

# LIBERATION INTERNATIONAL

Publication of the International Information Office of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines

January - February 2008

## Arroyo regime teeters on the brink of ouster

By Bagani Dong-ilay

The conversation between the taxi driver and his passenger showed how desperate life has become for many Filipinos: The driver made remarks on how life has become so difficult these days. Then he said, "If only someone can assure me that they will take care of my family, I am willing to die just so I can assassinate this no-good president Arroyo."

A social volcano is indeed waiting to erupt with the pent-up anger of the long suffering Filipino people against a cheating, stealing and lying president.

A new and yet bigger wave of calls for Arroyo's ouster or resignation has swept the country after revelations from former government official Rodolfo Lozada, Jr. confirmed the direct involvement of Mike Arroyo, the husband of Manila president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, in a multi-million dollar kickback scandal in connection with a proposed National Broadband Project awarded to Chinese company Zhong Xing Telecommunication Equipment Company (ZTE).

Rodolfo Lozada, Jr. has insider knowledge of the highly anomalous deal. Gloria Arroyo's henchmen in the Philippine National Police, military intelligence community and in her cabinet tried everything to stop Lozada from testifying before Senate committees investigating the scandal. They sent him to Hong Kong. But the guilt-stricken Lozada decided to come back to the Philippines to reveal everything he knew. While disembarking at the Ninoy

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civilians in Sulu**

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*A series of massive and widespread protest actions demanding the resignation or ouster of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo erupted across the country in February amid new evidence of corruption by Arroyo, her husband Mike Arroyo and top government officials. Arkibong Bayan .*

## Tens of thousands demand truth, join calls to oust Arroyo regime

by Jose Emilio Jacinto III

In a convincing display of "people power" reminiscent of two previous mass uprisings that led to the ouster of two Philippine presidents, tens of thousands of protesters massed up on 29 February in Makati City, the Philippines' financial district, to send a strong message to the murderous and corrupt Arroyo regime that its days are numbered.

The protest action dubbed as an "interfaith rally for truth", was held to demand the truth from the latest corruption scandal involving illegitimate president Gloria Arroyo and to ask for her resignation. First Gentleman Mike Arroyo, together with other top government officials, reportedly demanded up to US\$130 million in

commissions in exchange for granting the National Broadband Network (NBN) project contract to China's Zhong Xing Telecommunication Equipment Corporation (ZTE). The project was eventually shelved after news broke out about the anomalous deal, but it had not prevented the mounting protests and seething anger of the whole nation.

A cross-section of Philippine society totaling more than 50,000 converged on 29 February to demand the truth and to push for the ouster or resignation of Arroyo. Participants in the rally included workers, peasant groups, youth and students, women, businessmen, middle and upper class housewives, urban poor, church and religious groups, migrants and their

*Tens of thousands, page 2 ...*

...Tens of thousands, page 1, col 3

relatives, artists and the political opposition including two former Philippine presidents.

Militant groups estimated the number at 75,000, while the political opposition gave an even higher estimate. It was, according to analysts, larger than expected. Youth and students from many colleges and universities composed the main bulk of the protesters.

Speakers at the rally lambasted the Arroyo regime for its corruption, and its other crimes against the people, including the extrajudicial killings and disappearances of opposition activists. And as with the previous displays of "people power", protesters came out with their creative expressions of fighting slogans and demands. Militant groups carried a large streamer that says "Goodbye Gloria". A Catholic nun carried a placard that says "What is evil, is evil. Period". "Gloria, most corrupt president" says another placard, while a dog was seen with a poster on its back that says "Ow-ow-Oust Gloria!"

The resounding demand and call however was: Oust Gloria!

Ever-fearful of the fate suffered by her predecessor who was ousted by "people power", Gloria Arroyo sought refuge at a military camp in Quezon City.

Even before this mammoth gathering, military and police loyalists of Gloria acted desperately to prevent a groundswell of people massing-up. They fed media with worn-out alleged reports of possible infiltration of the rally by the New People's Army or by supposed terrorists. They set up blockades and checkpoints around Metro Manila to prevent rallyists from the

provinces from joining the Makati protesters. They further prevented media from taking aerial shots from helicopters of the massive protest by declaring the area a "no-fly zone".

