

Filipino Advocates Now an Endangered Species

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State Terrorism is now a fact of life in our country. Since Gloria Macapagal Arroyo assumed power in 2001, no less than 224 Filipino advocates, journalists, and activists have been assassinated by motorcycle-riding death squads in various parts of the country. The pattern of the killings is starkly clear: critics of the government who are lawyers, journalists, priests and ministers, labor leaders, peasant organizers, teachers and student leaders are being liquidated by professional hitmen. All the victims are legal opposition personalities who have been branded or tagged as "leftists" or members of what certain government, the military and police officials call "legal fronts of the CPP/NPA".

The pattern of killings is remarkably similar to "Operation Phoenix", launched by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in South Vietnam in the late 60s. Lists of suspected Communists or Communist sympathizers were given by the CIA to professional hit men, thugs and even criminals serving sentences who were released to do the dirty jobs for the military and police. As many as 40,000 suspected members or sympathizers of the South Vietnam National Liberation Front (SV-NLF) were abducted and assassinated in an attempt to physically wipe out the "political infrastructure" of the Vietnamese "insurgency".

Similar patterns of counter-insurgency and "anti-terror" tactics were also replicated in Latin America in the 60s and 70s by the CIA. The murderous rampage in Vietnam by the CIA and its local puppets was one of the most violent episodes of the Vietnam War. But it failed to accomplish its objectives. In 1975, the Vietnamese people finally defeated the U.S. military aggressors and their South Vietnamese puppets and finally liberated South Vietnam to establish the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Given the closer covert and overt coordination and cooperation of the U.S. special operations forces and Philippine military and police agencies in the "anti-terror" campaign as never seen before, it is impossible for them not to have a hand in this. The manner and pattern of killings today are even worse than the vigilante killings in the country that occurred in the late 80s against members and leaders of people's organizations and NGOs. They are meant to silence legal critics and the open opposition to the creeping dictatorship and the "Cha-Cha" locomotive train". The killings are a threat to the very existence of democracy which should guarantee freedom of speech, assembly and the right to freely organize for grievances and social change. Political killings of legal personalities will not only permanently sabotage the peace process, but will further fuel the armed insurgency as the legal option diminishes.

Advocates and social reformers are now an endangered species in this country. If the government is not really a party to this state of terror as it claims, then it should put a stop to these killings and assassinations of its citizens. The government must enforce law and order and provide protection to all its citizens, including its staunchest critics and those in the opposition. Government has no right to exist if it is inutile in carrying out the most basic duties of a state.

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P.S.

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