

THE PASTORAL ECUMENICAL DELEGATION VISIT: International Solidarity in Defense of Human Rights 14-20 July 2005

*One by one they came.
Thirteen church leaders -
bishops and theologians from
Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Germany, Norway, Sri Lanka and the US.
They came to be in solidarity with the Filipino people and
the National Council of Churches in the Philippines.*

The Pastoral Ecumenical Delegation Visit (PEDV), a team of church leaders put together by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) came to the Philippines from July 14-20, 2005 on the request of the NCCP to get current, first hand information and trends relative to political repression, attack on civil liberties, and violations of human rights obtaining in the Philippines. More importantly, they were here for a pastoral engagement with families of victims, churches, and organizations who bear the brunt of intensifying human rights violations and political repression in the country under the administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. They were also requested to help advocate the issues of the churches and people's organizations, and to dialogue with civil and military authorities about the present political situation, and challenge them to do something about it.

A fellowship dinner with NCCP church leaders, local partners and staff welcomed the Delegation the evening of their arrival. The next day, they were divided into three groups to visit three critical areas where heavy military concentration and rampant human rights violations have been documented.

Very early the next day, July 15, the three teams, joined by bishops and representatives of NCCP member churches traveled to:

Hacienda Luisita in Central Luzon, a sugar cane plantation owned by the Cojuangco clan, the family of former President Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino, which recently experienced the chilling massacre of peasants and farm workers on strike, their villages became highly militarized and some of their supporters have been killed;

Samar and Leyte, provinces in Eastern Visayas where there is high concentration of the military and where most of the killings have been happening of late; and,

Surigao, a province in Mindanao where indigenous peoples and upland farmers evacuated their communities due to heavy militarization believed to be paving the way for "development" projects like mining and logging.

To get to these areas, the teams endured long hours of land travel, stayed in the areas for three days to dialogue with the victims and their families, Protestant and Roman Catholic church leaders, local officials as well as with military officials. In almost all the areas visited, the three teams witnessed Catholics and Protestants working together in support of the oppressed. Each team made a report about their experiences.

On July 18, the teams returned to Manila with moving testimonies to share with one another. In the afternoon, the whole delegation met with representatives of organizations defending human rights, whose members have become victims of state repression. They met with representatives of the Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR), Voices of Women for Civil Liberties, and KARAPATAN-Alliance of the Advancement of Human Rights. They also met with Hon. Satur Ocampo and Hon. Joel Virador, congresspersons representing the party-list group BAYAN MUNA ("People First"), whose colleagues were among the many casualties from summary executions especially during the elections.

On July 19, after seeing and hearing testimonies of gross violations of human rights in the Philippines under the Arroyo administration, the Delegation was divided into two teams: one visited the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the other visited the Malacañang Palace, the seat of power in the Philippines, and met with a representative of President Arroyo. The international guests specifically followed up the letters of their respective churches to the Philippine government regarding the spate of killings and the rash of human rights violations in the country.

The Delegation expressed their findings and recommendations through a press statement. In a nutshell, they expressed concern over the large scale human rights violations happening in the country including police and military intimidation, illegal detention, torture, terrorizing of whole communities. They also stated that these patterns of gross and systematic human rights violations were further clarified and confirmed by a wide cross-section of people's movements, human rights organizations, local religious leaders, councilors and members of Congress. They also observed that, as in the past, churches and church workers serving the poor as Christ commanded, as well as community leaders and organizations are being labeled as "subversives." They noted that counterinsurgency against the New People's Army is being advanced by the officialdom as an excuse for atrocities. More importantly, they identified some of the root causes of the current turmoil in the country which include the inadequacies of state institutions such as the judiciary, inequitable distribution of resources which traps many Filipinos in abject poverty, and the monopoly of transnational corporations and other foreign interests in resource exploitation. Among their key recommendations is for an immediate and impartial investigation of all recent extrajudicial executions. They also called for the resumption of the stalled peace talks between the Government of the Republic of Philippines and the National Democratic Front

On July 20, the last day of the PEDV, the Delegation made their findings and recommendations public through a press conference and a public forum. The press conference was well attended by the media including representatives of the foreign press. The press conference managed to bring back the issue of human rights violations in the public limelight. The Delegation then proceeded to the public forum at the University of Santo Tomas (UST), which was jointly sponsored by the Peace for Life, the UST-Social Science Research Center and NCCP.

