNP-SAF had taken Badrudin before the fire fight began. Badrudin and Sarah have two children.

Almost at the same time that Badrudin left to charge his phone, the Pananggulon family was awakened by loud gunshots in Pimbalkan, Mamasapano. Their hut, which was right in the middle of the cornfield, was indiscriminately fired at by the PNP-SAF, killing 8-year-old Sarah Pananggulon and wounding her parents, Samra Sampulna and Pananggulon Mamasalaga. The sun was already up when civilians were able to help the Pananggulons leave the place. Only then did Samra realize that their hut was just 200 meters away from where the PNP-SAF made its assault.

According to the MILF’s Special Investigative Commission Report on the Mamasapano botched operation, the day after the mishap, and long after the GPH and the MILF declared ceasefire, another civilian was shot dead by the PNP-SAF lone survivor PO2 Christopher Lalad. Lalad shot four MILF members who were resting inside a small mosque. On his way out from the mosque, he shot one more, Mohammad Ambilang.

Ambilang, a tricycle driver, happened to be at the opposite end of the wooden bridge. Dressed in a white shirt and black pants, Ambilang was trying to get the belongings of his aunt who sought refuge at his house from the fire fight. Acting on his instructions, Ambilang left a wife and two children.

EJK cases all-over the country

Mabin “Tata” Beato (earlier reported as Tata Baito), a Lumad of Bukidnon province in Northern Mindanao was gunned down on March 24 at about 9:00 a.m. He was a member of the Lumad group TIK (Indigenous Group, Tribal Indigenous Oppressed Group Association), an organization fighting for its members’ rights to ancestral domain against the incursion of a landlord, Pablo “Poling” Lorenzo. The security personnel of Lorenzo fired at Beato and wounded two others, Jave Sam Bagna and Romeo Tintim (earlier reported as Japsem Bagna and Ricky Tumbaga, respectively), whose upper torsos were hit by bullets.

TINDOGA is one of the legitimate claimants of ancestral land under the government’s Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) program. Some 622 hectares of the ancestral land claimed by TINDOGA was leased by the government to the Montalvan ranch, owned by Lorenzo. The contract, however, ended in 2009 but the Montalvan ranch continued to operate, with the use of its own security personnel and the support of the military and government agencies.

Beato was on his way to TINDOGA’s bungkalang, where the indigenous people collectively till parts of their ancestral land to assert their claim. Beato, with 200 others were met by some 20-30 of Lorenzo’s armed men and security personnel who opened fire at them. Beato was killed instantly.

Up north, in Bgy. Matusalem, Roxas, Isabela province, another farmer, Virgilio Leotorco, was killed in the evening of March 16. “Help me. I was shot. I am dying,” Leotorco implored in Ilocano as a fellow farmer found him near an irrigation canal. Leotorco was there to catch edible frogs. He was shot three times at close range with a .45 caliber pistol. Before the other farmer could ask for help Leotorco died.

A member of the Agbiag Matusalam Roxas Isabela-Danggayan Dugtii Mamanlok iti Isabela (Amari), Leotorco, 56, was among the 66 settlers fighting for a space at the Mallig Plains Reservation, a promised resettlement area for which the Isabela State University (ISU) claims ownership. He was a Kalinga who migrated to Isabela to find land which he can cultivate and develop.

In a statement, the Kilusan Magbahubugid ng Pilipinas (KMP) in Cagayan Valley stated, “The land dispute became increasingly violent as the ISU-Roxas, an academic institution which should be a bastion of human rights advocacy, resorted to illegal demolition and burning of hundreds of houses, shooting of residents, indiscriminate firing of guns, destruction of crops, housing materials and house perimeter walls as well as verbal assault, threats and intimidation by its security personnel.”

Soldiers of the 5th Infantry Division (ID) of the AFP also entered the community, beefing up the ISU-Roxas security guards. Last year, on February 28, 2014, another member of AMARI, Romulo dela Cruz, was a victim of enforced disappearance. He has been missing since.

