

LIBERATION INTERNATIONAL

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November - December 2006

US-Arroyo regime isolated by popular resistance and global condemnation

by Ed Ladera

For the first time in Philippine history, the biggest Churches united to condemn the Macapagal-Arroyo government. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), the El Shaddai Movement, the Jesus is Lord Movement, and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) called for a massive prayer-rally on 17 December 2006. Even the usually conservative *Iglesia ni Kristo* (INK, Church of Christ) criticized the regime. The key issue they condemned was the Arroyo regime's scheme to change the constitution (Cha-Cha) through a Constituent Assembly (Con-Ass).

Nine Senators joined; two of them identified with the Arroyo administration. So did several members of the House of Representatives, former government officials and prominent businessmen. During the march, the protesters shouted: "Gloria Arroyo, *alis na!*" (Get out!), "Cha-Cha *ibasura!*" (Junk Cha-Cha!). In front of the US embassy, they shouted "VFA, *ibasura!*" (Junk the Visiting Forces Agreement!)

The angry response was provoked by Arroyo's allies in the House of Representatives led by Speaker Jose de Venecia who attempted to railroad the convening of the Constituent Assembly without the approval of the Philippine Senate. They trampled upon the constitutional provisions on amendments, changed the rules and procedures and denied the minority opposition their right to present their arguments.

Macapagal-Arroyo and De Venecia seek sweeping changes in the constitution. Ostensibly they want a shift from a presidential to a parliamentary system and from a bicameral to a unicameral parliament. In reality, Arroyo fears the outcome of the May 2007 elections.



Thousands of protesters marched to the Batasan Pambansa Complex in Quezon City on 12 December to condemn loyalists of the US-Arroyo regime in the Philippine Congress for rushing amendments to the constitution of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. photo from Arkibong Bayan.

She is deeply isolated from the people, with more than 65% of the population wanting her to resign or be ousted. She is charged with massive electoral fraud, corruption scams, and an escalation in extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances and other human rights violations.

The CBCP stated on 14 December that the accusations against her have accumulated: the "Hello, Garci" tapes (audio recordings that exposed the massive electoral fraud of 2004), the fertilizer scam (involving P 1.7 billion meant for poor farmers but misused for electoral fraud), the Cha-Cha (her charter change scheme), etc. Moreover, an increasing number of the population is suffering from hunger. A survey in November 2006 showed that some 3.3 million households, or about 20 million people, experience hunger.

Arroyo's Cha-Cha scheme aims to transform the current Congress, dominated

by her stooges, into a so-called new and improved parliament with the combined powers of the executive and legislative branches of government. She intends to lead this government as the "transitional president" and de Venecia as the "transitional prime minister". The incumbent congressmen, even those whose terms will expire by May 2007 will be kept in office. In this way, she avoids the serious threat of being impeached by an opposition-dominated House of Representatives.

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With her Cha-Cha scheme, Arroyo seeks the support of the US and foreign multinational corporations and banks. The Cha-Cha aims to accord national treatment to all kinds of foreign monopoly investments and to allow the return of US military bases. Provisions of the 1987 constitution that still protect the national patrimony are to be discarded.

Faced with the angry response of the Churches and political figures, Arroyo backtracked and withdrew her Con-Ass scheme a few days before the scheduled mass rally. House Speaker Jose de Venecia was made the scapegoat. He had to announce that his so-called Cha-Cha express train was not going anywhere.

Arroyo's announcement of the withdrawal of her Con-Ass scheme, coupled with the military's ploy of warning of violence and arrests and the Church organizers' decision to prohibit political statements, resulted in lesser than expected numbers at the rally. A few days after 17 December, Arroyo again said she would still push for Charter Change.

International condemnation of extra-judicial killings

Another reason for Arroyo's isolation is the alarming rise in extra-judicial killings. These have elicited international condemnation, especially after the brutal killing of Philippine Independent Church Bishop Alberto Ramento on October 3. The killing of human rights lawyer Gil Gojol on December 12 further raised strong protests especially of international lawyers' organizations which decried the killing of 20 lawyers and more than ten judges since 2001.

