

FOCUS: the Philippines

Gary King, member of the Philippine Study Group of Minnesota and the Ecumenical Advocacy Network on the Philippines, has lobbied the U.S. Congress and State Department about the dangers of sending U.S. arms and military aid to the Philippines, especially the murder and mayhem it buys. These groups have promoted three hearings in Congress on killings in the Philippines, including last July 20 on the massive drug killings under Philippine President Duterte.

by Gary King

Subhead: Recent Twists on Human Rights in a Troubled Land: The Philippines Under Duterte

Since the end of WWII, and particularly after the regime and martial law of Ferdinand Marcos, Philippine police and military have received added payments from wealthy oligarchs and corporations as enforcers of capitalism in this Third World country, where daily income for over half of the workers is still only about \$3 to \$5 per day. Labor union activism and farmers' organizations have been labeled "communist," enabling their oppressors to get ever more military aid from the U.S. A major Philippine NGO, Karapatan, that reports on disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture, and political imprisonment, has documented 1,000 cases each year, for over two decades. Each year, as new hardware arrives from the U.S., the older weapons are given or sold to private armies and paramilitary groups.

During his first year in office, the current leader, President Rodrigo Duterte, is setting new records for murders. He was the mayor of a major city, Davao City in Mindanao, for 20 years, and he bragged that his sanctioned "Davao Death Squad" of mostly police killed over 800 street kids, punks, and drug dealers. He is now a national tyrant, and rants in rambling, vindictive, and expletive-laced style about how he will continue killing. His main campaign pledge was to kill a million drug users and pushers, and fatten the fish in Manila Bay with their bodies. (Our President Donald Trump likes his style and has applauded such harsh measures).

Further, Duterte said that if Hitler could kill three million Jews in a Holocaust, he, Duterte, could kill as many drug addicts in the Philippines. In his first year in office, over 12,000 suspects have been murdered by Philippine police officers and motorcycling assassins. Both groups get paid a bounty for shootings, so bodies are always found with cheap pistols and samples of drugs nearby. But judging from eyewitnesses, often family, the victims plead for their lives before being killed. If the Philippines was as populous as the U.S., this would exceed our shameful annual loss of life by guns, a world record.

An Amnesty International 2017 investigation is entitled "If You Are Poor, You Are Killed." There is rampant impunity for murders by police, just as there was impunity historically for military killings and mayhem. Duterte has said that any civilians or NGO members who hinder the police should be shot as well.

So there are real, dangerous threats against civilians, like Tinay Palabay, the head of the Karapatan Alliance for the Advancement of Human Rights, whom I have worked with for ten

years. Duterte says human rights activists and members of their organizations should be killed — beheaded, if they interfere with police actions. The constitutionally mandated Philippine Human Rights Commission (PHRC) should be burnt to the ground. He applauded when his Congress tried to cut PHRC’s funding by 99 percent. His killings and claims have led Amnesty International and Philippine congressmen and lawyers to ask the International Criminal Court to investigate him for crimes against humanity, since the Philippine government is unable to rein him in.

Although Duterte has enjoyed great popularity, in part due to a few encouraging statements about respecting indigenous peoples and farmers, in fact there has been next to no positive action since he took office.

And now Duterte has called off all peace talks with the leftists in rebellion, the NDF (National Democratic Front), and the NPA (New People’s Army), which blossomed to lead the resistance against former President Marcos, his crony capitalists, and all subsequent presidents. In December 2017, he gave his military license to murder them at will, in conflict or not. His military has closed schools for the indigenous people, because it says only “communists” want to learn to read and write. Death squads, even some composed of indigenous people, have been given guns and are paid for killing leaders of indigenous people and farmers—about four each week—a similar rate as that for the last two presidents of the Philippines, Benigno Aquino Jr. and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Since November 2017, eight T’boli and Dulangan Manobo tribespeople were murdered by the military in an incident related to grabbing of their ancestral lands to expand a coffee plantation; in various places, hundreds of families (including 406 indigenous students and 59 teachers) were evacuated due to military offensives. Popular clergy, Pastor Lovelito Quiñones in Mindoro and Fr. Marcelito Paez in Negros, were killed.

Duterte also promotes federalism: changing the constitution to have to six more autonomous regions of the country. If this happens, his clan can focus its rule to forever dominate most of the large, resource-rich island of Mindanao.

Our Amnesty International (AI) chapter in Minneapolis has worked since we started in 1976 on over 30 cases of political prisoners, always urging a fair, rapid, and speedy trial with *justice*. We say: “Release them if no crimes are proven!” The Philippine government uses the euphemism that the prisoners are only “detained.” Courts are way too tolerant of tortured confessions and trumped-up evidence. All the cases we worked on, from the administration of Marcos through to that of Duterte, strongly resemble what AI calls “prisoners of conscience”: abducted, tortured, murdered, or imprisoned for their nonviolent activities in pursuit of justice for workers, farmers, the poor, the displaced, and indigenous people. We don’t give up until prisoners are released. When I visit the Philippines, almost every year since 1975, I have a lot of great people—union organizers, human rights activists, lawyers, priests—to celebrate with—if they are not killed, that is.