More than 200 participants from Protestant and Roman Catholic seminaries, religious congregations, schools, offices and the like attended the forum. Several bishops of NCCP member churches were also in attendance. The sharing of the results of the area visits brought the audience to tears when the experiences of the people whose rights were violated by the military were related. The audience responded positively to every speech and the open forum was very animated. The forum ended with a cultural presentation that dramatically called to "Stop the Killings of Church Workers, Lawyers, Journalists and Peace Workers".

After the forum, the Delegation together with the NCCP staff had a dinner fellowship to cap the successful PEDV.

*One by one
they left,
bringing with them
to share to the whole world,
the calls for peace and justice
of the Filipino people.*

REPORT OF THE PASTORAL ECUMENICAL DELEGATION VISIT TO EASTERN VISAYAS July 15 to 18, 2005

1. Introduction:

At the invitation of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, a Pastoral Ecumenical delegation under the auspices of the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia visited the Philippines from the 14th to the 21st of July 2005. Apart of the delegation visited Leyte and Samar to listen, learn and dialogue with a cross section of the people about increasing incidences of political repression and human rights violations. Amongst others, the delegation met church leaders, representatives of people's organizations, families of victims, local government authorities and political parties, and military officials.

The delegation heard stories of pain and anguish, of brutalization and sufferings as a result of illegal detentions, torture, intimidation, hamletting and food blockades, and extra-judicial killings allegedly committed by the military. A top political leader expressing his anger and frustration at the situation shared with the group a long list of documented offenses committed by the military from February 2005, since Brig. Gen. Jovito Palparan Jr. was posted in Eastern Visayas as the commanding general of the 8th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army based in Camp Lukban, Brgy. Maulong, Catbalogan, Samar. The general had launched and publicly announced a crusade to wipeout alleged enemies of the state particularly the New People's Army and alleged front organizations of the Communist Party of the Philippines within six months to one year. This political leader had already brought the situation to the attention of the Philippine congress and the Office of the President of the Philippines. But so far, his appeals seem to have fallen on deaf ears.

Commenting on this, the General stated to the group that there were 1,000 NPA's operating in the area. The political leader said it is on record that General Palparan reported that there were only 300 cadres of the NPA operating in the area during a congressional inquiry on the state of human rights in Samar. The insurgency, according to the political leader we met had rather become strong because of the army's repressive policies and actions of General Palparan. He had instilled fear amongst the poor and marginalized people by branding them as supporters and agents of the NPA's. According to them, General Palparan has become the best recruiter for the NPA. They urged that Palparan should leave the region and let the people live in peace. The people had and could take care of themselves as they were doing in the past.

2. Militarization and Resistance

The Philippines has a long history of militarization, and the institution of the military has always been used by the establishment to protect the economic and political interest of the elites. The country has no visible external enemies and there is hardly any justification to maintain a huge military establishment. The military projects increasing activities on part of its "internal enemy" in order to justify its growing defense budget. There has always been a close cooperation between the military establishments of the United States and the Philippines. Besides funding the, U.S. has supplied arms and provided trainings for the Philippine armed forces. Since September 11 and the U.S. War on Terror, this cooperation has increased. It has provided the Philippine military to revive and intensify its activities particularly in the rural areas where victims have been largely the poor and the socially marginalized.

The increase in military operations has inevitably resulted in resistance by the people in the rural communities with civil society groups and people's organizations taking up the cause of the poor and marginalized communities. There is increasing awareness of the human rights violations that are being committed in the name of fighting terrorism and protecting national security.

On the other hand, there is the presence of armed revolutionary groups like the New People's Army who has waged more than thirty years of struggle in the region. With the ongoing armed conflict, the life of civilians remains under threat and they become easily caught up between the lines in such a highly militarized situation.

Individual lawyers, clergy, journalist, worker and peasant leaders who have taken the courage to confront the military have been victimized and brutalized and in some cases eliminated. In the case of the province of Samar and Leyte (which has an obvious deterioration of the human rights situation

February 2005) the most prominent cases of extra-legal killings are that of Atty. Felidito C. Dacut on March 14th 2005 in Tacloban City, and Rev. Edison C. Lapuz on 12th May 2005 in San Isidro, where no clear results of the investigation have been reported till today. They are just two among the many other cases that have been brought to the attention of the team by the Philippine Churches during this visit.