Karapatan, the prime human rights organization in the Philippines, declared on December 1 that it had documented 185 extrajudicial killings and 208 enforced disappearances in the past eleven months. This was worse than the time of the Marcos dictatorship. This meant four killings every week. With the summary execution of Atty. Gojol and his driver, the number of extra-judicial killings during the Arroyo regime has exceeded 800.

Amnesty International (AI) issued a very critical report in August this year. In December, AI official Tim Parritt reiterated AI's call to the regime to stop the killings. Condemnations were also issued by the World Council of Churches, the United Church of Canada, the Asian Human Rights Council, and the Uniting Church of Australia, among others.

In an unprecedented move not done even during the Marcos dictatorship, the Foreign Chambers of Commerce issued a public statement on November 14 calling on the Arroyo regime to stop the extra-judicial killings, otherwise these would adversely affect foreign investments and economic aid. The statement was signed by the presidents of the American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, the Australian-New Zealand Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce, the Korean Chamber of Commerce, the Philippine Association of Multinational Companies Regional Headquarters and the vice-president of the European Chamber of Commerce.

Arroyo's all-out war policy negates peace negotiations

Disregarding her nationwide isolation and the international condemnation of her regime's human rights record, Arroyo banks on US support. She fully subscribes to Bush's "war on terror" and persists in her all-out war policy. She has pushed to higher levels the US military intervention in the Philippines. In exchange, she has received

greater economic and military support from Bush.

She has just approved Oplan Bantay Laya II (Operation Freedom Watch II) and declared her regime's objective of destroying the revolutionary movement before the end of her term in 2010. As a consequence, she has scuttled the peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

The twelve agreements signed by the two sides have been set aside. The Hague Joint Declaration of 1992 clearly states the basic economic, social and political reforms that the NDFP seeks in order to address the root causes of the 37-year-old armed conflict. The Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) signed in 1998

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Jobs, not charter change.

Amid widespread hunger and poverty, the US-Arroyo regime's proposed Charter changes aim at arrogating more dictatorial powers and further surrendering the national patrimony to foreign monopoly capitalists. foto from Arkibong Bayan.



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Oppression and resistance of Filipino farm workers

by Bagani Dong-ilay

There are an estimated 13 million farm workers in the Philippines, roughly 15% of the total population. They are peasants completely dependent on selling their labor-power to survive.

Lack of land to till is the main reason for the increasing number of farm workers in the country. For 75% of the peasantry, landlessness is the main problem. They are thus forced to sell their labor-power or engage in various kinds of occupations.

There are two kinds of farm workers. The traditional farm workers are peasants who do not earn enough from farming and must sell their labor-power to land-

lords or rich peasants. They can be found in rice and corn croplands, coconut plantations, vegetable and tobacco fields and even in haciendas and plantations of export crops (sugar cane, pineapple and bananas, among others) that utilize some modern equipment. Traditional farm workers comprise 95% of farm workers.

A small number (5% of the total) may be regarded as modern farm workers. They are concentrated in big haciendas and capitalist farms such as pineapple and banana plantations wholly owned by foreign farm corporations or in partnership with the local comprador-big bourgeoisie and landlords. They operate modern equipment like tractors and trucks for hauling. They also become regular workers in sugar mills and warehouses stocked with farm products. They receive extremely low wages and endure subhuman working conditions.

Wage boards of the reactionary government set the daily minimum wage ranging from US\$1.45 to US\$4.05. Many landlords do not follow these rates and pay even lower wages.

In times of crisis, it is the poor peasants and farm workers who bear the heaviest burden. They are laid off, their unions are crushed and they are subjected to violence. Those who retain their jobs have their wages severely depressed.

Benefits won through decades of struggle by the toiling masses are revoked.

It is only just for farm workers to organize and fight for their immediate interests such as decent wages, humane working conditions, job security and the right to unionize and to strike. It is likewise correct for them to fight for land reform as the long-term solution to their problem. The clamor for genuine land reform goes hand in hand with the call for national industrialization -- the solution to the chronic crisis of the semicolonial and semifeudal system.

