

OBSERVER

A JOURNAL ON THREATENED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE PHILIPPINES



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SEEKING FOR JUSTICE: POLITICAL KILLINGS AND IMPUNITY

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Nele Asche, Lukas Bauer, Asja Caspari (Layout), Luca Martin,
Johannes Richter, Christian Syrbe, Johannes Tonn

EDITOR

I.P.O.N. International Peace Observers Network
Netzwerk Bildung und Projektarbeit e.V.
Nernstweg 32, 22765 Hamburg, Germany
www.ipon-philippines.org
editor@ipon-philippines.org
+49 [0] 402 5491947

OFFICE ADDRESS IN THE PHILIPPINES

23 c Rizal St., Brgy. IV, Mulanay, Quezon
observer.bondoc@ipon-philippines.org
+63 [0] 42 3197661

68 Florida Street, Brgy. Villamonte
6100 Bacolod City
observer.negros@ipon-philippines.org
+63 [0] 34 7040185

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EDITORIAL

In the annual ranking of the „Committee to Protect Journalists“, the committee laments the deaths of 70 journalists in the Philippines since 1992; only Iraq counts more dead. According to the committee’s impunity ranking of countries, the Philippines occupy second place. The new president Aquino promised to overcome the dreadful humanitarian heritage of his predecessor. But the current administration still needs to prove that it possesses the political will and executive power within its state apparatus to let extrajudicial killings and impunity become history.

Genuine justice means to reprocess past political killings and to prosecute and sentence not only the direct delinquent but also the person or group behind the committed crime. Additionally, the state and its administration need to bear responsibility for past crimes.

After the hot spot year in 2007, the entire international community started to realise that extrajudicial killings rose up in the theoretic democracy in Southeast Asia. Within that year, many reports on political killings were published. This volume brings together a set of different perspectives such as legal, national and international, state-led and civil society-driven perspectives. The volume addresses well-known and unknown cases.

Anne Lanfer opens this issue by presenting the recent study on political killings in the Philippines of USAID and the Asia Foundation, which define extrajudicial killings and take a closer look at its implications.

Even though for many people it might be evident that the state is not allowed to kill people, there are exceptions. One of them are times of war. Not always it seems to be clear whether all conditions are met so that a killing might be considered legal. A humanitarian law perspective on the

issue presents Holger Stoltenberg-Lerche.

According to Jan Pingel, there are not only systematic-strategic reasons for political killings, but also cultural aspects which abet them. In his article, Pingel analyzes the democratic system and its patrimonial structures in the Philippines. The elitist power becomes especially manifested in the analysis of the Maguindanao Massacre in

about extrajudicial killings in Bondoc Peninsula, the EU decided to send a working group on extrajudicial killings to the Peninsula. Slowly, an investigation by the Philippine authorities started after several years. An interview with a family member of a murdered human rights defender gives a personal perspective. Finally, this volume presents different strategies of (non)involvement of civil society actors. The group Sumabay



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November 2009. Lukas Bauer highlights the aspects of these power structures and the accompanying difficulties investigators face.

Whereas the issue of political killings is often addressed with representative cases, this volume’s concern is also about elucidating the tacit and unknown cases. In the two regions where IPON is active, accompanied human rights defenders were killed because they were advocating for their rights. These extrajudicial killings are exemplarily discussed to understand the system behind it. The cases IPON is working on are usually not in the spotlight of the media and tend to sink into oblivion.

After receiving reports from IPON

Tayo! is one of many actively involved groups in foreign countries advocating for an end of political killings in the Philippines. In contrast, international Human Rights Observer such as pbi and IPON offer protection for endangered human rights defenders while not directly interfering with the domestic affairs of the country. The limits and the strengths of this approach presents Juliane Walter and Juliane Marquardt from pbi, showing examples from their works as human rights observers in Guatemala and Mexico.

This collection of articles provides a valuable examination of the issue of extrajudicial killings while enlightening this complex issue from a multi-perspective view. ■