



IPRI CONDEMNS ESCALATING EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Indigenous Peoples Rights international (IPRI) raises serious concern at the escalating and brutal attacks against Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines amidst the covid 19 pandemic. It strongly condemns the series of attacks against Indigenous Peoples communities in the Philippines that affected 659 Aeta families, killed a Manobo woman, and destroyed a Lumad school in just a week.

Bombing in an Aeta community in Zambales

On August 21, members of the 7th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army allegedly dropped bombs on Aeta communities, at the mountainous part of Barangay Buhawen, San Marcelino, Zambales. Local peasant and Indigenous Peoples organizations reported that soldiers harassed, physically assaulted, and were forcing members of the Aeta community to leave after the bombing incident.

According to a report from Umahon para sa Repormang Agraryo - Gitnang Luzon (Rise for Agrarian Reform - Central Luzon), three Aeta residents—Witi Ramos, Jepoy Ramos, and Nalin Ramos—were physically assaulted and detained. Nalin Ramos was reportedly forced to eat one of the soldiers' feces. The military however denied committing physical assaults, and instead accused the three Aeta residents of being New People's Army members.

The report added that the military has been forcing the Aeta residents to evacuate their ancestral lands to give way to the mining explorations of Dizon Copper-Silver Mines; however the residents, particularly the Ramos family, opposed the project and refused to leave as they know the project will destroy the environment and their ancestral lands.

Killing of a Manobo woman leader

On August 23, Manobo tribe leader and staunch defender of ancestral lands, Bae Merlin Ansabo Celis, was gunned down and disfigured by four unknown assailants in Magpet Town, North Cotabato.

Celis was a member of Tagaytay Lumadnong Panaghiusa Farmers Association and was among those who bravely advocated for the protection of Indigenous Peoples' culture and ancestral domain at her village in the face of continued illegal logging and destructive infrastructure projects.

According to reports, she was gunned down while walking with her pregnant daughter on their way to her farm. After shooting her, the assailants brutally slashed her throat and removed her eyes with a machete.

Demolition of a Lumad school in Bukidnon

On August 26, the Mindanao Interfaith Services Foundation Inc (MISFI) Academy in Sitio Laburon, Barangay Matupe, San Fernando town of Bukidnon was destroyed by 50 armed men of Bagani paramilitary group, according to reports from Save Our Schools (SOS) Network, a network of child rights advocates that works to address the violation of children's rights to education in the context of militarization and attacks on schools.

SOS Network report added that witnesses saw armed men tearing textbooks and destroying two school buildings and the teacher's headquarters which were built in 2007 through the help of European Union Aid and SFO - Overpelt of Belgium.

According to SOS Network, the Bagani paramilitary is under the command of the 89th Infantry Battalion Bravo Company which is encamped in Barangay Kalagangan, San Fernando, a 30-minute walk from the school.

"We are enraged by this series of attacks against Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines. These unabated human rights violations including killings, criminalization, harassment, and destruction of properties of Indigenous Peoples must end,"

"We see these acts of barbarism, discrimination, and gross violation of human rights not as isolated incidents, but as concerted actions aimed at silencing, through fear, intimidation and threats, the legitimate struggles of Indigenous Peoples communities to defend their ancestral lands, territories, and way of life.," says IPRI Co-director Joan Carling.

"Laws protecting human rights and indigenous peoples rights in the Philippines are violated systematically as confirmed by the report of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) issued in June this year," she adds.

Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and IPRI Co-director Victoria-Tauli Corpuz also stresses the duty of the national government in protecting Indigenous Peoples rights.

"The Philippine government should comply with its human rights obligations and commitments. It should protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and hold the violators of these rights to account. The government should investigate and identify these perpetrators and bring them to justice. The culture of impunity will continue to persist in the Philippines if the perpetrators go scot-free even after committing egregious human rights violations," says Corpuz.

IPRI fully supports the recommendations of the UN OHCHR for the Philippine government to fully implement the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, and to ensure respect for the principle of the Free and Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples and recognition of the right to quality education of Indigenous Peoples children.

IPRI calls on the Philippine government to implement measures that respects, protects, and fulfills its obligations to uphold human rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Lastly, IPRI joins other human rights and Indigenous Peoples organizations in calling for the Human Right Council to immediately establish an independent body that will conduct prompt, impartial, thorough, and transparent investigations on all killings and alleged violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), with a view to prosecute perpetrators and provide remedies for victims and their families. ###