

LIBERATION INTERNATIONAL

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January - February 2009

Rising unemployment, poverty under US-Arroyo government

By Pingkian

In the wake of the global financial crisis in October 2008, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, president of the Republic of the Philippines, boasted that the country's economy is more resilient than it has ever been. That economic reforms her government had initiated "would enable the Philippine economy to weather the current storm."

Judging from the swelling ranks of unemployed and underemployed Filipinos in the past three months, nothing could be farther from the truth.

In January 2009, Intel Corporation announced plans to close its testing facility in the Philippines. Citing RP government data, labor secretary Marianito Roque said that up to 60,000 jobs could be lost in the country's electronics sector this year. He added that a total of up to 800,000 workers could lose their jobs this year.

During the first two months of 2009, he added, some 15,000 workers have been laid off while 19,000 others had their workweek cut to four days or less.

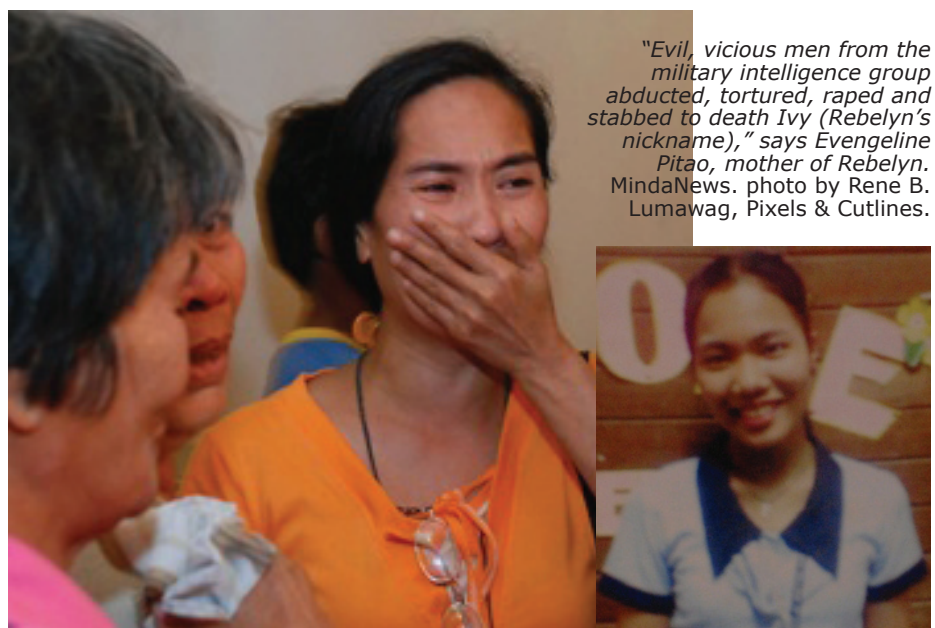
Largely underreported and manipulated to show a rosier picture, economic data from the Arroyo government obscure the severity of the unemployment crisis.

A forecast issued by independent think-tank Ibon Foundation, for example, says that the ranks of unemployed and underemployed Filipinos will swell to between 11 million and 12 million this year.

On an almost daily basis, newspapers report the closures of several businesses specifically in the manufacturing and service sectors, throwing thousands out of work while many more workers live in fear of being terminated and left without work the next day.

Current estimates show at least 4.06 million jobless Filipinos and an unemployment rate of 10.8 percent.

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"Evil, vicious men from the military intelligence group abducted, tortured, raped and stabbed to death Ivy (Rebelyn's nickname)," says Evengeline Pitao, mother of Rebelyn. MindaNews. photo by Rene B. Lumawag, Pixels & Cutlines.

NDFP condemns abduction, murder of Rebelyn Pitao

By **LUIS G. JALANDONI**
Chairperson
NDFP Negotiating Panel

The National Democratic Front of the Philippines condemns in the strongest terms the abduction and brutal murder of 20-year-old Rebelyn Pitao, daughter of Leoncio Pitao, Commander of the New People's Army. We hold Mrs. Gloria Arroyo and Executive Secretary, General Eduardo Ermita responsible for this dastardly violation of Rebelyn Pitao's right to life. It is likewise a blatant violation of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL).

Mrs. Arroyo's and General Ermita's frustrated satanic desire to defeat the New People's Army and in particular kill or capture NPA Commander Parago, *nom de guerre* of Leoncio Pitao, has led them to commit grave violations of international humanitarian law and the CARHRIHL. In

June of last year, the brother of Commander Parago, Danilo, was abducted and killed in Tagum City.

