Statement of Tebtebba on the Killing of Genesis Ambason

These continuing acts of violence against indigenous peoples in the country are truly despicable and reprehensible. We, in Tebtebba, express our sympathies to the family of Genesis Ambason, the Secretary General of Tagdumahan, who was tortured and killed on September 13, 2012 (around 8pm) at Km. 39, Brgy. Binikalan, San Luis, Agusan del Sur in southern Philippines. We condemn strongly this act and the perpetrators, allegedly, the members of the CAF-GU (Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit) of the 26th Infantry Battalion headed by Artemio Sublidan.

We call on President Benigno Aquino’s government to undertake an impartial investigation into his killing and bring the perpetrators to justice. Clearly, the emerging trend is that indigenous leaders, activists and organizations who are fighting for the protection of their lands and territories against large-scale commercial mining are the ones who are subjected to assassinations. A few weeks ago, the attempted assassination of indigenous leader, Timuay Lucenio Manda, which led to the killing of his son, Jordan, took place. We also express our deepest sympathies to Timuay Lucenio Manda and his family for the killing of Jordan.

This government, which is touting its “Daang Matuwid” (good governance) policy and program should systematically investigate all these cases of assassinations of indigenous leaders, including their families. It cannot claim that its program to clean up the government is a success if such killings, usually perpetrated by its own military and paramilitary personnel continue.

Even if such killings were done by paid mercenaries, the government is still legally obliged to protect the rights of indigenous peoples. The record of this government in terms of adhering to its obligations to international human rights law is so pathetic. We call on the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, Office of the President and the Commission on Human Rights to immediately undertake an investigation of
this case and also of the killing of Jordan Manda. We also call for protection of the witnesses to these murders, such as those who are now charged with rebellion in this case.

Such continuing gross violations of the rights of indigenous peoples in this country are unacceptable. The comment of the CAFGU that this was an encounter with the communist-led New People’s Army is the standard response they make. How can this be an encounter when Genesis Ambason and his companions were unarmed?

When will such dastardly acts stop? Is this government truly unable to do anything to stop these? Is its policy to attract mining investments into the country trumping what it should legally and morally do, in terms of upholding the basic human rights of its citizens, of its indigenous peoples? Can we rely on the NCIP to do its work considering the messy situation it is in now? Is it possible that the mess in the NCIP is allowed to fester by this government so that in this way, it cannot do its work in terms of ensuring the effective implementation of the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act? In this way the mining operations of large-scale mining corporations will continue unhampered.

These questions are being asked by indigenous peoples who are increasingly getting frustrated by the inability of this government to protect, respect and fulfill their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the IPRA and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We call on Filipinos who care for human rights of indigenous peoples to condemn the killing of Genesis Ambason and Jordan Manda to write letters to President Aquino to discipline the military and paramilitary forces who are under his command. We call on the international community to do likewise.

Justice for Genesis Ambason and Jordan Manda! Justice for all indigenous persons who have been killed, disappeared, tortured, and arbitrarily arrested! Protect, respect and fulfill the rights of Indigenous Peoples!

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