A good illustration of the oppression of farm workers is Hacienda Luisita owned by the Cojuangco family of former President Cory Aquino who replaced the dictator Marcos. The Cojuangcos own Hacienda Luisita, Incorporated (HLI), which was established to evade land distribution, and the Central Azucarera de Tarlac (CAT) sugar mill. Income from the two companies has sustained the luxurious lifestyles and unproductive activities of several generations of Cojuangcos that now live in the hacienda.

The Cojuangcos have their own private army known as the Yellow Army. They also enjoy protection from the Philippine Army and paramilitary units known as the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU).

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is flagrantly violated by the Arroyo government. Calls by the CBCP, NCCP and other peace advocates for the resumption of GRP-NDFP peace negotiations fall on deaf ears.

Broad people's resistance

In response to the intensification of the regime's oppression and violations of people's democratic rights, the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army, the NDFP and broad masses of the people have strengthened their resistance. Since September 2005, they have inflicted several hundred casualties on the regime's armed forces while securing several hundred firearms. They have achieved this through surprise raids, sometimes without firing a shot. These weapons can arm more than a dozen platoons or one battalion of guerrilla fighters.

The revolutionary forces continue to provide social services of land reform, health, literacy and numeracy programs and cultural programs to more than 120 areas covering more than 800 municipalities in 70 provinces throughout the country. With the support of mass organizations in these areas, they have built an alternative people's government or organs of political power in wide areas of the country. The long struggle for national and social liberation of the Filipino people lives on. ■



These tents are home to hundreds of contractual farm workers and their families in Hacienda Luisita in Tarlac, in northern Philippines. photo by Jes Aznar for Bulatlat.

Reaping the fruits of agrarian revolution

by Isah Antonio

The year 2006 has been a fruitful year for the New People's Army. News from the battlefield of the different regions in the Philippines reported victorious tactical offensives which garnered an impressive amount of high-powered rifles, ammunitions and other materiel, inflicted casualties and demoralized enemy troops and brought stability to areas governed by revolutionary organs of political power.

Such victories would not have been possible without the support of the peasant masses. The peasantry comprises the majority of the Philippine population and of the membership in the people's army. By waging agrarian revolution and carrying out the struggle against the existing feudal system, the movement has advanced the work in the countryside especially among the poor and middle peasants and the farm workers.

As victories in the armed struggle accumulate, so do successes in the struggle for genuine agrarian reform. The scores of successes range from distribution of land confiscated from despotic landlords to increase of crop-share of the peasants, lowering of land rent, increase in farm workers' wages, reduction of usury, establishment and development of agricultural cooperatives and mutual exchange of labor, establishment of communal farms tilled by mass organizations, improvement of working conditions and raising of farmgate prices for agricultural produce.

Reports gathered by *Ang Bayan* (The Nation), illustrate some of the most recent achievements in the struggle for genuine agrarian reform by the revolutionary forces and the peasant masses in the countryside.

■ A prime example of the close working cooperation between the revolutionary forces and the masses is the "*balik-bukid*" (return to farm) campaign. The campaign was launched by the revolutionary forces and the peasants in a town in southern Philippines against one of the biggest paper and woodproducts manufacturing companies in Asia. For several years now,



War against poverty and hunger. Red fighters of the New People's Army help with agricultural production in the guerrilla zones. Mechanization of farm production forms part of the agrarian revolution program. file photo.

the company has been rapaciously grabbing the lands tilled by the peasants in the area. It has now claimed up to 400,000 hectares of land which cover several provinces and forest and mountain areas, but only half of this concession has been registered with the reactionary government's Department of Natural Resources.

It has forbidden the peasants to reside and till within its concession area. The company uses the reactionary state's military, paramilitary and police forces, including its own armed goons, to crush any attempt by the peasant masses to farm and form communities.

But the revolutionary movement persevered in the implementation of the campaign until more and more of the peasant masses settled in the areas which cannot be continuously protected by the company's armed goons. Land was distributed to the peasants according to their capacity to till the land and to the number of family members. Principal crops planted were food crops such as rice, corn and vegetables to alleviate hunger.

