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Editorial

The brutality behind the gimmickry

Two weeks before marking International Human Rights Day, Benigno Aquino III unleashed a new round of gimmickry when he formed on November 27 an inter-agency committee (IAC) that would allegedly look into cases of extrajudicial killings, abductions, torture and other forms of human rights violations, particularly those committed by the previous regime.

The formation of this superbody is a desperate attempt by the Aquino regime to cover up its accountability for worsening violations of human rights throughout the country. Aquino is using it to shore up his credibility with regard to human rights in the face of widespread abuses and brutalities perpetrated by armed state agents.

Because the IAC includes the AFP and PNP chiefs, it will come to no other conclusion than the exoneration of military and police officials involved in human rights violations. It is no different from the Arroyo regime's Task Force on Political Violence that was formed in 2007, at the height of human rights abuses.

Days before this,

Aquino had also boasted of having signed the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration during a meeting of the region's leaders in Cambodia last November.

This declaration is a means by which its repressive signatories could portray themselves as human rights advocates. Contrary to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, this ASEAN document places human

rights at a lower rung compared to "national security" and other governmental considerations. It is this same justification that has always been invoked by both the current and previous regimes for committing human rights violations.

Hidden behind Aquino's gimmickry, attacks on the people by his armed agents have continuously worsened and become increasingly brutal. Not a single perpetrator of human rights violations has been convicted under the Aquino regime. In fact, it has failed to capture and imprison Gen. Jovito Palparan, the butcher general responsible for grave human rights violations under the Arroyo regime.

The list of human rights abuses grows even longer as



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armed agents of the state defend the interests of foreign corporations and their local comprador bourgeois and landlord partners.

The Aquino regime's brutal fascist campaign against the people is further intensifying as the deadline of the counterrevolutionary Oplan Bayanihan (OPB) nears. OPB is slated to end next year, but it is clearly far from achieving its objective of defeating the armed and democratic struggles of the masses.

The highlights of Aquino's third year in office include the killing of mass leaders like Genesis Ambason and Ely Oguis, who were both subjected to severe torture. Oguis' case is particularly heinous, as he was decapitated. Another thing to be underscored is the use of the AFP by the state and its big foreign corporate co-conspirators to quell the people's resistance. Stark examples include the killing of Lumad leaders opposed to foreign mining and the merciless massacre by AFP forces of the

Capion family in October.

Aquino's recent appointment of Brig. Gen. Eduardo Año as chief of the Intelligence Service of the AFP has been met with widespread protest. Año is one of 45 respondents in the preliminary investigation of the forced disappearance of activist Jonas Burgos in 2007. He was also responsible for the illegal arrest of NDFP consultant Tirso "Ka Bart" Alcantara in 2011 and the grave human rights violations in South Quezon-Bondoc Peninsula this year.

According to KARAPATAN's records, there were 129 victims of extrajudicial killing and 12 victims of forced disappearance from July 2010 to October 2012. In Mindanao, there were 37 victims of extrajudicial killing, among them 24 Lumad leaders opposed to large-scale mining and

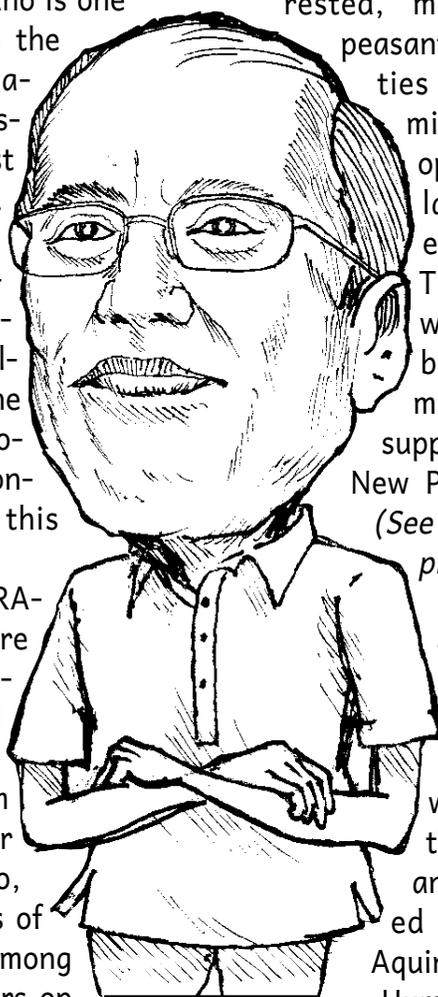
logging. Fifteen mothers and girl-children were killed by the regime under Oplan Bayanihan, 12 of them this year.

Up to 467 were illegally arrested, most of them peasants and minorities accosted by military forces operating in upland and forested areas. Those captured were arbitrarily branded as members or supporters of the New People's Army. (See table for complete list)

There are 401 political prisoners throughout the country, with 123 of them arrested and incarcerated under the Aquino regime.

Human rights violations have also been rampant with Aquino's drive to implement his economic program. Violent demolitions of urban poor communities have been undertaken to clear valuable real estate for Public-Private Partnership projects funded by foreign big companies. The workers' right to form unions and to strike are brazenly suppressed. Aquino has also threatened press freedom by pushing the Cybercrime Act.

The regime has been rampantly violating agreements signed by the state and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, especially with regard to guaranteeing the human rights and security of NDFP negotiators and consultants. This has made it difficult for the peace negotiations to continue.



	
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The deceptive ASEAN Human Rights Declaration

Part of Benigno Aquino III's overall pretensions of being a champion of human rights is his signing of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration in November. This is a deceptive document that actually supports repressive governments. It is a step backward from the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights which hold human rights as fundamental to all individuals.

