

# SILENCED

EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS  
AND TORTURE  
IN THE PHILIPPINES

PHOTO ESSAYS BY MARIO IGNACIO IV



The Asia Foundation

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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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torture in the philippines

photo essays by mario ignacio iv

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## **Extrajudicial Killings and Torture in the Philippines**

**Photo Essays by Mario Ignacio IV**

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THE cases featured in *Silenced: Extrajudicial Killings and Torture in the Philippines* were part of Human Rights Case Watch, a project supported by The Asia Foundation and the United States Agency for International Development in which VERA Files partnered with community journalists to revisit select human rights cases.

The project was essentially an experiment. It set out to test a conclusion lawyer Al Parreño arrived at after analyzing hundreds of cases of extrajudicial killings from 2001 to 2010 in a study also funded by The Asia Foundation. Parreño's had observed that cases progressed—whether in the investigation or litigation phase—largely because of media attention. Without media coverage, they languished in clogged court dockets or the rusty filing cabinets of local police precincts and prosecutors, and were mostly forgotten.

VERA Files took up the challenge of returning to a handful of cases and writing about them to see whether official action might come out of renewed coverage. It selected cases and matched them with experienced local journalists who knew how to pick up the trail of the cases, many of which had gone cold.

Each case was meant to represent a subset. One subset, for example, had lawyers and judges as victims, hence the case of Ilocos Norte judge Ariston Rubio. Another subset involved prominent people, hence the story of Abra politicians Vicente Valera and Luis Bersamin.

Most victims of extrajudicial killings were perceived to be leftists or connected to leftists, belonged to organizations with leftist leanings, or ordinary people who angered the powers-that-be in their localities by simply fighting for their rights.

These were the Methodist pastor Isaias Sta. Rosa of Albay, the peasants of Palo in Leyte, the Lumad leader Datu Dominador Diarog in Davao City, the Gabriela organizer Felisa Ocampo in Bataan, the schoolteacher Rebelyn Pitao and the victims of the serial killer in Central Luzon who remains in the military payroll. These cases had not progressed beyond the police investigation phase.

And then there were cases that have reached the trial stage, with hearings going on for years—those of woman leader Liezelda Cuñado in Bohol and labor leader Ricardo Ramos in Tarlac.

VERA Files also included cases of torture. One was the decade-old case of the Basilan 73, a group of men who were rounded up when the government cracked down on Muslims following the spate of kidnappings in Mindanao in 2001.

Two were recent occurrences—the case of two suspects in the 2010 bus bombing in Matalam, North Cotabato, and that of the policeman caught on video treating a pickpocket like a dog. VERA Files included them to see whether the recently enacted Anti-Torture Law would result in a speedier resolution.

VERA Files also included a hopeful note, and for this chose Dom-an Manegdeg. Her story mirrors many of the other cases. The witness to her husband's killing has retracted out of fear, and the case now faces a dead end. But Dom-an channels both her hope and frustration through healing and music.

Because we exist in a multimedia world, VERA Files decided early on that the stories would combine text, photos, audio and, where possible, video. They would be lodged in a microsite (<http://veraffles.org/human-rights-case-watch/>) as well as syndicated to mainstream media.

For the photos, photojournalist Mario Ignacio was tasked to travel the country from Ilocos Norte to Davao, meeting up with the local journalists assigned to the cases. The outcome of his travels is a series of photo essays that make up *Silenced: Extrajudicial Killings and Torture in the Philippines*.

In Central Luzon, VERA Files joined forces with the regional television network CLTV 36 whose reporters Mhike Cigaral, Homer Teodoro and Don So Hiong produced stories in TV and print format. (Because of time constraints, the case handled by a fourth CLTV reporter, Armand Galang, could not be included in this book, as were the cases revisited by Benedicto Sanchez of Negros Occidental, Melvin Gascon of Nueva Vizcaya and Carolyn Arguillas of Mindanews).

In Mindanao, Germelina Lacorte and Mindanews-affiliated journalists Ferdinandh Cabrera and Toto Lozano took part in Human Rights Case Watch. The rest of the team was composed of Artha Kira Paredes, Leilani Adriano, Desiree Caluza, Kenneth Roland Guda, Mylah Reyes-Roque, Robert Labalan, Ven Labro and Nestor Ramirez.

As the project was drawing to an end, team members, dubbed "Casewatchers," compared notes, and their findings validated Parreño's conclusions. The mere presence of a journalist asking a policeman or prosecutor about a case jogged their memories at the very least. At best, it spurred them to some sort of action.

In Albay, police officials vowed to reopen the investigation into the Sta. Rosa killing six years ago in which the suspects are military men. In Bohol, news reports have prompted a reclassification of the Cuñado case from the simple crime of homicide to an extrajudicial killing. In Basilan, police officials have promised to look into reports of torture and arbitrary detention of the Basilan 73.

In the end, the Casewatchers decided to continue covering and writing about the cases beyond the project life. VERA Files has committed to retain the microsite that hosts the stories of not just the handful that made it to Human Rights Case Watch, but others that need to be written.

**Luz R. Rimban and Yvonne T. Chua**

EDITORS

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STREET  
TERROR  
COMES

# 'A HAVEN FOR HIRED KILLERS'

**ROWS UPON ROWS OF BRIGHTLEAF TOBACCO, THE KIND RIPE FOR THE PICKING,**

glisten under the searing sun in the village of Nagrebcan in the town of Badoc in Ilocos Norte, 340 kilometers north of Manila. Nagrebcan is a landlocked community in the southern edge of the province, whose tobacco farmers are a hardworking lot.

But life is hard in Nagrebcan, and farmers earn a pittance from the crop. And it is public knowledge that some are strong-willed and carry guns as their most prized possession, supposedly a tool with which they earn extra income.

In election years past, the town of Badoc—Nagrebcan village, in particular—has been put under “close watch” by the Philippine National Police for being what it calls a “haven for hired killers.”

“But that was years ago,” said Edmund Tadena Sr., Nagrebcan’s village chairman, as he insisted that the peace and order situation is now under control.

“Village folk could attest to this,” he added, citing the regular patrols, the checkpoints and the strengthening of barangay police action teams that are ongoing.

Nagrebcan is of particular interest to the police. An overheard conversation, investigators say, has led them to believe that it is home to one Hadji Palafox, a notorious gun-for-hire and alleged operator of a criminal syndicate, although this has never been proven since no one dares talk. Palafox is one of Ilocos Norte’s most wanted criminals.

The police suspect Palafox to be behind several killings in the province, including the murder 10 years ago of Judge Ariston Rubio, who was driving to work when

motorcycle-riding men shot him to death in barangay Magnuang, Batac, Ilocos Norte.

Rubio was the first judge to fall victim to extrajudicial killings (EJK) during the term of former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. In the 10 years since his death, at least 14 lawyers and judges have entered the roster of EJK victims in the Ilocos region.

There were no eyewitnesses and no known mastermind, but there were many possible motives. At the time of his death, Rubio was handling controversial electoral and criminal cases. Police said the judge had received threats in Currimao town after he denied the motion of a defeated mayoral candidate there for a recount of election returns.

Rubio was also handling another election protest filed by a candidate from neighboring Paoay town against a rival candidate, and the judge had been accused of favoring one party. On top of these, Rubio had issued several arrest warrants for suspected criminals.

Many people whom Rubio helped had mourned his death. His family grieved, but they have moved on, although the sound of gunshots and the throttle of motorcycles still startle them. In the Rubio home, the judge's old red Mercedes Benz remains the way it looked that day in 2001, after two motorcycle-riding gunmen approached it as it slowed down on the highway, and peppered it with bullets.

The shadow of overhanging branches and fallen leaves sweep through the isolated private plot his family chose as the judge's final resting place, the grave of a revered public servant. In death Rubio joins another son of Badoc, the renowned painter Juan Luna, whose old well-kept home in the heart of town houses his famous works of art. Local residents take pride in the knowledge that Badoc has bred a world-class artist.

Yet, though Badoc has produced the likes of Rubio and Luna, people are reminded the town has also produced a Palafox and his ilk who, police say, kill with impunity. Even now, Rubio's relatives continue to worry: Who's next? **Written by Leilanie Adriano**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim:** Ariston Rubio

**Profession:** Judge, Regional Trial Court, Branch 17 in Batac, Ilocos Norte

**Date and place of incident:** October 31, 2001 in Batac-Currimao, Ilocos Norte

**Name of suspect:** Hadji Palafox, alleged leader of a gang of hired killers

Rubio was driving his red Mercedes Benz car on his way to the courthouse when he was gunned down at 9:30 a.m. Two men wearing crash helmets and camouflage uniform on board a TMX motorcycle fired at the back of the vehicle as it slowed down to pass through a road undergoing repair. One of the suspects approached the car, shot Rubio several times and escaped.



**In the garage at the Rubio home sits the Mercedes Benz the late judge was driving when he was killed, a reminder of the tragedy that took place almost a decade ago.**



**Judge Ariston Rubio was known and respected for his integrity.**



**The sala of the Rubio home where the judge used to receive guests and clients every morning.**



**At the Batac City Police Station, SPO3 Danilo Belandres is now in charge of the files related to the Rubio case.**



**JAIME AGAPAY y BAUTISTA**  
ALIAS: Buling  
NATURE OF OFFENSE: Murder  
CRIMINAL CASE NO.: 13884-65  
LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: Nueva Era,  
Ilocos Norte

**HADJI PALAFOX y TACBIAN**  
ALIAS: Sokoy  
NATURE OF OFFENSE: Murder  
CRIMINAL CASE NO.: 14104-65  
LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: Babod,  
Ilocos Norte

**KIMBERLY AGAPAY y BAUTISTA**  
ALIAS: Amgagay  
NATURE OF OFFENSE: Murder  
CRIMINAL CASE NO.: 14081-65  
LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: Nueva Era,  
Ilocos Norte

Notorious gun for hire Hadji Palafox appears on Ilocos Norte's Most Wanted Persons list with a huge bounty on his head.



**For village chief Edmund Tadena Sr., Nagrebacan, where Palafox hails from, is no longer a haven of private armies and hired killers.**



**Residents of Nagrebcan strive to make a decent living through tobacco farming.**



Known for their patience and hard work, Ilocano tobacco farmers start their day at 5 a.m. and toil under the nagging heat of the sun.



**Tobacco farmers here share Rubio's past, where in Badoc town the judge strove to become one of Ilocos Norte's finest magistrates.**



**Rubio's final resting place is a small family-owned piece of land on a hill adjacent to the Badoc public cemetery.**



Rubio's family has moved to Manila to cope with their grief, leaving a case that has since gone cold.

# MURDER IN HACIENDA LUISITA

## **INSIDE THE SPRAWLING 6,000-HECTARE HACIENDA LUISITA IN TARLAC**

owned by the wealthy Cojuangco family is a spot labor leader Ricardo Ramos loved. It was a makeshift hut made of bamboo slats not far from his home in Barangay Mapalacsiao, Tarlac City where Ramos would rest after a hard day's work at the Cojuangcos' Central Azucarera de Tarlac.

Anyone looking for Ramos was likely to find him there, and in the afternoon of October 25, 2005, two men did come looking, although Ramos was then still at work. The two turned out to be sergeants belonging to the 7th Infantry Brigade: Roderick dela Cruz and Romeo Castillo.

Around nine that evening, Ramos was at his favorite spot in the hut drinking with friends when the sound of gunshots rang out, forcing everyone around to duck for cover. When the firing stopped, Ramos—or “Kap Ric” as people called him because he was also the village captain—was sprawled on the bamboo bench, his head almost blown to pieces.

Ramos' widow Lily was about to step out of the house to fetch her husband when she heard the gunshots. “I said to myself, ‘Somebody again fired a gun at cattle rustlers.’ It was a common thing in our place to hear shots because of the cattle rustlers roaming around in the night. I didn't know it was already my husband,” she said, tears welling in her eyes.

Lily had no inkling her husband's life was in danger. In fact, he and his fellow workers were celebrating, having just received the back wages the court ordered the Azucarera to pay them. A year earlier, Ramos, then president of the Central Azucarera de Tarlac Labor Union, was one of those who led a strike of farm and mill workers asking for higher pay and additional working days.

The strike became one of the bloodiest in Philippine labor history, after the police violently broke up the picket line, killed seven people and wounded scores of others. But the court sided with the workers, even ruling that they were entitled to back wages, which were distributed on October 25, 2005.

