

“RED-BAITING: A DESPERATE MOVE TO SILENCE THE PEOPLE’S DISSENT” THE VIOLENCE OF RED-BAITING AGAINST CIVIL SOCIETY

The Alliance for the Advancement of People’s Rights (KARAPATAN) is promoting and protecting political, economical and social rights and an important actor of the human rights struggle in the Philippines. At the same time the group and their members are permanently “Red-baited” by the security sector. Hanimay Souza, Secretary General of KARAPATAN-Southern Mindanao Region gives an inside of KARAPATANs perspective on the issue, consequences, recent cases and steps to improve the situation.

IPON: Could you explain the perspective of KARAPATAN on Red-Baiting?

Souza: Red-Baiting is not a new tactic. It is a form of harassment of human rights defenders like KARAPATAN, because our organization is dealing with the promotion and protection and defence of human rights especially of individuals who are actively involved in local organizations. Red-Baiting has been happening since time immemorial. Especially with this kind of government that has very repressive policies. It is implementing anti-people policies which means it really doesn’t listen to what the people demand.

Which kind of human rights defenders are threatened?

Souza: For example the peasants. They are demanding for genuine agrarian reform but right now the government is blind and deaf to the calls of them. Another case is the issue of the workers who, until now, demand for salary increases and security of their jobs. The same it is for all other sectors that demand basic social services for the youth, accessible and affordable education, housing programs for the urban poor communities.

Our task is very dangerous and risky because we are in the frontline of defending human rights to these basic sectors.

In your area there are massive human rights violations, how do you consider the military’s role there?

Souza: The Southern Mindanao region is highly militarized. We have here the Eastern Mindanao Command of the Philippine Army directed by the 10th Infantry Division including four infantry brigades. All in all there are 15 infantry battalions employed here in our region. The presence of the military is questionable, especially in the countryside. Although it is a reality that there are insurgencies here in our region the presence of the military does not complement to the reason why they are here that is to combat the insurgents. They are present mainly to facilitate the entry of large scale mining companies and industrial plantations. Southern Mindanao Region is very rich of natural resources. That for us is the reason why the area is highly militarized.

The armed forces are in line with the security plan ...

Souza: In this regard Red-Baiting is one of the strategies in the counter-insurgency program. Just like in “Oplan Banta Laya” which was implemented by the former president Arroyo there is no distinction between combats and non-combats, individuals and organizations. They [the security forces] neutralize organizations by killing the leaders or the members. There have been about 1206 victims of extra-judicial killings and about 206 individual

victims of enforced disappearances under the former president. And right now, even though there is a new administration, the state policy is still the same. And still the culture of impunity, rampant human rights violations and killings continues. Under the new Aquino administration KARAPATAN has documented 55 extrajudicial killings already. The new counter-insurgency plan called “Oplan Bayanihan” is patterned by the counter-insurgency guide of the US department for national defence of 2009. The framework of this strategy is mainly to neutralize the liberation movements of the countries the USA are directly or indirectly involved with politically and economically. Here in the Philippines the US is indirectly involved in the economical and political system. Against this background the counter-insurgency program is to repress the liberation movement in a semi-colonial system. And in order to repress Red-Baiting is one of the best strategies. It has been like this under “Oplan Banta Laya” and it is like that under “Oplan Bayanihan”.

Do you see a paradigm shift over time?

Souza: There is a paradigm shift with the new strategy [but] it is still a notorious program – with a smiling face. The security forces say that they adhere to human rights, to international humanitarian law and the rule of law. They are engaged with different national stakeholders and some civil society actors as their partners for

peace and development. They conducted peace and development programs just to win the hearts and minds of the people in the communities. But they are trying to dismantle organizations like KARAPATAN, peasant movements and labour unions because these organizations are the hindrance to the entry of the military and mining companies into the area. Besides that the security forces coerce the leaders and members of these organizations to organize peace and development volunteers as a shield for the military and the police to fight criminality and insurgency in the areas.