Now, his daughter, Rebelyn, a teacher at St. Peter College in Toril, Davao City, was abducted by two armed men at 6:30 in the evening of 4 March 2009 at the crossing of Bago Gallera de Oro Subdivision in Davao City. The gunmen threatened the tricycle driver, Danny E. Pelicano, as they forcibly took Rebelyn and forced her into a white van.

On 5 March, at 6:30 p.m., her dead body was found floating on a river, bearing torture marks.

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The job situation in the country, according to an Ibon study, worsened in step with the global economic and financial crisis in 2008, with 279,000 Filipino workers losing their jobs. The same study also showed that in 2008, the manufacturing sector lost 150,000 jobs; the transport, storage and communication sector lost 10,000; and financial intermediation lost 4,000.

Ibon further revealed that around 500,000 to 600,000 jobs in the country's export-oriented electronics subsector will be affected by the ongoing economic depression in the US.

With a mounting unemployment crisis, poverty and hunger will strike more and more Filipinos as their poor standard of living becomes even worse.

Without even a superficial plan at job creation and economic sustainability measures to stave off the effects of the current crisis, the bankrupt US-Arroyo regime is relying more heavily on overseas jobs for its laid off citizens. It has intensified the export of Filipino laborers and professionals, even as thousands of overseas Filipino workers are already being sent home by countries also affected by the global financial and economic crisis.

A so-called "rationalization policy" in many government agencies had recently been implemented by the regime, retrenching rank-and-file employees while keeping intact the top-level, high-salaried, but obviously redundant positions often created out of nepotism and corrupt political considerations.

While desperate Filipinos wanting to escape poverty bleed their pockets dry to pay the Arroyo regime their last pesos to go abroad, they are victimized by illegal recruiters who often have connections to the regime. And whether in the Philippines or

... Rebelyn, page 1, col 3

This latest outrageous human rights violation by the Arroyo regime and its continuing violation of the peace agreements, including the CARHRIHL and the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees and the recent arrest and torture of NDFP Consultant Eduardo Sarmiento and the continuing detention of NDFP consultants Randall Echanis, Elizabeth Principe, Angie Ipong and Glicerio Pernia, among others, render peace talks with the Arroyo regime untenable.

For this dastardly murder of Rebelyn Pitao, and so many other human rights violations against the Filipino people, Mrs. Gloria Arroyo, General Eduardo Ermita and other minions of the Arroyo regime must be held responsible and accountable.

The blood of Rebelyn is on the hands of Mrs. Arroyo and General Ermita! ■

abroad, desperate Filipinos find themselves victims of the Arroyo regime's legalized extortion – exorbitant energy, housing, food and tax costs at home and increased exactions abroad.

As migrant Filipinos confront the crisis in their host countries and as overseas job sources contract, remittances are certain to be affected.

Militant groups inside and outside the Philippines have called for radical measures to address the crisis, among them, calls to implement genuine agrarian reform and national industrialization, which are also fundamental demands of the revolutionary movement in the Philippines.

One thing is certain though, as the crisis in the Philippines and the rest of the capitalist world deepens, so will the anti-imperialist struggle and revolutionary resistance of the working class and peoples intensify. As the Communist Party of the Philippines in a statement issued last 30 January so fittingly



stated: "The rotten ruling system is sinking so deep, it is helpless to lift itself and is only pushing the masses into ever worse squalor. Millions are being dislocated by the crisis. It is becoming increasingly clear to the Filipino people that there is no other option but to wage revolutionary struggle to put an end to the rotten and oppressive semicolonial and semifeudal system." ■



The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) is an alliance of revolutionary organizations with roots in the various sectors and regions of the Philippines. Its goal is to build a society that enjoys national sovereignty, genuine democracy, social justice, progress and peace. It seeks to unite with all forces willing to achieve these goals.

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BOARD OF EDITORS

- Roselle Valerio
- Ed Ladera
- Isah Antonio
- Jose Emilio Jacinto III
- N. Timmerman-Francisco
- Bagani Dong-Ilay

Liberation International is a publication of the NDFP International Information Office

NDFP International Information Office
Postbus 19195 | 3501 DD Utrecht
The Netherlands
Email: ndf@casema.nl
www.ndfp.net

US troops not welcome in the Philippines!

