



ANG

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Editorial

## Oplan Bantay Laya is a failure

Oplan Bantay Laya (OBL) has failed. Thus declared the entire revolutionary movement based on assessments and reports from leading Party organs and New People's Army (NPA) commands in various regions of the country.

The US-Arroyo regime's leading military officers and security officials are living a fantasy in their belief that they have succeeded in their objective of crushing the Philippine revolution through Oplan Bantay Laya. Not only does the revolutionary movement remain alive and strong, it continues to gain strength and all-sidedly advance. There are currently more NPA units. The number of Red fighters and their firepower have grown. Guerrilla fronts have grown in number. The mass base has deepened and expanded. Red political power continues to grow nationwide.

OBL has wrought unprecedented damage, poverty and suffering to the people. This craven campaign's main targets are civilian activists, suspected supporters of the revolutionary movement and the regime's political rivals. OBL has nonetheless succeeded in fuelling the people's anger and hatred of the regime. It has tempered their strength and determination to take action and wage resistance. Instead of drawing them away, OBL has brought the masses closer to the revolution.

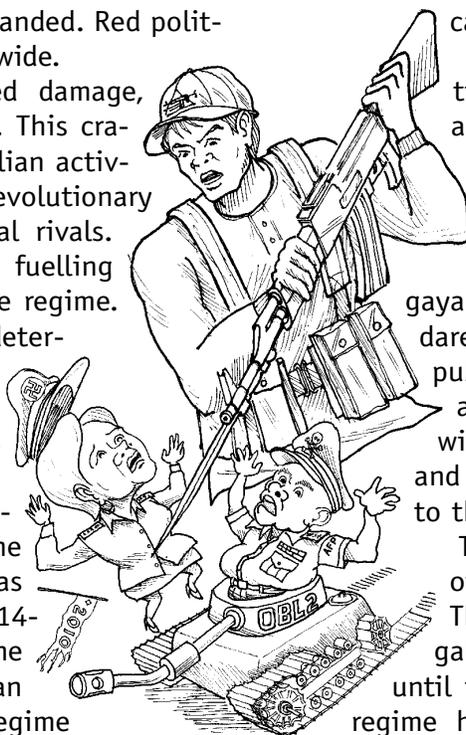
The US-Arroyo regime has committed heinous crimes against the people in implementing OBL. It has surpassed the Marcos dictatorship's 14-year open fascist rule in terms of the sheer quantity and brutality of human rights violations. The US-Arroyo regime

has been strongly condemned both here and abroad. The progressive and democratic forces, church people, human rights advocates, various sectors and the public at large are one in condemning the regime's terrorism. Despite all this, the US-Arroyo regime continues to pull all stops to implement OBL.

There were a number of guerrilla fronts that reeled from OBL's terrible onslaught. But the revolutionary forces and the people quickly adjusted. They closely studied the enemy's movements and adjusted to the situation's every twist and turn. In many areas, AFP operations failed to take momentum and were eventually thwarted after the revolutionary people took prompt and daring action, alongside the tactical offensives of the people's army.

Collective action by the people victimized by OBL were invigorated. They acted en masse and used the tactic of organized evacuation. Through effective propaganda work, they were able to expose the brutality of OBL and human rights violations. In Cagayan Valley and Surigao del Sur, they dared to speak over the radio and other public venues to declare their stand against militarization. They gained widespread support both from within and outside their communities all the way to the national level.

They daringly confronted generals and other military officers in their areas. They clamored for justice and used legal instrumentalities to wage struggle until the courts and other agencies of the regime had no choice but to address their



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grievances and dismiss the trumped-up cases used to suppress them. In many instances, they were able to effect the pullout of military troops conducting operations.

Alongside the people's struggles, leading Party committees at the regional, provincial and guerrilla front level systematically planned the advance of armed struggle against OBL1 and OBL2. They overcame the problem of guerrillaism, as did Southern Tagalog. They used the tactics of concentration and dispersal and coordinated the actions of various NPA units. They mobilized Party branches, the people's militia and mass organizations, giving their initiative and creativity full play in confronting the enemy's massive attacks.

Tactical offensives were successfully launched. In Southern Mindanao Region (SMR), the NPA demonstrated its capability to launch sustained tactical offensives to counter the enemy's campaign. In April-May 2008, the NPA launched 76 tactical offensives in the face of the AFP's region-wide offensive, inflicting casualties the size of a company on forces of the 10th ID and seizing enough weap-

# Prominent tactical offensives of 2009

**E**ven during the first half of the year, it was clear that the US-Arroyo regime's grandiose Oplan Bantay Laya (OBL) campaign was a failure. AFP Chief Gen. Victor Ibrado himself admitted that they failed to meet Gloria Arroyo's target of crushing the revolutionary movement before the end of her term in 2010. He knew that it would not be that easy to conquer the four-decade armed revolutionary movement in the country led by the Party. He also knew that while the military and police concentrate their forces on a few limited areas for a set amount of time, the NPA is able to exercise full initiative in other areas to launch tactical offensives like raids, ambushes, acts of sabotage, sniping and arrest operations.

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ons to arm a regular platoon.

Nationwide, the NPA was able to launch one to two tactical offensives daily, underscoring OBL2's failure and demonstrating the trajectory of the revolutionary movement's continued growth in strength.

As OBL 2 draws to a close with the end of Gloria Arroyo's term, the ruling regime can be expected to grow ever more desperate and inflict

ever worsening atrocities on the people. Arroyo is even now undertaking a number of desperate moves to cling to power and save herself from being accountable for her grave crimes against the people.

On the other hand, the people's army and the revolutionary movement enjoy the people's broad support. The revolutionary movement must take advantage of the weaknesses of the ruling puppet reactionary regime and state by launching more numerous and more advanced tactical offensives. We must inflict more body and head blows on the weakening regime and rotten ruling system.

We must advance the all-sided strengthening of the Party, people's army and the entire revolutionary movement. We must further expand the guerrilla fronts to cover more districts in the countryside, establish relatively stable base areas and expand the coverage of organs of revolutionary political power. We must advance guerrilla warfare based on an ever expanding and deepening mass base and bring it to a new and higher level. **AB**

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Based on partial reports, the NPA launched at least 92 tactical offensives nationwide from December 2008 to November 2009, the majority of which were ambushes (49) and raids (20). These numbers would be much higher if arrest operations, punitive measures and sabotage operations were included.