Ramos paid the price for those wages. Ten witnesses executed affidavits identifying Dela Cruz as Ramos' killer, court records show. Three years later, in 2008, Dela Cruz was arrested in Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija. He has been charged with murder, but Castillo was let go for lack of evidence.

Asked if the Cojuangcos might have had something to do with Ramos' murder, his mother Adelaida just stared at the hut and walked away without a word. There is nothing to link Hacienda Luisita and the Azucarera—whose owners include the late former president Corazon Cojuangco Aquino and her son incumbent president Benigno Aquino III—directly to the killing.

The Ramoses have a strong case, but many things about it puzzle and frustrate them. For one, the two soldiers were from the 7th IB under the command of Gen. Jovito Palparan, the nemesis of leftist groups, known as "the butcher" for allegedly having slaughtered many leftists. At the time of the killing, the two soldiers were assigned to the Hacienda.

Despite being a lowly sergeant, Dela Cruz has the benefit of a private lawyer, while the Ramoses have had to rely on government prosecutors, a succession of whom have already withdrawn from the case. There has also been a constant reshuffling of judges.

If she only had money, Lily said, she would hire a good lawyer and nail Dela Cruz for her husband's murder. But pursuing the case has become a huge financial burden.

"I have to rent a jeep every hearing for our witnesses. I have to go to their houses before the hearings to beg them to attend. Their families are already mad at me. I have to give them 25 kilos of rice, so that they will attend the hearings. I sacrifice our money so that we can pursue the case, but we have only very little and my three sons also have their needs," Lily said.

Adelaida has stopped attending the hearings. Every time Dela Cruz looks at them, he sends waves of fear down her spine, she said.

"He (Dela Cruz) might be released and then he will come and get Ric's sons," Adelaida added.

On September 26, 2011, the defense is expected to move for the dismissal of the case against Dela Cruz for lack of direct evidence.

If Dela Cruz walks, the Ramos case would be yet another to go unpunished. For the record, at least three others before him had fallen victim to extrajudicial killings in Tarlac, all related to Hacienda Luisita strike in November 2004. **Written by Homer Teodoro**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim:** Ricardo Salvador Ramos

**Profession:** President, Central Azucarera de Tarlac Labor Union

**Date and place of incident:** October 25, 2005 in Barangay Mapalacsiao, Tarlac City

**Name of suspect:** Sgt. Roderick De la Cruz from the Army's 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade

Ramos and his fellow farmers were at his nipa hut that night when shots rang out. A bullet hit him in the face, went through his left shoulder and all the way to his chest, killing him instantly. The 47-year-old union leader was one of those who led the 11-month strike of 700 farmers and 5,000 mill workers that started on November 6, 2004. The farmers have been fighting for the distribution of the entire property of Hacienda Luisita, the 6,419-hectare sugar estate owned and operated by the Cojuangcos, kin of President Benigno Aquino III. Police arrested De la Cruz who is incarcerated at the Tarlac Provincial Jail pending the resolution of the case.



**Adelaida Ramos sits on the exact same spot where her son Ricardo was shot. Since his death, the hut had been deserted and is now almost dilapidated.**



**A statue of the late former president Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino is one of the landmarks in the province of Tarlac where the disputed Hacienda Luisita is located. The sugar plantation is partly owned by the Aquinos.**



**Ramos's death was closely linked with the violent and bloody Hacienda Luisita strike in 2004. So far, no evidence has directly implicated the Cojuangcos to the killing.**



Known to many as Kapitan Ric, Ramos was well-respected and loved by many, say neighbors and co-workers.



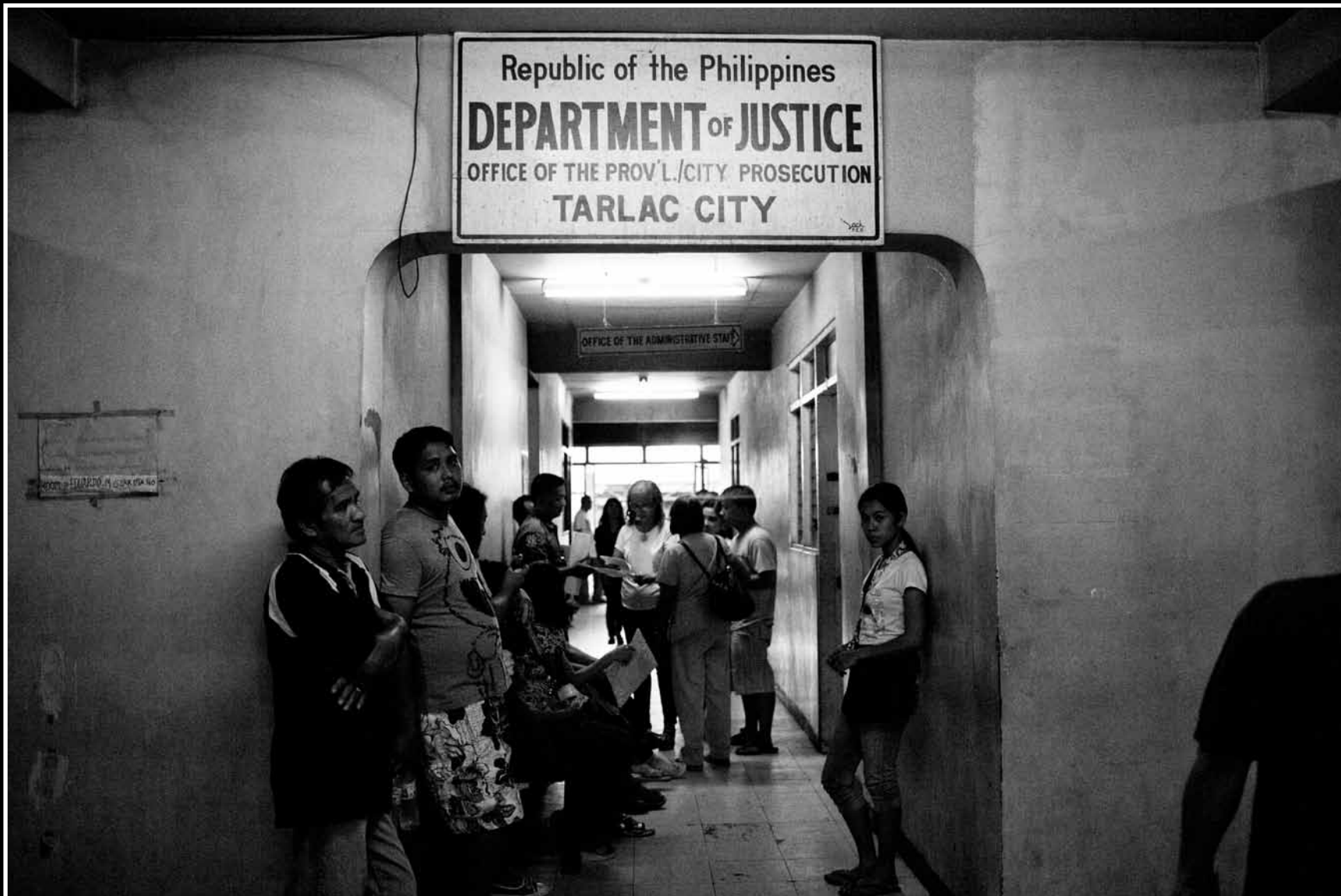
Despite fearing for her sons' safety, Lily Ramos has set her mind on seeing the court case to its end.



**George Gatus, Kapitan Ric's close friend and former bodyguard, recalls reading threatening text messages to Ramos hours before the union leader was murdered.**



**The trips to the regional trial court in Tarlac City have been taxing for Kapitan Ric's family, especially his wife Lily.**



For the prosecution's failure to properly handle the case, Sgt. Roderick "Joshua" de la Cruz of the Army's 7th Infantry Division might walk free.



***“Siyempre masakit ang pakiramdam namin ...hanggang ngayon wala pang hustisya  
(It hurts that up to now justice has not been achieved).” - Adelaida Ramos***

# KILLING FIELD

**RIZA BARGALLA DIZON, A 27-YEAR-OLD HOUSEWIFE, STILL VIVIDLY RECALLS**

that early morning about six years ago when she was roused from a deep slumber in her in-laws' house in barangay San Agustin in Palo, Leyte, only to wake up to a nightmare.

She heard loud explosions and gunfire, and then some neighbors shouting and wailing.

"What is happening?" she asked, and was told that soldiers had attacked the farmers who spent the night in the middle of the ricefield. Then it began to sink in that her husband Allan was among them, and she, too, started yelling and crying.

"My husband told me to spend the night at my in-laws' house together with my children, because he wouldn't be coming home and we had no male companion at our house at the Gawad Kalinga Village," she said.

Fear gripped her that day—fear for her husband's life and fear of what could possibly happen to her and her young children if they lost Allan.

The farmers had set up camp in the middle of the ricefield the night before, waiting for daybreak to start the traditional "tiklos" or mutual exchange of labor, with the help of the party-list group Bayan Muna and some other farmers.

That early morning of November 21, 2005, they were about to take possession of the piece of land that had been awarded to four local farmers who were named legitimate beneficiaries of the Department of Agrarian Reform's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

But before they could do so, heavily armed men attacked them, some wearing bonnets to hide their identities. But the farmers saw through their cover that they were soldiers.

The armed men brought the bodies of the seven dead farmers to Palo town proper 9 kilometers from San Agustin, and the wounded to the Eastern Visayas Medical Center in Tacloban City, 12 kilometers from town. Nine other farmers who were suspected of being rebels were also hauled off to the Palo jail. Then the soldiers set up a detachment in San Agustin.

After a couple of days, Riza and her two small children moved to her parents' house in the center of Palo, without them knowing what happened to Allan, who was not among those killed, wounded or arrested.

In Palo, Riza spent sleepless nights thinking about what became of her husband. After about two weeks, he appeared at Riza's house in Palo and was reunited with his family.

Allan narrated that when the first shots were fired, he took cover and started to crawl through a canal away from the scene of the shooting. He said he and two other farmers never stopped crawling and running that morning until they reached the town proper, where some friends hid them for about two weeks.

Allan and Riza still live in their home at the Gawad Kalinga Village in San Agustin. The scene of what has since been known as the "Palo massacre" in 2005 is just 500 meters from their house.

Allan is still farming while Riza does most of the housework, tends their small sari-sari store and takes care of their brood of now four children. Two more were born after the 2005 incident.

The couple is trying to live a normal life, but they cannot erase the bad memories of the Palo massacre. They also live in fear that the attackers would return to their village to sow havoc.

The other victims still have scars to constantly remind them of the incident, like Ronilo Orcida, 40, and Richard Margallo, 36, who was a village councilor and the chairman of the San Agustin Farmers Beneficiaries Cooperative when the massacre happened.

Both were hit by shrapnel: Orcida has a scar on his right side, while Margallo has scars on his side, leg and buttock.

Margallo, who was among those arrested, said he is buried in debt because he had to borrow money for bail and for his family's daily expenses while he was incarcerated. He also claims that whenever he leaves their village, intelligence men follow him.

"Life can no longer be the same (for us victims of the Palo massacre)," said Margallo, who has appealed to President Benigno Simeon Aquino III to look into their case. His hopes were raised when the president, in his 2011 State of the Nation Address, promised he would address the problem of extrajudicial killings. **Written by Ven Labro**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim/s:** Bernabe Burra Jr., Eric Nogal, Roel Obejas, Richard Tante, Gerry Almerino, Eufemia Burra and Alma Bartoline (seven months pregnant)

**Profession:** Farmers

**Date and place of incident:** November 21, 2005 in Barangay San Agustin, Palo, Leyte

**Name of suspect/s:** Soldiers from the Army's 19th Infantry Battalion

That morning, a group of peasants were about to start a "tiklos" (mutual exchange of labor) on a piece of land the Department of Agrarian Reform had awarded them, with some help from other farmers and the party-list group Bayan Muna. Suddenly, soldiers supposedly belonging to the Army's 19th Infantry Battalion opened fire, saying the farmers were communist rebels. Burra and the six others were killed on the spot, and about a dozen others were wounded.



