

## DEMANDING AN END TO HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES



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22 years, studies Medicine at the University of Greifswald, Germany. She accomplished a voluntary social year in 2007-2008 with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). She is a cofounder of Sumabay Tayo! Walking together – for Justice!

*On February 6, 2010, 43 health workers were illegally arrested by military forces in Brgy. Morong, Tanay, Rizal. The community health workers, doctors, nurses and midwives, are accused of being members of the maoist guerrilla, the New People's Army. The so-called "Morong 43" have been detained ever since. Some of them have been victims of torture and maltreatment. The detainees suffer from medical disorders and even a newborn baby was still exposed to the inhuman conditions in jail. The victims and their relatives are psychologically and physically worn out.*

During its 5th human rights day headlined "The Human Right to Health", commemorated in the German city of Oldenburg on September 4, 2010, the human rights initiative Sumabay Tayo! Walking together – for Justice! raised attention to cases of human rights violations in the Philippines and their impact on the psychological and physical health of its victims. With several information posters as well as a role play, the initiative portrayed the alarming human rights situation in the archipelago. Furthermore, a petition campaign was conducted. More than 90 pedestrians presented their pictures and signatures to demand a stop of political killings and enforced disappearances<sup>1</sup>. The pictures and signatures were sent as postcards to the Philippine President Aquino.

Sumabay Tayo!'s commitment is founded on

the disconcerting human rights situation of the past years: During the Administration of the former President Arroyo (2001-2010), more than 1200 political killings have taken place and over 200 cases of enforced disappearances were recorded according to the Philippine human rights organisation KARAPATAN- Alliance for the Advancement for People's Rights. Moreover, there has been increasing militarization and consistent impunity.

The climate of impunity allows the perpetrators - believed to belong to (para-)military forces - to systematically harass, oppress, make disappear and kill unarmed politically active civilians. The overall impunity continues under the new Administration of President Aquino with 15 political killings since his inauguration (data as of September 22, 2010). Among the recurrent victims are human rights defenders, farmers, church people, local politicians, journalists, lawyers, teachers and land reformists.

Deeply concerned with these conditions, young German and Philippine students and professionals founded Sumabay Tayo! Walking together – for Justice! in spring 2009. As an independent and voluntary human rights initiative, the action group currently focuses on the stop of politically motivated killings in the Philippines and the related cases of enforced disappearances. The initiative also addresses other human rights violations such as the illegal arrest of the "Morong 43". Raising awareness and conducting public activities, the group would like to reach a large audience, spread the word and mobilize fellow citizens. Furthermore, the initiative points out that its work

1) i.e. displacement of persons to a secret place by state or state-like organs.

© Sumabay Tayo! | A picture-collage of the passers-by in Oldenburg who demanded a Stop of political killings and enforced disappearances in the Philippines.



is to be seen complementary to advocacy and lobbying that is already undertaken by other German organisations: Through our activities we try to support those affected by human rights violations, those left behind, and human rights defenders in the Philippines. We try to actively contribute to the solving of cases and to hold perpetrators and masterminds accountable. Our initiative calls for thorough, comprehensive and impartial investigations and the prosecution of human rights violations as well as fair trials. In view of this aim, it is indispensable that witnesses, victims and their relatives are guaranteed full protection.

Through awareness building and continuous attention to the human rights situation, we hope that an end to impunity and of all human rights violations in the Philippines will become true some day soon!

For further information or the Sumabay Tayo!-Newsletter please contact [sumabaytayo@gmail.com](mailto:sumabaytayo@gmail.com) or visit our facebook account: *Sumabay Tayo! Walking together – for Justice!*

#### SOURCES

- Bulatlat (2010): Full coverage of the “Morong 43”. <http://www.bulatlat.com/main/tag/morong-43/>.
- Inquirer (2010): Foreigners cry with Morong 43 in jail visit. – 21-May 2010. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20100521-271179/Foreigners-cry-with-Morong-43-in-jail-visit>.
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Sumabay Tayo! | More than 1000 candles – each symbolizing one victim of political killings - were lit at Sumabay Tayo!'s first activity during the German Protestant Church Day in May 2009.

## AMNESTY STATEMENT ABOUT THE NEW AQUINO ADMINISTRATION

*The new President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino discusses the bad human rights situation of the country - one positive signal for human rights. He accepts that the military and the police of the Philippines are involved in the extrajudicial killings. The former chairman of the Human Rights Commission Leila De Lima is appointed as the new justice secretary of his administration. She is known as a person with a deep commitment to human rights. Amnesty International assessed the first 100 days of President Aquino as „two steps forward as well as three missed opportunities“.*

### *The missed opportunities*

*Aquino has the power to cancel the Executive Order No. 546 (presidential order 2006 by former President Gloria Arroyo) which directs the police to give active support to the military in counter-insurgency operations. Before and during the elections, Aquino said: “Our security forces must be directed to dismantle all private armies.” The private army of the former Maguindanao Governor Ampatuan, who is the alleged criminal of the Maguindanao massacre in November 2009 (see article of Lukas Bauer, this volume), had been armed by the state authorities for example. Amnesty said: „The system of authorization for armed groups which are then used as private armies remains intact.“*

*Secondly, the President promised the installation of a truth commission. But it is useless if this commission has no mandate to address human rights violations like extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. There exists the plan of de Lima to install the “superbody” to investigate political killings, but the president has to issue the executive order.*

*Thirdly, the new Administration also has the opportunity to give a great signal for human rights to the international forum. The UN “International Convention for the Protection of all Enforced Disappearances” needs ratification by only one more country in order to come into effect. ai said: “The President should promptly sign the treaty“.*

#### SOURCES

- Amnesty International (2010): Philippines: Human Rights Report Card for Aquino's First 100 Days. Document: ASA 35/006/2010; [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org); <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA35/006/2010/en/55268fb1-f402-4a1a-9301-d08429398382/asa350062010en.pdf>.
- Inquirer (2010): Aquino vows closure to human rights killings - Juni 1, 2010.