3. State Institutions and Accountability

The political institutions in the country are dominated by a small group of elites who have used these institutions to protect their economic interests. Presently, the system provides opportunity only to those who are rich and powerful to participate in the political process. In the Philippine congress, despite the fact that the large majority of the people are poor, their representation remains very minimal even with the introduction of the party-list system. The electoral system and process is flawed. It is badly in need of reform.

The judicial system is overloaded with litigation. It is slow and provides little opportunity for redress of grievances of the common people. Inefficiency and corruption in the investigative process of law enforcement agencies has further hampered the judicial process. As the group heard from the families of the victims, there has been no progress in tracking down the killers of their loved ones. The culture of impunity seems to have become all pervasive, as due process is ignored. Gen. Palparan told the group that, "at times we have to by pass the due process because we want to take this fast track".

It seems also to be obvious that the malfunctioning of state institutions like the judiciary, unjust access to resources such as land for people in the rural areas where many people suffer extreme poverty, the exclusion from any profits and benefits related to the exploitation of natural resources also by foreign investors are some of the underlying root causes of the conflict.

Under the Constitution, it is basically the responsibility of the State to protect the people, and to ensure there are no human rights violations. This can happen only if there are checks and balances on the actions of the Executive. These can only be provided by a conscientious legislature and independent judiciary that is open to the voices and concerns of the people and vigilant in protecting their interest. Only then can the state be accountable.

4. National Resource Extraction and Geo politics

Eastern Visayas is a critical economic engine of the country. It is endowed with rich agricultural land that produces much of the countries coconut, sugarcane, rice, tobacco, root crops, fruit and coffee. However, according to the research of the Regional Peasant Alliance of the Eastern Visayas, 70 to 80% of the regions farmers do not own the land they till. This resulted to the long peasant resistance to landlessness and further land acquisitions and marginalisation of peasant farmers by the state, a handful of family dynasties and foreign investors.

The virgin forests of this region have long been harvested by commercial logging companies, leaving large tracts of bare land and vulnerable to erosion.

The Eastern Visayas is endowed with abundant marine resources. However, these are dominated by major foreign commercial companies and local fishing magnates such as the Samar Sea, Carigan Bay, Maqueta Bay, Sognod Bay, Leyte Gulf, San Pedro Bay, Cabali-an Bay and the Philippine Sea.

It is also here where the geothermal power reserve that supplies the National Power Corporation and the Philippine National Oil Company is located. Yet, the local people of this area pay the highest electricity rates, with many still without access to electrical power.

More importantly, are the mineral deposits found in the Eastern Visayas. These include chromites, manganese, zinc, silver, gold, bauxite, nickel and copper. They pose a major mining interest and attraction to foreign mining companies.

This is why militarization of the area (supported and unchallenged by the government) is the main source of the violation of people's human rights. The military [is set up to] protects 'economic investments', and not the people of the land. Peasant farmers who struggle for life giving economy, and civil and church groups who support these struggles are named as enemies of the state and

must be eliminated. Power is concentrated in the hands of the few and structural/systemic violence, which includes the power of the military, is the order of the day.

It is critical for our analysis to name the ideology behind this market focused economic development as rooted in the neo liberal economic thinking, which claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and from creation. We see here in the Eastern Visayas the impact of economic globalization and its global geo politics backed by the dominant ideology of globalization. This ideology also referred to as Empire ensures that political, economic and military is power vested in one center, and that this power penetrates the internal political, economic, cultural and social structures of a particular country such as the Philippines.

Today's dominant leaders will not hesitate to use whatever power and force to suppress the people and the world when their objectives of economic exploitation are threatened or hindered.

5. The Poor and Poverty

We heard all over again the stories and experiences of the poor and sensed their vulnerability. In situations of structural injustices, violent conflicts, harassment and subtle intimidation, the poor of any society suffer first and most and increasingly.

Poverty is not an accident. Neither is it a punishment for lapse or sin. Poverty is a reality because power and greed are also realities. Poverty prevails because of unjust economic structures and systems sustained by those who benefit most from economic resources and profits.

Since the poor are deprived basic economic resources and political representation and power, any solution to the evil of poverty must strive to restore these rights and energies to the poor.

The resilience and spirituality of the poor expressed in the community they share through simplicity, sharing and courage must play a central role in this restoration of socio-economic justice. Whatever new models of community that emerges should ensure that this spirituality is not lost.