You mentioned that it is dangerous and risky to deal with the promotion and protection of human rights here in the Philippines. How does this threat look like? How would you describe the modus operandi of Red-Baiting?

Souza: First I would like to answer why our work is really dangerous. It is because we are exposing the issues. The clients come to us and we facilitate and document the cases, we do para-legal work, we file legal actions and provide legal services.

[...]

As part of our advocacy we expose the issues, the victims, we go to the media and campaign against human rights violations. In regard to this the military is very defensive to answer these allegations and they try to defend themselves that they did not do such actions. And the security forces expose to the public that they should not go to KARAPATAN because it is a front organization of the New People's Army. Besides that individuals like us, especially the leaders of KARAPATAN are very exposed to the media and involved in campaigns, mobilisations and march rallies. During these activities intelligent units are present and take close up photos and videos and get our cell phone numbers. There are a lot of cases where these members are monitored under surveillance. This is one example why we are at risk. One recent example is the case of Kelly Delgado. He was the Secretary General of KARAPATAN from 2005 to 2011. I replaced him this year. Kelly is a perfect example of Red-Baiting here in our region. He was accused, he was tagged, he was labelled and even a case was filed against him for being a member of the New People's Army. The 10th Infantry Division is still trying to formulate some intrigues about Kelly Delgado saying that he and Rubi Del Mundo, the spokesperson of the NDFP-Southern Mindanao



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[National Democratic Front of the Philippines], are one and the same person.

Now under the peace and development outreach program of the military they deploy peace and development teams. These teams are conducting forums in the communities to explain "Oplan Bayanihan" and at the same time explain that the people should not be involved or entertain organizations like KARAPATAN, KMP, Bayan Muna, Gabriela or Akbayan because these are front organizations of the CPP-NDF-NPA. This is a common practise of the military in the communities.

You already brought up the case of Kelly Delgado as an example of Red-Baiting. Are there other recent cases in the area?

Souza: For instance there is the case of Rudi Dejos and his son Rudyric in Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur just this February. Rudi Dejos was the vice chair of the local farmer association and very committed in the community. He has been receiving death threats and harassments before from the 39th Infantry Battalion. The organization has been accused of being a front of the CPP-NDF-NPA and he has been labelled as member of the NPA. The military dismantled the organization and coerced the members to be organized with the "Barangay Defence System (BDS)" in order to engage against

criminality and insurgency. In February the military conducted an operation and tortured and killed Rudi and his son in their house. In December 2010 for instance he was harassed in his house by the military and accused of being an NPA member. Besides this case there are many more recent incidents related to Red-Baiting. The consequences for the victims are ranging from harassments and threats, facing legal cases to killings and enforced disappearances.

You mentioned that Red-Baiting is not a new tactic and that it is part of the counter-insurgency program of the government. What do you think can or has to be done to tackle the issue and improve the human right situation?

Souza: The government and the military can not silence the dissent of the people.

They are very desperate and Red-Baiting is a desperate move of the government and the armed forces to silence the people's dissent. It is a big challenge for this government to change this repressive anti-people system because still there is no change at all. The big challenge for the new administration is to end the culture of impunity through prosecution of the perpetrators of human rights violations, including high ranking officers of the armed forces. They should be prosecuted now to give justice to the thousands of victims of human rights violations. Secondly, "Oplan Bayanihan" must be withdrawn. Withdraw any counter-insurgency measures! Counter-insurgency is not a solution to the problem of our country. The people's interests are land, poverty and hunger, security of jobs, education for the youth, home for the homeless, social services, the fight

against corruption and improvement of the political and economical situation. Counter-insurgency is not a solution for these issues at all. In order to address the roots of armed conflicts the government should be sincere to pursue the peace negotiations with the NDFP and the MILF. Rebellion is just a result of the bigger problems of our country, that are landlessness, corruption, discrimination, poverty and all other underlying issues.

Thank you very much for this interview!

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