

“WE KNOW THAT WE ARE ON THE RIGHT WAY”



Mira Florian

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After several years of land struggle in Negros, human rights defenders are still confronted with landlessness and continuous human rights abuses and violations. Two persons involved in the land conflict have been killed in Negros Oriental almost two years ago. For the IPON observer team talked Mira Florian, Anna Hollendung and Friederike Mayer¹ with Alexander “Dodong” Hoyohoy about the killing of his brother Arnaldo Hoyohoy on December 3, 2008.

Dodong, can you tell us about your experiences in the struggle for land on Hacienda Teves. Can you describe how it started?

DODONG: 1988, when the CARP² started, I and my brother were in Manila, but my father stayed here. That’s why he is included in the programme. He applied after the son of Lorenzo Teves told him that this land was voluntarily offered to sell. He told my father that he must apply – that he can benefit from that. But this was not in accordance with Lorenzo Teves, the former landowner.

What happened after your father petitioned for own land?

DODONG: He could not work under the present administration of Teves. After the land was voluntarily offered to sell, the Teves family did not allow him to continue his work because he was an applicant of the programme.

Did the situation change when he received his certificate of landownership?

DODONG: No. When there were some occurrences here I wanted a follow up with the authorities, from the DAR³. My father was already old and he had a lack of knowledge about documenting. So I came back from Manila to Bayawan. I help the farmers and support them with the documents, the activities and with our association. I am here for protecting my place because of some rumours and threats against farmer beneficiaries.

Did your brother Arnaldo come with you when you went back to Bayawan where your land is?

DODONG: No, he returned late. In the 1990s, or 99s. Then, he became a mechanic of Arnie Teves⁴. They were close friends.

And did he stay in his job?

DODONG: When we had our CARP activities in Manila I told him to remain aloof from Arnie Teves and his group. I told him that it is hard for

me to shout there, in the DAR while he was with the Teves. And I was afraid that something would happen to him. So, that is why he dropped his job and then he started to lead the people.

Did Arnie Teves and your brother Arnaldo stay in contact?

DODONG: After the land installation, as far as I know, there was no conversation between them anymore. Arnie Teves told him to tell our family not to participate in the CARP, and that we have no chance to get the land.

How did your brother Arnaldo get engaged in all that activism and fighting for the land?

DODONG: My brother became active in the fight for land when I and the others were in Manila to camp-out in front of the DAR and did a hunger-strike. He led the farmers here and protected them while I and the others were in Manila.

So, while you and a group of farmer beneficiaries were in Manila for protests Arnaldo stayed here in Bayawan?

DODONG: Here, my brother and another son of the beneficiaries were leading the activities before they entered the land on November 6 for a self-installation. But before that, there was a series of meetings with the DAR, the police and the other state agencies in Manila and Bayawan to install the land for us. When there was a meeting here in Bayawan, the remaining farmers went there.

Before your brother Arnaldo was shot down, were there no threats in this instance?

DODONG: We did not receive a threat, but the situation was very hot. Even at midnight there were many suspicious guys with big motorbikes passing by, going around or standing by. We were afraid. Only Arnaldo, my brother, was confident. You know they had been friends, he



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1) The interview was conducted without a translator in July 2010.

2) Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme.

3) Department of Agrarian Reform.

4) Arnie Teves is the owner of the regional sugar mill and administrator of their (former) landholdings.

and Arnie Teves. He expected no enemy anywhere. He thought it's OK, because he was able to go to every house of the Teves', he could enter everywhere... but after the activities in Manila they broke up their friendship.

Can you tell us more about the death of your brother? How did it happen?

DODONG: Early in the morning he was in the field, then by afternoon he went home, then he cooked food for dinner, then early evening we sat in front of the house until 6. Then, at 6 o'clock the news started. So we went inside. Only my brother walked outside. There was a truck loaded with sugarcane standing near to the gate. He talked to his friend, the owner of the truck for a short time. Then, after the truck passed he closed the gate and that's when we heard the gunshot.

At that time we were lying here, watching TV. His daughter entered the house. When she was at the door we heard a gunshot. I told his daughter "just look at the outside!" So she turned back. Her father was on the ground. She shouted "papa, papa!" and immediately ran to her father. Then we brought him to hospital, but we were too late.

Did you see the one who fired?

DODONG: No, because there were many people outside. The tricycle drivers, the students from the university on the other side of the road. At that time the night classes were finished, and the students came out. That's why there are many people who have seen the incident but they do not testify. The killers did not wear something to hide their faces, just wearing a cap. There were many witnesses, but no one was willing to testify. I do not know what happened, I asked them, they denied.

What do you think, why did they deny?

DODONG: Maybe they are afraid. This incident was related to that troubling... and to the mind of the people, it is related to the big man, Teves. The problem is that there is no real witness protection. There is a law, but the

witness protection does not run.

And nobody ran after these guys?

DODONG: No, that had to be done by the policemen who had been here at that time. The killers did not run away, they just walked inside the campus. But the police replied that they need an order. When they finally were looking, the criminal was far away. All this happened while the police was just five meters away.

And they did not come?

DODONG: That is not correct. They came, they came. But they did not run after the killers. I remember that they investigated the incident. But until now it is a bad investigation, there are witnesses and the legal records, and after that nothing.

Did somebody file a case?

DODONG: We filed a case. The NBI, the national bureau of investigation, filed it.

Did the killing affect the activism of your organisation?

DODONG: Yes. Some of the farmer beneficiaries are afraid. Others became nervous because of that accident. It can happen again. We don't go out at night and we don't go to the bay. There was a split because some farmers are not fully active anymore, due to fear. That is the situation. They are afraid of entering the land. Not all, but some of the beneficiaries. Some stopped all the activism, because of the risk. It can kill you.

So it was more difficult to fight for the land after the murder?

DODONG: Yes. But we know that we are on the right way. We are fighting through legal battle. We have a Supreme Court order. The DAR-Secretary had decided already that we are the owners of the land. I don't know what happened there, why the DAR-Secretary later reversed his own decision. So until now, we continue, we continue by writing and we try to pull the purpose forward.

After all, what do you think, why

did they kill your brother and not somebody else?

DODONG: On my part, maybe my brother was not the intention, maybe they wanted just one of my family... Any, any of my family, no matter whom, as soon as possible. They did not want my brother, but me, or my father, or also my other brother as long as we were visible. I am sure that it was not my brother who was the target but my family, because my family was recognized as leading group in the struggle. We are visible. That's my idea about it.

Do you think they could have killed you as well?

DODONG: Maybe. If I had been standing there in front of the house that evening they would have shot me. But only my brother was standing; only he was standing there.

Thank you for the interview! ■



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