In an official statement, Bayan (New Patriotic Alliance) said that the Makati mobilization sends a very strong message to Malacañang and other institutions of the government that the Filipino people seriously and urgently demand for truth, justice, and meaningful changes in the leadership and system of governance amid the latest political crisis that has been rocking the Arroyo regime.

Professor Jose Ma. Sison, Chief Political Consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), in a statement on 01 March stressed that "the fake president and her retinue of bureaucratic sycophants and military bully boys should be able to read the handwriting on the wall. They have been weighed and grievously found wanting. Their days are numbered. Their doom is in the horizon."

As Gloria Arroyo presses all her panic buttons, so to speak, the people and the organized forces are bracing for bigger mobilizations and more creative expressions of protest to force the ouster of Gloria Arroyo.

Militant migrant organizations, representing about 10 million overseas Filipinos forced to live and work abroad because of the corruption, brutality, poverty, unemployment and backwardness of Philippine society, have called for the withholding of remittances at least once a month. The remittances of migrant Filipinos help sustain the bankrupt Philippine economy and bureaucracy. Migrant Filipinos send US\$30 million in remittances daily.

Meanwhile, protest rallies by Filipino migrants and foreign allies around the world were also held to show solidarity with the calls being made in the Philippines for the ouster of the Arroyo regime. In Australia and Hong Kong, migrant Filipinos and human rights advocates not only called for the ouster of the Arroyo regime but also called for "Zero Remittance Day" on 8 March. They condemned the plundering of their hard-earned money to prop-up Arroyo's corruption-riddled government.

Rallies were also held in the cities of New York, New Jersey, San Francisco and Los Angeles in the United States, in Toronto and Vancouver in Canada, and in Amsterdam in The Netherlands. They demanded that Arroyo be held accountable for her many crimes against the Filipino people, including massive corruption and grave violations of human rights.

Danielle Galan, president of Anakbayan New York said that "corruption is a disease that robs Filipinos of a promising future. It is the same reason why our parents and fellow Filipino youth left the country to search for better lives abroad. Those who engage in it must answer to the nation's call for accountability." ■



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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# US and Philippine military massacre civilians in Maimbung, Sulu

By Isah Antonio

In the early morning of 4 February, while the villagers were sound asleep, troops of the reactionary Armed Forces of the Philippines launched an armed attack on the fishing village of Ipil in Maimbung town, Sulu, in the southern island of Mindanao. They massacred at least eight civilians, including two children aged 4 and 9, two teenagers aged 15 and 17 and a pregnant woman, and a soldier who was on leave at that time. The military operations also caused the wounding of many other civilians and destruction of property.

The AFP tried to cover up the massacre by saying that it was a legitimate operation and that the victims were members of the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). The women and children who were killed, they said, died in the crossfire. The surviving victims, their families and local government officials however vehemently belied these claims of the military. They asserted that the victims were ordinary seaweed farmers and fisherfolk, and not members of the Abu Sayyaf Group.

The ASG is a creation of the AFP and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1991 to undermine the Moro people's struggle for self-determination. It has since turned into banditry, kidnapping for ransom and terrorism, but continues to be handled by military officers.

But what is so damning about the Maimbung massacre aside from the killing of civilians is the presence of US military forces in the area. Eyewitness and survivors' accounts report seeing heavily armed US soldiers in the area while the carnage was going on. There were even reports that what happened in Maimbung was part of the joint military exercise between US and Philippine troops called *Balikatan* (shoulder-to-shoulder), a sort of practicum for the Philippine military. This is not farfetched since soldiers that attacked the Ipil village belonged to the Light Reaction Company, a unit composed of soldiers who have undergone specialized training from the US military during the joint military exercises.

The specialized US military training produced brutal results in the fishing village of Ipil: civilians were attacked; the

*Sulu massacre, page 5, col 2 ...*



*Philippine security forces, supported by visiting US troops, stormed the fishing village of Ipil in Maimbung, Sulu province on 4 February, leaving eight civilians dead and a deep psychological wound on the survivors. Arkibong Bayan.*

## 16 offensives in January and February

### New People's Army frustrates intensified enemy attacks

By Roselle Valerio

Despite the intensification of armed attacks by the security forces of the US-Arroyo regime and their repeated self-serving projections about the impending defeat of the revolutionary forces, reports coming from the battlefield reveal that the New People's Army and the revolutionary masses continue to hold the initiative in armed tactical offensives with the enemy.