By Isah Antonio

Signaling defiance against US military intervention and aggression in the Philippines, demonstrators burned 25 US flags on 25 February, the last day of the Anti-VFA (Visiting Forces Agreement) Caravan, in Legazpi City, south of Manila. Speakers and participants in the three-day protest caravan in the Bicol region called for the abrogation of the VFA and the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) between the governments of the US and the Republic of the Philippines, and the cancellation of all Balikatan (shoulder-to-shoulder) joint military exercises under the auspices of VFA.

Organized by the broad-based Bicolano Alliance for Nationalism against Balikatan (BAN Balikatan), the caravan coincided with other protest actions in various parts of the country led by the Bagong Alyasang Makabayan (BAYAN-New Patriotic Alliance).

In an attempt to sabotage the nationwide protest actions, security and intelligence forces of the Gloria Arroyo government tried to sabotage and harass the demonstrators. Sharpened nails were scattered on the roads to puncture tires; military and garbage trucks were used as road blockades; food supplies of the protesters were confiscated; and plainclothes agents infiltrated the ranks of the participants to sow fear and intrigue.

BAN Balikatan, an alliance of patriotic organizations and personalities from the Bicol region, was formed to protest and prevent the holding of the 25th Balikatan Joint RP-US War Exercises in the provinces of the region. An estimated 6,000 US military troops and 2,500 troops from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) are expected to participate in the war games from 25 February to 30 April 2009.

The first of these exercises was held in Basilan island, in southern Philippines in 2002, involving 4,000 US military troops. This had in fact been used as a guise for “counter-terrorist” operations under Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines.

Casualties of war exercises

Every Balikatan war exercise in the country has been met with widespread protests. In Mindanao, posters demanding “US Troops Out Now!” and “Junk the Visiting Forces

Agreement!” had been appearing in major cities, towns and highways since 2002.

The indignant people of Mindanao have been demanding the eviction of all US military forces in the country, whose main purpose has been to conduct counterrevolutionary operations, surveillance and spying, joint operations training and other forms of “activities”, aimed chiefly against the Muslim secessionist movement and the national democratic movement in the island.

The presence of US military forces exacerbates an already volatile situation in the island.

The people also raised the issues of social costs and threats to peace in the region, and the role of the US in actual military operations against the peoples of Mindanao.

Kawagib Moro human rights organization in one report cited atrocities perpetrated by US troops against civilians since the start of Balikatan military “exercises”. These included the shooting in July 2002 of a farmer, Buyung-Buyung Isnijal, by a certain Sgt. Reggie Lane in Tuburan, Basilan; the shooting and maiming of Arsid Baharun in Zamboanga City in 2004 while US soldiers were conducting a marksmanship practice; the wounding of 50-year old Bizma Juhan in Sulu in September 2006 when a US bomb misfired; and the intimidation and harassment of villagers as US soldiers brandish their high-powered arsenal.

Most telling was the statement of Rawina Wahid, one of the survivors of the 4 February 2008 massacre of civilians in Maimbung, Sulu, who said that she saw four US soldiers among the Philippine Army forces who perpetrated the massacre. One of those killed was her husband.

In December 2006, a Philippine court convicted US Marines Lance Corporal Daniel Smith for the rape of Filipina “Nicole” in November 2005. But instead of serving prison time, the officials of the Arroyo government turned over the convict to the US Embassy in Manila. Three other co-accused US Marines were earlier acquitted by the court.

Counter-revolutionary operations in the guise of war exercises

It is no coincidence that US-RP military exercises are being held in areas where the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People’s Army, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and its Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, hold strong presence. The war exercises should be seen as an integral part of the US-Arroyo regime’s counter-revolutionary scheme.

US Special Operations Forces (SOFs) are in actual war zones in major islands of the Philippines. Using low-intensity warfare operations, they combine public relations,



file photo, arkibongbayan.org

US troops, page 4, col 1 ...

... US troops, page 3, col 3

intelligence gathering, so-called civic action, road/infrastructure projects, psychological and covert combat operations to try to destroy the peoples' movements.

Former US ambassador to the Philippines Francis Ricciardone admitted in an interview three years ago that "a strategic support branch of US intelligence had been formed in the Philippines with 70 US spies working with the Philippine Southern Command to bring intelligence for the AFP and law-enforcement".