**A group of farmers had camped out in the middle of this ricefield, preparing to holding the traditional “tiklos.” At daybreak, armed men attacked them, killing seven peasants in what would be later known as the “Palo Massacre.”**



**Leyte is known as the home province of Imelda Marcos, who built the Sto. Niño Shrine in Tacloban City, about 12 kilometers from Palo. The shrine also houses a painting of the former first lady.**



**Palo is also known as the site where Gen. Douglas MacArthur first landed upon his return to liberate the Philippines from Japanese occupation in World War II.**



Despite the harrowing experience, Allan Dizon still chooses to live in Barangay San Agustin; many of the victims fled the village after the massacre.



**Riza Dizon vividly remembers the ordeal of looking for her husband Allan, wondering whether he was among those who perished in the ricefield.**



**Those who survived: Eduardo Margallo and Allan Dizon**



**Other survivors: Renilo Orzida and Richard Margallo**



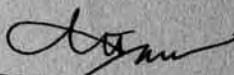
Orzida, 47, shows off a scar from a shrapnel wound during the early morning ambush of members of the 19th Infantry Battalion.

x-----x

**WHEREFORE**, foregoing considered, it is respectfully recommended that the instant criminal and administrative cases against **MAJ. LOUIE DAGOY a.k.a. LTC LOPE C. DAGOY (PA), CAPT. BENJAMIN DANIEL D. TIANCO a.k.a. CAPT. BENJAMIN CHANCO, CAPT. WILFREDO D. GOMOS, 1<sup>ST</sup> LT. MENNER C. GUTIERREZ, 1<sup>ST</sup> LT. EDDIE R. ABOLENCIA, 2<sup>ND</sup> LT. LUEL ADRIAN M. BENEDICTO, SGT. RUEL E. FERNANDEZ, CPL. DIOSCORO C. JAMORAWON, PFC. ERIC M. VALE, PVT. JESUS R. TARROZA, PVT. REY V. PAJARILLA,** all of the Philippine Army, be dismissed.

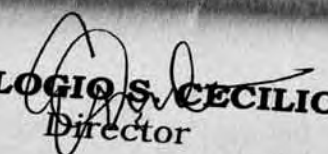
**SO RESOLVED.**

Quezon City, Philippines. 25 February 2010.



**MYSHELLE A. TAN-PELAEZ**  
Graft Investigation and Prosecution Officer

I CONCUR:



**EULOGIO S. CECILIO**  
Director

The Deputy Ombudsman for the Military in 2010 dismissed criminal and administrative complaints filed against the 19th Infantry Battalion soldiers for lack of probable cause and substantial evidence.

# A DAUGHTER'S SACRIFICE

## **REBELYN'S SMILING FACE LOOKS DOWN FROM A TARPAULIN DEMANDING**

justice for her death, keeping watch over her family's front yard littered with leaves from a mango tree that towers nearby.

Padlocked and abandoned, the house in Bago Gallera, Davao City is empty and eerily quiet.

Rebelyn's family went into hiding shortly after her gruesome abduction and killing more than two years ago. Rebelyn was the schoolteacher daughter of Leoncio Pitao, also known as "Kumander Parago," a New People's Army leader who is also one of the state's most wanted men.

The international humanitarian law, Republic Act 9851 in the Philippines, spares civilians and noncombatants on either side of the armed conflict from atrocities. But on March 4, 2009, Rebelyn was abducted on her way home from work. Her body was recovered in a ditch in barangay San Isidro in the town of Carmen, about 55 kilometers from where she was taken, barely 24 hours earlier.

Failing to get Parago despite years of intensive manhunt, the military instead targeted members of his family, Rebelyn's mother Evangeline claimed. She said the family had been under surveillance for years before Rebelyn's abduction, but because they were civilians and did not take part in the armed conflict, they thought they would be spared.

On a Black Saturday, *VERA Files* traveled from the abandoned house in Bago Gallera to the ditch in barangay San Isidro in Carmen town where Rebelyn's body was found, hoping to retrace her last moments.

Minutes after *VERA Files* took pictures of the padlocked house, the peddlers arrived, bringing to mind what Evangeline earlier said, whenever they make short visits

to check on the house.

“Barely 10 minutes and these people disguised as peddlers would come,” Evangeline once said. It was a Black Saturday when most people in the predominantly Roman Catholic country normally take a break from work.

Life hardly stirs in the deserted stretch of road that connects Bago Gallera to the highway where two years ago, armed men dragged Rebelyn to a waiting van that would take her to her death. Carmen town is about two hours’ ride from Bago Gallera and sits next to Panabo, where the military intelligence men Parago accused of killing his daughter are based.

From the Carmen highway, a dirt road flanked by rice fields leads to barangay San Isidro. The ditch where Rebelyn’s body was found is now overgrown with weeds. Farmers said someone once put a sign to mark the spot where her body was found, but now, there were only goats grazing. “Someone must have taken it away,” said Juanito Elilio, 39, who lives near the place.

But even without the markers, people still remember. “There was a disco that night in Dujali,” Elilio recalled, talking about the next town.

“It was cutting time,” he said, referring to harvest. “Water had flooded the ricefields and farmers had to drain it before they could start cutting the stalks with their sickle. After they drained the fields of water, they found something white.”

It was Rebelyn’s body reflected in the sun, Elilio said in Cebuano.

The police autopsy showed that aside from the heavy bruises in both eyes, five stab wounds below and above her breasts, and strangulation marks around her neck, the body showed signs of torture and rape.

Farmers recall that months before Rebelyn’s body was found in the ditch, two bodies with hands bound and tied together were found nearby.

“This has become a sort of dumping ground,” Elilio said, his hands indicating the road they call Crossing Bujang.

Beyond where the goats were grazing, amidst the sea of ripening fields, stood a house painted orange. It was still a skeleton of a building when Rebelyn’s body was found.

**Written by Germelina Lacorte**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim:** Rebelyn Pitao

**Profession:** Grade school teacher

**Date and place of incident:** March 4, 2009 in Sitio Bago Galera, Toril District, Davao City

**Name of suspect/s:** Unidentified men

Pitao was on her way home from school when the tricycle she was riding in was stopped by a parked white van. She was then dragged into the van and turned up dead the next day. Daughter of rebel leader Leoncio or more known as "Kumander Parago," Pitao was found in an irrigation ditch. The 20-year-old teacher was tortured, raped and stabbed to death. Her death and the continuous threat against her family are a violation of the government's obligation to protect vulnerable family members against such harm. The International Humanitarian Law or Republic Act 9851 in the Philippines specifies that family members of combatants not taking part of the armed conflict are considered civilians, and thus should be given protection and be spared from the conflict.



**In this ditch by the road in Carmen, Davao del Norte, Rebelyn Pitao was found dead, her body bearing signs of torture and rape.**



**Rebelyn took this route home, a long, deserted stretch where, one day, she was dragged out of the umbrella-covered tricycle she was in and taken to a white van.**



**The area where her body was found is known among villagers in Carmen town as a dumping ground of victims of extrajudicial killings.**



Farmers in San Isidro remember that day, at harvest time, when upon draining the ricefield of water they saw “something white,” which turned out to be Rebelyn’s lifeless body.



**On their way to San Isidro in Carmen town, the VERA Files team was stopped at a checkpoint, a regular police operation in certain parts of Davao del Norte which is a hotbed of communist insurgency.**



Rebelyn's family has since gone into hiding and to this day continues to be suspicious of strangers, like those plying goods, believed to be military assets tasked to gather information on leftists.



**Dry leaves litter the grassy alley leading to the house that once belonged to the Pitao family. Outside its concrete walls hangs a poster, "Justice for Rebelyn Pitao." She was 20.**

# THE SISTERS' ORDEAL

**AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH, THE SISTERS ANGELICA AND DIANNE CUÑADO SKIP** school and travel 200 kilometers from their hometown of Candijay to Tagbilaran City to go through one ordeal and relive another.

Inside a courtroom in Tagbilaran, the capital of Bohol province, the sisters come face to face with the person who they saw kill their mother and shoot their father. There is no escaping this traumatic encounter. They need to acquaint themselves with court proceedings and prepare for the day they take the witness stand, tell the judge what they saw and, hopefully, help keep the killer behind bars.

The scene is still etched in the girls' minds. One late night in April 2006, Angelica and Dianne, then 8 and 6, heard their parents arguing with their neighbor and distant relative, Joel Bayron, and his wife Gazella.

The Bayrons were known in the community to be military informers. That evening, they made a commotion in front of the Cuñado home in Barangay Panadtaran, shouting and accusing the Cuñados of being communists and terrorists. The Cuñados tried to settle the matter, but moments later, Joel had pulled out a pistol, and shot them.

The sisters were peering out from an upstairs window and saw everything unfold in their front yard. Their mother Liezelda was hit fatally in the chest, while their father Gerry sustained gunshot wounds. Joel Bayron was arrested and has been detained at the Bohol Provincial Jail since 2006, while his wife and co-accused, Gazella, is at large.

Although Liezelda has long been dead, Gerry still cries whenever he is reminded of her. Liezelda was then a coordinator of the women's group Gabriela while Gerry was

the municipal coordinator of the party-list group Bayan Muna. Both were so committed to their cause and apparently effective at what they did, they turned their community into the strongest in terms of membership and advocacy in Bohol.

At a hearing on July 15, Gerry took the witness stand but broke down after his lawyer asked how it felt to lose his wife. Gerry also asked for a postponement of the July 29 hearing, saying he was not ready to be reminded of how happy he was while his wife was still alive. They were not only husband and wife, he said, but partners in everything they did, including their pursuit of truth and justice by being street parliamentarians.

Soon, it will be the girls' turn to testify. The sisters, each a spitting image of their mother, look fragile and vulnerable but are more mature than they seem, taking on more responsibilities than other girls their age would. They help their father with household chores like cooking, cleaning the house and washing clothes near a deep well close to their home.

Angelica is now a second year high school student enjoying a scholarship granted her by a private school in their town, while Dianne is a sixth grade pupil in a barangay elementary school.

Their maternal grandmother, Teresita Esturba, said she would not be surprised if the two grow to become brave and outspoken like their parents. Teresita regularly rides the slow boat from Cebu to Bohol that lasts four hours, especially when there is a scheduled hearing, to give moral support and bond with her grandchildren.

Gerry would have wanted to accept his in-laws' offer to move to Cebu province to make life easier for his children, but he has opted to stay in Candijay for few more years—until his quest for justice is realized. **Written by Nestor B. Ramirez**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim:** Liezelda Cuñado

**Profession:** Development worker and municipal coordinator of Gabriela Women's Party

**Date and place of incident:** April 3, 2006 in Barangay Panadtaran, Candijay, Bohol

**Name of suspect:** Joel Bayron

At about 2 a.m., Cuñado and her husband Gerry were awakened by the suspect and his wife who were shouting in front of the victims' house, calling them communists and terrorists. The couple went out of their house to settle the matter. A few minutes later, they were shot. Cuñado died while Gerry survived the attack but was wounded.



From this upstairs window, Liezelda's daughters saw their mother killed.



**Nearly every month, the Cunados make do with the little they have to travel to Tagbilaran City to attend the hearings.**



**Angelica and Dianne Cuñado with their grandmother Teresita Esturba.**



**Now 13, Angelica has bravely agreed to take the witness stand to seek justice for her mother.**



**Gerry Cuñado talks to public prosecutor Eric Ucat, who only recently realized he was handling a case of extrajudicial killing.**



**Cuñado has refused any form of settlement, and is determined to put Joel and his wife Gazella—who to this day remains at large—behind bars.**



**Suspect Joel Bayron (far left) also happens to be related to the Cuñados. In court, Bayron sometimes tries to interact with his nieces Angelica and Dianne.**



**Both Angelica and Dianne familiarize themselves with court and criminal procedures in preparation for their testimony.**



Out of grief, Gerry sobs and breaks down in court, prompting the judge to suspend the July 15, 2011 hearing.



**Liezelda's daughters have learned to cope with their loss.**



**Dianne, now 11, plays badminton at the exact spot where her mother was slain.**



Formerly Bayan Muna coordinator, Gerry has since left activism and now focuses on raising his children on his own.



When their mother was alive, Diane and her sister used to join Liezelda and Gerry during rallies.



Photographs of a life they once shared with Liezelda hang on the wall, a tribute to a woman who fought for women's rights in her community.



Liezelda became an activist in 1994 while she was still a student at the Southwestern University in Cebu City. Her father, Cesar Esturba, was the regional chairperson of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas in Cebu while her mother was a community health worker in Candijay, Bohol.