On March 8, a union organizer of Paggakaisa ng Manggagawa sa Timog Katagalugan–Kilusang Mayo Uno (PAMANTIK-KMU), Florencio “Ka Bong” Roman, was found dead along the National Highway in Bgy. Ambilang, Batangas City. He was shot and his face was crushed. Roman’s friends and colleagues point to the Philippine Air Force stationed January-March 2015

### TABLE 1: Violations of Civil & Political Rights under the Noynoy Aquino Government (July 2010 to March 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violation</th>
<th>No. of victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extrajudicial Killing</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforced Disappearance</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torture</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated Extrajudicial Killing</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Arrest without Detention</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Arrest and Detention</td>
<td>723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Search and Seizure</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Assault and Injury</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demolition</td>
<td>2,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violation of Domicile</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of Property</td>
<td>12,722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devestment of Property</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced Evacuation</td>
<td>59,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat/Harassment/Intimidation</td>
<td>125,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiscriminate Firing</td>
<td>11,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced/Fake Surrender</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced Labor/Involuntary Servitude</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Civilians in Police and/or Military Operations as Guides</td>
<td>593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and/or Shield</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Schools, Medical, Religious and Other Public</td>
<td>169,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places for Military Purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restriction or Violent Dispersal of Mass Actions, Public</td>
<td>27,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies and Gatherings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
at the Fernando Airbase in Batangas City as perpetrators. Other leaders of progressive organizations have been victims like Romano of harassment and surveillance from the intelligence service of the Air Force.

The many victims of extrajudicial killings all over the country were killed because they fought for their right to land and jobs. The bullets that killed them aimed to silence them, their colleagues and their organizations, and disrupt their communities.

**Terrorizing communities and people’s organizations**

The death, for example, of Necasio Precioso Sr. on December 22, 2014 prompted the evacuation of hundreds of residents from San Luis, Agusan del Sur to Balit in the same province. Precioso was killed by motorcycle-riding men in front of his children and a relative.

The military operations of the 26th Infantry Battalion (IB) of the Philippine Army (PA), which started in the last quarter of 2014, went on until the first quarter of 2015; the impact of these operations has virtually become a war zone.

The many victims of extrajudicial killings such as: “indiscriminate fires and mortar shelling on March 11. A 42 year old, 3-month pregnant mother with 10 children who was interviewed in one of the missions “expressed uncertainty of life if the war continues.” The woman said “one of her children collapsed in the middle of the volley of fires because of intense fear and (afterwards) could not talk anymore.”

From the initial 1,500 residents who fled their homes after the failed military operation in Mamasapano, the humanitarian mission citing the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao’s Humanitarian Emergency Action and Response Team (ARMM-HEART) said there were at least 73,000 individuals from the 11 municipalities who were displaced. Most of them stayed in cramped evacuation centers — sick, hungry, and traumatized.

**Farhannah Abdulkahar, 26, a resident of Bgy. Dipawan, Datu Saudi, also evacuated when their house was indiscriminately fired upon. He left leg was hit by a bullet.**

During the peace mission at Barangay Madia, the Peace
Mission participants were harassed by soldiers of the 8th Mechanized Battalion who arrived in three 6x6 trucks and two military tanks. The soldiers went straight to the vacant lot beside the barangay hall adjacent to the evacuation center. They immediately mounted two more trucks even informing the barangay officials and residents in the community.

Other documented cases aside from forced evacuation and detention of property were indiscriminate firing, mortar shelling (81mm & 105mm howitzer) and aerial bombing by OV10 Bronco planes; destruction of property; frustrated extrajudicial killings; harassment and intimidation of civilians; military encampment in public and religious structures. The military operation disrupted children’s classes in the communities.

Karapatan at this point called on Aquino to immediately stop its all-out war against the Moro people. “It is nothing but a diversionary and face-saving tactic and does not help in arriving at the truth on the Mamasapano fiasco. It has only added to Aquino’s dismal human rights record as numerous human rights violations were documented by the peace mission.”