On the other hand, during encounters and defensive battles, the NPA was able to seize the initiative from the enemy and confiscate weapons. The NPA was able to confiscate at least 213 firearms, including machine guns like the FM Minimi and M60 light machine gun, M203 grenade launchers, rounds of ammunition as well as other military equipment such as communication radios and GPS (Global Positioning System).

The enemy sustained at least 231 dead and 176 wounded, and nine were captured as prisoners of war. On the other hand, four Red fighters heroically sacrificed their lives in these battles.

Following are some of the most prominent tactical offensives of the NPA from December 2008 to November 2009:

**December 22, 2008.** Red fighters of Front 21 of Northeastern Mindanao Region (NEMR) carted away 18 firearms in a simultaneous attack on the police headquarters in the town of Tubay, Agusan del Sur and San Roque Metal Inc. (SRMI). The arms haul consisted of 10 M16 rifles, three shotguns, three .38 caliber revolvers, two 9 mm pistols, a cal .45 pistol and a cal. 22 revolver. The guerrillas also seized two VHF radios. A policeman was killed and another one wounded when they resisted. Meanwhile, six pieces of heavy equipment owned by SRMI worth millions of pesos were torched by the NPA as punishment for the company’s destruction of the environment and the livelihoods of the Lumad, workers and people due to its mining operations.

**January 3, 2009.** In Southern Tagalog, the enemy was stunned when guerrillas of the Narciso Antazo Aramil Command of the NPA-Rizal ambushed troops of the 418th Provincial Police Mobile Group (PPMG) near the national capital. One policeman was killed and another one wounded when the patrol car they were riding was hit by command-detonated explo-

sives (CDEX) in Sitio Calumpit, Barangay Macabud, Rodriguez, Rizal. The guerrillas administered first aid to a wounded police before he was brought to a hospital.

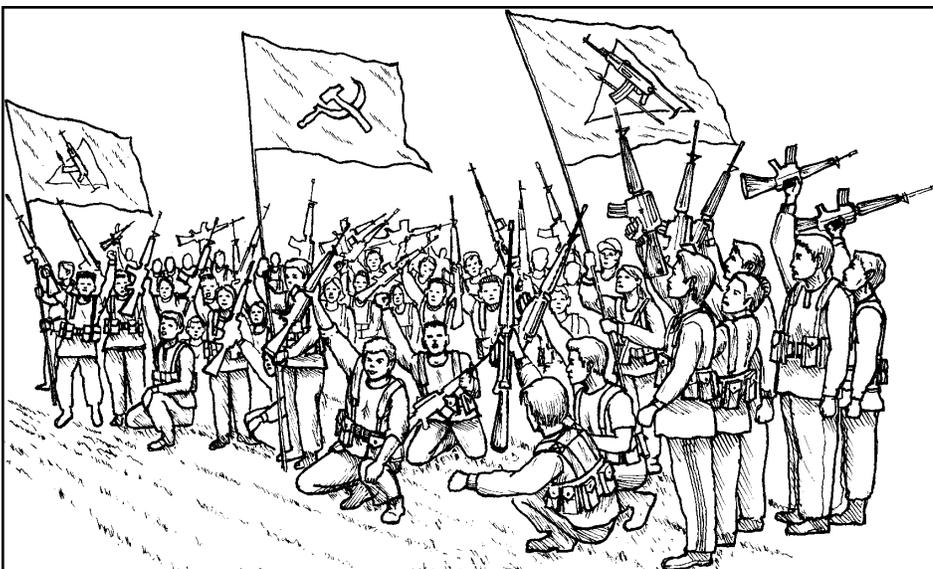
The Red fighters confiscated 12 firearms from the police consisting of six M16s, three 9 mm pistols and three cal .45 pistols. Three policemen were taken prisoner and after 83 days were freed by the people’s court and transferred by an NPA custodial unit on March 27 to representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Sen. Jamby Madrigal and Bishop Gabriel Reyes of the Diocese of Rizal.

**January 22.** In Bicol, the enemy incurred 16 casualties (eight dead and eight wounded) in a raid carried out by fighters of the Nerissa San Juan Command on the Philippine Army and CAFGU detachment in Barangay Poot, Pandan town, Catanduanes.

**January 31.** Twenty troops of the 53rd IB were killed in an ambush launched in Sitio Laknapan, Barangay Gibo, Siason, Zamboanga del Norte by the Front Feliciano of the NPA in Western Mindanao Region.

**February 15.** A platoon of Scout Rangers accompanied by four American soldiers were conducting “clearing operations” when they were ambushed by Red fighters of the Celso Minguez Command in Barangay Batang, Irosin town, Sorsogon. The Scout Rangers incurred 12 killed and eight wounded when a CDEX was exploded. The AFP and the American troops were then preparing for the 2009 US-RP Balikatan Exercises in Bicol.

**March 1.** In North Central Mindanao Region (NCMR), six soldiers were killed and three more were wounded in an ambush launched by the NPA in Sitio Tino-pongan, Barangay Sta.Cruz, Que-





zon town, Bukidnon. Among those killed was 1Lt. Ricardo Naguiat, 29th IB commander. The NPA seized four M16s.

**May 19.** Again, in Bicol, eleven (11) firearms consisting of five carbines, four Garands, an M14 and two cal .45 pistols were confiscated by Red fighters when they attacked the 22nd IB detachment in Barangay Lubigan, Jr., Sipocot town, Camarines Sur. They overran the enemy's camp when elements of the Philippine Army and CAFGU ran in the heat of battle.

**May 29.** In Eastern Visayas, eight high-powered firearms were added to the NPA arsenal in Northern Samar when six M16s, an M14, an M203 grenade launcher and rounds of ammunition were seized in a raid on an AFP detachment by Red fighters of the Rodante Urtal Command in Barangay Polangi, Catarman town, Northern Samar.

**August 9.** In Southern Mindanao Region (SMR), members of the Armando Dumandan Command of the BHB confiscated 15 rifles in a five-minute raid on the 72nd IB detachment in Barangay Napungas,

Asuncion, Davao del Norte without firing a single shot. Six M14s, eight Garands, an M16 and the patrol base's communication radio were taken. It became easy to enter the detachment when a sergeant of the Philippine Army, who is also the commander of the detachment at the neighboring village was taken prisoner at a checkpoint set up by the Red fighters. No soldier or paramilitary element was hurt because they offered no resistance. The sergeant was released after a few weeks.