The US uses high-tech and on-the-ground surveillance and spying operations. The SOFs also use unmanned spy planes equipped with camera, recording devices and other sophisticated equipment for aerial surveillance. Acknowledged by US and RP military officials as being used only to prepare for "humanitarian operations", civilians have reported several to have crashed in Jolo, Sulu in November 2007; in Indanan, Sulu in February 2008; in Pikit, North Cotabato in October 2008; and in Guindolongan, Maguindanao in November 2009.

US troops here to stay

At the end of the war exercises, not all US SOFs and other military troops leave the country. A large number stay and are being based inside Philippine military camps such as in Camp Navarro at the Southern Command Headquarters.

Monopoly capitalists are salivating over the rich mineral resources found in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao with its gold, oil and deuterium mineral reserves. US military troops' continuing presence in the Philippines protects the economic, political and military interests of US imperialism not only in the Philippines but in the whole Asia-Pacific region.

The Communist Party of the Philippines warned that "American presence in the Philippines is bound to become more pervasive and intrusive as US imperialism seeks to assert and maintain its proprietary hold on the country as a neocolony and as a forward base in the face of the worsening economic crisis presently rocking the US economy and the global capitalist system, and the threat of even worse consequences for the backward, neocolonial Philippine economy."

The Party called on the Filipino people to raise the banner of patriotism and revolution and heighten their struggle against US military intervention in the Philippines. ■

Photo: Xinhua/Luis Liwanag

US-based Filipinos condemn US-RP military exercises

Decrying what it described as a long history of senseless civilian deaths and gross human rights violations resulting from an endless series of military exercises of the US and Philippine governments, member organizations of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan USA (BAYAN USA – New Patriotic Alliance) in February called for a stop to the deployment of an additional 6,000 US troops to the Bicol region in the Philippines and the abrogation of the US-RP Visiting Forces Agreement.

The additional troops are said to participate in fresh round of joint "training exercises" in the central region of the Philippines in April, dubbed *Balikatan 2* (shoulder-to-shoulder), as a "counter-terrorism" measure for the region.

On 19 February, a 16-month-old child was killed and several others were wounded when operating troops of the 901st Infantry Brigade of the Philippine Army fired grenades into their home in Ligao, Albay province, in the Bicol region. The child, Rafaela Polvorido, died in the hospital of blast wounds. Other family members were also treated for blast and shrapnel wounds.

Military offensives in the province have been intensifying to "clear the area" for the scheduled joint military exercises in April.

BAYAN USA condemned what it called "the arrogant and costly continuance of the joint military exercises under the auspices of the VFA, despite the widespread opposition of the Filipino people... It is utterly disappointing that while the world celebrated the voting out of George W. Bush in favor of 'change we can all believe in', the Barack Obama administration has decided to NOT CHANGE Bush's foreign policy in the Philippines."

In a statement released to coincide with demonstrations in Manila calling for the

VFA's abrogation, BAYAN USA said, "The terms of the 1999 RP-US VFA has been poorly implemented and has been abused by both governments. The result has been a large wielding of favors and privileges for the US government while grossly diminishing the Philippines' right to national sovereignty in military and judicial affairs."

It cited the most recent case of gang-rape involving US military personnel deployed to the Philippines. Lance Corporal Daniel Smith was convicted in 2006 by a Philippine court for raping a 22-year old Filipina in 2005. Three other US marines were implicated in the gang-raping of the woman but were eventually acquitted by the court. In a blatant display of subservience, Philippine authorities turned over the convicted Smith to the US Embassy in Manila, despite the outrage of majority of the Filipino populace who wanted him to serve prison time in a Philippine jail.

In stark contrast, the same VFA stipulates that Philippine personnel found guilty of violating US laws will have to serve time in US penal institutions.

According to BAYAN USA, "the VFA must totally and completely be terminated and that there should be an assurance that no such agreement will ever be entered into again, in order to satisfy the yearning of the Filipino people for genuine national sovereignty and human rights."

"It is shameful that the Obama administration is paying for the costly *Balikatan* military exercises at a time of acute economic crisis in the US," it stressed. "As more and more people in the US lose their jobs, homes, education opportunities, and access to quality health care, it is unconscionable for the US government to deliver millions of taxpayer dollars to the corrupt and tyrannical Arroyo government which funnels the money to death squads." ■



Demands mount to investigate Israeli war crimes

By Ed Ladera

In the wake of the massive death and destruction caused by the government of Israel in its artillery bombardment and armed invasion of Gaza since the last quarter of 2008, there are mounting demands from all over the world for investigating Israeli war crimes.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned "in the strongest terms this outrageous attack, which is the third time it has happened" after Israeli GPS-assisted mortars hit the United Nations Works and Relief Agency (UNRWA) compound on 15 January. "I strongly demand a thorough investigation and punishment for those responsible," he added.