With more than 60% of the total number of the AFP forces deployed there, the whole of Mindanao has virtually become a war zone. Prior to BS Aquino’s bungled operation in Mamasapano, some 55 combat battalions were already deployed in Mindanao, a declared priority region. It has only added to Aquino’s dismal human rights record as numerous human rights violations were documented by the peace mission.”

Indiscriminate firing

On February 18, 2015, Ernesto Binaliw and his wife Merlyn Binaliw went back to Mangasa, Sitio Damitan, Dalwangan, Malaybalay and saw that his farm house was forcibly opened and ransacked by elements of 1st Special Forces PA based at Mampayag, Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon. The unit is under the command of Col. Nasser Lalasan. The 53-year-old Binaliw, married with six children, is an Igorot farmer who migrated to Bukidnon. He has a farm lot and a hut in Mangasa and in Casisang, both in Malaybalay City.

Binaliw said that at around 11:00 a.m. on February 14, he and his wife Merlyn heard gunshots. An hour later, the military bombed the village, which caused panic among the residents. The incident prompted Ernesto and his wife to go to their residence in Casisang. Binaliw was certain their Mangasa farm house was locked and things were kept in order before they left. When Binaliw went back to Mangasa after a week, they found several bullet holes in and outside the house—at the entrance, on one of the windows, in the kitchen and near the back door. They recovered empty 45 caliber and M16 ammuniite shells.

Ernesto and Merlyn said they found their belongings upturned and ransacked. The 50 sacks of chicken dung they use for fertilizer were thrown out and cooking utensils were deformed. Ernesto’s wallet with important documents in it, his farming tools, and the pictures of his children posted on the wall were carried away. Later, they learned that it was the work of some 90 members of the 1st SF PA who had a firefight with members of the NPA at Capitan Anghel, an adjacent village.

Another case of indiscriminate firing involved a group of tourists from the United Kingdom, Denmark and Australia who went to Bukidnon Province for bird-watching at the Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park.

Peter Simpson, the group’s leader, applied for a permit with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Malaybalay City. The DENR office issued a four-day permit from February 11-14, 2015, after the group submitted all the requirements. The group left with their local tourist guides Carlito Gayramara and Dannie Docinos.

On the third day, February 13, at about 6:00 a.m., the group headed for Purok Mangaso, Bgy. Dalwangan, Malaybalay City. Almost three hours later, at around 8:45 a.m., the group was met with a burst of gunfire as they approached the forested area.

Carlito Gayramara said the first volley of gunfire hit his left forearm. He said he remembered the heavy gunfire, which sounded like they were coming from high powered guns.

Gayramara managed to order the group members to drop to the ground and crawl for safety. Six of the tourists went with Gayramara while the other one went with Dannie O. Docinos. The tourists, using their shirts, jackets and belt, tried to give first aid to Gayramara who was bleeding profusely. The group spotted a farmer whom they approached for help. The farmer used his horse to bring Gayramara to Sitio Damitan, Dalwangan, Malaybalay City where a motorcycle was available.

The tourists were horrified and traumatized by the incident, hiding each other in the forest and crying for their “escape”. The tourists lost seven binoculars, two high-tech telescopes, cameras and a number of backpacks.

Later, in a radio interview, the Commanding Officer of 403rd IB PA Brgy. Commander, who is not yet being an NPA commander who headed the group which had an encounter with the military.

Harassment of leaders of people’s organization

Suppression of the people’s voice also takes the form of false charges being filed against the leaders and members of people’s organizations who openly criticize the fascist attacks on the civilian population and expose blatant state protection given to business interests that encroach on natural resources, especially those rich in natural resources.