# A LONELY TREK

**“PEOPLE MIGHT WONDER WHY YOU ARE HERE WITH THAT MAN WITH A BIG camera,”** said Mita Timog-del Rosario the day I showed up at her house on the main road of Morong town, with photojournalist Mario Ignacio in tow.

Morong is a third-class municipality in the western part of Bataan, 174 kilometers from Manila and 50 kilometers from the provincial capital Balanga. It is the province’s least populated town. A huge chunk of it lies within the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority that tourists frequent.

Yet the people of Morong do not welcome attention, and the sight of strangers scares residents. The way it scared Del Rosario’s younger sister, Felisa Timog-Ocampo, more than four years ago.

“She was so terrified seeing suspicious men roaming around our vicinity while she was doing the laundry,” said Del Rosario, recalling that day in March 2007.

Ocampo was in her backyard at the time and hid in a corner to avoid being seen. The suspicious- looking men left after two hours, and Ocampo decided to spend the night at Del Rosario’s house on the main road. Early the next day, Ocampo set off for the police station to report the incident when armed men stopped her in her tracks and killed her.

Published reports say six men were involved in the killing. Two of them shot Ocampo and threatened people who “tried to intervene.” Another two were waiting inside the getaway car, while two more were on board a motorcycle.

At the time of her death, Ocampo was a leader of the party-list group Bayan Muna and was well-respected in her community, especially by farmers, fisherfolk and market

vendors. Her fellow activists say she was killed by the military. The military says she was killed by her former comrades in the New People's Army.

Warrants of arrest were issued for suspects belonging to the NPA, but they were never served. The case has been archived.

More than four years have passed since the murder of Ocampo—Ate Feling, as friends fondly called her—and her relatives have likened the search for justice to a lonely trek on foot, in the dark, in a godforsaken town.

“Here in our town, there are no recorded crimes that have been solved by the authorities, especially for murder cases because almost all the witnesses are afraid to testify against the perpetrators or the so-called masterminds,” a resident said.

Del Rosario also pointed to one important detail: “You know, Mhike, it will be too hard for us to pursue the case filed against those named suspects who were complete strangers to us.”

Yolly Manalo, their niece and the town's chief social welfare and development officer, says the question that still puzzles her is who really is responsible for what she calls the senseless murder of her aunt.

“We don't expect this case to be solved in our lifetime,” Manalo said. She takes comfort, though, in the memory of an aunt she knew was beloved by the oppressed.

**Written by Mhike Cigaral**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim:** Feliza Timog Ocampo

**Profession:** Bayan Muna coordinator in Morong, Bataan

**Date and place of incident:** March 2, 2007 in Barangay Poblacion, Morong, Bataan

**Name of suspect/s:** Juanito "Ka Toktok" Carabeo and Analito "Ka Devon" Estrada, active members of the New People's Army

At 7:15 a.m., two men shot Ocampo. A witness tagged Carabeo of Barangay Daang Pare, Orion and Estrada of Barangay Balon, Mariveles as the assailants. Accounts showed that a day before, March 1, Ocampo was doing her laundry when she saw four men spying around her house. She hid at a corner until they left. She then went to her sister's house where she spent the night. Ocampo was supposed to go to the police station that morning to report the incident when she was stopped by the two men and shot dead.



Bayan Muna leader Felisa Ocampo in 2006 was shot in broad daylight on the main road in the center of Morong town in Bataan.



**Before she was killed, Ocampo had been repeatedly summoned by the 24th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army in Balanga City for questioning.**



**In Morong, residents say killings remain unsolved because witnesses, fearing for their lives, refuse to come forward to testify.**



**The Bataan Regional Trial Court Branch 3 has shelved the Ocampo case since 2008 for failure to arrest suspects Juanito Carabeo and Analito Estrada, tagged as NPA members.**



Members of leftist organizations in Bataan had been subjected to summary killings, with Ocampo's death as one of the most high-profile cases.



**Mita del Rosario remembers seeing Felisa sprawled by the road, dead, in front of her sari-sari store.**



**Felisa's niece Yolly says the family has lost all hope of seeing the case resolved in their lifetime.**



Felisa's room has since been turned into a warehouse.



**Felisa's belongings, her clothes and photos, are piled and kept in a dusty blue bin.**

# A RAMADAN WISH

## **IT'S THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADAN WHEN MUSLIMS FAST ALL DAY AND SIT**

down to a meal after sunset. If Jinky Samal had her way, she would cook sumptuous food for this meal, called "bukah," and bring it to her husband and younger brother who are detained at the Cotabato Provincial Jail in Kidapawan City, the capital of North Cotabato province in Mindanao.

But Jinky's government job does not pay much. "I have no more extra cash to spend for the visit although I really want to see them," she lamented.

Jinky is the wife of Allamin Samal and sister of Ebrahim Alimanan, who were incarcerated after being accused of bombing a bus in Matalam town in October 2010. Ten were killed and several others wounded in that bombing incident.

The Samal and Alimanan families deny the two are in any way involved with the crime. They also say Allamin and Ebrahim were tortured by policemen while under interrogation and investigation.

Jinky worried the two would end up badly beaten or, worse, killed and dumped somewhere, after they were arrested and taken from their home in Cotabato City on October 23. The police did not allow her to accompany them, but the arresting commander, Superintendent Alexander Tagum, advised her to follow them to the North Cotabato Provincial Police Headquarters about three hours away.

Once there, she pleaded with the police to let her see her husband and brother, invoking her right as an immediate family member and reminding the police that they have civil rights. But two days would pass before the police allowed Jinky to see Allamin and Ebrahim.

In the statement he executed later, Ebrahim said that every time he denied he was

"Torex," the man the police said was the suspect, he would be slapped and punched. They also poured hot water filled with pepper all over his body while they covered his head with plastic as if to suffocate him.

Allamin, meanwhile, was punched and kicked, and reportedly fell unconscious after the police covered his head in cellophane. Allamin said he was awakened when he felt hot water with chili being poured down his shoulders and knees. At one point, he said, interrogators squeezed his genitals with pliers. The two said they received this treatment while under interrogation.

For now, Jinky, her mother Calasuma Alimanan and sister-in-law Norilyn Alimanan, Ebrahim's wife, comfort each other as they go through the same sorrow. Jinky was left with five children. Norilyn had just given birth to her third baby a few days before the two were arrested.

"It's so hard now since all the children are in school, and add to that the newborn. It is only me and my mama who are employed, and we are forced to help each other to meet the daily needs of the family," Jinky said.

Jinky and her mother were desperate, until the Mindanao Human Rights Action Center (MinHRAC), Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and Medical Action Group (MAG) decided to take on their case. The MinHRAC is assisting them in the legal battle, and CHR and MAG on the issue of torture.

Still, Jinky feels the hardship, with the case dragging on and the financial burden falling on her shoulders. "Now, I only see my husband and brother if there are scheduled hearings," she said while waiting outside the court for a hearing in mid-May. "It is very hard to look for money for expenses every time we visit. Our lawyer is volunteering his services."

Jinky only prays something good happens while she observes fasting this Ramadan. All she wishes is for her family to celebrate the next Ramadan with her husband and brother. **Written by Ferdinandh Cabrera**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim/s:** Ebrahim Alimanan and Allamin Samal

**Profession:** Suspects in a bombing incident

**Date and place of incident:** October 23, 2010 in Matalam,  
North Cotabato

**Name of suspect/s:** North Cotabato Provincial Police  
officers

On October 21, 2010, 11 people died in a bus bombing along a national highway in Matalam. Police apprehended a 15-year-old boy who pointed to Alimanan and Samal as the masterminds. The two were arrested without warrants and were detained. When they were released after three days, a quick medical checkup showed they had been badly beaten up. A doctor with the Mindanao Human Rights Action Center also concluded that the two had been tortured. Under the Anti-Torture Act of 2009, a victim of torture has the right to an impartial investigation by the Commission on Human Rights and other offices such as the justice department and the police. An investigation should be completed within 60 working days from the time the complaint for torture is filed.



**The Grand Mosque in Cotabato City was built through the efforts of former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, under whose watch the country saw the highest number of human rights violations, next to the dictator Ferdinand Marcos.**



**The scene of the bombing, the Matalam national highway, where 11 passengers died from the bus explosion.**



**A day after the bombing, police arrested without warrant Alimanan and Samal and brought them to the North Cotabato Provincial Office where the two were allegedly tortured.**



The North Cotabato Provincial Office where the two bombing suspects are now being held for murder and frustrated murder charges.



**During their interrogation, Alimanan (left) and Samal (right) suffered from excruciating pain and injury allegedly inflicted by police officers under Kidapawan City Police Supt. Alexander Tagum.**



**Samal**



**Despite financial burdens, Jinky sees to it that she regularly attends Samal's court hearings.**



Alimanan



**Alimanan's mother Calusama seeks comfort from loved ones to withstand her pain and anxiety.**

# LIFE, INTERRUPTED

## **ONE DAY IN JULY 2001, 45-YEAR-OLD FISHERMAN MUHAMMADIYA HAMJA**

was returning home from a trip out to sea aboard his banca. Suddenly, soldiers appeared, told him he was a terrorist, arrested him and took him to an undisclosed camp.

During the interrogation, Hamja was blindfolded and held incommunicado. He was also punched, kicked and threatened with death.

In a dark prison cell inside that undisclosed camp in Basilan, Hamja heard screams for help and realized there were others like him. Many others.

It turned out that Hamja was one of the 150 or so rounded up in Basilan, Zamboanga City and Sulu that month in a series of arrests carried out on a massive scale on the strength of then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's declaration of a "state of lawlessness and rebellion" in the three areas. This was the government's response to a series of kidnappings by the bandit group Abu Sayyaf.

Within days, soldiers and policemen in Basilan, with "informers" in tow, brought more than 100 people to military camps. Eventually, a total of 73 people were brought all the way to Metro Manila, to a maximum prison facility inside Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig City.

Like Hamja, Munap Saliddin and his son Moner were among the first victims of the mass arrest. Their relatives eventually contacted human rights groups and told them how the Saliddins and 71 others were taken against their will, without warrant, without the benefit of counsel, and tortured.

Hamja and Munap were released in June 2005 after witnesses led by the American kidnap victim Gracia Burnham failed to identify them as her abductors. Munap went home to Basilan, but Hamja, fearful of being re-arrested back home, chose to stay in a Muslim community in Taguig. That turned out to be a big mistake.

In November 2008, while praying in a Taguig mosque, armed men nabbed Hamja, blindfolded him and shoved him into a van. His son Ahmad looked everywhere for him—in Army and police camps, detachments and jails in Taguig and Pasig. Finally, on the third

day, Ahmad found his father at the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) building located inside Camp Crame in Quezon City, the headquarters of the Philippine National Police.

“His face was swollen, his eyes were all red. He could hardly recognize me or anyone. He had bruises all over,” said Ahmad.

Hamja later told his son about the alleged torture he suffered in the hands of the CIDG men. “He was repeatedly kicked, punched, slapped. His face was covered with plastic to prevent him from breathing,” Ahmad said.

Tortured twice over, Hamja was later brought back to Basilan and charged before a court there for the same case he was already found not guilty of.

Meanwhile, arrests would continue months, even years after the spate of kidnappings, and the “suspects” taken to Camp Bagong Diwa. Edwin Sawaldi, an ambulant vendor in Zamboanga City, was arrested in October 2010. Seven detainees were students of an Islamic school in Palawan when they were arrested in September 2007. Patta Jalal Hoyo was only 10 years old when the kidnappings happened. He was arrested in November 2010 in Quezon City and accused of being a kidnapper.

Many of those arrested were “assigned” aliases that supposedly corresponded to actual names of Abu Sayyaf members. Sawaldi, for instance, was “Osama,” while Omar Galo, one of three identified minors when they were arrested, was “Jojo Razon.” The arrested students were “Mugera,” “Muadz,” “Islam,” “Ben Saif,” “Jaafar,” “Abu Jasim,” and “Abu Daiser.” They all said they do not know those names.

To be sure, some of those arrested in 2001, like Hector Janjalani (brother of Abu Sayyaf leader Khaddafy Janjalani), Nadzmi Sabdulla (Commander Global), Alhamser Manalad Limbong (Commander Kosovo), and Galib Andang (Commander Robot), were captured during military operations against the Abu Sayyaf. All three except Janjalani were later killed after the police siege on the prison in March 2004.

But a majority of those arrested claim innocence, presenting testimonies of neighbors and family members, birth certificates and school records to prove that they are not who the military accuse them to be.