The contents of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration were framed by various officials of ASEAN member-states but not a single human rights advocate was consulted. As a result, human rights activists in the region condemned the document instead of welcoming it.

The declaration states that "... the realization of human rights must be considered in the regional and national context bearing in mind different political, economic, legal, social, cultural, historical and religious backgrounds" and that the exercise of human rights shall be subject to the requirements of national security, public order, public health, public safety and public morality.

Fundamental rights such as suffrage, participation in government and forming and joining unions may only apply if they conform to existing national laws and policies. ASEAN's decision to include "public morality" in the document may also be used to prevent women from exercising their rights.

KARAPATAN cited the document's many loopholes, saying that it could be used by ASEAN states as a blueprint for further rights violations. No less than the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and 62 local, regional and international groups had called on ASEAN to suspend the signing of the declaration.

Aquino and the other ASEAN leaders, however, went ahead with the signing because the declaration upholds the repressive bent of governments in the region. **AB**

Aquino regime's human rights violations from July 30, 2010 to October 31, 2012	
Violations	Number of victims
Extrajudicial killings	129
Enforced disappearances	12
Torture	72
Rape	3
Frustrated extrajudicial killings	150
Illegal arrest without detention	228
Illegal arrest with detention	239
Illegal search and seizure	201
Physical assault and injury	205
Demolition	8,336
Violation of domicile	369
Destruction of properties	7,711
Divestment of properties	280
Forced evacuation	30,259
Threat/harassment/intimidation	27,281
Indiscriminate firing	6,743
Forced/Fake surrender	47
Forced labor/Involuntary servitude	162
Use of civilians in police and/or military operations as guides and/or shields	296
Use of schools, medical, religious and other public places for military purposes	23,792
Restriction or Violent Dispersal of Mas Actions, Public Assemblies and Gatherings	2,481

From KARAPATAN'S "2012 Year-end Report on the Human Rights Situation in the Philippines" issued in December 2012. The table shows that the most number of extrajudicial killings took place in Bicol (33), followed by Southern Tagalog (18), Southern Mindanao (14) and NCR (10). Fifteen of the 129 were women and 62 were members of mass organizations. Most of them were peasants (71), national minorities (25) and minors (15).

86th IB kills elderly couple in Isabela

Elements of the 86th IB shot to death Vicente Valenzuela, 60, and his wife Rosario, 51, in Sitio Calabaggin, Barangay San Miguel, Echague, Isabela in the early morning of November 23. The soldiers strafed their hut, thinking there were Red fighters spending the night there.

An investigation led by KAPATAN revealed that the killers of the Valenzuela couple belonged to a 14 to 16-strong group of soldiers who had stayed in two houses in Sitio Calabaggin the whole day of November 22. The group was led by a Lieutenant Bernardino and a Sergeant Balansa. The soldiers even held a drinking spree with some villagers before leaving at 1 a.m. on November 23.

At around 3 a.m., residents of the area heard two successive gunshots, followed by automatic fire. By 11 a.m., they heard a news report aired over a local radio station that an encounter had supposedly taken place in their sub-village. Nonetheless, the residents were skeptical since they did not hear any exchange of gunfire that early morning.

On November 24, soldiers told officials of Barangay San Miguel that some people had been killed and accompanied them to the Valenzuelas' house located atop a hill about half a kilometer away from the sitio center.

The barangay officials found Vicente Valenzuela's body at the entrance of their house. He seemed to have been chopping cassava when he was shot. He had a gunshot wound to the back, with the bullet exiting his chest. His wife Rosario's body was found in their bedroom, lying face up. She had a gunshot wound beneath her right ear,

with the bullet exiting the left side of her head. There were also several bullet holes in the walls of their hut, indicating that it had been strafed.

The soldiers took videos and pictures of the bodies and the house and picked up the spent bullet shells and placed them in plastic bags. They then wrapped the bodies in sleeping mats and ordered the villagers to bring them to the San Miguel barrio center. While the barrio folk were carrying the bodies, one of the soldiers named Robert Bagni apologized to them, saying that they had strafed the house, thinking that there were NPA guerrillas inside. Several residents heard what Bagni said.

On November 25, two police investigators arrived at the sitio to inspect the scene, take pictures and videos and collect more spent shells. That same day, however, the villagers heard over the radio a military report claiming that the Valenzuela couple had died in the crossfire in a gunbattle between the AFP and NPA. The day after, the PNP-Isabela repeated the military's lie over Bombo Radyo, even claiming that the NPA had used the couple as human shields. The police added that they had found detonating cords, a laptop and personal effects of one of the sol-

diers who had died in an NPA ambush days before. The villagers who accompanied the soldiers and retrieved the bodies strongly belied such claims.

Relatives of the victims also said that the ₱15,000 Mrs. Valenzuela had been keeping after selling a small parcel of land, was missing.

The Valenzuela couple's merciless killing and the perpetrators' shameless coverup reflect the real picture of the "peace and development" being peddled by Oplan Bayanihan's Community Peace and Development (COPD) Teams in the vast countryside.

The 5th ID's COPD Teams, to which the soldiers of the 86th IB belong, have been occupying ten villages in southern Isabela since January. In these areas, the military has been relentlessly violating human rights and the international rules of war, staying in public places such as barangay halls and areas adjacent to schools, engaging in drinking and gambling sprees and disrupting peace and order in the villages, sexually harassing and molesting women and terrorizing civilians during military operations. **AB**



Military attacks Lumad

Fascist military forces attacked Manobo tribespeople in North Cotabato. Meantime, three activists were illegally arrested, and a military detachment set up in the middle of a barangay in Davao del Norte.