Mindanao indigenous leader Jomorito Goaynon faces another trumped-up criminal case for the death of his cousin Dorito Goaynon dalla Mance on March 28, 2015. Goaynon, Chairperson of Kalumbay, a regional organization of Lumad in Northern Mindanao, was named in a complaint filed by Jenita della Mance, Dorito’s wife, at the Malaybalay City police station. Also named respondents in the murder charge were seven of Jomorito’s siblings. The complainant claimed the Goaynon brothers were members of the Renz Perez Command-New People’s Army. Later, members of the Julito Tiro Command-New People’s Army owned up to the “revolutionary punishment” meted out to Dorito della Mance, a leader of the de la Mance group, a paramilitary/ bandit group involved in robbery, hold-ups and extortion, cattle rustling, land grabbing and murder of civilians.

This is the second time Jomorito Goaynon...
Illegal arrests and criminalization of political acts

Three peace consultants of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) were arrested in separate incidents during the 1st quarter of 2015. This brings to 16 the currently detained NDFP consultants.

The arrests further jeopardized the peace talks between the GRP/GPH and the NDFP, which have been stalled since 2011. The GPH once more violated the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) which was signed between the two parties in 1995.

Rogelio Posadas was arrested on January 9, 2015, less than a week before Pope Francis’s arrival in Manila, at a time when political prisoners all-over the country were gearing for a nationwide hunger strike to highlight the government’s practice of criminalizing political acts.

Posadas, 57, was arrested by at least 12 members of the Regional Public Safety Battalion (RPSB) of the Philippine National Police (PNP) in the evening of January 9 in San Carlos City, Negros Occidental. He was riding a motorcycle with two others when a pick-up truck overtook and flagged them down near a bio-ethanol plant in Bgy. Panao. At gunpoint, they were ordered to get off the motorcycle. Led by Captain Tony Benitez, members of the arresting unit searched Posadas but found nothing.

Three were brought to the PNP headquarters in San Carlos City, where Posadas was interrogated. At around 3:30 a.m., he admitted to the police that he was Rogelio Posadas. His companions were released and he was brought to the Cadiz PNP Headquarters.

The authorities arrested Posadas based on the same warrant used against human rights worker Zara Alvarez, a former political prisoner. He is charged with murder, robbery in band and homicide.

Posadas should not have been arrested as he was protected by JASIG, being an NDFP peace consultant. He has a Document of Identification (DI) No. ND978240 under the assumed name “Orgel Dimaano.”

On March 4, 2015, Combined elements of the PNP - CIDG and the AFP simultaneously raided three houses in Quezon City and Caloocan City, and illegally arrested 13 civilians. One of them was Ruben Saluta, Arrested with Saluta was his wife, Presentacion Saluta, whom he was visiting at the time. Also arrested were four other civilians with diverse and unrelated activities—Alexander Raymund Birondo and his wife Winona Oñate-Birondo, Ruben Rupido and Joseph Cuevas.

Cuevas subleased the rooms in said house to save on cost and be helped in defraying the rent. Those arrested in two other houses in Caloocan City were Osias Abad, Emmanuel Bacarra, Rosalia

Cuevas subleased the rooms in said house to save on cost and be helped in defraying the rent. Those arrested in two other houses in Caloocan City were Osias Abad, Emmanuel Bacarra, Rosalia
alerted the National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL) which agreed to represent them during inquest. All 13 are detained at the Custodial Center of Camp Crame in Quezon City.

Meanwhile, arrests of leaders and members of progressive organizations continued.

In Nueva Ecija, Nueva Ecija Annual Conference, arrived at the Parsonage and introduced himself. He tried to take video shots of the things the perpetrators took from the victims but the soldiers and police forcibly took the video footage and threatened to arrest Pastor Efren. When Pastor Jun Candalaria finally arrived, he saw that the Parsonage was already in disarray. He also noticed that P5,000.00 in cash, a PSP game console, and a DSLR camera were missing. The three victims were taken to the Caloocan Police Station. Pastor Candalaria arrived at the police station an hour later. They were all separately subjected to tactical interrogation from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. the next day. Pastor Candalaria was charged with “harboring criminals”, but was later bailed out with the help of other UMC pastors in Nueva Ecija.