Still, the Moro detainees continue to languish in Camp Bagong Diwa. The cases filed against them have been moving at a snail’s pace. The wounds from the beatings have long healed, but the wounds in their minds are as fresh as the day they were arrested.

**Written by Kenneth Roland Guda**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim/s:** Muhammadiya Hamja et. al.

**Profession:** Tagged as members of the Abu Sayyaf

**Date and place of incident:** From 2001 onwards in Basilan

**Name of suspect/s:** Members of the Philippine National Police Criminal Investigation and Detection Group

The Basilan 73 are charged with different crimes and remain in jail. All of them have claimed to have been falsely accused of being part of the kidnapping activities of the Abu Sayyaf. Many also claim to have been tortured, while in military and police custody. Their court hearings, like that of Muhammadiya, are few and far between.



**In a series of arrests starting July 13, 2001, more than 500 individuals were rounded up in Basilan on charges that they belonged to the bandit group Abu Sayyaf. Seventy-three of them ended up in jail in Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig City.**



**Omar Galo was 16 when he was arrested in Malamawi, Basilan in 2001. He was accused of being Jojo Razon, a suspected Abu Sayyaf member.**



**Moner Saliddin was arrested along with his father Munap in July 2001. Moner was a student in Cebu when the Abu Sayyaf kidnappings took place, but unlike his father who was let go after Gracia Burnham failed to identify him as one of her captors, Moner continues to languish in jail.**



**Jeepney driver Isnajul Tayum, 49, from Jolo, Sulu was arrested in October 2001.**



The mothers, wives and relatives of the Basilan detainees regularly visit and bring food to Camp Bagong Diwa.



**Bobby Alonto, 43, claims innocence and said that in May 2000 when the kidnapping he was supposedly involved in took place, he was behind bars at the Basilan Provincial Jail for a different crime.**



**Jailed in July 2001, Marvin U. Hasam was one of the first to be arrested in Basilan.**



**Abdul Usman, 37, a former OFW who only went to Zamboanga in 2003 to sell agar-agar or seaweed gelatin, was arrested and, after seven days of undergoing torture, was forced to admit to the crime.**



**During an attempted jailbreak in Camp Bagong Diwa in March 2005, Hasam was severely wounded after the PNP Special Action Force raided the compound and started firing at the detainees.**



**The so-called Palawan 7 were arrested in September 2007 on charges of murder and membership in the Abu Sayyaf. They were taking up Muslim Studies at the Alfarouq Institute in Puerto Princesa, Palawan.**



**Edwin S. Sawaldi claimed to be selling watches and belts in Zamboanga City when he was arrested on October 16, 2010. In the hands of his captors, Sawaldi said he suffered from electrocution, waterboarding, and several blows to his body.**



The resolution of the Basilan 73 case looks dim, with the absence of a judge to handle the case. The last hearing was held in 2008.



**Relatives of the detainees cannot resort to the newly passed Republic Act No. 7945, or the Anti-Torture Act, since the law is not retroactive.**

# TORTURED

**TWENTY-EIGHT-YEAR-OLD MARGIE EVANGELISTA IS CONVINCED THAT THE** man in the video is her husband Darius who has been missing for more than a year now.

“I know it’s him. He was exactly as thin and pale. I recognized the tattoos on his body,” said Margie, the strain of conviction showing on her face.

Margie believes it was Darius who was shown in the footage taken on a cellphone camera and leaked to the Internet and a television station. In it, Darius (or someone who looked like him) was writhing on the floor, naked and in pain, while his genitals were tied as though on a leash being pulled by a police officer in civilian clothing.

The public outrage over the video led to a speedy investigation by the police and the dismissal from the service of the primary suspect, Police Inspector Joselito Binayug. The Philippine National Police-National Capital Region Internal Affairs Service shared Margie’s certainty that “the unnamed police official seen on the video footage aired by the ABS-CBN on August 17, 2010, where an unidentified naked male person was lying on the cement floor of a Police Community Precinct (PCP) with a string attached to his private organ being pulled and whipped simultaneously by another male person, was respondent PSINSP (Joselito B.) Binayug.”

But while the torturer’s identity is a certainty, the victim’s is not. The family and neighbors of 39-year-old Vicente Orbigo think it is him, not Darius, who was seen being tortured by the police. Unlike Darius’ family, however, Vicente’s was able to recover his body and filed a complaint against Binayug at the National Police Commission.

Darius Evangelista and Vicente Orbigo shared more than just tattoos and some physical resemblance. Both spent short periods in jail for various misdemeanors and were picked up by men believed to be police operatives before they disappeared.

In the Philippines, policemen committed nearly half of all reported human rights violations from 2001-2010. Police brutality is a fact of life for thieves, pickpockets, vagrants and other petty criminals who get caught and thrown into the tiny and filthy

jail cells of local precincts. But other local chieftains are likewise believed responsible for summary executions in the crowded slums of Manila.

Just a few months ago, Margie said, another body bearing torture marks was found abandoned at the foot of the Del Pan bridge near the Parola compound where both the Evangelistas and the Orbigos live.

Not far from there, in Barangay 254 Zone 23, a wake was held in July 2011 in the same spot where Vicente lay in state in August 2010. This time, it was Vicente's brother Benedicto, 49, who was killed, allegedly by barangay officials.

The families of Darius and Vicente believe there is no justification for torture, more so by the police, even if the two had a history as petty thieves.

The Evangelistas have filed a complaint for torture against Binayug and eight other officers, including his direct superiors. It could have been the test case for the prosecution under the newly enacted Republic Act 9745 or the Anti-Torture Act of 2009, but the case remains pending at the Department of Justice—exactly one year on August 23, 2011.

Darius' father Asper, 72, said he heard from his neighbors that some of the nine principal accused policemen in his son's torture have been seen reporting back to work. He directly approached Manila Police District Station 11 chief Senior Supt. Rogelio Rosales, and said, "*Buhay man siya o patay, ibigay nyo sa akin (ang katawan) ilalagay ko lang siya sa ayos, hindi ko kayo irereklamo* (Dead or alive, please release my son's body to me and I will not complain against you)."

Margie insists justice does not end with the dismissal from the service of one of the major suspects. "What about the other policemen seen in the video during the torture? What is keeping the DOJ from filing the case?"

Margie asks why the case has not reached the trial stage, as she looks at her two daughters, aged 7 and 5. In Parola, a community of predominantly stevedores and wage earners mostly working at the bustling commercial district Divisoria, people mind practically everyone else's business, and news travels fast. She hopes one day to finally hear news about Darius— hopefully alive. **Written by Mylah Reyes Roque**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim:** Darius Evangelista

**Profession:** Suspected thief

**Date and place of incident:** March-August 2010 (exact date unknown)

**Name of suspect:** Police Senior Inspector Joselito B. Binayug et. al.

On August 17, 2010, a news station aired a video showing a naked man in pain as a man pulled a string attached to the victim's genitals. Men in police uniform were in the video. Margie C. Evangelista saw the video and said that the man looked like her husband, Darius who has been missing since March 5, 2010. The PNP immediately formed a task force and based on its report the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group filed an information for torture on August 23, 2010 against Binayug, as well as his immediate superior, Superintendent Ernesto V. Tendero Jr, and seven other colleagues: Superintendent Rogelio T. Rosales, Senior Police Officer 3 Joaquin M. de Guzman, SPO1 Rodolfo S. Ong, SPO1 Burt N. Tupas, SPO1 Dante F. Bautista, PO1 Nonito B. Binayug and PO1 Rex C. Binayug.



Where the torture took place: The Asuncion Police Community Precinct at Recto Avenue and Asuncion Street in the poor district of Tondo, Manila.



**Margie and Darius Evangelista before he disappeared on March 5, 2010.**



**Asprin Evangelista, 72, has demanded the police to release the body of his son Darius. Three men detained at the Asuncion police station that night testified that they saw Darius looking battered, with his eyes and mouth bound by tape.**



**Darlene, 5, the youngest daughter of the Evangelistas.**



**The mother of two tries to keep it together for her children, and with courage continues to pursue the criminal complaint she filed against the Manila police with the help of the Commission on Human Rights.**

# THE 'EXECUTIONER'

**ALVIN ADRIALES IS TRYING TO EARN A LIVING IN LAUG, A RURAL COMMUNITY** in Mexico town in Pampang, using the barber's chair and scissors that once belonged to his father, Antonio.

"Life was easy when father was still alive," said 25-year-old Adriaes, whose mother Delia, now in her 60s, was forced to work six days a week as a housemaid after Antonio died.

Five years ago, on January 10, 2006, unidentified men killed Antonio in front of his home and fled aboard an unidentified vehicle.

According to the Philippine National Police, Antonio was a runner for the "Rebolusyonaryong Hukbong Bayan," a breakaway group of the communist New People's Army operating in Mexico, a charge his family denies. Yet they are not planning on filing charges or contesting the accusations. "We're afraid. They might come back for my family," Delia said.

The murder of Antonio would be the opening salvo in a series of extrajudicial killings to grip the interior villages of Mexico and neighboring San Fernando City that year. But it was the second murder barely a week later that would provide clues as to the motives and possibly the identity of the perpetrators.

In the evening of January 16, Ofelia Torno-Rodriguez, 61, was gunned down by two men inside her home in barangay Divisoria in Mexico, in front of her loved ones.

Nanay Pearl, as Torno-Rodriguez was known in the community, was attending to her mother Amalia de la Peña and carrying her two-year-old granddaughter Sarah, when one of the suspects grabbed and shot her in the arm. Torno-Rodriguez managed to put her granddaughter down and shield her from the killer. A gunshot to her head ended her life. The shooter and his companion escaped aboard a motorcycle.

"It was painful, and we are full of rage," said Anna, one of Ofelia's close relatives. "Nanay Pearl did not do anything bad. The worst part is, it happened in front of her mother and we all witnessed it."

Torno-Rodriguez was a peasant leader for the Divisoria Farmer's Association, Agumandareng Maglalautang Capampangan and Alyansang Magbubukid sa Gitnang Luzon. Townsfolk said she was suspected of sending food and supplies to rebel groups, but close neighbors and witnesses said otherwise.

According to the human rights organization Karapatan, back in 2005, Torno-Rodriguez had acted as a "convenor" of the Stop Palparan Alliance, a group that appealed to the government to discharge Gen. Jovito Palparan Jr., commander of the Philippine Army's 7th Infantry Division in Nueva Ecija.

Palparan was known for his violent campaign against suspected members of legal but left-leaning groups. During his time, the military implemented "Bantay Laya," a drive to rid the country of the communist rebellion.

Like the Adrialetes, Torno-Rodriguez's relatives still worry for their safety. "We are fearful of what might happen once this case is reopened. They might come back for us and kill us as well," said Anna.

Four months after Torno-Rodriguez was killed, bar owner and electrician Manuel Nardo was shot by two men who posed as customers of his bar in San Fernando City. They, too, fled on a motorcycle.

The fortysomething Nardo devoted himself to supporting his siblings and "even forgot to get married," said his 65-year-old mother Mercedes Real Bito.

Nardo was also an active member of Bayan Muna partylist organization before the incident.

Witnesses to all three cases identified one suspect in the killings. PNP investigations revealed that the prime suspect used different names—Wilfredo T. Layug, Leodegardo Layug Jr., Wilfredo T. Yumul Jr. and "Ka Bong."

Police archives showed that Layug was arrested due to possession of illegal firearms years before the killings transpired. The research done by *VERA Files* and Central Luzon Television (CLTV) discovered that he was a respondent to nine murder charges in Pampanga. Warrants of arrest were issued in places where Layug is suspected to have lived. But these were never served: Layug could not be found.

Witnesses say Layug was an NPA member who became a military asset and "executioner" for the Philippine Army. One of the warrants of arrest was addressed to a certain "PFC Wilfredo Yumul Jr."

