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Assassination and Violence Have No Role in Civil Society

A Statement of Concern about a Hit-list including Walden Bello and other Activists

Saturday 15 January 2005, by [Focus on the Global South](#) (Date first published: 15 January 2005).

Out of deference to the more than 160,000 victims of the tsunami tragedy that engulfed South Asia on December 26, 2004, we in Focus on the Global South (Focus) have refrained until now from pointing to an alarming development bearing on the security and well being of our Executive Director, Walden Bello.

Focus is not in the habit of calling attention to the status of its staff. This time, however, things are different. In the December 2004 issue of *Ang Bayan*, the principal organ of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), Walden was singled out as a “counterrevolutionary.” His name was listed alongside fourteen other names of individuals who are either living or dead. Two of the people in the “counterrevolutionaries” list, Arturo Tabara and Filemon Lagman, have already been assassinated, the former just three months ago. Another one, Ricardo Reyes, is being hunted down by operatives of the Communist Party and New People’s Army (NPA) and has been forced to go into hiding.

For people familiar with the history and practices of the Communist Party of the Philippines and its paramilitary wing, the New People’s Army, the message of the counterrevolutionaries’ list to Walden and the others is unmistakable: You’re beyond the pale. You’re a “class enemy” to be eliminated, the only questions remaining being when and where the party will carry out the execution.

For us in Focus, the listing of Walden and other Filipino activists as counter-revolutionaries deserving of elimination comes as a shock. Walden’s writings, books, and contributions speak for themselves: a recipient of the prestigious Right Livelihood Award (also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize), he is acknowledged to be one of the most articulate critics of US intervention and corporate-driven globalization. Others named in the list include prominent international activist Lidy Nacpil and Etta Rosales, head of the Human Rights Committee of the Philippine House of Representatives.

Walden, along with Congresswoman Rosales, did the best thing they could do to protect themselves upon the issuance of the CPP hit-list: they publicized it in the media. Since then, in a post-facto effort to justify Walden’s being on the hit list, scurrilous attacks have been heaped on him by Jose Maria Sison, chairman of the CPP, and Fidel Agcaoili, another high-level CPP officer. Walden has been pictured as, among other things, an agent of US imperialism and a pro-WTO advocate seeking reform of the organization so it can better exploit the world’s people. Focus on the Global South has been pictured as a recipient of “imperialist funds.” Organizations and movements that Walden and Focus work with have been labeled “Trotskyite” or “Social Democratic” counterrevolutionary groupings. The global civil society movement that helped bring about the collapse of the WTO ministerials in Seattle and Cancun has been described as a front for global capitalism. This most recent attack on global civil society is consistent with earlier attacks by CPP-linked groups on the World Social Forum (WSF) and Porto Alegre process as an “imperialist plot” to derail people from world revolution.

Coming from a sectarian political grouping with a very specific agenda, these fantastic charges against Walden, Focus, and global civil society do not deserve a serious answer. It is important to understand, though, what lies at the root of Walden being listed as a counterrevolutionary. Apparently, the CPP and its allied groups are threatened by the agenda and process of civil-society-led change that Walden and Focus support — a program that is pluralist, inclusive, and democratic, where different traditions are seen as a source of strength rather than poisons to fundamentalist purity.

But the threat to Walden's life and to the lives of the others named as counter-revolutionaries is very real and cannot be ignored. Moreover, sectarian activities carried out by CPP-linked groups — activities carried out in the name of "isolating the reformists and counterrevolutionaries"— are sowing intrigue and conflict in some civil society networks and movements, thus weakening our ranks in confronting corporate-driven globalization and US militarism.

Differences among groups fighting for change are natural. But these differences should be resolved through democratic debate— this is a fundamental premise of our movement. Seeking to resolve these differences through threats, force, and assassination cannot be condoned and must be denounced in the strongest terms possible. The use of violence, terror, and assassination must always be condemned, whether the agents are states or non-state actors like the CPP-NPA.

Focus on the Global South calls on all civil society organisations and networks globally to condemn such threats and actions in the strongest possible terms. Being part of a bigger global movement for social justice, we have interacted with, worked with, or even supported groups that are associated or working closely with the CPP such as Ibon Foundation, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA), International League of People's Struggles (ILPS), KMU (May 1st Movement), Asian Student Association (ASA), and Migrante. We now appeal to the sense of decency of individuals in these and other groups and urge them to denounce these actions and apply moral suasion on Sison and other leaders of the CPP and NPA to refrain from the threat and use of force and assassination.

We make a final appeal to the CPP to desist from its destructive course of action and refrain from dividing the movement fighting against corporate globalisation at a critical time in the struggle for a better, just and equitable world.

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Bangkok, January 15, 2005