**August 30.** In Eastern Visayas, ten automatic rifles—four M14s, four M16s and two carbines—were carried off by Red fighters of the Arnulfo Ortiz Command when they attacked the CAFGU detachment in Sitio Cambabang, Barangay Cogon, Basey town, Samar.

**November 2.** Also in SMR, despite the enemy's taunts, the NPA Red fighters were able to play a ruse on them when they were able to enter the patrol base of the 72nd IB in Sitio New Kapatagan, Barangay Casoon, Monkayo, Compostela Valley. The NPA guerrillas

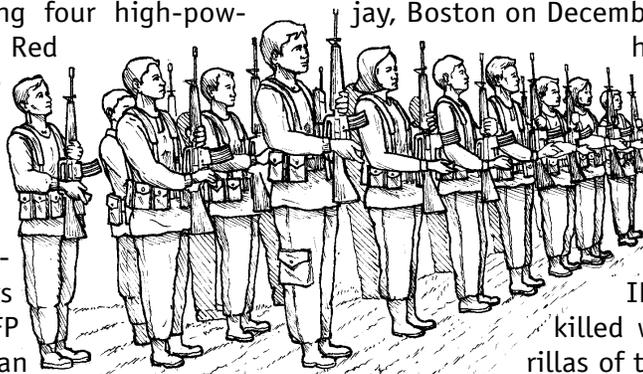
were able to go near the detachment by wearing Special Forces uniforms. It was too late when the enemy realized that they were outwitted by the 4th Pulang Bagani Company of the Merardo Arce Command of the NPA. The detachment commander, Cpl. Dominador Alegre was quickly arrested and the CAFGU elements disarmed. The NPA took 18 firearms consisting of 10 Garands, five carbines, two M16s and an M14. An ICOM radio, ammunition and uniforms were also confiscated. Corporal Alegre was taken prisoner and released after a few weeks.

**November 11.** People's guerrillas in NEMR once again carted off 18 firearms when they raided the compound of the Surigao Development Corporation (SUDECOR) and disarmed elements of the Special Civilian Armed Auxiliary (SCAA) who were guarding the big logging company. Military, police and paramilitary forces attempted a rescue but were ambushed by the NPA on their way to SUDECOR. As many as 20 enemy forces were killed and five were wounded in this firefight. **AB**

## Tactical offensives in December

**A** military officer was among 14 soldiers killed while at least 15 were wounded in firefights reported this December. The New People's Army (NPA) also seized 17 weapons and other military equipment.

Thirteen firearms, including four high-powered rifles were seized by Red fighters without firing a single shot in a raid on the Philippine National Police station in San Narciso, Quezon on December 20. The police fell for it when NPA guerrillas disguised themselves as soldiers of the Philippine Army. The AFP had just finished declaring San



Narciso "NPA-free".

In Davao Oriental, two elements of the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU) were killed and three others were wounded when they were attacked by Red fighters of Front 15 in Barangay Sibajay, Boston on December 18. The military forces were having lunch when they were besieged by guerrillas riding two dump trucks.

In Bicol, 2Lt. Michael Angelo Quibuyen, commander of the Casay Detachment of the Philippine Army 49th IB and another soldier were killed when they clashed with guerrillas of the Celso Minguez Command in

Barangay Tigkiw, Gubat, Sorsogon on the morning of December 14.

The NPA unit was maneuvering to avoid a large military operation when it clashed with fascist troops. The Red fighters were the first to fire. Due to the military's great embarrassment, they covered their casualties with tarpaulin and spread word that these were Red fighters. Even so, the villagers still came to know the identities of the casualties.

In Samar, two elements of the Philippine Army were killed when they encountered NPA Red fighters in Barangay Binanggaran, Calbiga on December 10.

That same day, a radio operator of the 82nd IB Alpha Coy was killed when his military unit attempted to besiege an NPA platoon under the Napoleon Tumagtang Command of the NPA in Sitio Bayong, Barangay Manampunay, Leon, Iloilo.

Meanwhile, according to the latest correspondence reports from the field, seven and not three soldiers were killed when Red fighters of the Conrado Heredia Command of the NPA ambushed elements of the 25th IB Alpha Coy in Sitio Paraiso, Diwalwal, Monkayo, Compostela Valley on December 3. In a statement, command spokesperson Ka Roel Agustin II reported the seizure once again of an FM Minimi light machine gun as well as two M16s, a .45 caliber pistol and other military equipment. At least 12 soldiers were wounded. *AB* had previously reported that four military troopers were wounded. **AB**

## A slap in the face of US imperialism

**A**nother slap in the face of US imperialism and its puppet Arroyo regime. This is the reaction of the Communist Party of the Philippines and National Democratic Front of the Philippines to Ka Jose Ma. Sison's removal on December 10 from the European Council's terrorist blacklist.

The decision issued by the General Court of the European Union became final and executory after the European Council did not appeal the first decision issued on September 30. According to the Court of First Instance, Sison was not even investigated, charged or tried in any court for terrorist acts.

Ka Joema was included on the European Council's terrorist list in 2002 based on the strong influence then of the US government and the Arroyo regime. According to the CPP, Ka Joema's latest victory is significant to the continuing struggle of the revolutionary forces and people of the world against the international terrorist war of the US and its puppets. **AB**

## Makata'y Mandirigma and UAve Culture of change



**T**wo musicals brightly lit the stage of pro-people and patriotic culture these past weeks. *Makata'y Mandirigma*, *Mandirigma'y Makata* (The Poet is a Warrior, the Warrior, a Poet) was presented on November 30 at the University of the Philippines Theater and *UAve* from December 11-13 in Marikina and at the University of the Philippines Aldaba Hall.

The presentation of *Makata'y Mandirigma* was part of celebrations marking the 45th anniversary of the founding of the Kabataang Makabayan and was also a tribute to Comrade Jose Maria Sison's 50 years of service to the people. Through poetry, song and visual presentation, the lives of Ka Joema and Ka Ador, both activists, poets and political detainees, unfolded.

The title and framework of the play are derived from Ka Joema's poem "The Guerrilla is Like a Poet." Through the stories of Ador and Joema, the history of the new democratic revolution and how it continues to thrive and advance come alive.