On 9 February, he told a closed-door briefing of the UN Security Council that the UN had set up a commission as a preliminary step to look into Israeli damage to UN premises.

On 23 February, the 47-member UN Human Rights Council in Geneva passed a resolution calling for an "urgent independent international fact-finding mission" to investigate all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by Israel. Ms. Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights told the special session, "I remind the Council that violations of international humanitarian law may constitute war crimes for which individual criminal responsibility may be involved."

Meanwhile, delegates from 22 member-countries of the Arab League (AL) agreed in an extraordinary session in Cairo on 27 January to ask the UN General Assembly to "form an international committee to investigate Israeli crimes in the Gaza Strip and to set up a criminal court to try Israeli war criminals." AL Secretary General Amr Moussa also informed the International Criminal Court (ICC) about this matter.

Luis Moreno-Ocampo, Chief Prosecutor of the ICC, subsequently announced on 3 February that a "preliminary analysis" has been launched to review the military conduct of Israeli forces participating in the offensive against Gaza.

He said his office had received 210 communications from individuals and non-governmental organizations around the world regarding events in Gaza. The ICC analysis

War crimes, page 6, col 1 ...



A UN foreign worker runs outside the UN warehouse in Gaza after Israeli strikes hit the compound 15 January. Photo from San Francisco Sentinel.

Kyrgyz Parliament votes to close down US military base

By Bagani Dong-ilay

The parliament of Kyrgyzstan on 19 February 2009 voted overwhelmingly, 78-1, to close down the US military base in its territory. By its decision, the parliament of Kyrgyzstan has exercised its sovereign right against US military intervention. Its decision is also in accord with the interests of the peoples of the world who aspire for a peaceful world and oppose the imperialists' wars of aggression and occupation.

This is reminiscent of the decision of the Philippine Senate to close down US military bases in the Philippines in 1991, due to the strong pressure from a broad and militant mass movement that fought for the closure of the bases. The Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Base, both located in northern Philippines, had been used extensively by the US in its wars of aggression in Indochina, Asia Pacific and the Middle East.

The United States concluded a military basing agreement with Kyrgyzstan in December 2001 to use the Manas airforce base, shortly after it launched its war of aggression in Afghanistan.

In apparent anticipation of the decision, Gen. David Howell Petraeus, chief of the US Central Command, traveled to Uzbekistan on 17 February to pressure

the Uzbek government to reopen the US military base in that country, closed down in 2005. The US had used the Khanabad Airport in Uzbekistan as an airbase until relations between the two countries soured in 2005.

Manas had been serving as a key supply line for US and NATO forces in their war of aggression in Afghanistan. It handles the transit of 15,000 troops and 500 tons of cargo each month to and from Afghanistan. The closure would further strain supply lines at a time when US president Barack Obama is planning to send more troops to Afghanistan.

The US dominates the world with its network of more than 700 overseas military bases in 130 countries in all continents except Antarctica. It deploys over half a million soldiers, spies, technicians and civilian contractors overseas to maintain this global hegemony. It also maintains secret bases to monitor military as well as civilian communications around the world.

US military bases in foreign territories are used as launching pads for wars of aggression and occupation, and in bullying smaller and weaker nations through gunboat diplomacy, in order to maintain and expand US economic interests around the globe. It is in the interest of the peoples of the world who aspire for peace to struggle for the closure of all US overseas military bases. ■

... War crimes, page 5, col 1

will focus on charges against Israel of using disproportionate force, white phosphorus bombs, depleted uranium, and using civilians as human shields. Israel is also charged with the destruction of schools, mosques, houses, UN compounds and government buildings, which it is bound to protect under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The foreign minister of the Palestinian Authority, Riyal al-Maliki met with Moreno-Ocampo and said, "We've come to ask for justice and an investigation into the crimes committed by Israelis and the Israeli army in Gaza recently. We expect the prosecution to take action." Earlier, on 21 January, acting Palestinian Justice Minister Ali Khashan personally gave the letter of recognition of the jurisdiction of the ICC to Moreno-Ocampo. The latter however said he still has to consider if the Palestinian Authority is authorized to recognize the jurisdiction of the ICC.

Elsewhere, institutions in Turkey have launched investigations into accusations that Israel committed genocide and crimes against humanity during its 23-day offensive on Gaza.