6. An Integrated Spirituality

The presence and leadership role of several clergy persons and lay people whom we met, clearly demonstrated a Gospel spirituality of prophetic urgency and pastoral care.

The prophetic presence challenges those entrusted with power and who abuse this power, to be accountable and transparent and to initiate and sustain reforms for the common good. It also articulates a voice on behalf of the voiceless. This includes the most afflicted, marginalized, and poorest of any society. .

Pastoral presence hears the cries and suffering of the afflicted, accompanies them and provides solidarity through identification.

Needless to say, this integrated ministry is not easily understood or appreciated by all in the wider faith community. If approached through dialogue however, this ministry ironically has tremendous potential to teach and nourish the whole community in our common journey in Christ.

Since such an integrated spirituality entails risks it requires the good will, prayers and support of the wider community.

7. Justice, Peace and Reconciliation

In its witness and mission by the death and resurrection of Christ, the Church is called upon to engage in wholistic ministry. This requires peace and justice and includes healing and reconciliation. The tendency to take entrenched sides in circumstances of conflict must be anticipated and countered through the discipline of self-scrutiny that Christ taught.

Consequently, the church in the Philippines must at the same time address justice issues and also be an agent of reconciliation. This balanced consistency, discerned in Christ, is a unique contribution the church offers to both oppressors and the oppressed.

The Biblical vision of Shalom requires the church to strive towards a better life of equality, dignity, and a sharing of all God's resources amongst all God's people.

All conflicts end when enemies becomes sisters and brothers. The church in the Philippines and indeed Asia and the world must live and work in rhythm between the Lord's table where we are nourished in Christ, and the peace table where we nourish one another through dialogue and negotiations.

8. Conclusions / Recommendations / Affirmations

In view of this situation, the conflict cannot be solved by a military approach. There is a clear need for dialogue between the conflicting parties and a comprehensive approach by the government in order to enable the rural communities to enjoy their full civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights. Such an approach might only become successful if the need for real structural reforms will be addressed by the Philippine legislative and executive powers.

Without effective measures taken by the government to implement and safeguard the fundamental rights of the people and to develop their livelihoods, to end impunity, to establish the rule of law, to guarantee a just and fair share of access to resources and to revise the existing legislation such as e.g. the mining act from 1995 accordingly there will be no peace and security.

To the Philippine people, the congregations and churches

We warmly thank the people whom we met during our visit to Samar and Leyte for their hospitality and their open sharing with us. We assure them of our deep respect and stay in solidarity with them.

We are grateful for the pastoral care Christian congregations in Samar and Leyte, the NCCP and the churches in the whole country are extending to the Philippine people especially those who are marginalized and we encourage them in their prophetic witness and firm solidarity with the poor.

To the Philippine Government and legislative bodies

We ask the Philippine Government to take immediate action to impartially investigate the cases of reported extralegal killings in the province of Samar and Leyte and to take concrete steps to protect the lives of church workers, human rights defenders and journalists.

We further more call upon the Philippine Government to revise its military strategy to solve the conflict in the province and to resume peace talks with the NPA.

We encourage the government and legislative bodies to consider seriously the implementation of real structural reforms in the country (e.g. land reform, reform of the judicial system) in order to address the root causes of the conflict such as the extreme poverty and marginalization of so many people in the rural areas as well as in the cities of the Philippines.

To the churches worldwide and the ecumenical bodies

We ask the World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, the partners of the NCCP and the Philippine Churches all over the world to stay in solidarity and prayer with the Filipino people.

We call upon our churches and ecumenical bodies to strive for the global implementation of human rights and to remind governments and international private business on their responsibility with regard to development and human rights.

We ask our churches and ecumenical bodies to take up the suffering of the Filipino people in their prayers statements and action and by doing this to support the Philippine Churches in their efforts to stop human rights violations and to work for a better quality of life and for the liberation of the people.

In Jeremiah 22,16 we hear the prophet saying: "He saw to it that justice and help were given to the poor and the needy and all went well for him". In this word of the bible the sovereign of the country of Israel, the former King Josiah is praised while he respected the rights of the poor and to ensure that they could enjoy them. As people of God with these words we are called to stay with the poor and to remind those in power to work for justice for the needy.

