

Philippines: Lawyer in South Cotabato shot dead outside house, 65th killed under Duterte

Friday 17 September 2021, by [BUAN Lian](#), [UMIL Anne Marxze](#) (Date first published: 15 September 2021).

Lawyer Juan Macababbad was a public interest lawyer. Two unidentified gunmen shot him in the head seven times.

Public interest lawyer Juan Macababbad was shot dead outside his home in Surallah town, South Cotabato, on Wednesday, September 15, the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) confirmed to Rappler.

“Atty. Macababbad was gunned down at around 5:30 in the afternoon earlier just outside of his house by two unidentified individuals. According to initial reports, he sustained seven gunshot wounds to the head,” IBP South Cotabato and General Santos chapter president Remigio Rojas told Rappler in a phone interview Wednesday night.

Macababbad was declared dead on arrival, said Rojas.

Macababbad is a member of the red-tagged National Union of Peoples’ Lawyers (NUPL), and the chairman of the Socskargen chapter of the Union of People’s Lawyers in Mindanao (UPLM).

The UPLM said in a statement that “Atty. Macababbad has been receiving death threats before his murder.”

“He’s active in peoples’ lawyering, he handled a wide array of cases from civil to criminal,” said Rojas.

“He was a silent, unassuming & amiable guy who had a ready smile behind his rather fatherly bespectacled profile. We are losing the good guys out there while the bad guys are frolicking and plundering all over,” said NUPL president Edre Olalia.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said on Thursday, September 16, that they will check whether Macababbad’s death can be placed under the justice department’s special committee investigating political killings. There is no special investigation so far into lawyer killings.

“The DOJ will await the report of local police investigators and evaluate whether the killing falls under the jurisdiction of the inter-agency committee on EJKs,” said Guevarra.

65th under Duterte

Macababbad is the [65th lawyer killed](#) under the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. That is according to our own consolidated list, compiled from different groups and government agencies.

NUPL has a different count at 58 because of a different criteria, counting only those whose death appear to be work-related. Macababbad is the 3rd NUPL lawyer to be killed under Duterte, said

Olalia.

“When will this madness stop? How? Coming as it is on the eve of our 14th founding anniversary, this latest attack on another comrade-in-law is hideously evil,” said Olalia.

Before Macababbad, human rights lawyer Rex Fernandez, also an NUPL member, was killed in Cebu City [just last August 26](#).

The new leadership of the IBP has hit what it called as an [“alarming increase”](#) in lawyer killings.

Rappler data shows that compared to 65 under Duterte, in contrast, there have only been 92 lawyers killed in the span of 44 years, from the administration of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos to that of Duterte’s predecessor, the late Benigno “Noy” Aquino III.

NUPL data shows [there’s also a surge](#) of other forms of attacks against lawyers under Duterte, including red-tagging.

The Supreme Court has [reconvened a human rights committee](#) to look at the trend of lawyer killings, [promising institutional changes](#) after it asked for a nationwide submission of threats, harassments and attacks against lawyers.

Another peoples’ lawyer killed in Mindanao

Another peoples’ lawyer was killed Wednesday, Sept. 15.

Lawyer Juan Macababbad, Union of Peoples’ Lawyers in Mindanao (UPLM) vice chairperson and member of the National Union of Peoples’ Lawyer (NUPL), was shot by two gunmen in front of his residence in Surrallah, South Cotabato.

Macababbad was the third member of the NUPL and 58th lawyer who was gunned down under President Duterte’s administration.

“While the case may go through the usual investigation, as with the other growing number of unresolved cases, it is clear that the murder of Atty. Macababbad is connected to his vocation of lawyering for the people,” said UPLM Chairperson Antonio C. Azarcon in a statement.

Azarcon said Macababbad had been receiving death threats prior to the incident.

Defender of indigenous peoples, environment

Macababbad handled several cases, particularly in defense of indigenous peoples and protection of the environment.

He served as the legal counsel of the Lumad victims in the [Lake Sebu massacre](#) in 2017.

Cristina Palabay, secretary general of Karapatan, said that Macababbad also joined several fact-finding mission and served as the legal counsel to indigenous peoples, teachers and community members in the SOCKSARGEN.

“Such attacks against those in the legal profession, particularly against the committed and tireless human rights defenders among them, should stop. We demand justice for Atty. Macababbad and all lawyers killed under this administration,” Palabay said.

Macababbad was also one of those who opposed the coal mining applications of DM Consunji at the Daguma Mountain Range in the SOCCSKSARGEN region.

In 2015, Macababbad was slapped with Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) after “their local mass movements barricaded the aerial spraying facilities of Sumifru’s Banana plantation,” according to Leon Dulce, national coordinator for Kalikasan People’s Network for the Environment.

“This is why it is urgent to enact policies such as House Bill 8170 or the Environmental Defense Bill that grants protection mechanisms and various remedies to human rights abuses against defenders. This is why we need to #DefendTheDefenders,” Leon added.

The groups demand justice for the slain lawyer.

“The climate of impunity pervades with the lack of serious investigation and prosecution over thousands of extrajudicial killings in the country. The legal profession is not spared, and our colleagues have become main targets especially those who resist tyranny and defend human rights,” Azarcon said.

Just last month, lawyer Rex JMA Fernandez was [killed](#) in Cebu City in broad daylight.

Different lawyers groups have been [calling the Supreme Court to take action](#) on the increasing attacks on the members of the judiciary.

Lian Buan covers justice and corruption for Rappler. She is interested in decisions, pleadings, audits, contracts, and other documents that establish a trail.

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