At least 18 elements of the enemy armed forces were killed and scores of others were wounded in about 16 tactical offensives and two tactical counter-offensives conducted in the last two months by various units of the NPA across the country. The Red fighters were able to seize several pistols and high-powered rifles, including an M-60 machine gun, which could be used to further increase the strength of the people's army.

On 29 December 2007, four soldiers belonging to the 21<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army were killed in an ambush by Red fighters of Danilo Ben Command of the NPA-Cagayan Province, in northern Philippines. The 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the PA had been conducting offensive military operations in several towns in the provinces of Cagayan and Isabela since the start of December before they were ambushed by the NPA.

Various units of the Merardo Arce Command of the NPA-Southern Mindanao Region, in southern Philippines, were able to launch victorious tactical offensives during the second half of January 2008 without sustaining any casualty. While the bulk of the enemy's forces – the 73<sup>rd</sup> IBPA and PA Scout Rangers – were busy in the

*16 offensives, page 6, col 1*

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Aquino International Airport, he was abducted by a unit of the Presidential Security Group (PSG) and PNP presumably upon orders of Arroyo's top cabinet officials. But the incident came to the knowledge of journalists and subsequent outcries from the public forced the abductors to surface Lozada.

Testifying finally before the Philippine Senate, Lozada disclosed in great detail what he knew about the anomalous deal. He revealed how former Commission on Elections Chairman Benjamin Abalos, acting on instructions from Mike Arroyo, brokered a deal with the Chinese firm ZTE asking for US\$130 million dollars in kickback or commission. He recounted that when the anomalous deal was exposed and subsequently shelved, he was sent to Hong Kong to escape being investigated by the Senate which had subpoenaed him to testify. He told about the harrowing ordeal he went through when he was abducted by elements of the PSG and PNP when he disembarked from the plane from Hong Kong thinking that he was going to be killed to prevent him from spilling the beans.

Reflecting the mood of the general populace, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), Archbishop Angel Lagdameo, has called on the people to launch "communal action". A broad spectrum of Philippine society, agitated by Lozada's testimony, has interpreted the archbishop's words as a call for the people to mobilize to remove Arroyo from the presidency.

## The roots of discontent

Under the Arroyo regime, joblessness has grown to record levels. In 2007, conservative estimates put 4.1 million Filipinos without jobs. Since 2001, when Arroyo assumed the presidency, up to 2006, average family income has dropped by PhP20,400.

There is a great disparity in incomes with the top 20% or 3.5 million families accounting for 52.8% of the total income, while the poorest 80% or 13.9 million families taking the remaining 47.3%. The income of the top 10% is 19 times that of the poorest 10 percent. The Forbes.com estimates the net worth of the country's 20 richest individuals of US\$15.6 billion in 2006 as equivalent to the combined annual income of the poorest 10.4 million families or 52 million Filipinos. Eighty percent of families or 70 million Filipinos struggle to survive on around US\$2.50 a day.

This situation has impelled the workers to fight more resolutely for a wage increase which has always been stubbornly opposed by the regime. In 2007, the average wage of workers in the most industrialized area around the capital is not even half of the actual cost of living. Poverty in the countryside is even worse.

The trade deficit in 2006 was \$6.817 billion. The perennial trade deficit is the result of the basic weakness of the country's semifeudal economy which does not have an industrial base. Because of this, it imports most of its manufactured goods. Even its so-called manufactured exports are merely low-value added re-exports because as in the electronics sectors the products contain from 90%-95% imported raw materials. These re-exports actually earn very little for the local economy.

A fiscal crisis is threatening to explode on the regime's face in 2008. The regime has been able to buy time in 2007 only because it had gone on a privatization binge unparalleled in the country's history. In 2007 alone, PhP90.6 billion in government assets were sold to private capital which was nearly as much as the PhP93.9 billion sold in the previous 15 years spanning three administrations. Without the proceeds from privatization there would have been a PhP78.0 billion deficit.