Sources in the Armed Forces of the Philippines confirmed that a certain PFC Wilfredo Yumul Jr. serves as an intelligence officer in Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija and still draws his monthly salary from the military. Inquiries also disclosed that "PFC Wilfredo Yumul Jr." is on court martial for violating military rules. **Written by Don So Hiong**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim/s:** Manuel Nardo, Bayan Muna member; Ofelia Torno-Rodriguez, tagged as New People's Army supporter; Arnel Guevarra, suspected member of the New People's Army; Antonio Adriaes, runner for the Rebolusyong Hukbong Bayan (breakaway group of the NPA operating in Mexico, Pampanga)

**Dates and places of incidents:** 2005-2006 in various places in Pampanga

**Name of suspect:** Wilfredo T. Layug Jr. aka Ka Bong, Leodegardo Layug Jr., Wilfredo T. Yumul Jr. of the Army's 7th Infantry Division

Sources in the Armed Forces confirmed that Wilfredo T. Layug Jr. still draws a salary as an intelligence operative of the Army's 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, despite being the principal respondent in four cases of extrajudicial killings in 2006 and five other murders. Layug is tagged as a remnant from the year Army general Jovito Palparan headed the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, from September 2005 to September 2006, when he launched a campaign to purge Pampanga of leftist elements.



Five years after his father's death, Alvin Adriaes, in his late 20's, strives to make a living for his mother and younger brother.



**Remnants of a life. Antonio Adriaes was a barber in Laug, Mexico, Pampanga when, one evening in January 2006, he heard men looking for him and went downstairs to talk to them. Minutes later, he was dead.**



Adriaes's son Alvin took on his father's job as barber in the village of Laug.





Known as "Nanay Pearl," Ofelia was suspected to be a New People's Army supporter.



**On the night of January 16, Ofelia was busy attending to her ailing mother when armed men barged into her home and shot her in the head.**



**A year before her death, Ofelia reported to the human rights group Karapatan that the military invited her for questioning, threatening to kill her if she refused to confess her communist affiliations.**



**Ofelia managed to save her granddaughter by shielding her from the perpetrators who fled on board a motorcycle.**



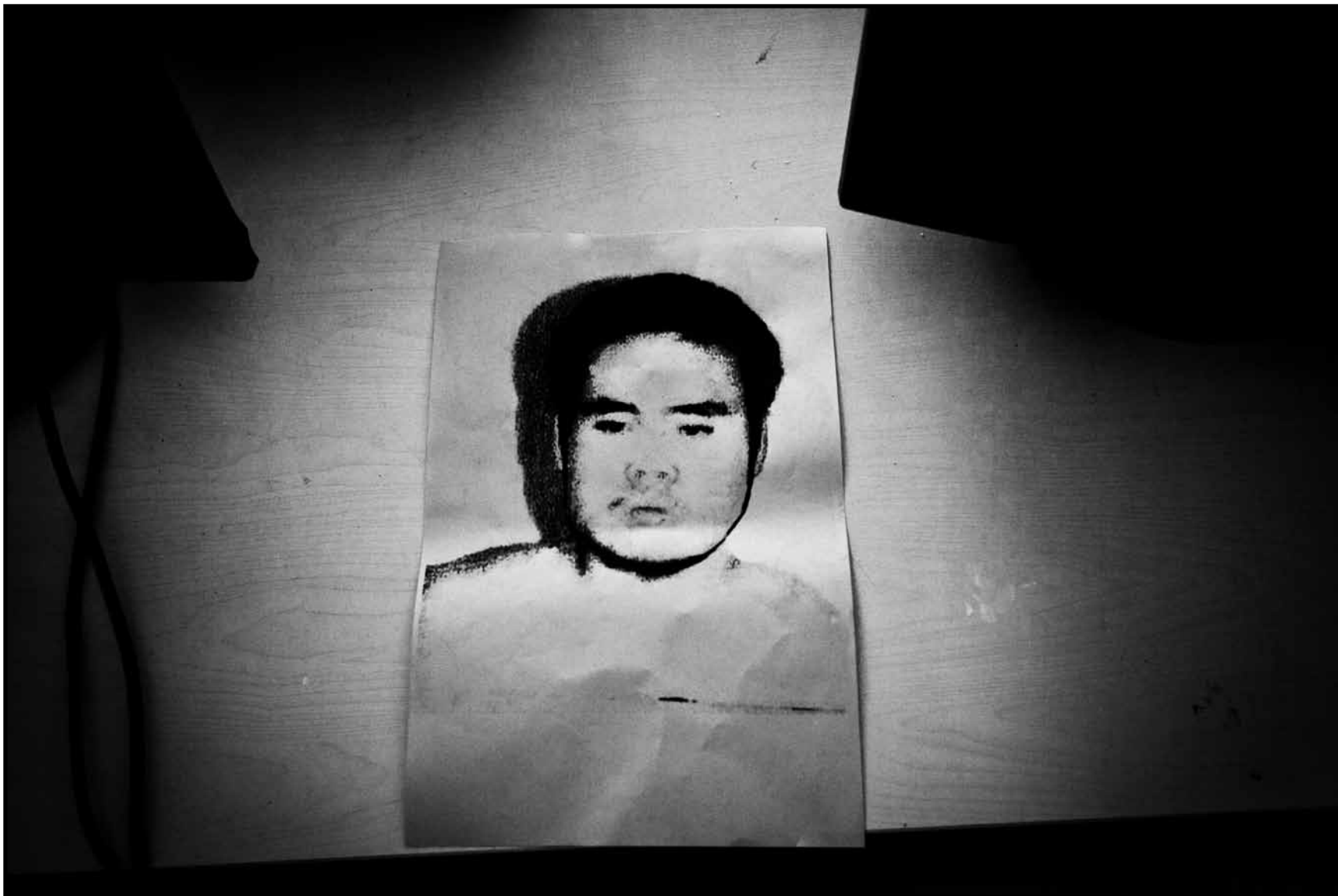
**Merceditas Real Bito holds a photograph of her son Manuel Nardo whom she fondly describes as an “ideal son” who singlehandedly supported the entire family as an electrician.**



Merceditas points to the spot where Nardo was killed, in front of a canteen-cum-videoke bar in Barangay Quebiawan, San Fernando, Pampanga.



**From 2001 to 2010, Pampanga has posted the most alarming number of extrajudicial killings: 41 out of 305 victims in the Philippines.**



**Witnesses point to Pfc. Wilfredo Yumul Jr. as the executioner. The alleged military asset goes by different names such as Wilfredo T. Yumul Jr. and Wilfredo T. Layug.**

# DANNY AND THE GLORY MOUNTAIN

## **DANNY DIAROG DREAMT OF BEING A SOLDIER. HE BELIEVED THAT ONCE**

drafted, he could help his parents support the family and serve their community in Sitio Kahusayan, Tugbok District in Davao City.

“Kahusayan” means harmony in Bisaya, the language of the majority in Davao. It is situated at the foot of Mount Apo, or Apo Sandawa to indigenous peoples, and can be reached using a modified motorcycle locally known as “habal-habal” from Calinan District, south of Davao City.

But Danny’s dream ended more than three years ago when his father, Datu Dominador Diarog, the chieftain of the Bagobo-Giangan, defended the tribe’s ancestral domain against a “development project” being planned by Pastor Apollo Quiboloy.

Quiboloy belongs to a sect called Kingdom of Jesus Christ The Name Above Every Name and is known among his flock as “the Son of God.” Quiboloy gained influence with politicians by lending his name and his flock to them whenever they needed warm bodies.

Local residents recall that Quiboloy and his group first arrived in 1997 to set up what they called a “prayer mountain.” They were accompanied by armed men, and before long, started fencing off the area. The Bagobo-Giangan families whose homes were situated within the perimeter were harassed by the armed men and forced to leave. Among them were the Diarogs.

Datu Doming, as he was called, decided to build his house just outside the fence, close to where his family grew vegetables.

On April 29, 2008, armed men strafed the Diarog house, killing Datu Doming. The

rest of his family survived the attack, but two of Danny's younger siblings got hit. Jenely lost a toe, while a splinter remains buried in Jeniemie's arm to this day.

The strafing incident and the harassment prompted the residents of Sitio Kahusayan to leave their homes, turning the once peaceful village into a ghost town. The residents sought refuge in a banana plantation at the adjacent village of Dominguez. The city council of Davao issued a resolution urging the Davao City Police to provide security to residents of Sitio Kahusayan.

Danny believes that the people behind the killing of his father were members of Quiboloy's private army backed by soldiers from Task Force Davao, an anti-terrorism unit affiliated with the Philippine Army that was created in 2003 after the bombing of Davao International Airport and Sasa Port. Its primary function is to "insulate" Davao City from possible terrorist attacks and criminality.

Danny narrated several instances when armed men bearing the task force insignia harassed his family. They were usually escorted by Barangay Tamayong chief Greg Canada who is known among Sitio Kahusayan residents as Quiboloy's representative.

Emily Diarog, widow of the slain datu, recalled that Canada once approached her husband and offered him P50,000 for the two-hectare land where the Diarog family grew vegetables. But Datu Doming turned down the offer. Their farm is now part of a 21-hectare pine tree plantation called Glory Mountain belonging to Quiboloy.

Danny no longer dreams of becoming a soldier. He is now a father and works as a laborer in a banana farm. He sees Glory Mountain in the horizon every day, on his way to work. The towering pines remind him of a false Son of God and his flock who sow terror in a once peaceful village.

For Danny, the real Son of God does not live in a palace or steal from its people. Danny believes that someday, a true son of God will bring justice to the people in a small village called Kahusayan. **Written by Toto Lozano**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim:** Datu Dominador Diarog

**Profession:** Lumad leader, Bagobo-Giangan tribe

**Date and place of incident:** April 28, 2008 in Sitio Kahusayan, Manuel Guianga, Davao City

**Name of suspect/s:** Barangay Captain Greg Canada of Tamayong, Calinan and Special Civilian Auxiliary Army (SCAA) members under the 73<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion employed by Pastor Apollo Quiboloy

During the night, armed men strafed Diarog's house. He died while his wife and children were wounded. On May 27, 2008, Diarog's wife Emily filed a complaint before the Commission on Human Rights Region XI office against the suspects. The suspect Canada is known as an aide of Pastor Quiboloy of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ The Name Above Every Name. Quiboloy came to Sitio Kahusayan in 1997 and started acquiring land for his prayer mountain. The lumads in Sitio Kahusayan have since been fighting for their land and have appealed to officials to help them reclaim their ancestral land.



**Diarog's daughters Jolesa and Jenely trek a path leading to where they used to live, the house where their father was killed four years ago.**



**When Pastor Apollo C. Quiboloy was born on April 25, 1950, his mother said she heard God refer to him as his “son.” The Kingdom of Jesus Christ has a flock of about six million.**



**A dusty road leads to the prayer mountain in Kahusayan, a sprawling property mostly of tall pine trees, iron sheets and barbed wires fencing off Lumads from the ancestral land.**



Nearly three years after the killing of the Bagobo chieftain, most of the villagers have packed up and moved to nearby villages.



**In the “land of harmony,” the Lumads in Kahusayan continue to fight for their right to their land despite continued harassment and threats from the military and other armed groups.**



**“My husband died for his ancestral land so that we can live. If they will take this land away from us, where will we go?” – Emily Diarog**



**Diarog's daughter Jeniemie poses for the camera, showing the bullet wound in her wrist.**



**Danny and his wife Aileen both witnessed the three attempts of paramilitary groups to burn Datu Diarog's farm house weeks before the ambush.**



**“They fired upon our house indiscriminately while we were sleeping that we thought it was rain,” remembers Diarog’s eldest son Danny.**



**About three kilometers away from where they used to live, Emily built a house for her children in Purok 14, away from Diarog's grave, hoping to finally find peace.**



**Medinia, fondly called Ising, is the youngest daughter of Datu Doming Diarog.**



Like Judy, Diarog's nephew, Lumads in Kahusayan have turned down offers to sell their land to an alleged emissary of the "Son of God" Quiboloy.



In Southern Mindanao, 16 Lumads had been killed since 2004, most of whom from the Davao provinces. Diarog's death is the first in his village.



**The main suspect behind the killing of Diarog, Kahusayan village chief Greg Canada, is depicted in a campaign poster for the barangay elections in October 2010.**



**“Where is justice when below that towering kingdom, the people are hungry, driven away from their lands?” Diarog’s kin asks.**

# WHEN GODS FALL

**IN HIS HEYDAY, VICENTE "VICSYD" VALERA WAS A GOD REVERED BY MANY IN**

the province of Abra. He could do no wrong, his word was law, and he could roam about freely.

These days, the former governor who ruled Abra for nearly two decades is behind bars at Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig City. He could leave only twice a month, each time to attend hearings at the Quezon City Regional Trial Court, escorted by throngs of jail guards and policemen.

Valera is standing trial for the murder of then incumbent Abra congressman Luis "Chito" Bersamin Jr. and his police security escort, Senior Police Officer 1 Adolfo Ortega.

