

Campus Harassment: “Student activists” tear down FBC-Phils. exhibit on Burma

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MANILA, MARCH 6 — At 1:30pm today inside the campus of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) in Manila, a group of young students claiming to be “genuine activists” forced the members and volunteers of the Free Burma Coalition - Philippines (FBC-Phils) to fold down a photo exhibit on political prisoners in Burma, confiscated their campaign materials, and pushed them out of the campus, threatening physical attack if they do not leave.

The activity is hosted by a class of management students who had applied for, and was granted, a permit to hold the activity by the school administration. The exhibit was about the 8888-faces photo petition campaign calling for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners in Burma anchored by the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) and FBC-Philippines.

Members of Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP) and FBC-Phils volunteers from the school have just finished setting up the exhibit when the incident happened. A group of students (about 20 of them) claiming to be “genuine activists” from a group called ANAKBAYAN [[1](#)] ganged up on them, tore copies of the 8888-faces leaflet in front of the volunteers and commanded them to fold up the exhibit. “You are not allowed to set up the exhibit here, counter-revolutionaries — with or without permit from the school administration. You are fake activists.”

Teody Navea, BMP secretary-general and part of the campaign team, tried to negotiate with the students, stressing what the campaign was about and that it is part of an international solidarity effort in support of the people of Burma. The “activists” led by a certain “Jojo Kulot” then started a countdown, further threatening to attack the FBC volunteers if they do not fold up the exhibit.

To avert any further violent confrontation, the FBC team volunteered to fold up the exhibit. But not satisfied, the “activists” from ANAKBAYAN even grabbed the tarpaulin exhibits and the BMP banner and all other materials. Navea tried to calm down everyone and appealed to the activists to return the materials as they are packing up. The “activists” started pushing and shoving FBC-Phils volunteers, slapping one in the head, as they violently escorted them outside the school gate and on to the thoroughfares.

As these things happen, other members of the “activist” group explain to all bystanders and onlookers that “these things will happen to you if you organize activities like these and if you join these and other organizations.”

We condemn, in strongest terms, this barbaric act of “gangster activism.” The issue of Burma’s political prisoners is a legitimate international issue and to prevent any group from holding this kind of campaign in any venue is not just a show of “sheer ignorance” to the issue but also an act only the “military dictators” of Burma can appreciate.

FBC-Phils is a coalition of individuals, trade union workers, NGOs, peoples' organizations, youth and students, church groups, human rights and women organizations. This campaign of 8888-faces is just one of the many expressions the coalition can contribute in the spirit of international solidarity. It's ironic and disgusting that this legitimate democratic campaign was attacked in the name of the so-called "revolutionary ideals?". Where in this world you can see one "activist group" attack the very basic right to freedom of expression?

As activists, we SHOULD hate dictatorship whatever its name, we must abhor undemocracy; we ousted Marcos because of military dictatorship and now Burma is suffering the same kind of rule. Our message to these "activists" is simple: LET US NOT BECOME THE EVIL THAT WE DEPLORE!

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based on the incident report filed by Teody Navea in behalf of the FBC-Phils 8888-faces campaign team at PUP campus.

Footnotes

[1] Essf explanatory note: Anakbayan - a youth organisation - is part of what is referred to as part of the "Reaffirm" bloc, ideologically identified with the line of the CCP-NDF.