*Makata'y Mandirigma* highlights the founding of the Kabataang Makabayan amid deepening and expanding organizing work among workers, peasants, students, church people and professionals in the early 1960s. It depicts how the armed struggle was born out of the unity and determination of the re-established Communist Party of the Philippines. It showed the confusion and errors that undermined the revolutionary movement and which have been systematically addressed since the First Great Rectification Movement.

The various stories of ordinary people who shaped history, influenced and supported or joined the revolution were depicted by char-

acters from various sectors. There is a soldier who learned to create poetry; a student who becomes politically conscious by associating with the toiling masses and becomes a courageous commander of the New People's Army (NPA); two women who persevered in complicated struggle; and an orphaned child of martyred guerrillas who later also decides to join the NPA.

The narratives of ordinary folk are also prominent in the play *UAve* which was collectively created by Rommel Rodriguez and the cultural organization *Sining na Naglilingkod sa Sambayanan* (Sinagbayan). The play focuses on how the student sector interacts with other sectors of society.

The stories of the impoverished people in the city and countryside, their complicated relationships with each other, and the contradiction and the eventual unity of various viewpoints and understanding were intertwined in *UAve*.

One of the stories concerns the adventures of a worker-leader and his son who is a new student at *UAve*. The youth's awakening and their integration with the exploited and oppressed sectors to gain valuable lessons, and which culminate in their fighting the enemy together, confronting the violence of reactionary authority and witnessing the worker-leader father sacrifice his life at the picket line is a narrative of how the exploited and oppressed classes build their solidarity in order to wage struggle.

The characters also depict the process of consciousness-raising and developing the conviction to wage struggle—like the students who used to be apathetic but eventually became activists; a janitor who

was privy to the events at *UAve*; a progressive teacher who is the wife of another teacher who has become *desaparecido*; and a conservative mother who eventually joins her child in a protest action.

The artists effectively and admirably presented both *Makata'y Mandirigma* and *UAve*. There were scenes that were heartwrenching and provided food for thought to the audience. There were scenes that made those in the audience-filled hall laugh, cry, become enraged, aroused and applaud.

Though different, the two musicals both depict scenes and issues regarding family, love, friendship, dreams, confusion, deciding, sacrificing and standing one's ground—beginnings, advances, weaknesses and downfalls, realizations and resurgence.

The use of music, dance and color in both plays was also amazing. In *Makata'y Mandirigma*, a number of classical revolutionary songs are combined with original musical compositions on piano and guitar. Using computer software, the music is further accompanied by the sounds of other instruments, creating an orchestra-like effect.

By accompanying a protest march scene with blues and hiphop music, *UAve* rocks and invites the audience inside the theater to dance along.

To show that such scenes should not be confined within the theater, the actors greeted the members of the audience as they exited, thanking and inviting them to carry on the struggle. These simple gestures demonstrate the importance of consolidation and anticipating future struggles after a successful mass action. AB

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## NPA denounces joint exercises in Ilocos-Cordillera

The Chadli Molintas Command (CMC) of the NPA in the Ilocos-Cordillera Region staunchly denounced the launching of the US-RP Balikatan Exercises in the provinces of Ilocos Sur, Mountain Province and Abra this coming 2010. The CMC said it is clear that the US troops in the country will be engaged in military intervention. They will also be trampling on the country's sovereignty and integrity as the joint exercises will be conducted

amid intense militarization in the countryside and accompanied by abuses by US troops against the people.

Then DND Secretary Gilbert Teodoro and Deputy National Security Adviser Luis "Chavit" Singson announced in June the launching of the Balikatan Exercises in Ilocos Sur. As many as 1,500 US soldiers will participate in the military exercise in February 2010.

In a related development, clearing operations have already

been launched by troops of the 50th IB in Salcedo, Ilocos Sur simultaneous with the visit of several US military officials to inspect the area. On November 11, several US officials again visited the towns of Salcedo and Sta. Cruz in the same province.

Lt. Col. Rogelio Migote, chief of the 50th IB also announced that US troops will start arriving in the country in January 2010. Sgt. Hernani Garcia of the 503rd Bde said that the exercises will be held

mainly in the lowland and upland areas of the first district of Ilocos Sur. There are exercises also scheduled at the Abra-Mountain Province boundary which is believed to be an NPA stronghold, Garcia added.

The CMC assailed the Arroyo regime and the AFP for portraying such military intervention as a humanitarian mission.

This military exercise will be disguised as medical action programs (MED-CAP) and engineering action programs (ENCAP). But the CMC asserted that Balikatan is essentially interventionist and violent in nature. According to some highly-placed sources in the Arroyo regime, the AFP is lobbying for the inclusion of combat missions in Balikatan 2010 despite the strong objection of local government officials and the people.

The Balikatan Exercises are carried out yearly by the US and Philippine governments under the framework of unequal pacts like the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty and the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). The CMC said that the puppet regime is unequalled in its rabid implementation and incredibly twisted interpretation and embellishment of these unjust treaties and agreements to suit its needs.

This relationship is mutually beneficial to the Arroyo regime and its US imperialist master. On the one hand, US imperialism has regained basing rights on Philippine soil at far lesser political and economic cost than maintaining actual military bases. On the other hand, Gloria Arroyo is assured of continued US patronage for her corrupt and brutal regime. AB

*9 years of the Arroyo regime*

## Bloodiest, most brutal violations

**T**he US-Arroyo regime is the bloodiest and most brutal for the sheer number of victims of human rights violations. There have already been 1,118 recorded victims of extrajudicial killings in the eight years and ten months of its rule.

KARAPATAN made this summation in a statement issued in commemoration of International Human Rights Day on December 10.

There have been 77 victims of extrajudicial killings from January to October 31 alone. If the 57 victims of the November 23 massacre in Maguindanao so far unearthed are added, this will bring the total to 134. There are also 204 victims of abduction and 1,026 victims of torture on recorded. Thousands more have suffered forced evacuation and displacement due to ongoing military operations in the countryside.

Victims of human rights violations are increasing as Oplan Bantay Laya has been designed to target not only the armed revolutionary movement but legal and democratic organizations, media and

the political opposition, and even simple critics of Gloria Arroyo's corrupt policies. This is due to the regime's zeal in fulfilling its deadline of crushing the armed revolutionary forces by the end of Arroyo's term in June 2010.