The Turkish human rights association Mazlumder filed a complaint against President Shimon Peres, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Defense Minister Ehud Barak and army chief of staff Gabi Ashkenazi. Under Turkish law, prosecutors are required to examine all complaints to determine whether there are grounds for a full-scale investigation that could lead to formal charges.

Mazlumder accused Israel of directly attacking civilians "with the aim of annihilating them", and employing internationally-banned weapons, including white phosphorus bombs and depleted uranium. This constitutes, according to Mazlumder, genocide and crimes against humanity.

It demanded that "the suspects be detained should they enter Turkey". Turkish law allows for the trial of people accused of genocide or crimes against humanity even if the crimes have been committed abroad.

In Spain, Judge Fernando Andreu launched an investigation into seven Israeli officials over a 22 July 2002 bombing in Gaza that killed suspected Hamas leader Salah Shehadeh and 14 other people, including nine children.

The one-ton bomb dropped on a densely populated area also caused injuries to some 150 Palestinians. Judge Andreu declared that the attack "showed signs of constituting a crime against humanity". He called



A spokesperson for the Muslim Christian Peoples Alliance (MCPA) condemns the US-supported Israeli military attacks and invasion in Gaza, during protest rally in front of the US Embassy in Manila, 16 January 2008. Photo from arkbongbayan.org.

the attack "disproportionate and excessive". Referring to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the court said the accused could face 10 to 15 years in jail.

The judge acted in line with Spain's assumption of the principle of universal jurisdiction in alleged cases of crimes against humanity and genocide.

Judge Andreu's action caused outrage in Israel. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni called on Spain to change its legislation, while opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu called the judicial investigation "absurd". Former military chief of staff Moshe Yaalon and National Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, both targeted for investigation by Judge Andreu, called the judge's order "ludicrous".

The others named in the suit are Dan Halutz, former Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff and Israeli Air Force commander at the time who admitted to having personally released the bomb; General Doron Almog; national security council head Giora Eiland; defense ministry official Michael Herzog; and Avi Dichter, director of the Shin Beth intelligence agency.

Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos informed Livni of Spain's plan to amend the Spanish legislation. But Spanish government sources said the possibility of a legal "adjustment or modification" would not be retroactive and would not affect the case before the court.

Israeli officials led by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert have promised military personnel state protection from foreign prosecution. He declared that "the commanders and soldiers sent to Gaza should know they are safe from various tribunals and Israel will defend them." He said the Israeli Justice Minister would consult the country's top legal experts.

Israel has prohibited the publication of the identities and photos of Israeli commanders and other personnel involved in the invasion of Gaza.

In the past, Israel has relied on US po-

litical support to stop any international investigation of Israeli atrocities against the Palestinian people. In April 2002, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan appointed former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari to head a 20-member UN commission charged with assessing the civilian death toll from the April 2002 Israeli attack on Jenin, where hundreds of civilians were killed during three weeks of assaults by fighter jets, helicopters and bulldozers in a "zone" closed to the media.

The Israeli security cabinet led by then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon voted against letting the investigators proceed. John Negroponte, US ambassador to the UN, declared that the US was against the Jenin war crimes inquiry. Sharon who was found by an Israeli commission to have been "indirectly responsible" for the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre, arrogantly declared: "No attempt to tarnish our name or put us on trial before the world will succeed."

Kofi Annan regrettably announced the disbandment of the UN commission.

Attempts to investigate the 25 July 2006 Israeli bombing of the UN post in Lebanon, which caused the death of Canadian Infantry Officer Maj. Paeta Hess-von Kruedener and three other UN observers, were also blocked by Israel with US support.

Cynthia Hess-von Kruedener, widow of the Canadian major, said: "I know my husband was reporting war crimes. And I guess they don't want to deal with that." She had called on the Canadian House of Commons to take the issue to the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly, but Prime Minister Stephen Harper said he did not believe Israel deliberately targeted the UN post. Israel claims the attack was an accident.

The wall of impunity which Israel puts up with the complicity of the US government is beginning to crack under mounting pressure from around the world to put Israeli officials and commanders on trial for war crimes perpetrated against the Palestinian people. ■

Widespread unrest, protests rock Europe

By Isah Antonio

From France to China, the world is being rocked by widespread social unrest and militant protests against imperialist policies that have triggered the worst economic and financial crisis since the Great Depression. The world's peoples are fighting back against the imperialists and their local reactionary cohorts who pass on the burden of the crisis onto the shoulders of the working people, while bailing out the criminal corporate chiefs that have caused and benefited from the crisis.