Subhead: A Human Rights Victim and Heroine: Elisa “Nene” Badayos

I first met Nene Badayos in 1992, while fact-finding at the office of Task Force Detainees in Cebu City. This office was full of volunteer workers to assist victims and families of terrible

human rights abuses. People there would assist me to interview people, meet lawyers and judges, attend trials, and visit political prisoners in their cells to gather data to share with AI. Many of the human rights workers had suffered imprisonment and torture themselves, or had loved ones who had already been killed in extra-judicial state killings, or “disappearances.”

Nene headed a group of families of victims called FIND (Find those INvoluntarily Disappeared), because her husband, Jimmy Badayos, had been murdered by disappearance in 1990, after being abducted by Cebu Metrodiscom (the Metropolitan District Command of the Philippine National Police in Cebu). He was a leader of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) in Cebu Province and had been working to help a labor union at the Visayas Glass Factory in the Guadalupe area of Cebu City hold a picket line for livable wages. Police and goons often are paid to make “labor relations” easier for corporations in the Philippines. Nene explained the plights of families of the murdered and disappeared: a lost parent, a lost wage-earner, hunger, anxiety of having a missing relative, a disrupted community, fear and terror. And nightmares for all.

One of the problems that prisoners’ families experienced was that the children could not afford to continue going to school. They lacked textbooks, acceptable clothing and shoes, inoculations, uniforms, lunches, and motorbike rides or the *jeepney* (a form of public transportation like a jeep but that accommodates multiple passengers) to take them to school. If they must wait until the parent is released, they are so far behind that most never again will go to school.

My family in Minnesota began providing financial support so Nene and her four kids could eat. We helped the oldest daughter finish a secretarial school. Eventually, we helped Nene’s son Jerry attend college. Nene left Cebu in 2007 to avoid harassment and threats against her from military intelligence. She went to a neighboring island, Bohol, to help organize urban and rural poor communities to defend themselves.

Jerry, exposed to the people’s struggle for justice all his life, abandoned college and joined her. Nene returned to Cebu, but Jerry stayed longer in Bohol, fighting for the rights of farmers. He finally returned to Cebu with a wife, and settled down. One night, about nine years ago, military soldiers came to his house, strafed it, and killed him. A lot of people marched in his funeral procession. They appreciated that he was committed to the struggles of the poor.

I ran into Nene a number of times over the years, and she helped me get around Cebu to do AI work. She kept visiting prisoners in jail, helping them, their families, and poor communities. She was probably known by all the police and military in the Visayas region because of her activism. Working with Karapatan Alliance for the Advancement of People’s Rights in Negros Occidental, a province in the western Visayas, she coordinated fact-finding missions concerning a host of farmer organizations. On November 26-28, 2017, she led a team of 30 persons who went to the San Ramon area in Bayawan City (the “Agricultural Capital of Negros Oriental”) to investigate and report on human rights violations alleged to have been perpetrated against farmer groups by members of a private army of Pryde Henry Teves, Bayawan’s mayor, who is backed by a political clan called the Gaudiels. These guys use armed goons to squash farmer assertions of land rights, and do land-grabbing. Armed men stopped the bus transporting the fact-finding team, and demanded to know their destination and the purpose of the mission, while aiming shotguns at the bus. Local drivers hired by the mission team negotiated with the guards, and

eventually the bus was allowed to pass. From noon to 2:30 p.m. on November 28, the team conducted interviews with rural farmers.

Then Nene; Patrick Torres of the Farmers Development Center; a village watchman named Eleuterio Moises who was a member of Mantapi Ebwan Farmers Association; Angel Trocio of the Women's Resource Center of Visayas; and Carmen Matarlo of Kabataan Partylist, a representative of youth in the Philippine Congress, got ready to travel by motorbike to the Bayawan City Hall for a courtesy call, after which they planned to go to the police station to file a blotter report about an earlier harassment incident.

The five left the main group, riding two persons on the first bike, and three on the second. Within 20 minutes, they noticed a third motorbike following them, driven by men wearing black jackets, and holding handguns. The assailants overtook the second bike, and six shots later, three persons fell. Many people started flocking to the scene, and the assailants fled. Nene and Eleuterio were DOA at the hospital, and Carmen is surviving in critical condition.

Nene was my seventh friend to die in the struggle for peace and justice in the Philippines. All of them knew the dangers but were committed to help the poor and victims of injustice.

I think not only her remaining children and grandchildren, but the farmers of Negros Oriental and all Filipinos who believe in human rights have a very deep appreciation of why she died, and how she lived. Mabuhay! Long live her memory and her causes!

Gary King is a retired neuroscientist living in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is active in the Filipino community. A conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, he has worked for peace and justice all his adult life. He helped start a chapter of Amnesty International (AI) in Minneapolis in 1976, and in 30 subsequent trips to the Philippines he has visited prisoners and collected data for AI. While the facts related to AI in this report are accurate, the opinions expressed are his and do not represent an official Amnesty International view.

I think Nene Badayos, and her remaining children and grandchildren have a very deep appreciation of why she died, and how she lived. Mabuhay! Long Life! She and her son died before their time. Why long life?