Members of Team:

Mr. Clement John, World Council of Churches
Dr. Jochen Motte, United Evangelical Mission, Germany
Rt. Rev. Duleep de Chickera, Anglican Church of Sri Lanka
Ms. Omega Bula, United Church of Canada
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Mr. Tony Waworuntu, Christian Conference of Asia
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20 July 2005

REPORT OF THE PASTORAL ECUMENICAL DELEGATION VISIT TO HACIENDA LUISITA July 15 to 18, 2005

1. What Have We Seen and Heard?

Serious justice and human rights issues have attracted worldwide attention and must be addressed. These issues stem from long-standing labor and land reform issues and their often tragic and bloody aftermath. This report focuses on the fact-finding mission and pastoral engagement conducted by the PEDV team that went to Hacienda Luisita, Tarlac City, in Central Luzon, Philippines.

Dispersal of Strikers and Killings of Workers at Hacienda Luisita

This is the defining story in Hacienda Luisita (although it is grounded in long-term land reform and labor issues – Pls. see next point). These issues in the vast sugar cane plantation and sugar processing plant at Hacienda Luisita came to a head in November 2004.

On November 6, 2004, two labor unions declared a strike against Luzon's biggest sugar refinery: Hacienda Luisita's Central Azucarera de Tarlac (CAT). The two labor unions – the Central Azucarera de Tarlac Labor Union (CATLU), representing more than 750 sugar mill workers and the United Luisita Workers' Union (ULWU), composed of more than 5,000 farmworkers of Hacienda Luisita – called the strike following the dismissal of more than 320 laborers, including the president and vice president of ULWU and eight other union officers.

On November 6 and 7, the local Philippine National Police (PNP) force tried to disperse the strikers who had formed picket lines by blocking the two gates leading to the refinery. The dispersals were supposedly carried out following a ruling by the Department of Labor and Employment (DoLE) declaring the strike 'illegal.' The PNP force used water canons from fire trucks and lobbed tear gas to disperse the workers to no avail.

A week later, on November 15, the PNP forces, together with soldiers from the Armed Forces of the Philippines, unsuccessfully attempted another dispersal.

On the afternoon of November 16, the combined forces of the PNP and AFP, operating from inside the CAT gates, tried a fourth time to disperse strikers with tear gas and water cannons. After an hour, guns were fired into the crowd. Seven individuals were killed, felled by gunshots, and more than 100 others were wounded in the carnage.

The strikers and eyewitnesses said that the deaths and injuries resulted from the gunshots coming from the guns fired by the PNP-AFP forces. AFP and PNP officials claim that there was at least one gun spotted on the side of the demonstrators. Investigations done by the PNP showed that based on paraffin tests, at least nine policemen fired guns during the dispersal. On record, the AFP-Northern Luzon Command has concluded that the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) / New People's Army (NPA) / National Democratic Front (NDF) were directly involved in instigating the strike as part of a 'grand design' to foment labor-agrarian unrest.

Update: Inquiries by the PNP, AFP, and the Commission on Human Rights, and committee hearings 'in aid of legislation' conducted by the Senate and House of Representatives have not produced any finalized reports. However, Police Senior Superintendent (PSSPT) Nicanor Bartolome informed the PEDV team that charges have been filed.

Hacienda Luisita: The People and the Land

At its outset, the Hacienda Luisita strike was not apparently a part of a larger agrarian reform issue; it stemmed from a set of specific labor grievances against the Hacienda Luisita management. However, there are those who believe that two root causes are the failure of the government to implement genuine agrarian reform and the action of then President Corazon Cojuangco Aquino to include the so-called Stock Distribution Option, exempting Hacienda Luisita from the provision of the agrarian reform law mandating land transfer or distribution to tenants.

Farmers have tilled and occupied the land dating back to the Spanish occupation of the Philippines. In 1957/1958, Jose Cojuangco, Sr. (former President Corazon Aquino's father) acquired Hacienda

Luisita from a Spanish-owned-and-controlled company known as Compania General de Tabacos de Filipinas (a.k.a, TABACALERA), financing the purchase with a government-approved loan from the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS). The loan to purchase Hacienda Luisita was approved subject to some conditions, one of which mandated that after 10 years, the land comprising the Hacienda shall be subdivided and distributed to the tenants, who shall pay the costs under reasonable terms and conditions. After 10 years, the Cojuangcos reneged on the agreement.

On December 2, 1985, the Manila Regional Trial Court ordered the heirs of Jose Cojuangco Sr. (i.e. the Cojuangco family) to comply with the Central Bank and GSIS Resolutions requiring the distribution of the Hacienda land to the tenants and to convey the lots at cost to the qualified and deserving small farmers in line with the government's social justice policy.