Workers, peasants, government employees, urban poor, women, youth and students, and other sectors are pouring onto the streets to protest the cutbacks in wages, job layoffs, high prices of basic goods, widespread hunger, cutting down on expenditures for already deteriorating social services, rampant corruption and violations of workers' rights and other human rights.

Following is a partial list of actions around the world held in January and February 2009 against monopoly capitalism and its policies:

- In France, up to 2.5 million people marched in the streets to demand pay hikes and job protection. Labor leaders hailed the action, which marked the first time since 2007 that France's eight union federations joined forces against anti-worker policies of French president Nicolas Sarkozy. The union federations called for a new day of action on March 19 to protest Sarkozy's policies and his handling of the crisis.
- In Ireland, about 100,000 people mostly from the public sector, protested against government plans for tackling the economic crisis. They are furious over an extra pension charge which the government wants to introduce and that the employees are made to suffer the burden of the crisis.
- In Russia, street rallies erupted in almost every major city in the last weekend of January to protest the hardships caused by the financial crisis. The protesters in Moscow called for the resignation of Russia's leaders.
- The calm temperament that usually prevails over Iceland's politics was shattered by the daily militant protest actions against the economic fallout

in Iceland. The protests resulted in the resignation of the prime minister and the collapse of his government. The country tumbled from being the world's fifth richest country to one in a state of bankruptcy. Today, 70 percent of all companies and 40 percent of households are technically bankrupt. Unemployment increased from six to nine percent in December 2008 alone; inflation is now close to 20 percent.

- In Germany, thousands of public sector workers went on strike to press for a wage increase to stave off hardships due to the economic downturn.
- The spontaneous massive demonstrations in Greece to protest and demand justice for the killing of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos by the police were supported by widespread workers' strikes and actions by farmers. The strikes were supported especially by the unemployed youth, while the farmers set up roadblocks across the country to protest against the depressed prices of their produce. Even

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invasion of Gaza and the war crimes being committed there. The resolution advanced the following calls:

- Apply severe sanctions against Israel, such as calling off relations and covenants and forbidding any sale of weapons to this country;
- Legal proceedings against states and companies selling weapons to Israel;
- Urging the EU to put an end to all economic, political and cultural relations with Israel and to cancel all the covenants and agreements linking it with this country;
- Holding an international conference in order to judge war crimes and crimes against humanity inflicted upon Gaza's population, as well as economic and environmental crimes, and to bring to court the persons accountable for these actions, as well as for those committed in Lebanon in 2006;
- Restoring UN Resolution 3379 which classifies Zionism as racism, and ousting Israel from the UN;

journalists joined protesters in occupying television stations and the offices of the conservative journalists' union.

- In Bulgaria, people took to the streets to demand economic and social reforms, and the resignation of the ruling coalition. Bulgarian farmers blocked the Danube bridge and demanded a minimum protective price and a stop to imports of cheap substitutes. The Bulgarian police also threatened to launch protest actions until their demands for better salaries and working conditions are met.

Working peoples around the world have launched protest actions since the last quarter of 2008 to demand accountability for the severe economic crisis and concrete actions to alleviate the peoples' suffering. Liberation International gathered reports of general strikes in China, northern India, and in the Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe where workers staged a 40-day strike demanding wage increases, freeze on house rents and cut in taxes and food prices.

In most of these actions, state security forces were quick to respond with the proverbial iron fist, preventing marches and breaking up demonstrations with the use of water canons, tear gas and guns. ■

- Launching an international campaign for rebuilding Gaza, lifting the blockade and for the release of all political prisoners.

A representative of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) spoke in the workshop "Anti-imperialism and solidarity between peoples: Coordination mechanisms, exchange of expertise and means of support". He conveyed his admiration for the strong determination and sentiment expressed by the wide range of forces present in the forum to forge unity in fighting imperialism and its lackey and hatchet-man in the Middle East, Israeli Zionism.

