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Press Release

Two More Farmers Killed in Agrarian Reform Hotspot in the Philippines

Wednesday 23 July 2008, by [Fian International](#) (Date first published: 15 July 2008).

Masbate/Heidelberg, 15/07/08 - On 6th July 2008 at around 6:00am two coconut farmers, Rene Llabres, 32 and Junrie Pagaspas, 28 were tortured and brutally murdered by seven men dressed in military uniform. The perpetrators, believed to be the New People's Army (NPA), stabbed and shot the farmers several times. Rene Llabres and Junrie Pagaspas were both tenants of Hacienda Batuan and members of Samahan ng mag Magsasaka ng Hacienda Batuan (SAMAHABA). On December 22, 2007, Botsoy Vale, a peasant leader and Barangay (village) Captain was also murdered by the NPA. All three victims had one thing in common: They had fought for the re-distribution of the hacienda under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

In 2004, the members of SAMAHABA had petitioned for the coverage of the Hacienda Batuan landholding under the CARP. They also filed a petition to replace the current sharing system, whereby they only received 25% of the produce, with a legally mandated leasehold system, entitling them to 75% of the net harvest. Soon after, the hacienda administrators - with the help of armed men - started intimidating and harassing the tenants to dissuade them from continuing their land reform initiatives, resulting in some leaders and tenants leaving the area for fear of their lives. Since December 2007 the area has been gripped by a reign of terror, slowly paralyzing the organization and their claim for land. Shortly after the death of Botsoy Vale, armed men distributed a death list of 18 more tenants. Junrie Pagaspas was number 10 on the hit list.

Earlier this year in another agrarian reform hotspot, in San Vicente, Bondoc Peninsula, a local peasant leader Deolite Empas was abducted and killed by armed men. Deolite Empas was the fifth person who has been murdered in the course of peasants' struggle for land in Bondoc. "FIAN condemns the killings in Masbate and Bondoc. These brutal acts committed on peasants pursuing land reform through legal means show the failure of the government of the Philippines to protect the lives of the peasants", says Yifang Tang, Country Officer for the Philippines at FIAN. "The government of the Philippines must immediately provide land to these peasants in accordance with the CARP and end the climate of impunity that allows for the abduction and murder of peasant leaders".

On Friday, July 18th, the relatives of the two victims in Masbate, together with supporting NGOs, including FIAN Philippines will have a dialogue with the Committee on Human Rights.

More information with Yifang Tang at tang.fian.org

FIAN is an international human rights organization that since more than 20 years advocates for the

realization of the right to food. FIAN consists of national sections and individual members in over 50 countries around the world. www.fian.org

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