November 27-December 5. The 57th IB indiscriminately bombed the villages of Bagumbayan, Noa, Amabel and Bantac in Magpet, North Cotabato. At least 15 bombs were dropped by the military from December 4 to 5, forcing up to 200 families, most of them Manobo Lumad to flee their homes.

Earlier, on November 27, soldiers from the 57th IB trained their guns at a villager, ordered him to undress, bound his wrists and subjected him to intense interrogation. Aurelio Buhisan, 54, of Si-tio Tanay, Barangay Doles was found by soldiers hiding under his house and arbitrarily accused of being an NPA commander. He was released only after the Doles barangay captain came and vouched that he was a civilian.

At Sitio Salingsing in the adjacent village of Amabel, soldiers herded several Lumad residents at the community basketball court and interrogated them under the heat of the sun. The victims included two women and five children.

The soldiers also ransacked and stole items from the house of Stella Imbud, 40, another Lumad resident of the same sitio. The military claimed it was looking for guns and grenades.

December 3. Operatives of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) abducted Randy Vegas and Raul Camposano, both organizers of government employees affiliated with the Confederation for the Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE). They were seized at gunpoint in Metro Manila by unidentified armed men and taken to Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig before being brought to Daet, Camarines Norte where they are currently being detained. They were interrogated without the presence of a lawyer and have been slapped with trumped-up charges related to a New People's Army raid on AFP personnel in Labo, Camarines Norte on April 29.

Evening of November 29. Policemen arrested Marites Bacolod, leader of the Samahan ng Maralitang Nagkakaisa-Corazon de Jesus, a local affiliate of KADAMAY in San Juan City. Bacolod was arrested a day before a speaking engagement by Benigno Aquino III in San Juan. The police invoked a civil disobedience case relating to the residents' resistance to a demolition in Barangay Corazon de Jesus in 2011.

October 22 up to the present. Elements of the 60th IB put up an encampment right in the populated center of Sitio Naulinan, Barangay Palma Gil, Talaingod, Davao del Norte. Several children have stopped going to school and some residents have left the village out of fear. Among those who have been forced to evacuate are Toto Barintos and his family, because soldiers have been continuously staying at his house and store. The militarization has caused a standstill in the cultivation of rootcrops, corn and rice which are the residents' main sources of livelihood.

Manilakbayan

for justice

More than 70 peasants and national minorities from various parts of Mindanao arrived in Manila on December 3 as delegates to Manilakbayan. The activity seeks to rally support for their anti-militarization cause. They were warmly welcomed by KARAPATAN, Kalipunan ng mga Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas (KAMP), nuns and other religious under the Ecuvoice group.

Manilakbayan is led by Panalipdan-Mindanao and Kalumaran, an alliance of national minorities in Mindanao. It is seeking support for their struggle for justice and a stop to extrajudicial killings and forced evacuations in Mindanao due to continuing militarization and the plunder of their lands by large-scale mining.

Among the members of the delegation are relatives of the Capion family, victims of a massacre on October 18 in Tampakan, South Cotabato. The military and Sagittarius Mines Inc. (SMI)-Xstrata connived to kill the Capion family, based on the results of an investigation conducted on November 17 by the National Peace and Solidarity Mission which is led by the Justice for Capion Family, Justice for All Network.

According to those interviewed by the investigators, Dan Balandra, a former colonel and currently a security consultant for SMI visited the Capion family three times days before the massacre perpetrated by the 27th IB.

Also among the delegation are five widows of minority leaders killed for fighting for their rights to their ancestral

lands being seized by mining and agribusiness corporations and for the construction of megadams.

Manilakbayan also aims to heighten public awareness for their "Save our Schools" campaign. Literacy schools for the people have been set up through the initiative of people like Fr. Pops Tenorio of PIME, who was killed by a paramilitary group under the AFP's employ. Not content with

bombing communities and perpetrating extrajudicial killings, the military has also been using schools as camps or putting up detachments within school premises.

Welcoming the Manilakbayan delegation forms part of the activities lined up for a mass action on December 10, the annual commemoration of International Human Rights Day. AB

Two ambushes in the early morning

Red fighters from the Benito Tesorio and Reynaldo Piñon Commands dealt blows on the strike forces of the 5th ID in two separate ambushes in the early morning of November 27. The 51st and 52nd Division Reconnaissance Companies (DRC) are the so-called elite units of the 5th ID. Up to 13 of their troops fell in battle in two firefights that took place three hours apart in the adjacent towns of San Mariano and Echague.

In an official statement, the Benito Tesorio Command reported having seized an M60 and three K3 submachine guns, five M16 rifles, three pairs of night vision scopes, a Harris radio, a pair of binoculars, hundreds of rounds of ammunition and 15 US backpacks from the enemy in the second gunbattle in Echague.

The 51st and 52nd DRC's tactics involve night movements and the use of night vision scopes. These two ambushes proved that despite operating under cover of darkness, the enemy could not conceal the pattern of its movements from the

masses and the NPA.

At 1:30 a.m. of November 17, in Sitio Luzcon, Barangay Gangalan, San Mariano, six troopers from a platoon under the 51st DRC led by 2Lieutenant Cabanas were killed in an ambush by a platoon under the Reynaldo Piñon Command.

