

14 September 2015

Dear President Aquino:

As we learned of the murders of Dionel Campos, Bello Sinzo, and Emerito Samarca, and the events surrounding those killings, we could see the pattern and the repetition of extrajudicial killing, threat, harassment, forcible evacuation, torture, divestment of property, destruction of property, and military occupation of schools and villages.

As we learned of the horrific events in Lianga, we could hear in the sorrows of the Lumad people the echo of an ancient Psalm:

We are troubled and tossed about.
We are distraught by the discord all around,
Because the corrupt oppress us.
For they bring distress upon us,
And furiously harass us.
Our hearts are in anguish within us,
The terrors of death assail us.
Fear and trembling come upon us,
And horror overwhelms us. (adapted from Psalm 55)

As people of faith, we have joined in prayer for those who are mourning their loved ones, their schools, their homes, and their ancient lands and customs.

As people of conscience, we call upon your government to:

1. Immediately pull out the 36th IBPA and the 75th IBPA Special Forces from the Lumad community and dismantle the paramilitary group Magahat-Bagani Force.
2. Create an independent body to investigate the killings and other human rights violations perpetrated by the 36th IBPA, the 75th IBPA Special Forces, and the paramilitary Magahat-Bagani Force.
3. Prosecute the perpetrators of the extrajudicial killing and other human rights violations committed against the residents of Han-ayan and Km. 16 in Lianga, Surigao del Sur.
4. Dismantle the counterinsurgency program, Oplan Bayanihan, which continues to victimize innocent and unarmed civilians.
5. And, as a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, promote that declaration and abide by its provisions.

In hope for justice and peace for all people,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Susan Gast".

Rev. Dr. Mary Susan Gast, Steering Committee Chair,
National Ecumenical-Interfaith Forum for Filipino Concerns

cc: U.N. Human Rights Rapporteur Chaloka Beyani, U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer, U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy, U.S. Representative Barbara Lee, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry