



**KEY POINTS OF UN
RAPPORTEUR'S
DEPARTURE
STATEMENT**

The Philippine Government's invitation reflects clear recognition of problem

Government's willingness to permit outside scrutiny exhibits a very welcome preparedness to engage on this issue

The assurances received from President Arroyo were very encouraging

Top leadership acknowledges the seriousness of the problem

Mixed messages at the executive and operational level

Some killings attributable to AFP, but committed by rogue elements.

The AFP needs to indicate actions taken with regard to cases involving military personnel

Measures ordered by President Arroyo constitute important first steps

PALACE WELCOMES ALSTON RECOMMENDATIONS

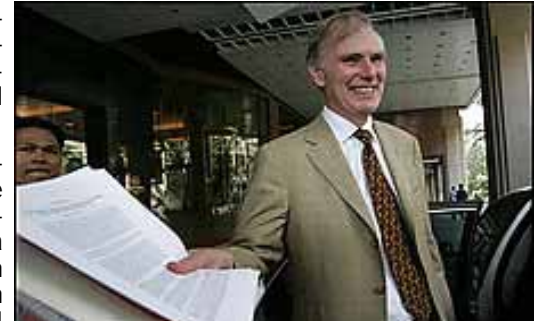
The Philippine government welcomes all recommendations, including that of United Nations Special Rapporteur Philip Alston, in resolving the issue of extra-judicial killings and providing justice to the families of the victims.

"The government is prepared to look into Professor Alston's recommendations and see how these can be dovetailed with the measures already slated by President Arroyo as a result of the Melo Commission Report, such as the strengthening of the Witness Protection Program (WPP) and the creation of special courts by the Supreme Court," Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said today (21 Feb 07).

To show that her administration is not condoning the killings, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo created the Melo Commission as early as August last year, headed by retired Supreme Court Justice Jose Melo, to investigate and put a stop to the slaying of journalists and leftist elements.

Upon receipt of the report of the five-man fact-finding body last month, the President immediately issued several directives to different government agencies, including the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

These include the consolidation of the differ-



Professor Philip Alston, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings, shows his statement shortly after a news conference Wednesday Feb. 21, 2007 at suburban Makati city east of Manila, Philippines to report on his 10-day trip to the Philippines on the spate of political killings around the country

ent government agencies and resources, inviting the international community including the European Union to assist in the investigations, ensuring the protection of witnesses, fielding more special prosecutors and the installation of special courts for human rights violations.

The commission last week gave a confidential briefing on their findings and recommendations to Alston, who came to the country on the invitation of the Arroyo administration.

PRESIDENT ARROYO VOWS TO SOLVE KILLINGS

Stressing that the government was not in denial over the spate of unexplained killings in the country, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo vowed today (21 Feb 07) that these cases would be resolved and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) would continue to protect the people.

"The government is not in denial, these killings will be resolved and the Armed Forces shall continue to be a vanguard for freedom," the President said in a statement .



U.N. Special Rapporteur Professor Philip Alston meets with members of the Philippine House of Representatives during his 10 day visit to the Philippines.

Reacting to the United Nations Special Rapporteur Philip Alston's report that the military "should acknowledge" the increase in the number of extrajudicial killings, the President said the AFP is dealing "decisively" on the issue and would continue to safeguard the people.

The President said the government is serious in dealing with the issue of unexplained killings and this was manifested when it welcomed the UN special rapporteur and allowed him to do his work "unimpeded and to render his report in full glare of the media."

"This proves beyond doubt that the Philippine government upholds democracy, human rights and press freedom. We thank Mr. Alston for acknowledging the cooperation of the government in his probe, and that we are taking the right steps to right the situation," she added.

The President also acknowledged the "serious views" of Alston and said these were taken constructively together with the recommendations of the Melo Commission.

"The nation must unite to bring down the cur-

PALACE WELCOMES (FROM P. 1)

Upon reading the Melo Report, Alston acknowledged the independence of the fact-finding panel but recommended a more balanced outcome of the investigation because of the refusal of the families of victims and leftist groups to cooperate.