At around 4:00 p.m., the arresting team forcibly opened the door of the Candalaria home, claimed that they have a warrant of arrest, and took the three by force. The AFP-PNP joint forces accessed the three by being members of the New People’s Army. Guino, Ely and Torres were harassed and repeatedly hit by members of the arresting team. They were also threatened that something bad would happen to their families if they did not cooperate.

Pastor Efren Reyes, Chairperson of the Church and Society of the South
Now, more than ever, Miradel Torres should be immediately released on humanitarian ground. Torres is currently facing trumped-up criminal charges and her child is likewise made to suffer for this.

Violations of the rights of detained persons

Repressive measures in jails reached its peak when political prisoners, particularly those at the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology—Special Intensive Care Area (BJMP-SICA-1) male dormitory, launched a fasting and hunger strike during the visit of Pope Francis in January.

The reprisals and restrictions against the political prisoners at the BJMP-SICA-1 were enforced when the political prisoners launched their 20-day hunger strike (five days before and five days during the visit of Pope Francis) that apparently irked Warden Michelle Ng-Bonto.

Despite the political prisoners’ letter informing jail authorities and other government agencies of their planned action, the jail warden refused to allow entry of doctors and human rights workers, and to some extent, the lawyers of the political prisoners.

Representatives of human rights organizations, doctors and leaders of people’s organizations attempted several times to visit the political prisoners but jail authorities gave various lame excuses—all were brazen violations of the law on the rights of detained persons.

Among those denied entry were Dr. Julie Cayugiat, former Gabriela party-list representative Liza Maza, Ilaya Chairperson Dr. Carol Araullo, Karapatan Chairperson Marie Hilao-Enriquez, and Karapatan Secretary General Cristina Palabay. Lawyers from the National Union of People’s Lawyers (NUPL), who are handling most of the cases of the political detainees, were twice denied entry but were later allowed to see a representative of the political detainees.

For the first time some family members like Julieta Caloza, wife of detained NDFP peace consultant Leopoldo Caloza, was not allowed inside her husband’s cell. A jail guard informed her that Leopoldo’s health is “OK”, but could not see her because he could not get out of bed!

The jail authorities also prevented visits to the common crime violators, citing the fasting and hunger strike as the reason. This was an attempt to isolate the political prisoners from the other inmates. It provoked violent reaction by the Sputnik-list strike leaders and members who shouted threats and invectives at the political prisoners, “Papatayin namin kaya! Hanggang kayang babahay pa namin kaya. Lalo na yung mga matandang. (We will kill you! Don’t come down, we will kill you, especially your elderly.)”

The jail guards enjoyed the threatened violence against political prisoners. The hunger strike was meant to symbolically deliver the political prisoners’ call for freedom, social justice, and peace talks between the GPH and the NDFP.

People’s counter action

The blatant violations of people’s rights perpetrated by the US-Aquino regime and its machineries have made the poor majority of the Filipino people realize that they have themselves to defend their lives and limbs, and their livelihood, too. People’s actions are alive, calling attention to and gathering support for the need for genuine change.

Letters to the Pope, letters of hope

The need to free all political prisoners—their unjust detention, the human condition in jail—and the need to resume peace talks between the NDFP and the GPH—became the central call of the campaign of human rights organizations and the families and relatives of victims of human rights violations during the Papal visit in January.

The visit of Pope Francis to the Philippines became an opportunity to show the realities in Philippine society to the whole world—the hunger and inequality, the oppression and exploitation. The international media covering the Pope’s every move further exposed the BS Aquino government’s criminal negligence of disaster victims. Every year after the super typhoon Yolanda, no significant rehabilitation has been implemented for the survivors.

For the under-represented and marginalized Filipinos, the papal visit was the perfect opportunity for their cries to be heard and have someone like Pope Francis to stand by them in their search for justice and peace as their demands always fell on the government’s deaf ears.