Despite the relentless violence unleashed by the antipeople and counterrevolutionary OBL campaign, none of the perpetrators has been punished. It is this culture of impunity cultivated by the Arroyo regime that paved the way for the heinous massacre in Maguindanao.

Recruitment for paramilitary groups such as the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU), Special Civilian Armed Auxiliaries (SCAA), Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVO) and the warlords' private armies is being implemented under OBL. These elements are trained and armed by the military and police as multiplier forces against the NPA and MILF. It is these paramilitary forces that have also been providing protection for Arroyo allies such as the Ampatuans. AB

## 312 massacre victims under the Arroyo regime

**T**here are now 312 massacre victims under the Arroyo regime after 57 persons were slain in a massacre in Ampatuan, Maguindanao on November 23. According to KARAPATAN, there were already 255 victims of massacre in 51 separate incidents from January 1, 2001 to September 30, 2009 even before the massacre in Maguindanao took place. An incident of murder is considered a massacre when there are three or more victims.

According to KARAPATAN, 42 of the massacre victims are women



while 40 are minors. This is aside from the victims in Maguindanao, where 21 women were killed.

Most of the massacre victims are from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (47 victims); Southern Mindanao Region and Central Luzon (30 victims each); National Capital Region (29 victims); Southern Tagalog (27 victims); and Eastern Visayas (25 victims). Seventy out of the 255 victims are peasants. Forty are Moros and 21 are workers.

The latest massacre recorded by KARAPATAN prior to the Maguindanao massacre was the killing of six members of the Suarez family on April 9, 2009 in Sitio Kamanikan, Barangay Malinao, Gingoog City, Mi-

samis Oriental. Among the victims was the Suarez's two month old infant child. The family was massacred when elements of the paramilitary Bungkatol Liberation Front (BULIF) conducted a retaliatory strike a few days after the military incurred casualties at the hands of the New People's Army.

Among the most heinous massacres that took place under the Arroyo regime was the massacre of 14 people at Hacienda Luisita on November 16, 2004; nine people in Kananga, Leyte on April 16, 2003; and nine people in Palo, Leyte on November 21, 2005.

No one has been punished for these crimes. **AB**

## The iniquity of Proclamation 1959

**M**alacañang suddenly lifted Proclamation 1959 declaring martial law in Maguindanao on December 12, exactly a week after it was decreed. Martial law was withdrawn in the midst of severe and widespread criticism and serious questions over its legality in the Senate, in the joint session of Congress and in the Supreme Court. Gloria Arroyo announced the lifting before leaving for a United Nations meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark. She avoided being flayed by criticisms all the way there.

The Arroyo regime was hoping that with the end to martial law in Maguindanao, the criticisms would die down and the legal processes and judgment on its actions would stop. The Arroyo regime has been resorting to this wily tactic every time it does something that reaps severe and widespread condemnation and is difficult to defend in court and

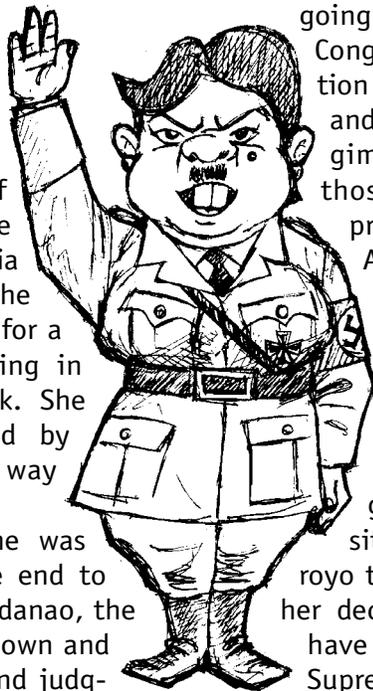
other legal processes.

Even so, the Senate has declared that Arroyo's declaration of martial law in Maguindanao is illegal and violative of the constitution. Criticisms and debate are ongoing at the joint session of Congress. But with opposition arguments compelling and with some of the regime's allies joining those opposed to the proclamation, the pro-Arroyo Speaker and Senate President prevented voting from taking place during the session. Even after the three-day deliberation in Congress was over, oppositionists still want Arroyo to explain the basis of her declaration. Groups that have filed petitions at the Supreme Court against martial law are also demanding that the highest court issue a clear ruling on the issue of constitutional violation so that the mistake would not be repeated. The petitions are to be followed by the fil-

ing of criminal cases against six leading members of Cabinet Cluster E because of their key role and atrocious conduct in declaring martial law in Maguindanao. Cabinet Cluster E is a group within Arroyo's cabinet that deals with security issues.

All of the critics and groups that filed petitions against the proclamation cited the utter baselessness of the "imminent rebellion" claim used to justify the declaration of martial law in Maguindanao. All of them questioned the charges of rebellion against the warlord Ampatuan clan and its private army which was armed, funded, boosted and mobilized by the Arroyo regime against the opposition and genuine rebels. Suspicions are also strong that if the rebellion case is pursued, the multiple murder case faced by the Ampatuans will weaken because it could merely be subsumed by the lighter rebellion case and could possibly lead to amnesty in the future.

Suspicions are even stronger that the declaration of martial law in Maguindanao is just a dry-run for a more extensive declaration of



direct military rule that could encompass the entire country. The Arroyo regime attempted this in 2005 and 2006 but it was unable to push through with its plans due to strong opposition and the difficulties it faced in implementing it. But with Arroyo's desperation to cling to power beyond the end of her current term in June 2010, one of her options is the declaration of outright martial law and the continuance of her rule through a "transition government".

Former National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales, who is today in a more strategic position to implement this as Defense Secretary, has already hinted at this several times. There are growing reasons for the regime to implement such a scheme in the face of the very slim possibility that Arroyo's party and candidate for president and other national positions will win—even if they resort to rampant cheating.

There is also a growing possibility of a "failure of elections" scenario due to the anticipated confusion attendant to the implementation of poll automation.

Anti-Arroyo military groups have also revealed detailed information indicating that the ultimate objective of the ruling regime is to

declare martial law throughout the country. According to the Young Officers' Union/Young Organizers' Union (YOU), plans to declare martial law all over the country is part of "Oplan Alpha" which was drafted after Secretary Gilbert Teodoro launched his presidential candidacy. The oplan calls for the declaration of martial law nationwide this December or in January 2010, and will be followed by the suspension of elections in May 2010 and the extension by two years of Arroyo's rule as "transition president". Defense Secretary Norberto Gonzales is now scrambling to implement the plan and garner support for this scheme.

