

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Asia > Philippines > The Left (Philippines) > CPP (Purges) (Philippines) > **“We were tied up with dog chains”: Filipino ex guerrilla calls attention (...)**

Interview

## **“We were tied up with dog chains”: Filipino ex guerrilla calls attention to human right violations by rebels**

Saturday 14 June 2008, by [GARCIA, “Bobby”](#) (Date first published: 31 May 2008).

Amsterdam,

From a dedicated communist guerrilla to an enthusiastic liberal human rights activist. It seems an unlikely transition, but Filipino Bobby Garcia is the living proof that it is possible.

“It’s the meaning of life” says the 41 years old secretary general of Peace Advocates for Thruth, Justice and Healing (PATH) who, during his short tour in Europe, calls attention to the human rights violations of the guerrilla movement in the Philippines. “One passes through different stages and learns from it.”

The big turning point in his own life was mainly caused by the torture he had to endure during the internal purges by the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP-NPA), at the end of the eighties.

Many of his comrades did not survive this ordeal. The party has partly admitted the torture and executions in 2000, “but it is certainly not a closed book yet” says Garcia. The activist made it his mission in life to unearth the truth about the excesses of his former party leadership. “The relatives do not know exactly, until this day, what happened to their loved ones, and their remains have never been returned.”

The Philippine government still considers the CPP-NPA, which has strived to establish a Maoist state in the South East Asian archipelago since 1969, as the biggest security threat to the country. The armed conflict already caused more than 40 thousand deaths. This month the Norwegian government announced that the two parties held peace talks in their country, for the first time in three years.

During the time he was a student, Garcia joined the rebels to fight against the government army. At that time, with strong protests against President Marcos who was involved in one corruption scandal after the other, this was not uncommon among students, he says. “We wanted to feel and experience the passion and intensity of the struggle. It was a romantic notion, just like Che Guevara to fight for liberation.”

But the romance quickly vanished. In November 1988 Garcia was arrested by his own party leaders together with more than a hundred comrades from his own unit. There was a lot of paranoia inside the movement because of infiltration attempts from the government, says the Filipino. Through torture the prisoners were forced to make (false) confessions and to mention the names of other ‘spies’. Garcia: “They tied up my hands and asked me when I had become a government spy. When I denied their charge, I was beaten up and threatened to be killed.”

With a dislocated jaw Garcia was brought to a prisoners' camp that night. "We were tied with dog chains on stretchers of rice bags."

The next morning Garcia was interrogated again. When he continued denying, he was beaten up with a cudgel on his shins and his head. Finally Garcia gave in and 'confessed'. "They asked for my rank and serial number. I just told them I was a sergeant and gave them my telephone number. It was bizarre, but they were satisfied."

Sixty six of the prisoners in his camp did not survive. They were executed, succumbed to wounds or died from malnutrition. Garcia: "The torture was unbearable, but hunger was the worst. Three times a day we got a spoonful of rice, that was all."

The survivors were released at the end of the year. Garcia: "The leaders apparently realized that they had accused the people wrongly. Besides, through the domino effect caused by the torture, the fire came too close. More and more higher ranking party members were pinpointed as enemies."

Garcia says he does not believe anymore in the ideology of the CPP, but he still sympathizes with some of their views. "The elite in the Philippines has indeed a dominant position, there are many economic problems. And the government lacks transparency in its own corruption investigations. But I do not believe anymore in armed struggle or a seizure of power by the CPP."

Garcia would prefer the establishment of a truth commission that will investigate the abuses of his former party. "We do not know how many party members were killed. Through our own field research we have counted about two thousand. But that is only an estimate. Some family members were told that their sons or brothers died as heroes of the revolution, others never got any news. We want justice for all the victims."

---

## **P.S.**

\* Published in the Netherlands by the Volkskrant May 31, 2008. From page 4 - foreign news page. From Volkskrant's reporter Map Oberdorff.