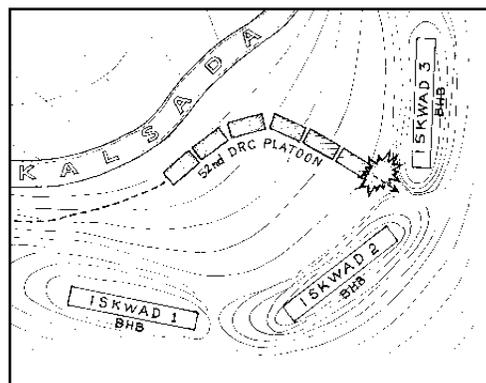
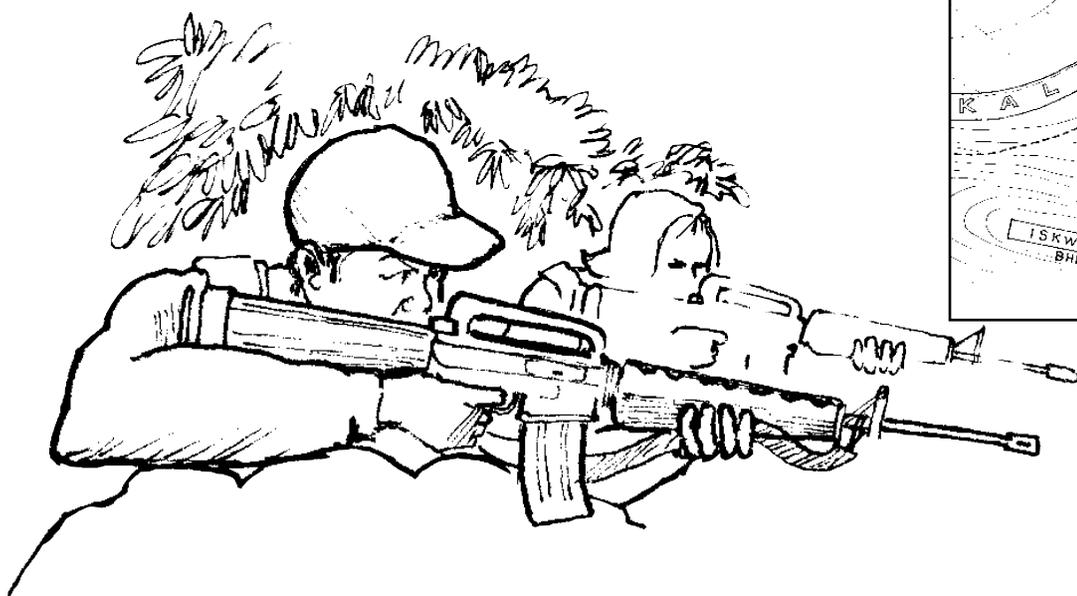
Meanwhile, in the early morning of November 16 in Mabbayad, Echague, Red fighters ambushed elements of the 52nd DRC conducting operations in an area that was previously the site of an NPA encampment. Seeing no one at the site, they stayed the whole day in a place full of thickets. An

NPA platoon nearby learned of their presence and positioned themselves in a place where the soldiers would likely pass and waited in ambush.

Three NPA squads took position at the ambush site. They skipped supper and did not leave their positions all night because they knew that their targets could pass by any time.

The NPA platoon command studied how they could counter the DRC's night movements through a night ambush.

The killing zone designated by the NPA command was a small road below a hill where the guerrillas were positioned. The first squad was relatively far away from the two other squads. The second squad was positioned atop the hill with only mounds of earth for cover.



The third squad waited nearby at a higher position, behind a cluster of banana trees. Between the road and the two squads' position was the hillside, recently cleared and newly planted with corn. It was a dark night, with the surroundings growing even darker as dawn neared on November 17.

At a little past 4 a.m., the squads atop the hill vaguely saw a group of people walking closely behind each other, approaching their position. At first, they could not discern whether they were the enemy or the third squad of NPA guer-

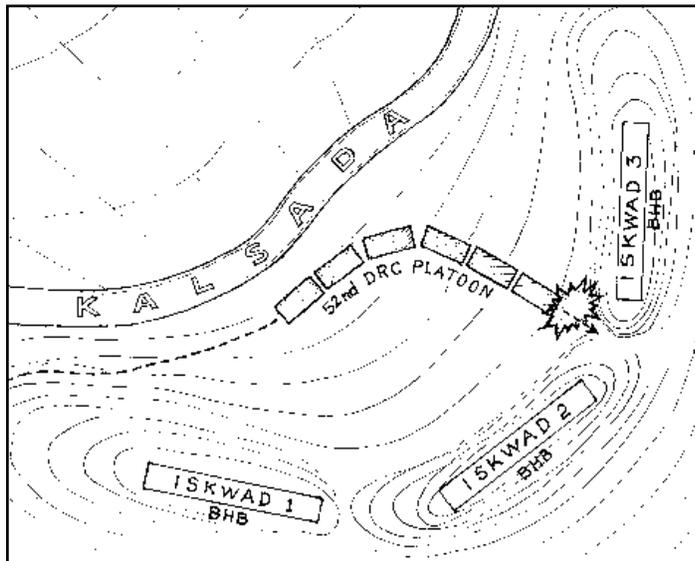
rillas. The soldiers were a mere three meters away when the Red fighters opened fire.

Most of the soldiers ran downhill, but some, including the trooper with the M60 who was in front, ran uphill, right smack into the third NPA squad's position. One of the guerrillas ran towards him, aiming his shotgun, but it failed to fire. He grappled with the soldier instead. Another comrade stuck the end of his M14 rifle at the soldier's ribs, sending him running downhill and leaving the M60 behind. The machine gun was the first weapon seized in the first volley of fire.

