



September 21, 2014

Urgent Call for the Immediate Cessation of AFP Military Operations in Lacub, Abra

We call on all peace and human rights advocates--individuals, institutions, the Church, people's organizations, the academe and other groups to support the call of the people of Lacub, Abra in the Cordillera Region, Philippines, for the immediate cessation of the military operations of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) therein and nearby communities.

The AFP military operations in Lacub, Abra, reported to have started since August, resulted to a number of reports of human rights and international humanitarian law violations. **Two civilians became victims of extrajudicial killings by the Armed Forces of the Philippines.** Seven members of the New People's Army (NPA) were killed in the AFP combat operations. **The state of the bodies of civilians and NPAs killed by the AFP, as observed during the retrieval, bore signs and strong indications of probable torture and desecration of remains. There is a probability as well that rules of engagement were violated, that there could have been excessive use of force and that even if the members of the NPA had no more capacity to fight back, they were still slain or 'no quarter' was given during the conduct of the AFP military operations.**

As the AFP operations are ongoing in the area and there are still violations being reported, there is a need to provide support to the affected communities. Agricultural production has been limited and small-scale mining activities have been suspended seriously affecting the livelihood and food source of the people. Classes in elementary and high school have been suspended twice. There is also an urgent need to conduct a thorough investigation of human rights and international humanitarian law violations to be able to pursue accountability and justice.

A fact finding mission conducted last September 8-9, documented the following violations:

1. EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLING OF ENGINEER FIDELA SALVADOR

Engr. Salvador, 50 years old, and a mother of three children is a consultant of the Cordillera Disaster Response and Development Services Inc. (CorDisRDS) and the Center for Development Programs in the Cordillera (CDPC). She was on a monitoring visit for various socio-economic projects implemented by CorDiSRDS and CDPC in Lacub, Abra when she was killed by the AFP in their operations.

On September 6, Engr. Salvador's body along with the dead body of another civilian, Lacub resident Noel Viste, was airlifted by the AFP from their Bantugo military camp in Lacub to the Barbarit, Lagangilang, military camp. Attendants of the Pineda Funeral Homes fetched and brought them to the Pineda Funeral Homes in Bangued where her body was identified by the staff of the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance (CHRA) on the evening of September 6.

The autopsy report conducted by the National Bureau of Investigation cites that she suffered from 9 gunshot wounds, multiple contusions and lacerations and a head injury caused by a blunt object. The report states that the cause of her death are: "hypovolemic shock secondary to gunshot wounds and the blunt traumatic injury to the head (contributory)".

2. AFP'S GRAVE COERCION and USE OF CIVILIANS AS HUMAN SHIELDS AND GUIDES IN THE CONDUCT OF THE MILITARY OPERATIONS, EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLING OF LACUB RESIDENT NOEL VISTE

Elements of the 41st IBPA under 2Lt. Jose Mari Landicho coerced 24 civilians from Brgys. Poblacion and Bakag to be human shields on September 5, 2014. The 24 civilians were retrieving the dead when the AFP unit accosted them. They were coerced to walk in line between soldiers for almost an hour. Noel Viste of Poblacion, was among the 24, coerced by the AFP that night to be a civilian guide. On September 6, he was found dead.

From the same incident, they coerced Nicasio Asbucan to act as guide and detained him from September 5-7. Asbucan was only surfaced and turned-over to Chief of Police of Lacub on the noon of September 7. He manifests symptoms of acute stress disorder (ASD). The AFP attempted to coerce him to name Jay-ar Balaoag, Brgy. Capt. Of Lan-ag, Lacub as the NPA who fired and killed Noel Viste.

*The indigenous peoples of the Cordillera regard the retrieval of the dead in their community and turning them over to their families for decent burial as a sacred obligation.

3. THREAT, COERCION AND ILLEGAL DETENTION. On the morning of September 3 at about 8:30 am, Norberto Borgonia, a resident of Brgy. Guinguinabang was looking for his carabao when he was apprehended by a unit of the AFP at Mt. Kiboot. He was detained, accused and forced to admit that he was a member of the NPA. He was released at about 6:30 pm when his villagemates were able to locate and vouch for him.

4. INDISCRIMINATE FIRING AND SERIOUS DISRUPTION OF LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY. On Sept 5 between 9:00-10:00 pm Army personnel stationed at Sitio. Bantugo, Poblacion, Lacub belonging to 41st IBPA indiscriminately fired their weapons in the direction of Talampac Proper and

Pacoc, Talampac. An M203 shell landed in Bobon, a farming area, and the direction of the bullets was towards the houses. This resulted in the following:

- a. 3 farmers manning the irrigation were forced to sleep in the fields for fear of being strafed;
- b. 6 families in Sitio Pacoc evacuated from their houses and stayed with their neighbors for the night; and
- c. the suspension of classes in Bantugo Elementary and High School and Our Lady of Guadalupe High School on September 5 and 8.

5. RESTRICTION OF MOVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY. Due to fear and to protect the residents from the military operation, Brgys. Talampak, Poblacion and Guinguinabang were forced to impose a curfew from 9:00 pm to 6:00 am. Small-scale miners stopped operating their mines since Sept 4 up to this reporting.

6. REINFORCEMENT OF MORE AFP TROOPS IN THE COMMUNITY AND THEIR CONTINUING MILITARY ENCAMPMENT ENDANGERING CIVILIANS. Despite two community petitions against the detachment in Sitio Bantugo, the 41st IBPA continues to maintain their detachment near the Bantugo Elementary and High School. The recent indiscriminate firing drove the residents of Talampak to come up with an agreement not to let their children attend school in Bantugo unless the detachment is removed.

Recommended actions:

- 1. Support the calls for the following:**
 - Urgent cessation of military operations in Lacub, Abra to ensure the protection of civilians from the AFP
 - Immediate pull out of the 41st IBPA and other AFP units from Lacub, Abra to ensure the impartial and thorough investigation of the human rights and international humanitarian law violations
- 2. Issue statements/letters of indignation on the violations and to call for the following:**
 - Justice for Engr. Fidela Salvador
 - Justice for Noel Viste and the other victims of human rights violations of the 41st Infantry Battalion in Abra
 - Prosecution of the perpetrators of this incident and ensure that accountability is demanded in full from the 41st IB, the 5th Infantry Division and the Northern Luzon Command of the AFP ensuring command responsibility
- 3. Call on the Philippine government to:**
 - Withdraw Oplan Bayanihan, the Philippine government's counterinsurgency program, that victimizes civilians.

- Observe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all the major Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law instruments that it is a party and signatory to including the Comprehensive Agreement to the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL)
- Resume the Peace Talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP)

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Please send us a copy of your email/mail/fax to the above-named government officials and coordinate with us for the support to the communities and families affected through our address below:

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