Bersamin was shot in the head at the Mount Carmel Church in New Manila in Quezon City on December 16, 2006. He was waiting to be picked up by his car at the church door, after attending the afternoon wedding of his niece Pia, the daughter of now Supreme Court Justice Lucas Bersamin. Valera was one of the guests.

Fingers immediately pointed at Valera. After all, it was not the first time this happened. Under Valera's watch as Abra governor and congressman, some of his staunchest political enemies were murdered.

Right after the incident and even before any case could be filed, the Bersamin family, as well as majority of Abrenians, was convinced of Valera's guilt. He was branded a *mamamatay tao* (murderer) and became the face of *apal ken agum* (envy and greed).

But Valera said it was unthinkable for him to have had a hand in Bersamin's death. In the counter affidavit he submitted, he said he and Bersamin "grew up together, almost like brothers." Valera also said it was he who "sponsored" Bersamin's appointment as mayor of the capital town of Bangued in 1986, a post that would launch Bersamin's political career.

The Valeras and Bersamins count decades of friendship—political as well as personal. The ancestral homes of both families in Barangay Zone 7 in Bangued are not only adjacent but were once connected by a wooden footbridge. The footbridge was torn down after Bersamin's death.

Days before the wedding, Bersamin was said to have received text messages warning him about his impending death. Family members speculate that his somber expression in the wedding photos showed that the threats had worried and alarmed him.

Despite constant reminders to increase security, Bersamin was lax. Daughter Rosario, who is now a provincial board member, recalls that her father only had two security escorts and would even instruct one of them to stay behind when he had public engagements.

Today, the Bersamin murder is one of few cases of extrajudicial killings (EJKs) being heard at a pace faster than usual, although it is not open to the public because of the involvement of a witness who is a minor.

Compared to other EJK cases filed in court, Bersamin's case is not beset by the usual obstacles. It does not lack witnesses, and the judge and public prosecutors are always in attendance. The Bersamin family—which now has within its ranks a Supreme Court justice, a governor, a provincial board member, a mayor and a barangay captain, among others—can afford to attend hearings and support witnesses.

The seemingly smooth flow of the Valera trial—which sends the message that the rich and the powerful sometimes do fall—gives enough hope that justice, at least in this case, is not a worthless cause.

Yet the arrest and detention of Valera did not end the violence in Abra. On the contrary, Abra's fate seems dimmer by the day.

With Bersamin dead and Valera gone, other political families and individuals now rule Abra and employ violence without flinching.

So savagely violent are the new political players that compared to them, some Abrenians say, Valera looks like a wise and humane leader, indeed almost a saint.

**Written by Artha Kira Paredes**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim:** Luis Bersamin Jr.

**Profession:** Former Abra representative

**Date and place of incident:** December 16, 2006 in New Manila, Quezon City

**Name of suspect:** Former Abra Governor Vicente Valera et.al

Former Abra Rep. Bersamin and his aide were shot at the Mt. Carmel Church in New Manila after attending a wedding. Former Abra Gov. Vicente Valera, his chief security officer Leo Bello and Jerry Turqueza were charged with the murder. The former governor and Bello were allegedly the masterminds while Turqueza was the gunman. The three are also facing frustrated murder charges for shooting and wounding three others in the incident. Similar cases were filed against four other suspects implicated in the crime.



**Scene of the crime: One of Abra's most powerful men was gunned down right after attending a wedding at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Quezon City.**



**Former Abra Rep. Luis Bersamin Jr. was shot dead at the entrance to Mount Carmel Church where he was waiting to be fetched by his Ford SUV.**



**Daughters Rosario (center) and Anne (right) Bersamin regularly attend court hearings at Branch 84 of the Regional Trial Court in Quezon City.**



**Lawyer Cornelio Aldon briefs the witness, a minor at the time of the killing, moments before the start of the hearing on February 23, 2011.**



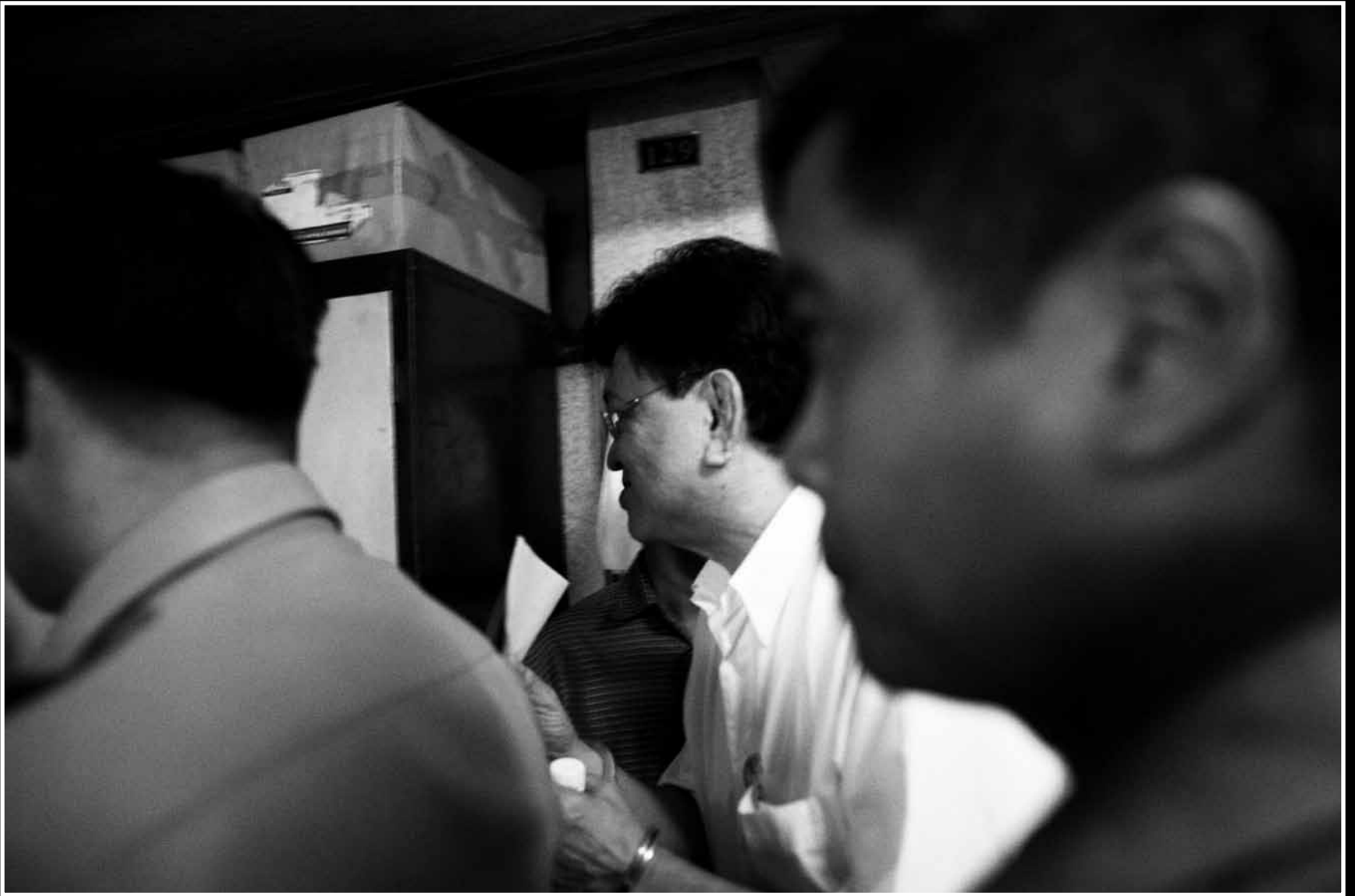
The trial has moved at unusual speed especially after a witness, a minor at the time, came forward, prompting the transfer of the case to a family court.



**The scions of the north, the Bersamins still rule Abra politics to this day with several members of the clan elected into office.**



**Suspect turned state witness Rufino Panday, then a security guard in Taguig, was among the three men who allegedly planned the assassination of Bersamin. They were supposedly paid P5 million.**



**Former Abra governor Vicente Valera exits the courtroom in handcuffs, wearing a clean and perfectly ironed yellow polo shirt.**



Unlike ordinary criminals, former governor Valera does not have to sit and wait in the prisoners holding area before and after each hearing.

# A SLIVER OF HOPE

## **WISPS OF SMOKE CURLED UP FROM THE TIP OF MAJESTIC MAYON VOLCANO'S**

perfect cone, visible from an old concrete house in barangay Malobago in the town of Daraga in Albay. The occupants of the house were, however, oblivious to the sight of the Bicol Region's most famous landmark.

The house is bare except for some clothes belonging to Ronaldo Madara and his wife, as well as framed paintings left by the Sta. Rosa family, the former occupants who had moved to a relocation site after the village was ravaged by typhoon "Reming" in November 2006.

The Madaras stay in Malobago only on weekends to tend to their small farm; they too now live at the relocation site. Ronaldo is tense and wary of strangers, but manages to eventually relax to retell the harrowing story that happened on August 3, 2006.

"It was really dreadful," he began.

His family lived a stone's throw away at the time and was celebrating his wife's birthday when they heard screams, cries and a commotion from the house where his sister Sonia Sta. Rosa and her family lived.

"By the time we reached her house all that were left were my sister and her children. Her husband was gone, and so were the unidentified persons who ransacked their house," he said.

Sonia and the children were huddled in a corner and still in shock, blood splattered on the wall of the couple's bedroom, indicating a struggle. "Everything happened so fast. We did not know where they took him as the surroundings were so dark," Ronaldo said.

But even before they could make sense of anything, shots rang out.

With only cigarette lighters and a flashlight, Ronaldo, his friends and some neighbors fanned out toward the brook at the back of the house where they thought the shots came from. The women stayed to comfort the family.

Minutes later, they found Sonia's husband Isaias, a Methodist pastor, sprawled

near the bank with gunshot wounds, lifeless. Just a few feet away, another man also lay dead, a gun in his hand. Soon, responding policemen swarmed the area and after some perfunctory questioning, took the cadavers with them.

Ronaldo accompanied his sister to the Daraga Municipal Police Office about five kilometers away where she was asked by the police to shed light on the incident.

Since then, terror had enveloped their community, as unidentified armed men would suddenly show up near their houses. They were hounded by fear that those who killed Sta. Rosa would return anytime and harm them again.

For five years, the killing of Isaias Sta. Rosa had languished unresolved in the files of the Daraga police, like many other cases of extrajudicial killings. Called the "pastor of the poor," Sta. Rosa was a member of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas-Albay and headed the Farmers Assistance Management for Rural Management, Education and Rehabilitation Inc.

After *VERA Files* revisited the case, the Philippine National Police Criminal Investigation and Detection Group and the human rights group Karapatan said they would welcome a reopening of the investigation.

"We all have a common goal: Get justice done for Pastor Sta. Rosa," Superintendent Eduardo Kempis, CIDG deputy regional director, said at a meeting with human rights lawyers Burt Rayco and Dona Escio and Karapatan regional coordinator Agnes Tacres.

They all agreed that lapses had been committed in the investigation and that they would enlist the help of the National Bureau of Investigation and the Commission on Human Rights to compel the military to cooperate in the renewed investigation.

Rayco, however, views the turn of events with guarded optimism. "There is yet no strong political will manifested by the new administration to get to the bottom of extrajudicial killings," he said.

Back in Malobago, Ronaldo Madara was cold to the idea of reviving the case. After all, two soldiers from the Philippine Army had been charged with killing Sta. Rosa, but the case against them was dismissed.

"We are really afraid. We are trying so hard to put that incident behind us now," he admitted, adding that they could not afford to go through the experience again.

"Please tell them not to harm our family again. Please?"

**Written by Bobby Labalan**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim:** Isaias Sta. Rosa

**Profession:** Pastor, United Methodist; Member, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas

**Date and place of incident:** August 3, 2006 in Daraga, Albay

**Name of suspect/s:** Maj. Ernest Marc Rosal and Capt. Arnaldo Manjares of the 9th Military Intelligence Battalion

At 7:30 p.m., 10 hooded men in fatigue and combat boots barged into the home of Sta. Rosa where he was hogtied and beaten up. He was dragged to a nearby creek where he was shot six times. Sta. Rosa was found along with the body of a hooded man who was later identified as Cpl. Lordger Pastrana, a member of the 9th Military Intelligence Battalion. A .45-caliber pistol, cell phone, driver's license and a "mission order" were recovered from Pastrana's body.