The first NPA squad positioned behind the enemy could not open fire immediately, because the fight was too close and it was too dark. They opened fire at the break of dawn, causing even more confusion among the enemy's ranks.

Although under NPA fire from the front, flank and rear, the enemy's commanding officer

did not order his unit to retreat and instead stayed put at a part of the hill where they had no cover, even when morning came. Except for those who were able to run downhill and take cover behind trees, the soldiers on the hill were hit one after the other,



including their leader 1Lt. Jimnah Torrepalma. Machine guns, armalites, packs, the dead and the wounded all littered the hillside, just meters away from the guerrillas surrounding them.

By 6 a.m., the NPA began calling for them to surrender. Torrepalma, who was badly wounded, signalled his surrender, along with two other wounded soldiers. NPA medics applied first aid on the surrendered lieutenant, but he later died because of the seriousness of his wounds. The two other soldiers who surrendered were also given first aid. They were not too badly wounded and survived.

The NPA immediately called a local radio reporter about the wounded enemy troops, so they could be retrieved and given medical treatment. But it was already past 12 noon when two helicopters and the 5th ID's reinforcement troops arrived.

The enemy tried to deflect

public attention from their defeat by spreading lies about the presence of three foreign women with the NPA and the alleged deployment of NPA fighters from Cagayan. But they nonetheless failed to conceal the fact that the people's army and armed struggle have significantly gained strength in Isabela.

Before these two victorious ambushes, three gunbattles took place between the NPA and the 51st DRC in Jones and San Mariano towns. Nine soldiers were killed and at least ten wounded in these firefights.

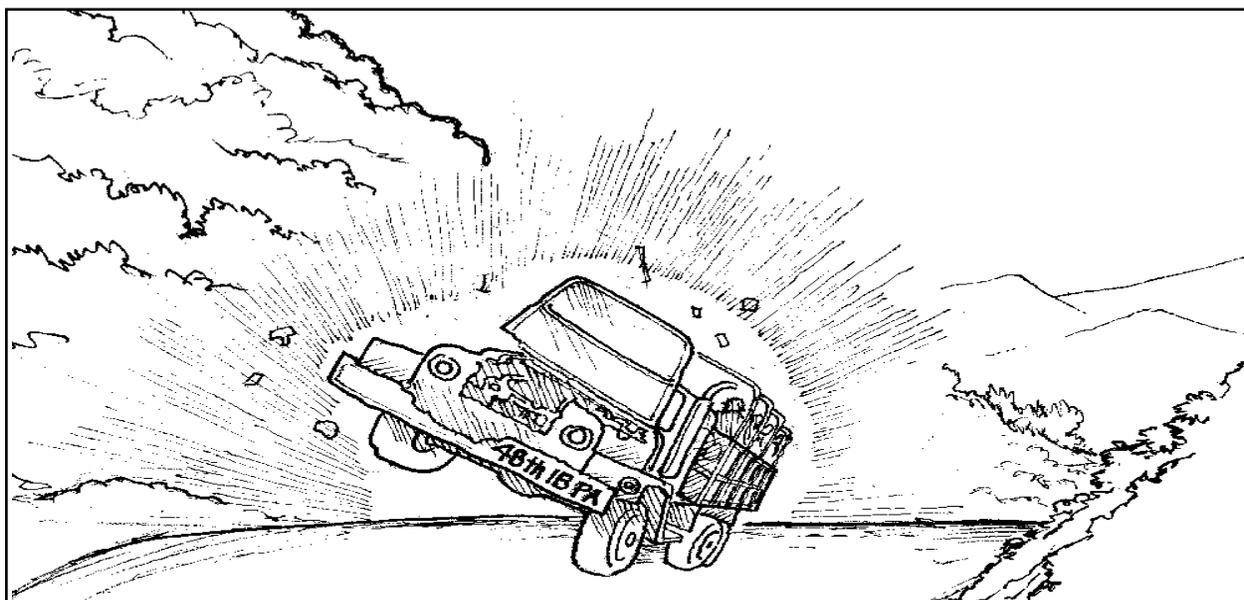
Two soldiers were killed and ten wounded in a harassment operation by an NPA squad on November 8 against the 54-man 51st DRC troop in Sitio Namulan, Barangay San Jose, San Mariano. The AFP concealed this from the media, but several peasants saw two military helicopters retrieving the dead and wounded.

Meantime, four troopers from a 25-man platoon of the 51st DRC were killed in another harassment operation by an NPA team on October 30 at Sitio Old Nursery, Barangay Disulap, San Mariano.

At past midnight on October 17, three soldiers from a 24-man platoon also of the 51st DRC were felled and an undetermined number wounded in an encounter with a platoon under the Benito Tesorio Command in Sitio Kidog-kidog, Barangay Santa Isabel, Jones town. The Red fighters did not suffer any casualties in the 30-minute firefight. The 5th ID claimed that neither side suffered casualties.

(Culled from a report from the Fortunato Camus Command NPA-Cagayan Valley)

Government troops ambushed in Aurora



New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas under the Domingo Erlano Command (DEC-NPA) in Aurora ambushed 48th IB troops on November 22 in Maria Aurora, Aurora province.

According to DEC-NPA-Aurora spokesperson Ka Rowena Cervantes, an NPA platoon ambushed troops that had arrived in response to the burning of a dump truck and a backhoe owned by Angel Palacios Constructions.

The first military truck loaded with about 20 soldiers was hit by three anti-personnel command-detonated explosives at 8:15 a.m. in Barangay Villa, Maria Aurora. The military was unable to return fire.