Seemingly, the only bright spot in this grim economic horizon are the remittances of around eight up to ten million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). The US\$12.761 billion remittances in 2007 served to offset the US\$6.817 billion trade deficit. Ironically, this has redounded to the detriment of the families back home dependent on these remittances. Partly because of the surge in dollar remittances from abroad, the peso has appreciated against the dollar. By the end of 2007, the average family dependent on OFW income lost PhP2,440 a month due to the appreciation of the peso against the dollar.

The OFW phenomenon is one clear indicator of the economy's backwardness. Eight to ten million Filipinos are abroad because the economy has been failing to provide enough jobs for the people.

Already suffering from economic hardships brought on by the regime, a litany of shady deals and corruption scandals involving the first family has further fueled the anger of the people against the Manila president. Among these were the US\$70 million payoff by German firm Fraport AG to the Office of the President for a US\$425 million airport terminal expansion project; the PhP400 million laundering of ill-gotten wealth from monthly kickbacks from government

corporations; the diversion of PhP728 million in fertilizer funds for the campaign kitty of Gloria Arroyo in the 2004 presidential elections; US\$50 million in "commissions" for the overpriced North Luzon Railways Project; the 5.1 kilometer Diosdado Macapagal Boulevard whose PhP1.1 billion cost was reportedly overpriced by PhP536 million, and many others.

Massive demonstrations are being planned in the coming days to demand the resignation of Arroyo. Restive anti-Arroyo soldiers and policemen are reportedly watching in the sidelines ready to move at the proper time. (Please see related story on anti-Arroyo demonstrations)

NDFP Chief Political Consultant Jose Maria Sison said that Arroyo is "ripe for ouster". He explained that "the sheer growth of the legal and peaceful mass actions in the National Capital Region and on a national scale in the coming days, weeks and months can encourage the military and police to withdraw support from the Arroyo ruling clique and can suffice to cause the resignation, impeachment or outright ouster of the illegitimate and morally bankrupt president".

Sison further said that prospects for the resumption of formal talks in the GRP-NDFP peace negotiations are bright if the broad masses of the Filipino people and the broad united front succeed in ousting Gloria M. Arroyo. He added, "The broad mass movement can succeed to oust Arroyo only with the full active participation of the patriotic and progressive forces. These (forces) would have some significant weight in the new government and would certainly demand the resumption of the aforesaid formal talks in order to address the roots of the civil war through comprehensive agreements on social, economic and political reforms". ■



**US troop "surge" a big failure**

**Iraqi resistance inflicts heavy toll on US occupation troops**

By Ed Ladera

**L**atest official US statistics document heavy casualties inflicted by the Iraqi Resistance on US occupation troops. As of 19 February 2008, 3,960 US soldiers have died: 3,225 killed in action and 735 through "non-hostile" fire. Wounded in action totaled 29,133, of which 13,013 did not return to duty within 72 hours.

According to data provided by the Defense Manpower Data Center, Statistical Information Analysis Division, from 19 March 2003 through 2 February 2008, the non-hostile deaths included 139 self-inflicted deaths. The great majority of those who died, 3,070 or 78% of the total were aged 30 years or below.

The number of US soldiers who undergo major amputations, toes and fingers not counted, reached 500 on 12 January 2007. This number comprised only 2.2% of the total wounded at that time, 22,700.

Traumatic brain injuries (TBI), according to one expert cited in a February 2007 Discovery magazine article, affected over 7,500 soldiers. Mental illness or psychosocial disorder affected about 1/3 of the 103,788 veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars of aggression diagnosed between 30 September 2001 and 30 September 2005. Among the effects of these psychosocial disorders were homelessness and marital problems, including domestic violence. The Pentagon reported in March 2006 that more than 8,000 US soldiers had deserted. The following year it said that the rate of desertions was even increasing.

**Troop "surge" a big failure**

The yearly statistics prove that the US troop "surge" proclaimed by the Bush administration as a great success is in fact a big failure.