As early as November 2, 2014, Families of Desaparecidos for Justice started its letter writing activity on Plaza Miranda, in front of the Quiapo Church. Relatives and friends of the disappeared wrote to Pope Francis seeking his help in the search for their missing loved ones. Raised in Argentina, Pope Francis, or Father Jorge to his fellow Argentinians, knew only too well the issue of enforced disappearances for his country experienced thousands of abductions and disappearances during the dictatorship.

Pope Francis’ intercession in the release of the Cuban 5 also gave stronger hope for Filipino political prisoners that he can do the same in the Philippines. For this, almost all political detainees in more than 50 jails held a nationwide hunger strike or fasting in time for the Pope’s visit on January 15-19. They appealed to Pope Francis to join them in their call for the release of political prisoners especially the women, the sick and elderly.

In the Batangas Provincial Jail and Davao Penal Colony, more than 600 common crime offenders joined the hunger strike in solidarity with the political prisoners.

Political prisoners in SICA-1 in Camp Bagong Diwa, Taguig City, requested jail authorities to donate the money saved from their food rations to the typhoon victims. “As we will not be getting our food rations for 10 days, we are asking the jail authorities to donate, in our behalf, the savings in our food rations to the victims of super-typhoon Yolanda and typhoon Senyang. We estimate such savings amount to at least P10,000. We ask that the donation be carried out by the International Committee of the Red Cross.” The request was dismissed by jail authorities who opted to serve unusually good meals at the time of the hunger strike.

Families of political prisoners, desaparecidos, and victims of extrajudicial killings held a welcome activity in front of the office-residence of the Papal Nuncio on the eve of the Pope’s arrival on January 14. “Viva Il Papa! Hear our cries for justice,” the families chanted.

On January 15, relatives of political prisoners and other victims of human rights violations joined members of people’s organization in welcoming Pope Francis in a “Masagana Bayan” (People’s Mass) at the Lawasan Bonifacio. During the Holy Mass, relatives of political prisoners offered red roses made of beads—product of women political prisoners at the Correctional Institute for Women. They also offered a cross with...
Karapatan Monitor

January-March 2016

painting done by Eduard Sarmiento, an NDFP peace consultant who is at the New Bilibid Prison. The painting depicts the plight and struggles of political prisoners and the role of the Church of the Poor.

As a response, the BS Aquino government militarized the Pope’s visit—shameless as it is, interspersed with numerous human rights violations, corruption scandals and guilty of criminal neglect. The AFP and the PNP’s deployment of forces bordered on the absurd, in the guise of the Pope’s safety and security. In truth, the deployment was meant to keep the people away from the Pope, especially those who would want him to know what ails this country.

“We tried to line up along your route from Malacatiang to Manila Cathedral, holding banners of gratitude and doing pleases, but we were blocked by policemen brandishing truncheons and clubs. They could not give us any reason for doing so aside from their grim faces of suppression. They continuously questioned us whenever we saw us holding our banners and pictures of our loved ones with the word “Free” written on it, as if we were holding an instrument of potential harm. We were not disheartened, for we saw in the eyes of others waiting for you, dear Pope Francis, a light of interest and sympathy,” Nikki Gamara, daughter of a political prisoner, NDFP peace consultant Renante Gamara, wrote in her open letter to Pope Francis.

Independent Church. He was among the ecumenical leaders who met with the Pope.

Raps vs. Jail Warden Michelle Ng-Bonto

On February 12, political prisoners and their relatives, lawyers Ng-Bonto for gross misconduct, grave abuse of authority, gross oppression political prisoners and the non-compliance of the NDFP Peace Agreement on Release and Return of Hostages, which is an agreement between the government and the NDFP that was signed in 2013.

The complainants are political prisoners Arzate Sarmiento, Dennis Ortiz, Eliseo Lopez, Voltaire Guaray, Hermogenes Rezes Jr., Modesto Araza, Rolando Layd, Philip Encrea, Alberto Macasining, Feliciano Salamat, Edward Lanzanas, Jared Morales, Jesus Abelria Jr., Alex Arias, Eddie...
prosecution and due punishment of those involved in the threats against a human rights defender.”