Policemen aboard five motorcycles came to reinforce the soldiers but were met with sniper fire by the NPA blocking force in Sitio Kamatis, Barangay Villa. Eight policemen were killed on the spot. The Red fighters also blocked approaching soldiers aboard a civilian truck.

After a 20-minute gunbattle, the Red fighters made a safe retreat.

The military's use of civilians as human shields led to the death at the blocking zone of the driver of the Department of Public Works and Highways

truck commandeered by the soldiers, as well as two other civilians riding with the military towards the ambush site.

The DEC-NPA-Aurora extended its sympathy and condolences to the families of the civilians caught in the crossfire and said it was ready to extend assistance.

The DEC-NPA-Aurora condemned the 48th IB's guileful use of a civilian truck and driver and for bringing innocent civilians as passengers to the scene of the fighting. This is a violation of the Geneva Conventions and the provisions of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law.

The DEC-NPA called on the people to oppose military schemes to use civilians as human shields to thwart NPA attacks, such as encamping amid clusters of houses or in schools, churches and other public facilities.

The NPA ambush in Aurora was a big slap in the face of Col.

Victor Castro, chief of the 702nd Infantry Brigade. Two weeks prior, Castro had boastfully declared over a radio program that the NPA in Aurora and Nueva Ecija was no longer capable of launching offensives.

Castro's attempts to conceal his men's fate from the media comes as no surprise. He wants to preserve the lie that the revolutionary movement in the area had been wiped out in hopes of gaining a promotion and keeping Aurora attractive to foreign investors in line with the interests of the Angaras, the province's ruling clan.

The dynasty led by Sen. Edgardo Angara has been pushing the Aurora Pacific Economic Zone (APECO) which is centered at Casiguran town. The project has been allotted P353 million in the 2013 budget.

According to Ka Rowena Cervantes, the tactical offensive forms part of the NPA's continuing military campaign in Aurora and Nueva Ecija to hold the butcher 48th IB and other soldiers under the 7th Infantry Division accountable for the mounting number of victims of intimidation, assault, abductions and extrajudicial killings. **AB**

Tactical offensives launched in Panay

Three enemy elements were killed and seven were wounded, including members of the bandit Revolutionary Proletarian Army (RPA) in tactical offensives launched by the New People's Army (NPA) in Panay's Southern Front from August to October.

The enemy suffered two killed and four wounded in an ambush by a unit under the Napoleon Tumulag Command (NTC-NPA) on a column of the 82nd IB Bravo Coy in Sitio Tabionan, Barangay Bucari, Leon, Iloilo on October 27, at around 7:30 a.m.

In an article published in *Daba-Daba*, the revolutionary mass newspaper in Panay, the ambushed unit of the 82nd IB was one of four military columns scouring the forest in hopes of encountering the NPA. Two soldiers were killed in the first volley of fire. The second enemy column quickly sent reinforcements but the NPA unit had already retreated to safer ground.

The enemy sent in two helicopters—an MG520 and a Huey. But the Huey ran into mechanical trouble and made a forced landing at Sitio Tabionan. The military sent a technician to repair it, but the US surplus helicopter burst into flames when its pilot attempted a takeoff. The soldiers just resorted to salvaging parts of the helicopter and burned the rest of it.

That afternoon, the 61st IB and 31st DRC arrived as reinforcements from central Panay. They were fired upon by another NPA unit in Barangay Danao, Leon town which is adjacent to Tabionan.

At around 7 a.m. the day after, an NPA unit harassed the 82nd IB Alpha Coy command post in Barangay Lanag, Tubungan, sending the soldiers who were then playing basketball in the plaza scampering in different directions and leaving their firearms behind. Their commanding officer who was sleeping, was surprised to wake up, seeing the detachment completely deserted.

Earlier, on September 27, an RPA element was killed and two others wounded in an ambush by NPA fighters under the NTC-NPA in Barangay Valentin Grasparil, Sibalom, Antique. The NPA confiscated a carbine, two short arms, ammunition, a grenade, other military equipment and documents.

On August 27, a soldier from the 82nd IB was wounded in an encounter with an NPA unit in Barangay Onop, Miag-ao, Iloilo. AB

NPA punishes 78th IB in Leyte



Red fighters of the Mt. Amandewin Command meted punishment on 78th IB troops for the latter's grave human rights violations.

The abusive military unit was ambushed in Sitio Calingatnan, Barangay San Pedro, Albura, Leyte on November 30. Six soldiers were killed, and several others were wounded but the AFP only admitted in the media to suffering a single casualty. The soldiers were aboard a six-by-six truck on the way back to their camp after a military operation in Barangay Liberty, Ormoc City.

In a statement, National Democratic Front-Eastern Visayas spokesperson Fr. Santiago Salas said the ambush belied the AFP's boastful claims that the NPA was finished in Leyte. He added that the 78th IB was punished for terrorizing civilian communities during its operations, disrupting the peasants' farming and other economic activities. The 78th IB has also been violating the rules of war by occupying the houses of civilians and using barangay halls, schools, chapels and other civilian structures. In October, a soldier attempted to rape a 12-year old girl after an NPA ambush in Barangay Cagbana, Burauen that killed two military men.

Fr. Salas likewise assailed the Aquino regime's posturing about human rights. "Not a single military man responsible for human rights violations has been punished in Leyte or anywhere else," he said. AB

NPA military actions in Kalinga

Two soldiers under the 21st IB were killed in a gunbattle with Red fighters of the New People's Army under the Lejo Cawilan Command (LCC-NPA) in Sitio Inumbog, Bagtayan, Pasil in Kalinga province on November 30.

