

**ISSUE FOCUS: ENDING VIGILANTE KILLINGS****ARROYO GOVERNMENT FULLY SUPPORTS PROBE INTO DAVAO VIGILANTE KILLINGS**

**Philippine Government supports local advocacy on ending vigilante killings in Davao**

09 Feb 2009 - A Multi-sectoral dialogue on the vigilante killings was held last February 9 in Davao. This was organized by the City Council's Committee on Human Rights and the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) Davao Chapter. Among those who attended were the regional director of the Commission on Human Rights, the top ranking officers of the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Ombudsman's Office, the Archdiocesan Social Action center, representatives from various Non-Government Organizations and officers of the IBP.

Having condemned all extrajudicial killings and ordering authorities to fully investigate and prosecute these cases, the Arroyo government has expressed strong support for the efforts of the Philippine Commission on Human Rights (PCHR) to investigate the vigilante killings in Davao.

The PCHR is an independent body created by the Philippine Constitution to promote and strengthen human rights.

The first series of public inquiries were held in Davao City on 30-31 March 2009. This was followed by a third inquiry on 17 April 2009. A fourth inquiry is proposed to be conducted in the middle of May 2009.

With a view towards ending vigilante killings and to bring those responsible to jus-

tice, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo March ordered the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines to give the PCHR their full support and cooperation.



17 April 09 - Commission on Human Rights Chair Leila de Lima at the public inquiry on the vigilante killings in Davao City.

**PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT ACTION TO END VIGILANTE KILLINGS IN DAVAO**

- ▶ President Arroyo allotted 25 million pesos on May 5 as initial funds for a government reward system to put an end to extrajudicial killings (please see story on page 2). This new measure is in addition to the other initiatives taken by the President to end political and extrajudicial killings and to bring those responsible to justice (please see previous PHILIPPINE EMBASSY UPDATES).
- ▶ The head of the Philippine National Police, Director General Jesus Verzosa condemned vigilante killings on April 7 and ordered the police to intensify investigation of vigilante killings to identify and arrest those responsible (please see story on page 2).
- ▶ Southern Mindanao Regional Police Director, Chief Superintendent Pedro Tango assured that witnesses to vigilante killings will be given full police protection. "We at the Philippine National Police will secure them and give them the security they want. In that way, they can testify and tell everything they know about the Davao Death Squad," Chief Superintendent Tango said in a statement on April 20.
- ▶ The Philippine Congress announced plans to conduct its own investigation into the vigilante killings in Davao. Legislators who are proposing that Congress hold its own probe believe that this would greatly support the Arroyo administration's commitment efforts to end all extrajudicial killings. House Speaker Prospero Nograles Jr. ordered the House Committee on Human Rights chaired by Quezon Rep. Erin Tanada to conduct a parallel inquiry. "I fully support the Commission on Human Rights probe and the House will do its part to get into the bottom of these cold-blooded executions and assassinations," Speaker Nograles said last March 31.

**REWARDS FUND TO END KILLINGS ESTABLISHED**

5 May 09, Manila - President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo on Tuesday allotted P25 million as initial fund for the government's reward system to put an end to political killings in the country.

President Arroyo also asked the lawmakers to contribute P250,000 each from their Countrywide Development Fund (CDF) to build this fund.

"Political violence has been a scourge in Philippine politics long before our administration," the President said.

"We want to erase the legacy of political violence that haunted our nation for generations. We want to achieve a violence-free political culture in the Philippines once and for all," the President emphasized.

Hence, I am allotting an initial 25 million for rewards to informants who provide information that foils political assassination attempts or leads to their solution especially identification of their masterminds. I invite lawmakers to contribute 250 thousand each from their CDF to build this fund," President Arroyo also said.

**PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE INTENSIFIES PROBE OF DAVAO VIGILANTE KILLINGS OF CRIMINALS**

7 April 09 - The Philippine National Police (PNP) has intensified efforts to investigate the series of killings in Davao City and other parts of the country.

PNP Chief, Director General Jesus A Verzosa ordered all police units to intensify investigation and intelligence gathering to identify and arrest persons or groups involved in the killing of suspected criminal elements in Davao City.

Verzosa directed the PNP Regional Director for Southern Mindanao, Chief Superintendent Pedro Tango, himself a seasoned investigator, to gather evidence and file charges

against suspects involved in these killings.

"I expect lower unit com-



Members of a Philippine National Police Crime Scene Investigation unit gathering forensic evidence at a crime scene.

manders to take the cue from my instructions to their Regional Director to go hard against persons or groups behind the series of unexplained killings in Davao City," Verzosa said.

The Chief PNP condemned the killings in Davao City saying there is no justification for taking the lives of criminals outside legal and judicial processes.

"Even the most hardened criminals deserve their day in court, because they too have rights under the law that should be respected, including the presumption of innocence until proven guilty by a competent court," the PNP Chief said.

A civilized society like ours does not allow and cannot allow vigilantes to roam the streets as both judge and executioner. Only the courts are vested the authority to determine guilt and appropriate punishment for criminal offenders

**Dir. General Jesus Verzosa**  
Philippine National Police



**Ambassador Willy C. Gaa**  
FROM THE CORNER OF  
BATAAN AND MASSACHUSETTS

The Philippine Government condemns all extrajudicial killings, including the vigilante killings in Davao. This has been the consistent stand of President Arroyo, whose administration has adopted several initiatives and measures to put an end not only to extrajudicial killing but to all political violence.

The President has once again shown her commitment to protect and promote human rights by ordering all government agencies to give their full support to the probe being conducted by

the Philippine Commission on Human Rights (PCHR) on vigilante killings of criminals, particularly in Davao City, where a group has been identified as the "Davao Death Squad"(DDS).

Three public inquiries have already been held by the PCHR and one more is scheduled around the third week of May.

The Government clearly recognizes the problem of these vigilante killings of criminals and the need to enforce the rule of law and to ensure that the principles of due process and the right to a fair trial are extended, even to known criminals.

In the particular case of Davao City, one may note the history of violence that has plagued the city starting from the late 70s and its height in the early to mid-80s. The communist New People's Army (NPA) utilized Davao City as their laboratory for urban guerilla warfare and assassination campaigns. The resulting violence gave rise to vigilante groups from among the citizenry who waged war against the communists in the streets of Davao City. Unfortunately, when the threat posed by the NPA to the peace and

order situation in the city diminished, the legacy and environment of violence has somehow managed to remain. From targeted killings and assassinations of a political or ideological nature, criminals became the target of the vigilantes in their continuing effort to establish peace and order in a city that is currently recognized as one of the major commercial and trading areas in Mindanao.

The problem of the vigilante killings in Davao City is a local issue and one concerning law enforcement and the establishment of peace and order in a community. There is obviously no state policy advocating or tolerating these criminal actions. However, the Chief of the Philippine National Police clearly stated, a civilized society cannot allow vigilantes to roam and act as both judge and executioners. Therefore, despite this being a local governance issue, the Government will be supporting and assisting the collective efforts of the PCHR, the Philippine National Police and local government units in addressing this serious issue.

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