The US Defense Manpower Data Center recorded the total deaths in the year 2006 as 704. After the so-called "surge" with the increase of 30,000 US troops, the deaths increased to 762 for year 2007. The rate of American deaths in Baghdad over the first seven weeks of the "surge" security escalation had nearly doubled from the

*Surge failure, page 6 ...*



*A US armored military vehicle smoulders in the background after an attack by Iraqi resistance forces. file photo.*

**... Sulu massacre, page 3, col 1**

children were shot in the head; victims' eyes were gouged out; and fingers and ears were sliced off.

This was not the first time that the US troops have taken part in AFP military operations in Sulu. In early 2007, US troops were present during an armed encounter between the AFP and the Moro National Liberation Front in Indanan town, Sulu. During that period, US military personnel were supposedly building roads in Indanan while the AFP troops were launching big military operations in the entire province.

The US use the so-called humanitarian missions of building roads, bringing relief goods and medical services to neutralize people's resistance against its presence and to cover up the real purpose of the joint exercises. According to Command Sgt. Maj. William Eckert of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) in his article "Defeating the Idea: Unconventional Warfare in the Philippines": "Working in close coordination with the US Embassy, JSOTF-P uses Special Forces, Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations forces to conduct deliberate intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance in very focused areas, and based on collection plans, to perform tasks to prepare the environment and obtain critical information requirements. The information is used to

determine the capabilities, intentions and activities of threat groups that exist within the local population and to focus US forces – and the AFP – on providing security to the local populace. It is truly a joint operation, in which Navy SEALs and SOF aviators work with the AFP counterparts to enhance AFP's capacities." [Bulatlat.com]

The presence of US military personnel in the Philippines must be seen in the context of the US' continuing control of the social, economic, cultural and military aspects of Philippine society, and of the Philippines as the second front in the so-called US war on terror. The Philippines is an ideal launching pad for future attacks against enemies of the US especially in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East.

The people condemn the *Balikatan* exercises, the presence of US troops, and US military aid as having exacerbated the already tense and dangerous situation in the country, and in Mindanao in particular, and has led to increasing human rights violations including extra-judicial killings and forced disappearances.

They demand a pull out of all US troops, a stop to the joint military exercises, the scrapping of agreements and treaties between the United States and the Philippines such as the Mutual Defense Treaty, Visiting Forces Agreement and Mutual Logistics Support Agreement. ■

... *Surge failure, page 5, col 1*

previous period. According to the Iraq Coalition Casualty Monitor, US troop deaths since the “surge” has been running at 3.14 per day. Moreover, reports indicate that even after the troop surge, more than two-thirds of Baghdad is under the effective control of various groups within the Iraqi resistance. In an attempt to crush the resistance in Baghdad, the US military dropped 40,000 pounds of bombs in the first ten minutes of a January 10 [2008] assault on the town of Arab Jabour on the southern outskirts of Baghdad.

Forty houses and the main road were destroyed and many civilians were killed.

### More than a million Iraqis dead, more than 4 million refugees

The main victim of the US-led war of aggression and occupation in Iraq is however the Iraqi people. A survey made in August 2007 estimated over 1.2 million deaths since March 2003. The Opinion Research Business (ORB), a London polling organization, published the results of its survey on September 14, 2007. The ORB reported that “48% died from a gunshot wound, 20% from the impact of a car bomb, 9% from aerial bombardment, 6% as a result of an accident and 6% from another blast/ordnance.”

Besides the over a million deaths caused by the US-led war of aggression, Iraqis are subjected to torture, rape, and many other human rights violations. 60 to 70% of Iraqi children are reported to be suffering from psychological problems. 68% of Iraqis have no access to safe drinking water. Cholera and other epidemics are taking place, while half of Iraqi doctors have left the country.

According to a press briefing of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on 19 February 2008, there are some 2 million Iraqi refugees outside the country and about 2.4 million internal refugees. 95% of the refugees outside Iraq are in Middle East countries, with about 1.2-1.4 million in Syria and 500-750 thousand in Jordan.

At the end of his mission to Iraq and neighboring countries, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, appealed for international help for Iraqi refugees and for Syria and Jordan. Jordan announced it was spending US\$1.7 billion yearly to assist the Iraqi refugees in Jordan.