"In the Philippine movement, we used to say that the dictator Ferdinand Marcos was the best recruiter for the revolution," he stated. "In imposing fascist rule on the people in order to suppress the revolution, Marcos only succeeded in driving the people to embrace the revolution. In the same way, the wars of aggression and atrocities being committed by US imperialism and its lackey in the Middle East, Israeli Zionism, against the peoples of the world have served to unite all the diverse forces who are now present in this forum in fighting imperialism and in building a new world." ■

Beirut International Forum: Intensely united against imperialism

By Bagani Dong-ilay

While Israel was invading Gaza and committing genocide and war crimes against the Palestinian people, hundreds of anti-imperialists and progressives from around the world gathered in Lebanon on 16-18 January 2009, for the Beirut International Forum for Resistance, Anti-imperialism, Solidarity between Peoples and Alternatives.

Sounding a global call to unite political forces against imperialism led by US imperialism, the forum was organized by the Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation in Beirut, the National Gathering to Support the Choice of Resistance (Lebanon), the International Anti-imperialist and Peoples' Solidarity Forum (Calcutta Conference), the International Campaign against American and Zionist Occupation (Cairo Conference), and the Stop the War Campaign (London).

There were more than one thousand local and foreign participants, with more than 300 coming from Europe, North America, South America, Asia, Africa and other countries in the Middle East. All in all, participants came from 5 continents and 66 countries. This important gathering of anti-imperialist and progressive organizations and personalities from around the world was held at the UNESCO Palais in Beirut.

Prominent personalities participated in the forum. Among them were former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark of the International Action Center (IAC) and the Calcutta Conference; Leila Khaled of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP); Belgian sociologist Prof. François Houtart of Centre Tricontinental (Belgium), Tribunale Permanente dei Popoli (Italy) and one of the founders of the World Social Forum; and Cynthia McKinney, former member of the US Congress who staunchly opposed George W. Bush's war in Iraq.

What distinguished the Beirut forum from many others was the wider spectrum of political forces present, coming from widely divergent religious and ideological persuasions, cultural and political orientations, but intensely committed to uniting against a common enemy: imperialism.

There was a big delegation from Iran, both coming from the government of the Islamic

Delegates and observers to the Beirut International Forum for Resistance, Anti-imperialism, Solidarity between Peoples and Alternatives



Republic and Iranian non-government organizations. There was also a big delegation from Venezuela composed of members of parliament and representatives of mass organizations. Forum participants enthusiastically applauded the Venezuelan people and President Hugo Chavez for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador to Venezuela in protest against the Israeli invasion of Gaza.

There was a delegation from Hamas, high-level delegations from the Jordanian and Syrian Communist Parties, Red Party of Norway, Communist Organization of Greece (KOE), Revolutionary People's Liberation Party of Turkey (DHKC-P) and their People's Front, Workers' Party of Belgium, CARC Party of Italy, and the Workers' World Party of the US, among others.

As reflected in the forum's theme and its final statement, the prevailing spirit was that of resistance and unity of all forces fighting imperialism.

Diversity is recognized but differences were consciously toned down and unity against imperialism was stressed. A constant refrain expressed by speaker after speaker was that Islamists, secularists, communists, nationalists and all people of goodwill must unite against imperialism led by US imperialism, the number one enemy of the peoples of the world.

There was also a strong sentiment for concrete cooperation, and not just empty rhetoric.

The Final Statement of the Beirut Forum proclaimed the following rights and principles in building an alternative to the present world order dominated by imperialism:

The right of peoples to resistance as an inalienable principle; free choice and culture, a primary condition to peoples' freedom and the rejection of the imposed policy of

the world order, are the only way to protect social achievements.

The resistance against occupation is an integral part of the world's progressive and revolutionary movements' struggle against imperialism and neoliberalism, hegemony and militarization, and the destruction of social achievements accomplished throughout more than two-hundred years of righteous struggle.

Reinforcing the right of peoples to sovereignty over their natural resources, to the management of their own affairs, based on the principle of solidarity between peoples and creating alternatives enabling them to face the dictatorship of the market and policies adopted by some international financial organizations that violate the peoples' rights.

The right of peoples to food sovereignty, health and education; these rights should stay above all market considerations; and the practice of democracy should embrace not only the political but also the economic spheres.

The rejection of intellectual and cultural stereotyping and the recognition of the right to intellectual and religious differences.

Developing and spreading the fight against neoliberal globalization, and working for a world with more solidarity and humanity which requires the rejection of the hegemony of the big industrial countries and building another axis between the North and the South (South America, the Islamic Arab region, Asia and Africa) in order to reach equitable political and economic relations.

The assembly approved a special resolution on Gaza that expressed wholehearted support for the Palestinian resistance in Gaza, and condemned the ongoing Zionist

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