LCC-NPA spokesperson Ka Tipon Gil-ayab said two columns of the 21st IB were conducting patrols when they encountered the Red fighters at around 9 a.m. Two fascist military troops were killed on the spot.

Meanwhile, the NPA was able to make a quick retreat without suffering any casualties.

On the afternoon of the same day, two helicopters indiscriminately bombed the forested area along the boundary of Sitio Inumbog and Sitio Gaang in Talalang village, Balbalan town.

The 21st IB serves as the "Investment Defense Force" for the entry of foreign capitalist projects such as large-scale mines, hydropower dams and geothermal plants. AB

NPA metes blows on 57th IB

A soldier from the 57th IB was killed and an undetermined number wounded in a firefight with Red fighters of the Herminio Alfonso Operations Command (HAC) at 11:40 a.m. on December 3 in Mt. Makaindos, Barangay Amabel, Magpet, North Cotabato. The soldiers retreated after an hour-long battle, leaving behind their casualties and medical supplies.

Earlier, at around 9:30 a.m. on November 26, the HAC had also figured in a gunbattle with the 10th Special Forces Company (SFC). Three soldiers were killed and six wounded, contrary to AFP reports that there were no casualties on either side.

The 57th IB and 10th SFC have been intensifying their abuses as part of their operations to pave the way for the entry of the Hitcho Group of Companies, Dole Philippines' new investors. AB

Typhoon Pablo devastates hundreds of thousands

Hundreds of thousands, most of them impoverished farmers, were devastated by typhoon Pablo which struck Southern Mindanao in the main on December 4. At least 400 were killed and hundreds of others remain missing in the towns of New Bataan, Cateel, Baganga and Monkayo after huge volumes of mud and water rampaged down the upland areas of Compostela Valley. Homes and livelihoods were decimated to as far as Northeastern and Northcentral Mindanao, Southern Leyte, Southern Negros and Palawan.

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the National Democratic Front (NDF)-Southern Mindanao condoled with the victims of the great disaster. They called on all revolutionary forces to raise funds and donations to assist the victims. The CPP called on units of the New People's Army to help in rescue efforts and as-

sist the victims in recovering from the calamity.

The NDF-SMR assailed the Aquino government's inaction and incompetence in confronting this disaster. It cited the failure of Aquino officials to put into place sufficient preparations and respond to the needs of the people. To avoid accountability, government officials instead blamed the people for the disaster that befell them because they allegedly failed to heed warnings about the coming storm.

The NDF-SMR likewise condemned the continued entry of huge mining and agribusiness companies in Compostela Valley. "Nowhere can we see the hundreds of millions of pesos of taxpayers's money" that has been siphoned out of Comval province. In the face of the gigantic tragedy that has struck the resource-laden but poor communities, all the government has done is to deliver piecemeal assistance. AB

Fallacious economic growth

Benigno Aquino III was beside himself after his technocrats reported on November 28 that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 7.1% in the third quarter.

This statistic is meaningless to most people in the absence of any indication that the economy has recovered or that progress has touched the majority poor.

The much-vaunted 7.1% GDP growth was spurred by a 24% growth in construction expenditures, mostly on office buildings, shopping malls and condominiums.

Construction has expanded because of an expected rise in the number of call centers and migrant workers' remittances. Up to 2.2 million square meters of office space will be built between now and until 2015, mainly in Quezon City, Mandaluyong and Manila to address the anticipated growth in the business outsourcing sector.

But such efforts will all come to nought as the call center business in the Philippines is in for a fall. With the US itself mired in crisis, there has been a growing clamor for the government to subsidize "in-sourcing" or the employment of American workers for services normally performed by call center agents in other countries like the Philippines.

This eventuality will render call centers vulnerable to suffering the same fate as nursing schools that mushroomed in the early 2000s, only to close down after a few years when the demand for nurses and caregivers abroad dwindled.

The Aquino regime's push for real estate projects has also had a clearly deleterious effect on the poor due to the widespread demolitions being conducted in the National Capital

Region to clear vast tracts of land.

Employment actually shrank by 0.1% from July to September, the equivalent of 250,000 workers losing their jobs.

The real unemployment rate is at least 22%, especially since most of the jobs created this year were part-time in character. Among the employed, up to 25% are classified as "unpaid family workers," a catch-all term to cover those who have been forced to eke out a living by vending and the like. Up to 20% are classified as "underemployed," another catch-all term to obscure the real extent of unemployment.

Up to 40% of the unemployed have college-level education, indicating the extent to which skills and knowledge available to the community is wasted due to the reactionary state's failure to effect the modernization of the economy.

No matter how much Aquino resorts to statistical manipulation, he cannot hide the agrarian and backward character of the Philippine economy. The trend is not progress and growth, but stagnation and crisis.

The Philippine reactionary state has neither the economic motivation or the political will to develop the local productive forces and modernize the economy. It is in the interest of the ruling classes of big landlords and big bourgeois compradors for the local economy to remain backward and dependent on the economies of big capitalist countries. **AB**

FAO 167 is an instrument for plundering the seas

Foreign plunder, and not the preservation of marine life is the objective of Fisheries Administrative Order (FAO) 167 issued by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR). In the name of "sustainable fishing," the order aims to ensure a stable supply of fish for industrial fishing vessels owned by foreign capitalists.

FAO 167 was issued in 1989. Its avowed objective was to provide time for various species of sardine and mackerel to replenish. These species are said to be in short supply due to overfishing in the Visayan Sea. This year, the BFAR declared a fishing moratorium from November 15 to March 2013. The Visayan Sea is considered the "beating heart of marine biodiversity on earth" because it has the most number of marine species.