In February 1986, Corazon Cojuangco Aquino became President of the Philippines. Subsequently, the government under President Corazon Aquino instituted a Comprehensive Land Reform Program (CARP) and devised the Stock Distribution Option (SDO) under CARP to distribute capital shares in the form of stocks to legitimate beneficiaries instead of giving them the land.

Since the distribution in 1991, only one annual dividend has been declared and paid. Documents have indicated that the Cojuangcos intend to use the land not for agriculture, but for industry, commerce, and tourism. Half of the land has already been converted (without consultation with the farmers, who are minority stockholders) into a shopping center, golf course, and industrial park which includes a Sanyo facility (Corazon Aquino later became a Sanyo board member). The rest is to be used for further industry and for the government's Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway Project (SCTEP).

Update: At present, 11 barangays [villages] exist within Hacienda Luisita. The AFP has militarized [i.e., deployed soldiers] in the barangays. Soldiers are present inside 8 of the barangays. In two other barangays, soldiers are encamped 50-100 meters from the boundaries. Documented cases of harassments and human rights violations have occurred.

Church Support and Solidarity

A number of churches have been supportive of the farm laborers and their needs for justice and fair treatment. Other churches seem not to be very aware of the situation or have not been supportive. Support has ranged from providing direct aid to laborers and others who are living at poverty levels on Hacienda Luisita, to hard work at monitoring and advocating for proper conclusion of legal processes and agreements.

Particularly noteworthy is the long-term support of the National Council of Churches of the Philippines, as well as some local churches of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente [IFI], and church-related organizations, e.g. the Promotion of Church People's Response [PCPR].

Killing and Harassment of Church Workers

As is often the case for those advocating support of the powerless in society, churches and church members have been harassed and killed for their efforts. The most egregious of these human rights violations were the murders of IFI priest Fr. William Tadena, Tarlac City Councilor Abel Ladera, and Marcelino Beltran, who actively supported the Hacienda workers and the strike. Other forms of harassment are also evident. One is a threat issued through text messages against the life of IFI Bishop Alberto Ramento.

The notion that anyone who supports the poor may be a communist sympathizer and is therefore anti-government underlies some of the killings and threats. During the dialogue with the Public Information Officer of the AFP-Northern Luzon Command, the officer shared the AFP's belief that members of the New People's Army (NPA) try to infiltrate churches and that, therefore, some churches should be watched. These churches and other organizations 'being infiltrated by the Communists', and are therefore to be watched, are listed in the book TRINITY OF WAR: BOOK III – The Grand Design of the CPP/NPA/NDF, copies of which he distributed to members of the PEDV team. He stated that although it is legal to be a Communist (provided such Communist does not bear arms), such people must and will still be watched. He openly identified one person accompanying the PEDV team in the room as one of those who was indeed being watched.

2. Analysis

November 16, 2004

This is the pivotal, identifying event for people of Hacienda Luisita. The date, November 16, is as important to them as September 11 is to the United States. It is a traumatizing event, which has both become the focus of most of their recent activity, and has engendered strong feelings of solidarity. The AFP information officer told us "It is not the policy of this country that people should get killed." If so, someone needs to be held accountable for these acts of violence. We find it unusual that the armed forces are used in the Philippines for internal security, a responsibility which is given in most countries solely to the police.

Hacienda Luisita – The People and The Land

Many of the families of those who work the land at Hacienda Luisita have lived there longer than the Cojuangcos have owned the land. Land conversion, particularly as it contradicts court orders and is done without consultation with supposed stock holders, is a moral issue. For the people of Hacienda Luisita, taking their lands for an expressway is more damaging than it would be for most of us, because they are so tied to the land, both in terms of their self-identity and in terms of their prior claims to the land.

The militarization of the barangays is another pressing issue that cannot be justified, morally or otherwise. The AFP's claim that the soldiers are posted in the barangays to protect the people from the NPA, and other subversive groups, is unbelievable.

Church Solidarity

As stated above, support from churches and church workers has been important for people who are struggling to survive in Hacienda Luisita. The gospel mandate to proclaim good news to the oppressed and to serve "the least" is clear. From a biblical standpoint, the problem is not doing justice; rather the problem is not doing justice. We encourage those churches, particularly those Roman Catholic and Protestant churches near Hacienda Luisita to proclaim and act on this gospel of good news to the poor.