"This administration is doing its best to serve the ends of justice and it looks forward to any form of assistance in helping obtain testimony to pin down the guilty," he said.

Bunye said the Philippines would resolve the killings under its justice system with the support of all well-meaning partners such as the

UN and the European Union (EU).

"We hope that Prof. Alston's efforts would open the communication lines between the government and the various sectors concerned that would pave the way for cooperation and renewed trust and confidence to obtain justice," Bunye said.

At his regular media briefing this afternoon in Malacanang, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the report of the Melo Commission was still incomplete due to the refusal of the families of victims and militant groups to cooperate with the investigations.

Ermita said the copy of the report would be made public tomorrow.

"The Melo Commission report will be released. The copies of the report will be made available through the office of Secretary Bunye by tomorrow," he said.

Ermita said the report would be made available together with the letter of AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon Jr. and retired Gen. Jovito Palparan, who is being accused by leftist groups as allegedly responsible for the killings.

ARROYO VOWS (FROM P. 1)

tain on a generation of political violence and strengthen social order and justice. This is about right and wrong, not about left or right," she stressed.

The President reiterated her call to "all sectors and stakeholders" to speak up, present witnesses, achieve justice and "help us move forward."

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye added that the government is committed to putting a stop to all extrajudicial killings as he appealed for "calm and resolve" and that the issue on unexplained killings would not be used "during the volatile political campaign season."

"For the first time in a generation, we have begun to lift the

veil on violence that has beset our nation for far too long. This is a significant step forward to bringing perpetrators of political violence to justice," he added.

Saying that accusation do not solve the problem, but actions do, Bunye called for unity in solving it and "not fix blame or point fingers."



From the corner of Massachusetts and Bataan

The invitation extended by the Philippine Government for a UN Rapporteur to look into the issue of extra-judicial killings in the Philippines is an unprecedented move by a sovereign nation. It is a clear and strong manifestation of the Philippine Government's commitment to effectively address this issue and its high regard for human rights.

The transparency and openness by which the Philippine Government has exhibited with regard to dealing with this issue only further reinforces our country's sincerity and commitment to resolving this issue.

Aside from the UN Rapporteur, it may be recalled that President Arroyo had also met with representatives of Amnesty International during her visit to London in 2006. Similar invitations have also been extended to several European countries.

In my experience in diplomacy, one would be hard pressed to find similar examples of voluntary cooperation from a government towards NGOs and other foreign governments on such a sensitive issue like human rights.

Such actions serve to emphasize the importance of democratic values in the Philippines. Despite challenges posed by security concerns and poverty, democratic governance and

adherence and respect for human rights and civil liberties constantly remain as crucial elements of Government policies.

Thus, it is not surprising to note that the UN Rapporteur and the Melo Report both acknowledge that there is no Government policy behind these killings nor does it condone such incidents.

Correspondingly, the Philippine Government had taken important steps to right this situation in response to observations made by Prof. Alston and recommendations made in the initial report of the Melo Commission.

Important steps are being taken, and as all sectors and stakeholders respond to the President's call to come together over this issue, positive strides forward can be made in our march towards establishing a strong covenant for democracy and the establishment of the primacy of the rule of law in the Philippines.

ALSTON CITES CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

- Acknowledgement by the AFP of its need to respond effectively to killings attributed to them
- Moving beyond the Melo Report, noting the need to release the report (Note: the report was released 22 February 2007)
- Need to restore accountability
- Witness Protection
- Acceptance of the need to provide legitimate political space for leftist groups
- Re-evaluate problematic aspects of counter-insurgency strategy

"We thank Mr. Alston for acknowledging the cooperation of the government in his probe, and that we are taking the right steps to right the situation.

Nevertheless, the UN Rapporteur on Human Rights has leveled some serious views that we take constructively, alongside the recommendations of the Melo Report....."

- Pres. Arroyo

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