The fishing moratorium is being enforced in accordance with the five-year (2012-2017) Ecosystem Improved for Sustainable Fisheries (ECOFISH) project launched in October 2012 by the Department of Agriculture and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), with the World Bank's prodding. The Visayan Sea is one of eight major fishing areas in the country allegedly in need of marine life rehabilitation. The Philippines is the sixth largest fish producer worldwide.

The moratorium enables renewed oil and gas exploration activities by the Australian-owned NorAsia Energy Limited

whose area of operations covers the Cebu-Bohol Strait and certain parts of Eastern Visayas. The Pambasang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya (PAMALAKAYA) and the research groups Fisheries and Marine Environment Research Institute (FMERI) and Visayan Sea Fisherfolk Forum (VSFF) launched coordinated protests in Panay, Guimaras, Negros Island, Central Visayas, Masbate, Iloilo, Samar and Leyte to denounce the serious effects of the fishing moratorium on the livelihoods of small fisherfolk in the Visayas. With their low technology, small fisherfolk cannot venture far to catch fish.

The protesters said that the moratorium

should apply to big commercial fishing companies. To conserve marine life, big commercial fishing vessels that use destructive technology such as huge trawls that scour the depths of the oceans and destroy coral reefs (where fish lay their eggs and other marine life live) should be banned. The rights of small fisherfolk to their traditional fishing grounds should likewise be ensured and commercial fishing prohibited in these areas.

The four-month suspension will also lead to the arrest and detention of fisherfolk and fishing industry workers. On November 18, fifteen fishermen of F/B Entan San Antonio were arrested by the Philippine Coastguard. **AB**

Palm plantation workers strike in Agusan del Sur

Workers of Filipinas Palm Oil Plantation, Inc. (FPPI), Agusan Plantation Inc. (API) and AGUMILL in Agusan del Sur waged a simultaneous strike on November 27. The striking workers are members of the National Federation of Labor Unions (NAFLU)-Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU).

The workers' unions are protesting illegal dismissals, grave violations of labor laws and violations of Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA).

FPPI and API workers are opposed to management orders compelling them to sign declarations that their employers have not violated any labor laws. The companies have however failed to regularize the status of workers who have been casuals for five to 29 years. As a result, FPPI laid off 252 casual workers and API booted out 15 employees on October 25.

Aside from the illegal dismissal of workers, the unions are also up in arms against low wages; the lack of SSS, Philhealth and Pag-ibig benefits; nonpayment of holiday and 13th month pay; absence of service incentive leaves and rest days; and the absence of protective clothing for 600 FPPI workers, 100 from API and 50 from AGUMILL.

The companies have all failed to regularize casuals who have been working for more than six months. Benefits for more than 200 workers provided for in the CBA from 2007 to 2011 have not been given, along with backwages from 2007 to 2011. They have also been violating labor wage standards.

FPPI owns more than 30% of all land planted to palm nationwide, making it the biggest in the Philippines. It has 8,430 hectares of palm plantations in San Francisco and Rosario towns. Like coconut, the palm fruit is used to make cooking oil, margarine and soap, among others.

It has more than a thousand workers, most of whom are casuals. The union had also struck in October 2010 because of a deadlock in CBA negotiations.

The API plantation comes in second, with a 1,815-hectare land area in Trento. **AB**

3.5 million coconut farmers are impoverished

Three and a half million coconut farmers are now in dire straits because copra prices have fallen from ₱40-60 in mid-2012 to ₱4-6 in the past few months. The farmers have thus demanded the return of the ₱70-billion coco levy fund to them in cash because this would go a long way in helping them recover from their severe poverty.

The Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) and the Coco Levy Funds Ibalik sa Amin (CLAIM) are opposed to proposals by some government officials to use the coco levy funds to subsidize copra prices. They said this would only benefit greedy businessmen in cahoots with big companies that purchase and use coconut products.

The KMP also refused proposals to use the coco levy to help coconut farmers develop and modernize the industry, saying it was the same justification used by the Marcos-Danding Cojuangco combine to forcibly collect the coco levy from the farmers in the 1970s.

The KMP and CLAIM insisted that the Aquino government should not control the coco levy monies since it did not contribute a single centavo to the fund.

The farmers also demanded the abolition of the 15% *resikada* which reduces the price per kilo of copra sold by small coconut farmers on the pretext that the copra product would shrink in volume while in storage due to the loss of moisture content. The demand was upheld by the Pinag-Isang Lakas ng mga Magsasaka sa Quezon (Piglas-Quezon) who said that the *resikada* system and other fraudulent practices that reduce the income of coconut farmers must be done away with.

The price of copra in the international market is dictated by the big copra processing companies Procter and Gamble Philippines (US), Unilever Phil-

ippines (UK), Cargill Philippines (US), Franklin Baker (US), Jardine-Davies (US) and Nichimen (Japan) which have been dominant since the 1930s. Their co-conspirators are comprador bourgeoisie like Ayala Corporation which has partnered with Mitsubishi Corporation; and Aboitiz Corporation and San Miguel Corporation which have partnered with Fuji Oil and C. Itoh and Company Ltd.

Copra and coconut oil are ingredients in the production of medicines, cosmetics, soap, various food products, beverages, pet food, oil additives, batteries, fertilizer and other basic needs.

The Philippines is one of the leading exporters of copra worldwide. Eighty-five percent of copra is exported and 15% is used in the country. In December 2011, the country earned up to \$2 billion in gross income from the export of copra products.^{AB}