Part of the plot involves fomenting disorder in Metro Manila, which will be linked to the tumult in Mindanao and blamed on progressive forces and others considered as enemies of the state. After this, Left forces and anti-Arroyo elements of the AFP and PNP will be arrested.

Meanwhile, the people's intense hatred at the leaders of the Ampatuan clan and its close ally in Malacañang knows no bounds. Mayor Andal Ampatuan Jr. who led the massacre was roundly condemned by irate journalists and other protestors when he was

transported from prison for a court appearance.

In a related development, members of the media launched protest actions throughout the country on December 10 to demand an immediate stop to the killing of journalists. The actions were launched in connection with the worldwide commemoration of the "Global Day of Solidarity against the Maguindanao Massacre" which was led by the International Federation of Journalists.

Rallies took place in Angeles City during a visit by Gloria Arroyo. Protest actions were likewise launched in Bacolod City and Bulacan.

In Maguindanao, several members of the media lit 30 candles at the very site of the massacre that cut short the lives of 30 journalists. They also offered 30 white roses for the victims from the media.

In Western Mindanao, radio stations in the cities of Ozamiz, Tangub and Pagadian broadcast an emotional appeal from the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines asking the public's support for the protection of media members. The appeal was followed by a minute of silence at noon. AB

## Arrest, torture and grave threats

**F**ive Dumagat tribespeople were tortured by the military. Eight rallyists were arrested in Calamba. And the military continues to sow fear among residents of Naga City.

**December 11.** Eight members of BAYAN-Southern Tagalog were arrested by police and jailed at the PNP station in Calamba City. They were seized after launching a lightning rally during Gloria Arroyo's visit to the area. The victims are Bujs de la Cruz, Adrienne Ng, Freddie Bernal, Riza Adiaton, Rechel Tanteo, Jose Gloria, Aly Naredo and Efraim Ponce. They were carry-

ing placards that said "Never Again to Martial Law" and "Pahirap sa Masa, Patalsikin si Gloria" (Gloria is a bane to the masses and must be ousted).

**December 1.** Five members of the Dumagat tribe were seized and tortured by soldiers of the 48th IB in Barangay Makulapa, San Luis, Aurora. The victims Roland Corpuz, Junjun Acleto, Ricky Torres, Lolit Agbayani and Edwin Buryo were picked up by the military, kicked and beaten because they were accused of being members of the NPA. They were imprisoned at a military camp for three days

before being released.

**December 2009.** Elements of Task Force Liwanag (TFL) of the Philippine Army waylaid Evangeline Oliva, 14, in Balatas, Naga City along with her male companion who was also a minor. The uniformed military men took down their names and took pictures of them. The military accused the both of them and their families of being NPA supporters. This prompted the Alyansang Laban sa Urban Militarisasyon asin Abuso sa Naga to petition Mayor Jesse Robredo of Naga City to pull out the TFL from Barangay Balatas. They cited as reasons the military men's threats against residents of Balatas and the spate of burglaries in the village. The local government, however, refused to make the military leave the barangay. **AB**

## Thousands rally on Human Rights Day

**T**housands of people launched various forms of protest within and outside the country from December 4 to 10 against the declaration of martial law in Maguindanao as part of the commemoration of International Human Rights Day. They demanded justice for the victims of the massacre and an end to martial law in Maguindanao.

On December 4, some 4,000 people from various parts of Southern Mindanao rallied at Freedom Park in Davao City. The rally led by BAYAN-Southern Mindanao was attended by peasants, women, fisherfolk, urban poor, workers, professionals and lawyers. Members of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines also joined the protest.

In Cebu City, more than 100 people launched a march-rally from Fuente Osmeña towards the center of Cebu City on December 10 led by KARAPATAN and BAYAN-Central Visayas. The rallyists paraded images of Arroyo, Norberto Gonzales and Jovito Palparan as the "number one violators of human rights". In Iloilo City, a caravan went around the city on December 9 as the closing activity to a series of protest actions propelled by the massacre and the declaration of martial law in Maguindanao that started on November 26 .

Meanwhile, overseas, protest actions were also launched by militant groups in Hongkong on December 10. Worker members of the United Filipinos in Hongkong and GABRIELA-HK picketed in front of the Philippine Consulate.

In a related development, Muslim members of Migrant-Middle East in Saudi Arabia expressed concern that if the Arroyo regime fails to give justice to the massacre victims, it would not have the moral authority to request amnesty for the 3,000 imprisoned Filipino migrant workers in the Middle East. **AB**

## The Ampatuan family's ill-gotten wealth

**T**he family of Andal Ampatuan, Sr. are not only murderers but are also plunderers who feed off stolen government funds.

The family reported a mere ₱11 million in assets in their 2002 statement.

But judging just by the number of the Ampatuans' mansions, their declared income of ₱11 million is far from the truth. They have four mansions in Shariff Aguak; five in Cotabato City; three in Tacurong, Sultan Kudurat; nine in Davao City; two in Koronadal City in South Cotabato; one in Cavite; one in Dasmariñas Village in Makati City; one in San Andres Bukid in Manila; one in Barangay Palanan in Makati City; and one more in Tandang Sora, Quezon City. These houses which are worth hundreds of millions of pesos are listed under the names of various relatives. Almost all of the houses have steel vaults stocked with weapons and cash. It is estimated that the Ampatuans have up to ₱3 billion in cash stashed in these vaults.

The Ampatuan family also owns numerous luxury vehicles. The house of Andal Ampatuan Sr. alone in Shariff Aguak yielded a Hummer, a Toyota Land Cruiser, a Chevrolet Suburban, a GMC luxury truck, two Toyota Hilux pick-up trucks, a Ford F-150, an Isuzu D-Max and a Toyota Hi-Ace van and two military trucks hidden in an old stable within the compound. These vehicles alone are estimated to be worth ₱26 million. The Ampatuans are also in possession of several high-powered weapons, rockets and rounds of ammunition that could arm a brigade of troops and blow up all of Maguindanao.

It is impossible for the Ampatuans to have accumulated such vast wealth from their salaries as government officials.

While the Ampatuans live like kings, the plight of the ordinary residents of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is tragic, especially in Maguindanao.

The most impoverished provinces in the entire country are in the ARMM. This is in spite of the fact that the ARMM receives an Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) of ₱10 billion yearly.