Part of the "*balik bukid*" campaign is the formation of peasant associations and cooperatives, mutual exchange of labor and communal production. At the same time, the movement and the masses set up strict rules and guidelines so that gains made are preserved.

For example, selling of land is forbidden and so is landgrabbing. Those who violate these rules are stripped of their landholdings.

■ In Cagayan Valley in northern Philippines, more than 71,000 peasants in 52 barangays (villages) from eight towns benefited from the agrarian struggles despite intensive military operations and harassment in these areas. Through the peasants' concerted actions, they were able to reduce interest rates on their loans from 7% per month to 2.5%. In other areas in the province, land rent was reduced to one-fourth of net production from a previous one-third of gross production.

In other villages, tenant farmers have altogether stopped paying land rent. An additional 21,790 peasants are

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now working under better conditions after 920 peasant activists from 22 barangays took action against miserable working conditions.

The reactionary government was not spared from the actions of the peasants. In another province in northern Philippines, the peasants prevented the implementation of the government's Socialized Integrated Forest Management Agreement which is another scheme to grab the land from peasants for the benefit of landlords and capitalist developers.

- In the Bicol region, the movement has been able to reduce land rent in over 35,000 hectares of land, thereby benefiting over 10,000 families.
- The agrarian revolution is also advancing in Quezon province. Copra farmers negotiated with a local big landlord for the implementation of provisions in the minimum program of the revolutionary agrarian reform. Through united action, the farmers were able to raise their crop share from 40 to 50% and made the landlord defray the cost of coconut picking and half of the transport expenses.

They were able to raise the daily wages of the coconut pickers. At the same time, they confronted the cheating tactics done by the landlord against the farmers. The most common ways of cheating which the landlord uses are automatically taking off 15-25% from the weight of copra sold to him citing moisture of the copra, rigging his weighing scales and concealing the actual weight from the farmers.

The success and implementation of genuine land reform bring to the fore the cooperation of the New People's Army and the revolutionary masses in the guerrilla zones. In every action taken, they study and investigate each case carefully, develop the correct tactics in facing the landlords and capitalists in the area and make sure that implementation primarily benefits the poor and middle peasants and the farm workers.

In the struggle for land, the masses learn the meaning of collective action and that they have the strength and power to face their class enemy with the support of the New People's Army.

Only through a thorough-going organizing and consolidating work among the peasants could the revolutionary movement further surge forward, and defend and maintain the victories it has achieved. ■

Agrarian revolution sweeping across the northern valley

The first Cagayan Valley regional conference on agrarian revolution held in May 2005 was characterized by intense debates and discussions. Experience on the conduct of agrarian revolution and the implementation of genuine land reform were shared by the delegates who came from various guerrilla fronts, revolutionary mass organizations and local branches of the Communist Party of the Philippines in the region and observers from national Party organs and revolutionary publications. The lessons, conclusions and resolutions of the conference are spurring further the advance of agrarian revolution in the region.

Major conclusions of the conference:

- More than 300,000 individuals in the region's three provinces have so far benefited from the agrarian revolution and the implementation of the land reform program of the revolutionary movement. Achievements included reduction of agricultural land rent, increase in crop share, reduction of interests on agricultural loans, increase in farm workers' wages and improvement in their working conditions, and reduction in the costs of production.
 - The correctness of waging agrarian revolution as the key factor to all-round advancement of revolutionary work in the countryside was validated.
 - The region achieved victories not only in the economic field but also in the political, organizational, military and cultural arenas.
 - The anti-feudal movement has reinvigorated the anti-fascist (against wide-scale and intense militarization and violation of human rights) and anti-imperialist movements (against neo-liberal globalization, IMF/WB impositions), the legal democratic struggle, the promotion of health services and the protection of the environment.
 - From 1999 to 2004 the number of revolutionary mass organizations grew by 904% in the guerrilla zones and by 2,538% in the entire region, while organizing groups* grew by 532% and organizing committees* by 610%. The number of activists and mass leaders grew by 779%, and the mass base** expanded by 459% in barrios (villages) and town centers.
 - The peasant movement and revolutionary political power have grown stronger not only at the barrio level but also at the municipal, district and provincial levels.
 - Regarding carrying out socialist transformation of agriculture, the conference stated that it is not enough to merely address the bourgeois demands of the peasants for land to till but it is also necessary to advance and strengthen the socialist features until socialist transformation of agriculture can be realized.
- The socialist factors that must be strengthened are the Party leadership over the peasant movement and the organs of political power, the establishment of solid cores of poor and lower-middle peasants within the revolutionary mass organizations, the organizing of agricultural workers in capitalist plantations and farms, and the conscious advancing of the socialist perspective.
- The realization of the socialist transformation of agriculture relies on the victory of the national-democratic revolution. ■