Killing and Harassment of Church Workers

Such harassment is not only illegal; it is immoral. We protest it from a legal, human and theological point of view. If our actions in providing support and resources for the poor happen to be similar to the actions of others, so be it. Apparently we must be even more vigilant in proclaiming the gospel of justice, not only to remind ourselves of Christ's call, but to be clear to others that our actions are motivated by Christ and by no one else.

3. What do you intend to do with information and experience in home country?

- a. We commit ourselves to continue telling this story outside the Philippines. This will help our organizations be in solidarity with those on the front lines of justice in the Philippines, and will help to encourage our congregations in prayer and support.
- b. We will challenge our own churches and church agencies to set up projects which will support human rights work and work with the poor.
- c. We will work to develop networks with churches and organizations in the Philippines, personally and between groups. Larger organizations can provide support and put it on their own justice agendas. We encourage the development of Filipino relationships with congregations which have had similar experiences (e.g., Latin America).
- d. We will make report to WCC and CCA for distribution and monitoring.

4. What can you say to the Filipino people?

We have greatly appreciated the privilege of sitting with them and "listening to the cries of my people." We struggle with how, when we go back to the safety of our homes, we can say anything of value. Nevertheless, we do commit to keeping their story before us. We understand that the Philippines have internal political and economic challenges. Recalling the Christian heritage of the Philippines,

the challenge is to remember that, from a biblical perspective, a country's success is measured by how it treats the least powerful members of its society. We recognize further that global issues involve us all, and that we can only address the increasing pressures of globalization by doing it together.

Members of Team:

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Rev. Steven Sprecher, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church, USA
Ms. Reiko Suzuki, National Christian Council of Japan
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The Most Rev. Alberto Ramiento, Iglesia Filipina Independiente
Bishop Benjamin Justo, Baguio Episcopal Area, The United Methodist Church
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REPORT OF THE PASTORAL ECUMENICAL DELEGATION VISIT TO MINDANAO July 15 to 18, 2005

1. What we saw and heard

Just 9 years old, he stood holding the microphone, but he was too overcome to speak. Only after a full minute of silence did the words come out. The soldiers had held a knife at his throat, said that as he would probably become an NPA they may as well kill him now, and told him to start digging a hole for his grave with his bare hands. As he spoke, he wept, and we wept with him.

There in the Manobo community of Han-ayan, Brgy. Diatagon, Municipality of Lianga, Surigao del Sur, we heard story after story of heartrending anguish, telling us of those terrible days from late April to mid-May 2005. A young widow told how soldiers shot her husband during the forced evacuation. He died on arrival at hospital, 4 hours later, delayed time and again by military checkpoints and interrogations. "I have two children and I am pregnant" she said, "what will happen to us now?"

A teenager told how he and two friends were detained for two days by the military. After negotiations they were exchanged for four men – who have never been seen since. The mother of two of these men pleaded with us for help to find out what has happened to them; the wife of one broke down as she spoke of the buck-passing from one military unit to another as she sought information. She too pleaded for our help.

Beatings, humiliations, detentions, burning of houses, killing of animals, bombings and shootings – we heard of the pain and fear and anguish of this small indigenous community. The military claimed they were fighting insurgents nearby and evacuating the community for its own protection. But the community chieftain and the people believe that the government and military want them out of the area, so the mining companies can commence operations unhindered by the opposition of those who've farmed this land for centuries. They live every day with the fear that the military will return.

A Manobo local councilwoman told us how she was offered incentives to agree to mining operations in the Han-ayan area. She was given to understand the incentives were on offer from a mining company. She refused on the fundamental principle of being against any mining of her ancestral land.

We met also with church leaders and human rights groups in Butuan City, Lianga and Davao. Roman Catholic and Protestant, indigenous and non-indigenous, rural farmer and town worker, the story was the same everywhere. The lumad of Mindanao (indigenous people) are suffering. Their rights are disregarded, they are the victims of forced dispossession, they are not consulted before "development" is approved on their ancestral land, they are repeatedly accused of being NPA's or NPA sympathizers, they are threatened, beaten, detained, abused. Some have been killed.