The trial of BS Aquino launched

The crimes of the BS Aquino government—the extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, massive forced evacuations, the Mamasapano fiasco, its criminal negligence of disaster victims, the massive corruption through the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) and the pork barrel system, other attacks on the people’s lives and livelihood, and the sell-out of the country’s sovereignty and patrimony—have gone too far, from worse to worst. The need to make the US-Aquino regime accountable for these crimes becomes more urgent today.

Last March 12, 2015, the International People’s Tribunal (IPT) was launched at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City to try the crimes of the US-Aquino regime.

Among those who attended the activity were families of victims of the BS Aquino government and complainant organizations. Aurora Santiago, wife of slain Dutch missionary Willem Geertman, came to the launch and is set to present Geertman’s case to the IPT, which will be held in July 2015 in Washington, DC. Geertman, a Dutch national who lived for many years in the Philippines, was killed almost three years ago in July 2012.

Mothers of missing University of the Philippines activists, Karen Empeno and Sherlyn Cadapan also attended the launch to represent the victims of rights violations during the Macapagal-Arroyo administration who are still crying out for justice. For them, BS Aquino should also be held accountable for the continuing injustice and impunity.

Other cases that will be presented to the IPT are the military attacks against people-initiated schools and learning centers, the extrajudicial killing of Fr. Fausto Tentorio and free-trade advocate Romeo Capalla, the killing of a minor, Roque Antivo, and the violations of workers’ rights in TNC-owned plantations and agribusiness especially in Mindanao.

The IPT will also probe into the role of the continuing and even increasing US military presence and intervention in the Philippines such as the botched Oplan Wolverine/Exodus in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

Conveners of the tribunal include the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP), the National Lawyers Guild (NLG), the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), and IBON International.

The ICHRP Chairperson and IPT Convenor, Reverend Canon Barry Naylor, explained the IPT, although judicially non-binding, is symbolic and significant. “People’s tribunals have had success in directing international attention to grave abuses of human rights in various countries including the Philippines during the Marcos and Arroyo regimes. The IPT draws inspiration from and builds on the momentum of previous peoples’ tribunals to advance human rights and hold governments to account,” he said.

A similar tribunal was held in 2007, the independent Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal (PPT) based in The Hague, Netherlands that handed down a guilty verdict against Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for “crimes against humanity.” The PPT said Arroyo was guilty of colluding with her US counterpart, George W. Bush, to perpetuate extrajudicial killings, massacres and tortures of civilians in the Philippines in the name of the US war on terror.

The current president, similar to his predecessor, will have to face serious charges in the courts. Now that calls for BS Aquino to resign have become popular, the cases to be presented to the IPT will give clearer bases why this criminally negligent president has to step down.

BS Aquino’s ‘business as usual’ stance did not and can no longer deflect the people’s call for his resignation from office, which he brought upon himself. The attacks against the people are bound to intensify and cases of human rights violations will continue to rise if he stays longer in power.

BS Aquino fanned the flames of people’s anger with his treachery in the Mamasapano case. He provoked the people to call for his resignation because of a failed promise to end corruption in government and because of his barefaced puppetry to US imperialism.

BS Aquino showed the people the need for nationalist and pro-people leaders. BS Aquino showed the people the need for leaders who genuinely respect human rights and international humanitarian laws. The Filipino people need leaders who need not suppress the people’s voices because they and the people’s voices are one. BS Aquino showed the people the need for leaders who know the meaning of real peace. BS Aquino showed the people the need for leaders who have the heart for the poor. BS Aquino moved the Filipino people to unite. He showed the Filipino people the reasons why he should resign, now!

PHOTO CREDITS
arkibongbayan.org | bulatlat.com | Ciriaco Santiago III | Erwin Mascarinas | Kilab Multimedia | pinoyweekly.org