* organizing groups and organizing committees are preliminary forms of organizations which expand and consolidate themselves into full-pledged revolutionary mass organizations of peasants and farm workers, women, youth, children and cultural activists.

** the revolutionary mass base in a specific area is the total number organized into various revolutionary mass organizations, including individual activists and those actively supporting the revolutionary organs of political power.

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The majority of farm workers in the hacienda are of the traditional type. They are poor peasants who are in fact the real owners of the land now "owned" by the Cojuangcos. In 1957, the Cojuangco family and Tabacalera, the hacienda's former owner, entered into an agreement to distribute the land to the farm workers in the area. The agreement also stipulated that the Cojuangcos were not actually being awarded the title to the hacienda but only acquired the right to lease the land. The agreement likewise covered only portions planted to sugarcane and did not include other areas now occupied by HLI.

While fighting Marcos, Cory Aquino promised that when elected president land reform would be her centerpiece program. When she became president however, Hacienda Luisita made use of the so-called Stock Distribution Option (SDO) to avoid land distribution. Under the scheme, the farm workers were supposed to own 33% of the stocks of HLI.

In August 2003, the farm workers were secretly and illegally made to sign a document stating that if a farm worker loses his job, he likewise loses his standing as an HLI stock owner. Over 300 farm workers have been terminated and others deceived if not coerced into having their names stricken from the list of HLI stockholders.

In the face of the Cojuangcos' deceptive and exploitative schemes, the farm workers decided to stage a strike. They demanded the reinstatement of all those terminated. They also demanded an increase in wages and the distribution of land.

On November 16, 2004 about a thousand soldiers and police of the reactionary government and paid goons of the hacienda violently attacked the strike of the workers along with their supporters. The fascists used two armored personnel carriers and machine guns to demolish the picketline. Seven were killed and scores were injured. More than a hundred were arrested.

But the farm workers have continued their resistance. They are supported by the people in the surrounding communities. The massacre of the striking workers has also caught international attention. Solidarity groups around the world have condemned the Arroyo government for the massacre and the continuing repression. ■

NDFP appeals for international support for disaster victims

The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) on 5 December appealed to comrades and friends abroad to actively support the relief and rehabilitation operations being extended to disaster victims in the Philippines, in the aftermath of super-typhoon Durian which brought great devastation to the communities in Bicol and other regions in the country.

The revolutionary movement expressed deep sympathy to the victims and called for a massive mobilization of the revolutionary forces in order to carry out relief and rehabilitation work. Red fighters of the New People's Army and contingents of revolutionary mass organizations were called upon to give priority to organizing, assisting and coordinating relief efforts, and ensure that food and other assistance will go directly to the victims and their families.

Heavy rains and cyclone winds dislodged accumulated lahar and other

debris from the slopes of Mayon volcano causing avalanches which buried tens of communities in the outlying areas. The Arroyo regime completely ignored the warnings of its own scientists and failed to evacuate the people from the affected areas. The policies of the regime to allow unbridled logging and mining activities have also caused wide-scale deforestation, soil erosion and other forms of environmental destruction in large parts of the country.