### Iraqi resistance grows in strength, condemns US scheme of sectarian civil war

While the US says there were only 2000 attacks against US “Coalition” troops in September 2007 compared to 3200 attacks in September 2006, claiming that the “troop surge” was successful, an Iraqi resistance leader declared in an international solidarity conference in March 2007 that the Iraqi resistance was carrying out over 1300 attacks each week.

Abdul Jabbar al-Kubaysi, general secretary of the Iraqi Patriotic Alliance, described how large areas of Iraq and many of the smaller cities and towns are under the control of the Iraqi resistance and in the larger cities, fierce street battles rage daily. The conference held in Chianciano, Italy, also had Ayatollah al Sayyed Ahmed al-Baghdadi, a leader of the resistance among



the Shiites, as a speaker by telephone. He condemned the US scheme of fomenting “sectarian civil war” between Sunnis and Shiites and claiming that US occupation is a “peace keeping” mission. He declared: “Confrontational clashes were never known before the occupation. It is a confrontation planned by external powers to burn Iraq and the whole region.”

He added: “America will never be able to control Iraq because of the strength of the resistance. We will always reject the occupation. No mask could ever cover up its ugly face. The resistance will remove all the masks, and defeat the occupier’s project of civil war in Iraq.” Al-Kubaysi concluded his speech at the international conference: “With the heroic sacrifices of the Iraqi people, the American occupation has been stopped dead in its tracks. The shackles of occupation are crumbling, thanks to the courageous resistance of the Iraqi people.” (See Kosta Harlan, “Voices of the Iraqi Resistance”, *Fight Back! Lucha y Resistir!*, March 2007, [www.fightbacknews.org](http://www.fightbacknews.org)). ■

... *16 offensives, page 3, col 3*

western part of the region, the NPA inflicted blows on isolated enemy positions in the eastern side, namely Compostela Valley and Davao Oriental provinces.

In the morning of 30 January, seven soldiers belonging to the 67<sup>th</sup> IBPA and a member of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) were killed while ten other soldiers were wounded in an ambush by the combined forces of Guerrilla Fronts 15 and 25, when the enemy troops were patrolling through the villages of Kinablangan, San Victor and Kampawan, in Baganga town, Davao Oriental. Seized from the enemy were an M-60 machine gun and two M-16 rifles.

In the afternoon of the same day, an intelligence operative of the 1102<sup>nd</sup> PNP Mobile Group was killed and two CAFGU elements were wounded in the village of Bukal, in Nabunturan, Compostela Valley, when they fought it out with Red fighters of Front 27. Another element of the 1102<sup>nd</sup> PNP Mobile Group was killed and ten others were wounded, this time in the village of Ngan, in Compostela, when the NPA 5<sup>th</sup> Pulang Bagani Command ambushed the reinforcing enemy troops.

On 31 January, a soldier was wounded when the NPA launched harassment operations against a detachment of the 733<sup>rd</sup> Combat Squadron of the Philippine Air Force in Clayo Village, Nasugbu town, Batangas province. Elsewhere in southern Luzon, four soldiers of the 9<sup>th</sup> IBPA and the

565<sup>th</sup> Engineering Battalion of the Philippine Army were seriously wounded when their armed convoy was ambushed by the NPA in Buenavista village, Bacon town, in Sorsogon province on 1 February. The following day, an army sergeant was killed when the NPA attacked an AFP detachment in Badian village, Oas town, in Albay province. The Red fighters seized a .45 caliber pistol from the enemy.

Meanwhile, latest reports reveal that the NPA in Samar province, in central Philippines, was able to seize 11 high-powered rifles when they raided the PNP municipal headquarters in Hinabangan town on 23 December. It was earlier reported that the Red fighters seized two HPRs and three pistols from the raid. ■

# Uribe government assassinates FARC commander Raúl Reyes

By Gloria La Riva

The Colombian military brutally bombarded an encampment of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) inside Ecuador on 1 March. The attack took the lives of the FARC's number two commander, Raúl Reyes, and 16 other guerrillas.

Noted FARC leader Julián Conrado, member of the insurgent army's general command, was also killed in the attack. The US Department of State had recently posted a US\$2.5 million bounty on Conrado, 53, whose actual name was Guillermo Enrique Torres.