Even so, 30% of the people of the ARMM make only ₱50 per day. Due to poverty, the average mortality rate in the ARMM is only 52 years (compared to the national average of 71.6 years). Fifty-five out of 1,000 infants die before they reach the age of one year (compared to the national average of 49). Among the children that die before they reach five years of age, 57% die from diarrhea, which is easily preventable and treatable.

Only twenty-six percent (26%) of school-age children are able to attend elementary school (compared to the national average of 49%). Among children that enter Grade 1, only 37% are able to reach Grade 6 (compared to the national rate of 66%). This is because the ARMM spends only ₱100 per student, on education—the lowest nationwide.

There is no clear accounting as to where the ARMM's funds end up because the Ampatuans have always threatened anyone who attempts an audit. This December, Sen. Aquilino Pimentel also questioned the whereabouts of the ₱1.7 billion agrarian reform fund passed on to the ARMM in the first seven months of 2009. Aside from the lack of accounting, Pimentel said that no funds for agrarian reform should have been given to the ARMM in the first place because the region is not covered by CARP.

The IRA received by Maguindanao, which is directly ruled by the Ampatu-

ans has also grown bigger through the years. From ₱555 million in 2005, it grew to ₱633 million in 2006 and ₱1.080 billion at present. This is aside from ₱1.731 billion allotted to the municipalities and ₱616.57 million allotted to the villages, or ₱3.428 billion as a whole.

But only 2.9% of Maguindano's budget is reserved for social services such as health and education. Thus, only 32.9% of children are able to finish elementary school. The literacy rate in the province is only 66.27% (compared to the national rate of 92.3%). Due to the low priority of education in Ma-

guindanao under the Ampatuans, not a single centavo has been set aside by the provincial budget for the construction of new schools since 2001, even if the province has the lowest classroom-pupil ratio nationwide.

On the other hand, the Ampatuans have charged hundreds of millions in commissions from the construction of a new provincial capitol and sports complex in Shariff Aguak.

Meanwhile, 55% of Maguindanao's budget is allotted to pay the salaries of provincial employees as well as the maintenance of the Ampatuans' huge private army. The municipal governments have also been contributing a hefty part of their budget to the private army.

According to the National Statistics Coordinating Board (NSCB), Maguindanao was the third poorest province in the country in 2006. The plight of the province under the long-time rule of the Ampatuans has worsened. According to the NSCB, currently 62% of the population in Maguindanao is impoverished, compared to 41.6% in 1997.

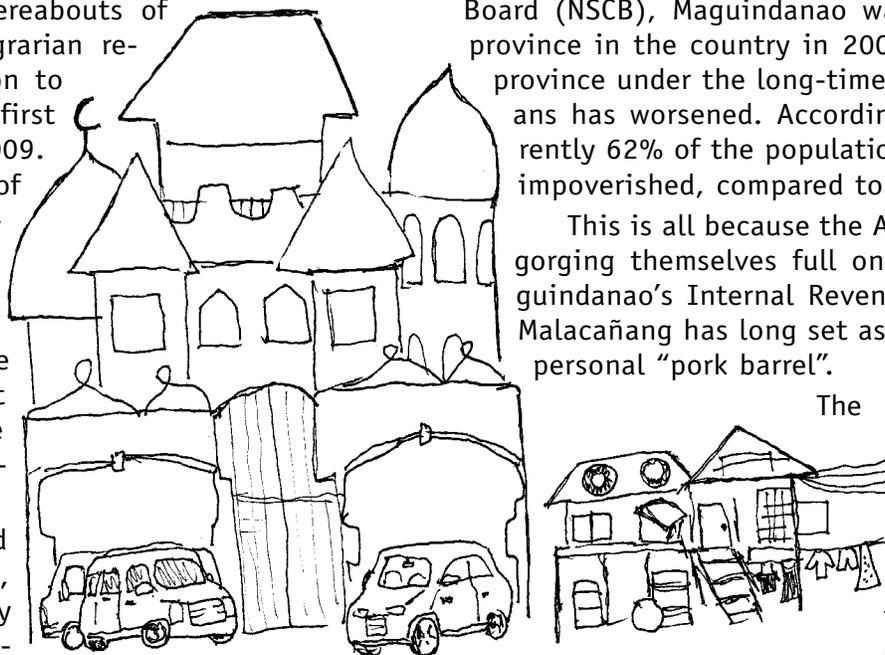
This is all because the Ampatuans have been gorging themselves full on the ARMM and Maguindanao's Internal Revenue Allotment, which Malacañang has long set aside for them as their personal "pork barrel".

The Ampatuans are just one of the Arroyo regime's minions who have been raiding the nation's coffers, just like their master in Malacañang. AB

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# Suffering of coconut and abaca farmers in Eastern Visayas

**A**lmost two million peasants and others making a living from coconut and abaca farming are suffering severe hunger in Eastern Visayas as a result of the international economic crisis.

Since January, the price of copra has plummeted and remains grounded at ₱15-18 per kilo from the previous ₱45 per kilo in 2008. The price of abaca was also stuck at ₱10 per kilo in March, even lower than its cost of production. Although abaca prices have risen to the current ₱27 per kilo, this is still a far cry from the previous price of ₱70 per kilo in 2008.

The plunge in prices is due to reduced international demand for coconut and abaca as a result of numerous factory closures and declining consumption in advanced capitalist countries. The region is the third largest producer of coconut in the Philippines and 80% of this is exported abroad. Eastern Visayas is also the country's leading abaca producer, and supplies a third of the international demand for the product.

There are 1.7 million people in the region who currently make a living off of planting and semiprocessing coconut, including 365,000 landless peasants. Also up to 10,000 peasants on the island of Leyte rely primarily on abaca. It is estimated that there are even more abaca farmers on the island of Samar.

The peasant masses in the region are extremely vulnerable to the international crisis because production in Eastern Visayas is largely export-driven.

In the past three decades, a growing portion of agricultural lands has been planted to export products (like coconut) at the expense of rice and other food crops.

From 1985-2002, the size of

agricultural lands fell by 22% from 927,000 to 723,000 hectares. Land set aside for rice production shrank by almost 65% (or more than 300,000 hectares), while land earmarked for the planting of coconut trees grew by 18% (more than 60,000 hectares or 56% of the total). In Northern Samar, Eastern Samar and Southern Leyte, almost 70% of agricultural lands are being planted to coconut.