The NDFP appealed for international solidarity to alleviate the sufferings of the disaster victims and has requested financial support to be coursed through the following bank account:

NDF St. Internationaal Informatie Buro,
Account No: 394570642
Rabobank, Utrecht, the Netherlands;
t.a.v.: Typhoon victims.
IBAN No: NL 70 RABO 0394 5706 42.
BIC: RABONL2U. ■

45 more firearms for the people's army

Red fighters of the New People's Army seized 45 high-powered firearms, including an M203 grenade launcher and an ultimax submachinegun, killed 12 enemy soldiers and wounded several others, during successful ambushes and disarming operations against the reactionary troops. The tactical offensives by the NPA were carried out in November and first week of December against enemy forces stationed in the provinces of North Cotabato, Surigao del Sur, Compostela Valley and Sarangani in the southern island of Mindanao, in Masbate in central Philippines and in the northern Philippine province of Cagayan.

In two of these operations, the guerrillas, disguised as policemen, launched surprise attacks on the enemy detachments and seized 34 high-powered firearms, hundreds of ammunitions, military uniforms and important military documents, without firing a single shot.

The targetted enemy troops had been engaged in heavy military operations within residential areas, causing terror, violence and harm to the people. ■



A Red fighter of the New People's Army hauls off logistics from a municipal police station in northern Philippines. Lying face down are members of the reactionary security force who chose to surrender in the face of certain defeat. file photo.

People's right to resistance tackled in Beirut conference

by Bert De Belder

An "International Conference in Support of the Resistance" was held in Beirut from 16 to 19 November 2006. It was organized by the Hezbollah, the Lebanese Communist Party, the People's Movement, the National Unity Forum, and al-Leeqa'.

Approximately 400 representatives from all over the world participated on behalf of tens of political, trade union, anti-globalization, anti-war and anti-imperialist movements that support the people's right to freedom and progress.

The objective of the conference was to help transform the historic victory achieved by the Lebanese resistance against the Israeli aggression into an incentive for reinvigorating the struggle for comprehensive Arab liberation, and to direct it against the Zionist and imperialist project. The conference likewise aimed at consolidating global solidarity with the resistance of the Arab people, particularly with their national resistance in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq, within the framework of supporting the people's right to resistance.

The importance and the broadness of the conference were clear from the very start. Guest of honor at the opening session was former Lebanese prime minister Salim Hoss. Among the other speakers: a journalist of the renowned progressive Mexican newspaper La Jornada, a member of parliament from India, the general secretary of the Lebanese Communist Party and the deputy secretary general of the Hezbollah, sheik Naim Kassem.

"We must unite against US hegemonism and overcome divisions based on religion or political color," said the Hezbollah leader. "Our resistance is an act of legitimate self-defense... We are fighting the oppressors. The victory of the resistance is the victory of the poor. And we obtained this victory also thanks to the broadest possible alliance of Lebanese forces."

Workshops during the conference discussed the strategy of the resistance against war and occupation, the role of the media, legal action and Arab unity.

The participants came up with conclusions and principles of a shared vision regarding the dangers threatening the region and the whole world, in addition with methods for facing these threats and challenges, and mechanisms for unifying the vital forces contending with these threats.

Conference participants, in their final statement, 'The People's Right to Resistance', agreed on the following points:

- The 'Greater' or 'New Middle East' projects are aggressive US initiatives aiming at balkanizing the area and inundating it with conflicts and wars in order to continuously control the region and pillage its resources.
- Working towards developing more and better relations between Left, democratic and nationalist currents and Islamic and resistance movements, in order to consolidate and strengthen alliances that oppose the imperialist-Zionist alliance.
- Crystallizing the theoretical premises for reconciling Left and nationalist currents with those of the Islamic resistance, in order to propel forward liberation movements within the Arab and Islamic area and all over the world.
- Calling for and working towards unifying all forms of resistance on the level of each Arab country and on the regional and worldwide levels, and working for the crystallization of an Arab resistance project that includes the various resistance forces in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq with the aim of toppling US and Zionist occupation.
- Consolidating and expanding the efforts aimed at confronting the campaigns launched to blemish the image of the resistance within the framework of the so-called 'war on terror' by deceptively confusing the image of freedom fighters with that of members of fanatic and violent movements."