Reyes, 60, was the FARC's actual ground commander and chief negotiator in the talks with the Andrés Pastrana government between 1998 and 2002. Reyes' real name was Luis Edgar Devia Silva.

The encampment was one mile inside Ecuador's border, just south of the Putumayo River near Santa Rosa. To justify its invasion of that country, Colombia's right-wing president Álvaro Uribe claims that its military bombarded from within Colombia's airspace.

But in a contrary statement, Juan Manuel Santos, Colombia's defense minister, stated that the planes bombed the camp from a position two kilometers – over 1.2 miles – inside Ecuador. He also admitted that Colombian troops entered Ecuador to sequester the bodies of Reyes and Conrado and take them to Colombia to prevent their recovery by the FARC.

Uribe notified Ecuador's president Rafael Correa only after the attack. Correa has ordered an investigation into the bombardment, and reiterated the call for peace negotiations.

Despite numerous offers by Venezuela's president Hugo Chávez and other international leaders to help negotiate a peace settlement of the 60-year-old Colombian conflict, the right-wing, pro-US Uribe has responded by calling for the FARC's extermination.

The assassination of the FARC combatants came only days after the FARC's second unilateral release of prisoners of war facilitated by Chávez's government. The four high-profile prisoners immediately

joined international calls for a political solution to the conflict, just days before the bombardment.

Uribe has refused any meaningful proposals by the insurgent army to carry out a humanitarian exchange of prisoners held by both sides. In particular, he rejects the call for demilitarizing two territories – Pradera and La Florida – for a period of 45 days, in order to facilitate the exchange of prisoners.

“I publicly challenge President Álvaro Uribe to demonstrate the success of his policy of democratic security and clear the military from the municipalities of Pradera and Florida,” said Luis Eladio Pérez, one of the four former Colombian legislators just released by the FARC. “The solution is political, Mr. President Uribe,” Pérez added.

There is good reason for the FARC's demilitarization demand: During the previous FARC's unilateral liberation of

*Raúl Reyes, page 8, col 3 ...*

## “Operation Peace” sows terror in north Brazil countryside

By Isah Antonio

The Brazilian state, military and local government have launched massive operations against the peasants in the state of Pará in northern Brazil, resulting in grave violations of human rights.

The military operation called “Operation Peace in the Countryside” was ordered by the governor of Pará state, Ana Julia Carepa, to hunt down peasants who are courageously fighting for their rights to own the land and against the abuses of the landlords. The military used 400 military and police troops, 40 armored vehicles, four helicopters and one plane. The massive show of force was to intimidate and harass the peasant population to give up their struggle and to force them to give information about the activities and plans of the League of Poor Peasants (LCP) or Liga, a social movement fighting for peasant land rights.

More than 200 peasants were arrested and imprisoned. They were subjected to severe torture such as constant beatings, drowning and suffocation. The victims were also forced to swallow large quantities of fresh pepper with salt and onion which damaged their internal organs. Although a number of peasants were freed last 03 January, many peasants and their leaders are still missing. Their families and comrades have no information of their whereabouts and they continue to look for them.



A peasant leader from Redencao by the name of Rivaldo was killed. He was shot twice in the head. It is reported that the owner of the Forkilha Farm, Jairo Andrade ordered the killing of Rivaldo.

A series of articles were nationally distributed before the attacks, slandering and demonizing peasant activists and leaders and calling for harsh measures against the Liga.

Brazil is afire with the struggle of the peasantry for land rights. Peasants are evicted from their land to give way to big agricultural corporations. The state and local officials are in cahoots with the landlords in enforcing the eviction and criminalization of peasants.

But the peasants, their families and supporters are not intimidated by the military operations launched against them by the state, the landlords and the officials of the local governments. They know that for them to finally own the land that they and their ancestors have tilled for so long, they would have to continue organizing and preparing themselves for bigger struggles ahead. ■

## Heartfelt condolences to family, comrades and the Palestinian people on the death of Comrade Dr. George Habash, Al-Hakim

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The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) conveys its heartfelt condolences to the family of Comrade Dr. George Habash, Al-Hakim, to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Palestinian people on the passing away of the Founder of the PFLP and the Arab Nationalist Movement.