With the downturn in international production, the market for copra and abaca has dwindled. This is aggravated by the high costs of local production caused by the backward system of production. Processing is largely done by hand or with the use of outdated tools.

The international market for copra and abaca further shrank in the face of competition from cheaper oil products made from palm, soybean, sunflower and rapeseed sourced from other countries.

**Government neglect.** In spite of the severe hardship that coconut and abaca farmers are suffering, they continue to be neglected

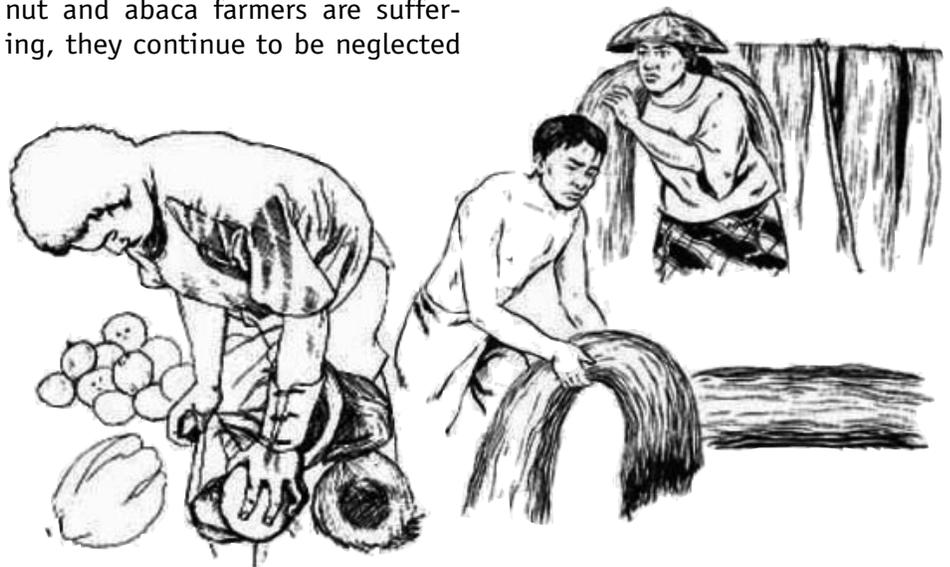
by the government. Worse, most of the meager support funds set aside for such situations ends up in the pockets of highly placed government officials and for funding their media hype.

In 2008, more than 14 million coconut trees worth ₱400 million were destroyed by typhoons. Despite this, the peasants did not get significant assistance from the reactionary government.

Government agencies are also impotent in the fight against the brontispa pest which started ravaging the region in 2006 and has now destroyed coconut trees in 25 towns in the region.

The government has also done nothing to combat the diseases affecting the abaca crops which started breaking out in 2002. At present, there are 7,000 peasants whose livelihoods have taken a nosedive after the pestilence affected 10,000 hectares of abaca plantings on the island of Leyte.

**Landlessness and exploitation.** Even before the international crisis occurred, the majority of coconut and abaca farmers were



already victims of exploitation by the landlords and merchants because of the longtime problem of landlessness.

The sharecropping system in coconut and abaca is widespread. The usual arrangement ranges from splitting 50-50 to 75-25 in favor of the landlord. Tightly interwoven to this are other forms of exploitation like charging usurious interest, paying depressed prices for the farmers' products, selling basic goods at atrociously high prices and perpetrating fraudulent practices in weighing and tabulation—because the landlords are also often the copra and abaca merchants and owners of retail stores. The average coconut and abaca farmer has a daily net income of only ₱30-50.

**Headed towards even deeper crisis.** The suffering of peasants and others dependent on coconut and abaca will be a protracted one because the international econom-

ic crisis is expected to last long and worsen. Meanwhile, they cannot expect any significant and immediate relief from the reactionary government. The Arroyo regime's "economic development" and "poverty alleviation" programs are nothing but hot air.

The Arroyo regime has been presenting useless solutions to the crisis in the coconut and abaca sector such as shifting to the export of alternative coconut products like biodiesel, coconut wine, virgin coconut oil, high grade abaca and hybrid abaca. Likewise, the Arroyo regime has been calling on farmers to switch to alternative crops which it has been prioritizing in the region, such as yellow corn and jatropha—another useless move.

Shifting to new agricultural products is a problem for the peasants who are already steeped in debt and have nothing to invest on new farm implements and more ex-

pensive inputs. With landlords controlling the land, it is likewise difficult to shift to another type of crop. Merchants also control the market which has been depressed and where prices are at all-time lows.

These moves remain export-oriented and fixated on supplying the needs of foreign businesses instead of the needs of the people and the national economy.

Because local and international markets for abaca and copra are in a state of collapse, the revolutionary movement is now focusing on a campaign to raise the peasants' production of crops that can be of immediate benefit. Aside from cultivating rice and corn, the revolutionary mass organizations in the localities are campaigning for the planting of root crops and vegetables so that in any eventuality, the peasants will have something to eat and their families will not go hungry. **AB**

## Climate change conference in Denmark fails

**T**he 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference ended with nothing significantly accomplished to alleviate global warming caused by overpollution and the destruction of the environment.

The conference, which was held in Copenhagen, Denmark on December 7-18 produced the "Copenhagen Accord," an agreement that supposedly recognizes the importance of curbing global warming. But the accord is useless because it does not obligate any country to curtail its carbon dioxide emissions or set any targets for this.

Widespread carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere is the main culprit behind global warming, climate change and more frequent calamities.

The US deliberately led the drafting of the ineffectual Copenhagen Accord because it does not want any of the big US corporations to be tied to any agreement that will translate to additional

expenses due to the need to retool their machines. The added costs will bind their capital and greatly cut their superprofits.

The US' attitude is not surprising, since it has refused until now to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement structured by the UN in 1997 which aims to control the emission of gases like carbon dioxide.

Widespread and massive protest actions were held simultaneous to the Copenhagen conference. As many as 100,000 people marched on December 12 in Copenhagen to demand the creation of an effective agreement on climate change. Police arrested almost 1,000 protesters. An alternative conference, the Klimaforum, was attended by up to 50,000 people at the same time as the UN conference.

In London, 20,000 people marched a week before the conference took place. As many as 50,000 people marched in various places in Australia. **AB**