The author with Salam Harb (left), staff of Lebanese Popular Assistance (SPL), inspecting the devastation in southern Beirut. Bert de Belder is the coordinator of Belgian solidarity movement International Action for Liberation (Intal). photo by Luc Vancauwenberge.

The Conference concluded with a guided ocular visit of the devastated southern neighborhood of Beirut and villages in the south of the country. The direct confrontation with the destruction caused by the US-Israeli aggression against Lebanon only served to strengthen the resolve of the participants to support all forms of resistance against imperialist wars and occupation. ■



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

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Brussels protesters denounce US-Arroyo political killings

More than one thousand protesters from all over Belgium, and from France and the Netherlands turned out on 11 December in Brussels, Belgium, to commemorate the victims of political assassinations and enforced disappearances in the Philippines and to denounce the US-Arroyo regime for its culpability in these atrocities.

Each participant carried the name of one of the victims on their chest, dramatically illustrating the 797 individuals assassinated and 200 more who have disappeared since Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo came to power in 2001. Victims include leaders and members of militant organizations and opposition political parties, labor union leaders, lawyers, religious leaders, journalists, youth leaders and even children.

The protesters marched to the Philippine Embassy in Brussels, holding up torches and shouting slogans: 'Stop the Killings!'. Meeting a delegation of the protesters, the Ambassador of the

Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP), Cristina Ortega defended her government.

Rally speakers included Dr. Constancio Claver, who himself survived an assassination attempt on 31 July, in Tabuk, north of Manila, but where his wife was killed and their youngest daughter wounded and psychologically traumatized. He stressed that arousing international public opinion is important as it may put pressure on the Arroyo regime to stop the killings. Underscoring the GRP's culpability, the protesters hung their placards with the names of the victims at the gates of the embassy.

The torch rally was organized by a coalition of 65 trade union organizations, political parties and non-government organizations in Belgium. ■



Protesters hang placards with photos and names of the victims of extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances on the entrance to the Philippine embassy in Brussels. from stopthekillings.be

Hamas, Palestinian parties, reject Abbas early elections coup d'état

Hamas and other major Palestinian parties and factions jointly rejected the proposal on 16 December of Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas to hold early parliamentary elections, describing such a proposal as "unconstitutional" and as a coup d'état against the popularly elected Hamas-led government. They instead reiterated the call for the formation of a government of national unity on the basis of an earlier agreement signed by all Palestinian factions and on the basis of the results of the January 2006 parliamentary elections.

In a report released 17 December, Khaled Mishaal of Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement), Ramadan Shallah of Islamic

Jihad, Politburo member Maher Al-Taher of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), PFLP-General Command secretary general Ahmed Jibril, and Fatah Chairman Farouk Kaddoumi together assailed Abbas' call for early parliamentary elections as "unjustified". They pointed out that the January 2006 elections were held "amidst absolute transparency and testified by the whole world".

Hamas won 74 seats to wrest control of the 132-seat Palestinian Legislative Council while Fatah garnered 45.

The governments of Israel, the United States and the United Kingdom have chorused behind Abbas' move, seeing

an opportunity to unseat the Hamas-led government. Many observers also detect the hand of the "Israeli alliance" behind the most recent violent incidents which are provoking civil war in Palestine, including the murder of the three children of General Intelligence officer Bahaa' Musbah Ba'lousha on 11 December, the assassination attempt on Prime Minister Ismail Haneyya on 14 December and the internecine clashes between security forces loyal to Mahmoud Abbas and other Palestinian armed factions.

Meanwhile, Hamas officials have announced success in breaking through the Israel-US embargo against Palestine, saying that funds are beginning to flow "into certain institutions, and into health and education". Prime Minister Haneyya reportedly came back on 16 December from a successful tour of neighboring Arab and Muslim countries where he said Hamas enjoys wide support.

Hamas is fighting for a sovereign Palestinian state within the 1967 borders of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their lands, among others. It is also calling for a 15-year truce with Israel in exchange for the latter's recognition of a sovereign Palestinian state. ■