The NDFP joins the Palestinian and Arab peoples in mourning the death of an outstanding leader of their struggle for national and social liberation. His contributions over seven decades of struggle constitute an ineradicable legacy for all those persevering in the liberation struggle.

As stated by his comrades in the PFLP, not only did he demonstrate the highest level of care and dedication to his people, but he also consistently and clearly conveyed and developed a scientific vision and analysis both of the future of the revolution and the dangers and plans against it forged by the enemies of his people.

After the outbreak of the great Intifada in 1987, he called for upholding Palestinian unity as a necessary condition for the continuation of the struggle. He called for the convening of the Palestinian National Congress in 1988. Appalled by the massive uprooting of over 700,000 Palestinians in 1948, Comrade Habash and other Arab patriots founded the Arab Nationalist Movement. He firmly upheld and defended the vital and central right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their beloved homeland. He therefore strongly opposed the Oslo Agreement in 1993 for attacking this right to return.

At the Sixth Convention of the PFLP in 2000, Comrade Habash declared: "We cannot seize the future without having read our history well, not in order to be enslaved by that history, but in order to benefit from it as a necessary precondition for dealing with the future. The present is a qualitative extension of the past, while at the same time it constitutes the material and intellectual foundation for the building of the future." On that occasion, when he relinquished the leadership of the PFLP, he



announced his idea and plan of establishing a center for studies, which he said would be a "dynamic, social, intellectual and dialectic operation." He added, "Recognizing the reasons for our defeat is a beginning step on the path toward the sphere of success and achievement, leaving behind the realm of failure, and getting closer to victory." He highlighted the great role of women and youth in the Palestinian revolution.

At the end of his speech, Comrade Habash declared: "My aim in this closing speech has been to say to you – and not only to you, but to all the detainees, or those who experienced detention, to the families of the martyrs, to those who were wounded, to all who sacrificed and gave for the cause – that your sacrifice has not been in vain. The just goals and legitimate rights which they have struggled and given their lives for will be attained, sooner or later... And my aim, again and again, is to emphasize the need for you to persist in your struggle to serve our people, for the good of all Palestinians and Arabs – the good that lies in a just and legitimate cause, as it does in the realization of the good for all those who are oppressed and wronged. You must always be of calm mind, and of contented conscience, with a strong resolve and a steel will, for you have been and still are in the camp of justice and progress, the camp whose just goals will be attained and which will inevitably attain its legitimate rights. For these are the lessons of history and reality, and no right is lost as long as there is someone fighting for it."

For the Filipino people persevering in their struggle for national and social liberation, the life and dedication of Comrade Habash is also an inspiration and further strengthens the solidarity between the Palestinian people and the Filipino people.

*Long live the noble memory and inspiration of the outstanding and exemplary Founder of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Arab Nationalist Movement, Comrade Dr. George Habash, Al-Hakim!*

*Long live the Palestinian people's struggle for national and social liberation!*

*Long live international solidarity for the revolutionary cause of the Palestinian people!*

... Raúl Reyes, page 7, col 3

former members of Congress – among them Clara Rojas – the Colombian military bombed the route of the FARC release, almost killing the hostages as well as FARC soldiers.

It is clear that the US government's intent is to continue hunting down FARC combatants using Colombia's military as a proxy. Colombia's efforts to exterminate the guerrilla army are fully under Washington's direction, aided by Plan Colombia's multi-billion-dollar counter-insurgency program funded by the United States.

A political solution that might require any compromise on their part is not in the interest of the Colombian and US governments. The assassination of the FARC leaders was unambiguously intended to decisively derail the mediation efforts led by Venezuela once and for all.

In an interview to Kaosenlared.net completed just two days before his death, Commander Reyes said, "In Latin America we see a positive turn towards the revolutionary left with the leadership of governments that are anti-imperialist, progressive, independent, Bolivarian, moving towards socialism, and whose commitment is to fulfill the mandate of the Liberator (Simón Bolívar), that of attaining the greatest happiness for their peoples.

"Colombia will not be the exception. As Bolivarians who are in the midst of conflict with an ultra-right, fascist and paramilitary government, we are proceeding along the same road. Nothing and nobody will impede that." [Party for Socialism and Liberation, [www.pslweb.org](http://www.pslweb.org)] ■