We were deeply impressed by the courage of the Han-ayan people. With no government support, they are working hard for their own development. They have established their own people's organization; they run a successful community co-operative; they manage their own schools, including an innovative "Alternative learning center for agricultural and livelihood development"; they hold their heads high; like all indigenous people they support each other, and they persist in seeking for government to listen to them and for their rights to be respected. Sadly, these initiatives are under threat from government and military actions. We salute them – their desire to live in peace on their ancestral lands, their respect for the sanctity of creation, their commitment to stick up for their rights, non-violently, their faith in the wider Filipino community, and their hope in God, are extraordinary in face of the difficulties they endure.

We also salute the ecumenical community in the Caraga region, especially in Surigao del Sur. Catholics and Protestants are working together with determination in support of the oppressed.

2. Analysis

We believe there is a pattern to the military harassment of rural communities. The churches and human rights organizations in Mindanao speak again and again of how the lumad communities in areas of interest for logging and mining are harassed by the military. It appears the military are being

used by government to clear the way for new logging and mining operations. The reason advanced for military action is nearly always that of security concerns, that the NPA is active in the region and must be rooted out. This "reason" seems to us to be nothing more than excuse for military involvement in so-called economic development strategies which are opposed by local communities.

We see signs in Mindanao and elsewhere in the Philippines of a return to the abuses of the Marcos era. Harassments, killings and other human rights violations are now so frequent that it seems these are the policies of the national government. In the Philippines, as in many countries, the rich get richer along with shareholders of transnational corporations, and the millions of poor remain trapped in poverty.

In Mindanao Filipino law does not protect the interests of indigenous communities but instead serves the interest of logging and mining corporations and the rich. We point especially to four failings of law:

- The legal title of ancestral domain is held by individuals, instead of by the community. The "Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim" can only be issued to individuals, who are susceptible to pressures from government and corporations. The law needs review.
- The process provided in law for consultation with local communities before logging or mining may take place is flawed. Consultation is only with a few municipal councillors and is seldom undertaken with the whole community, and results in complete disregard for the views of indigenous communities.
- The 1995 Mining Act has aggravated human rights violations, opened the way for wholesale exploitation of Mindanao's resources, allows transnational corporations to enrich their shareholders and irrevocably damages the environment. It needs to be repealed.
- The military acts at the behest of logging and mining interests, in harassing and forcibly evacuating indigenous communities with impunity. Civilian authorities need to reassert their control of the military and the military needs to be held accountable for its actions.

3. Our follow-up in our own countries

Requests from the PEDV members for ongoing action by the WCC and CCA. We especially recommend an ongoing ecumenical ministry of presence with the suffering people of Mindanao.

Raise with the Filipino Government the case of the four missing men from the Han-ayan community – as individuals and as the PEDV delegation.

Recommend to our churches and ecumenical bodies that they express support for the indigenous people of the Philippines and for the campaigns/efforts of Filipino churches and the NCCP, and that they undertake education and advocacy work within our home churches.

Recommend to our churches and ecumenical bodies the possibility of people-to-people exchanges as a concrete form of solidarity.

Individually make direct contact with the Filipino embassies in our countries to raise our concerns and questions with them.

Find out what companies based in our countries are involved in logging and mining operations in the Philippines, and contact those companies to raise our concerns and questions about the policies of the Filipino Government and about mining operations.

4. To the Filipino people

We thank the people of Mindanao with whom we met for their trust and their openness to us, for sharing their stories of deep pain and anguish, for risking further negativity towards them from the authorities because of their honest sharing with us.

We assure them of our deep respect for them and our solidarity with them. We will not forget the stories we have heard and we will take up the case of the four missing men.

We will take action as PEDV in our meetings with Filipino authorities in Manila, we will make recommendations to the WCC and the CCA, and we will take action in our own countries.

We express our distress at the lack of care and respect by government and military towards the Filipino people, the very people they are called to serve. We note this applies especially to the Filipino indigenous people. We are horrified to realize that while we have traveled thousands of kilometers to come and listen to the pain and hope of local Filipino communities, no such effort is made by those in national government in the Philippines. Failure to listen seriously to the needs and hopes of the poorest citizens is surely a failure of morality and governance.

We express our admiration for the spirit of the suffering Filipino people and communities, honouring your persistence and your courage. As well as the actions we take in solidarity with you, we shall also hold you in our prayers.

We remind you of Jesus' concern always for the poor, for his ministry of liberation to the oppressed and good news to the poor, and for the promise that nothing can separate us from God's love. We are one human family, and we are one in Christ. We stand with you, and for you.

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