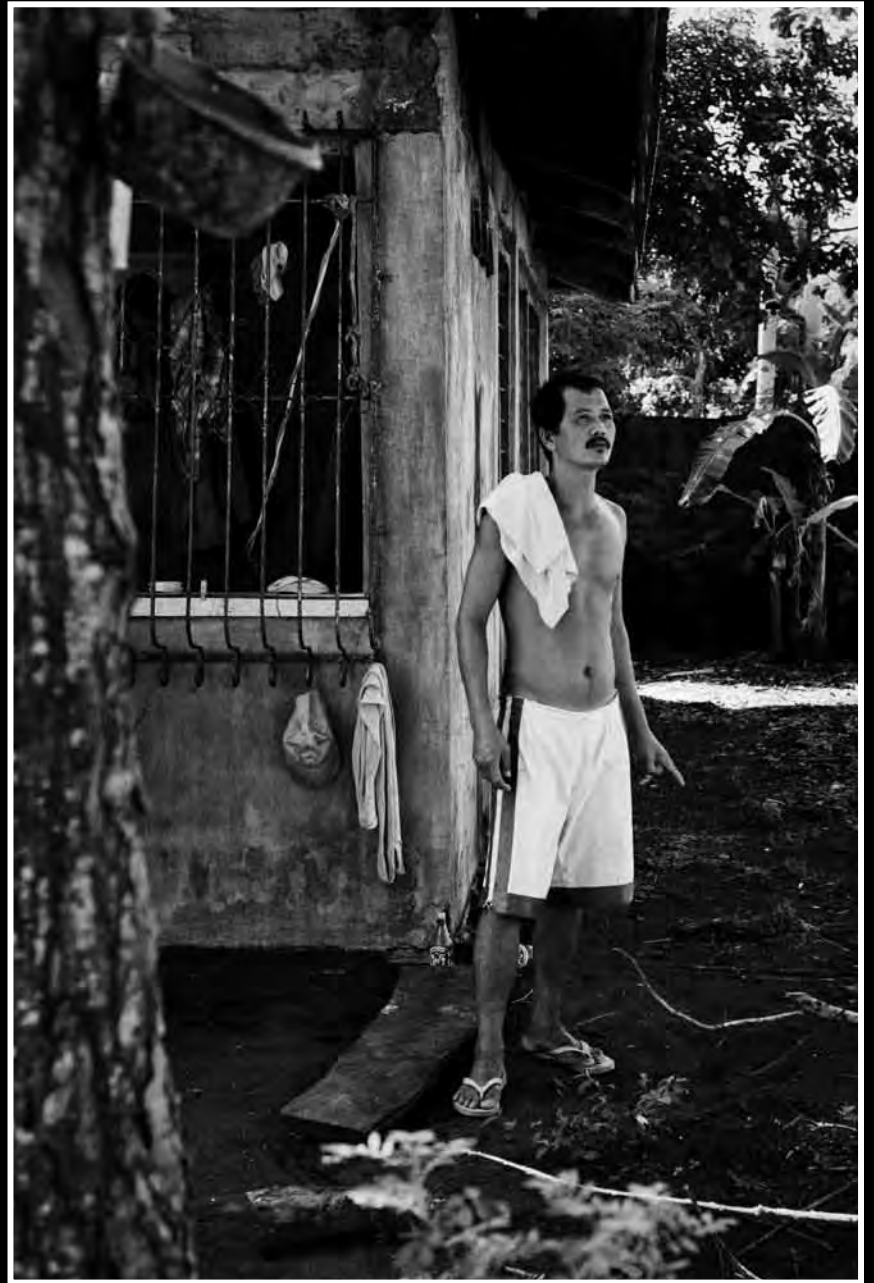
**Further down the ridge, near the brook, was where Pastor Isaias Sta. Rosa's body was found, next to that of Army Cpl. Lordger Pastrana of the 19th Infantry Battalion.**



**At the time of Sta. Rosa's death, Bicol had 117 victims of extrajudicial killings, most of whom were members of leftist organizations.**



**In the early evening of August 3, 2006, 10 hooded men in fatigues and combat boots barged into the Sta. Rosa home, beat up the pastor, dragged him to the brook behind the house, and shot him six times.**



**Ronaldo Madara and his wife were the first ones to rush to the Sta. Rosa house, where they heard screams of distress and calls for help.**



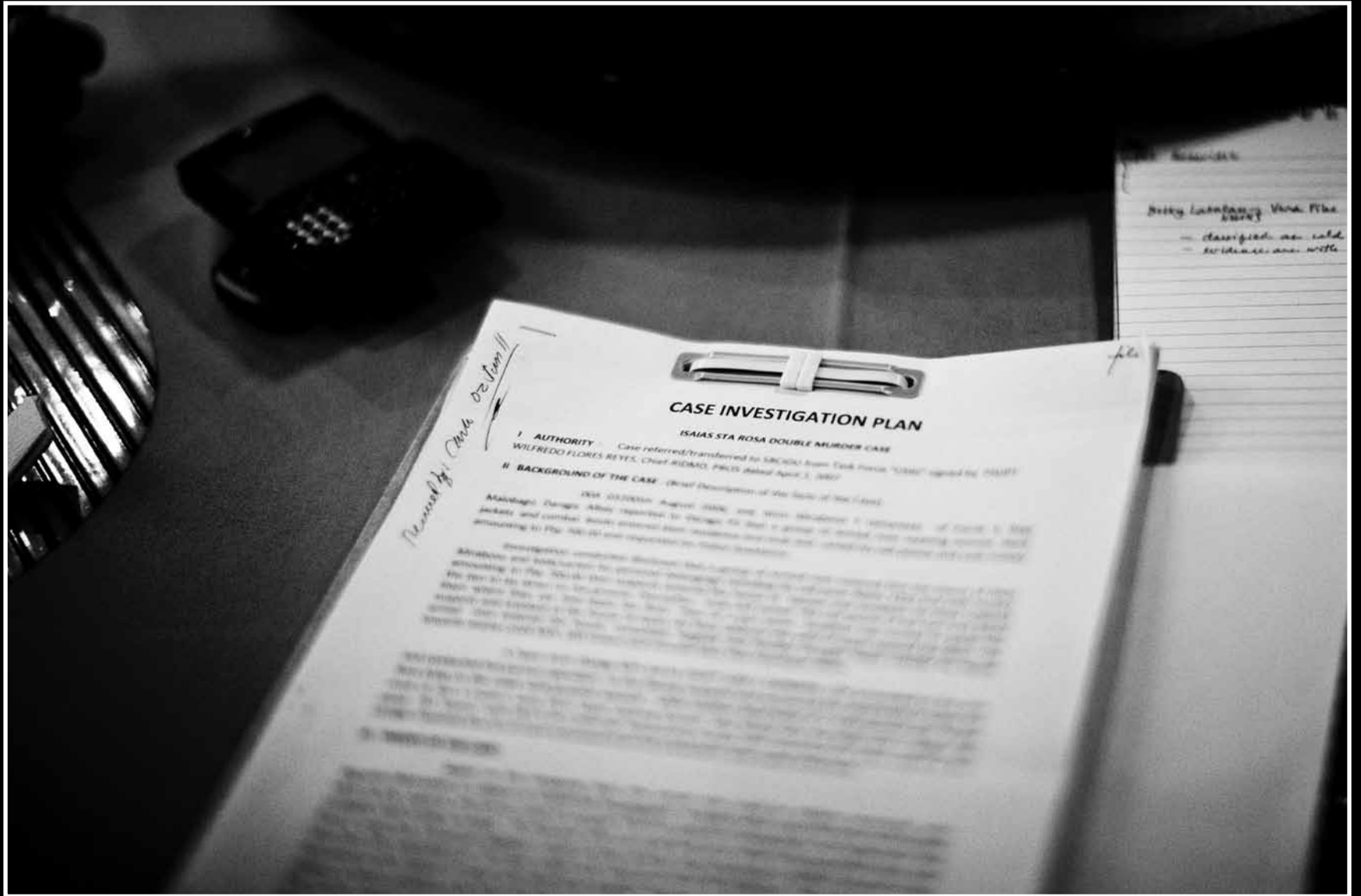
**A framed diploma, a prayer and a painting belonging to the Sta. Rosa family still hang on the walls of the house they used to live in.**



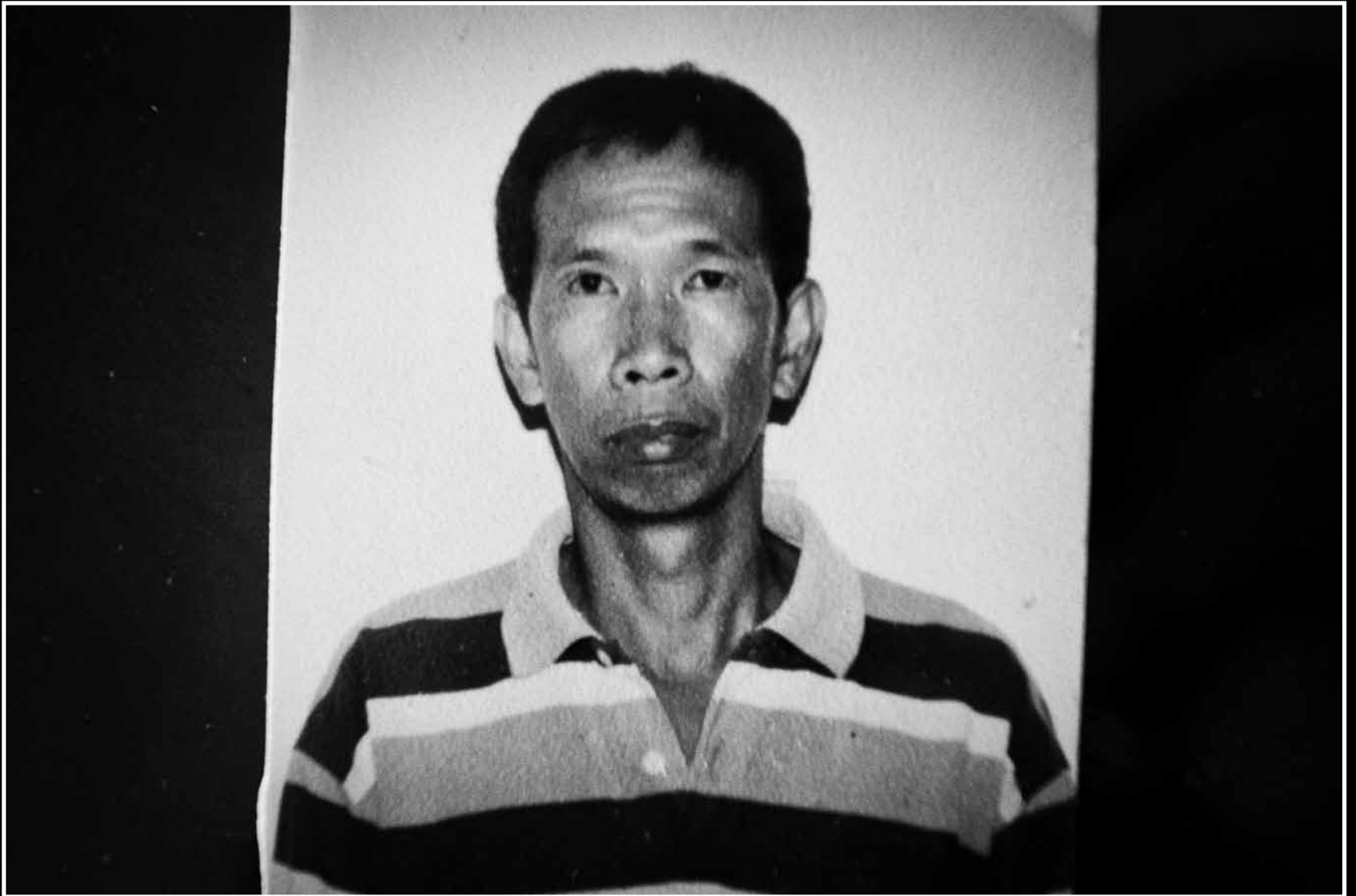
**CIDG deputy regional director Supt. Eduardo Kempis and Burt Rayco of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers discuss the possible reopening of the Sta. Rosa case.**



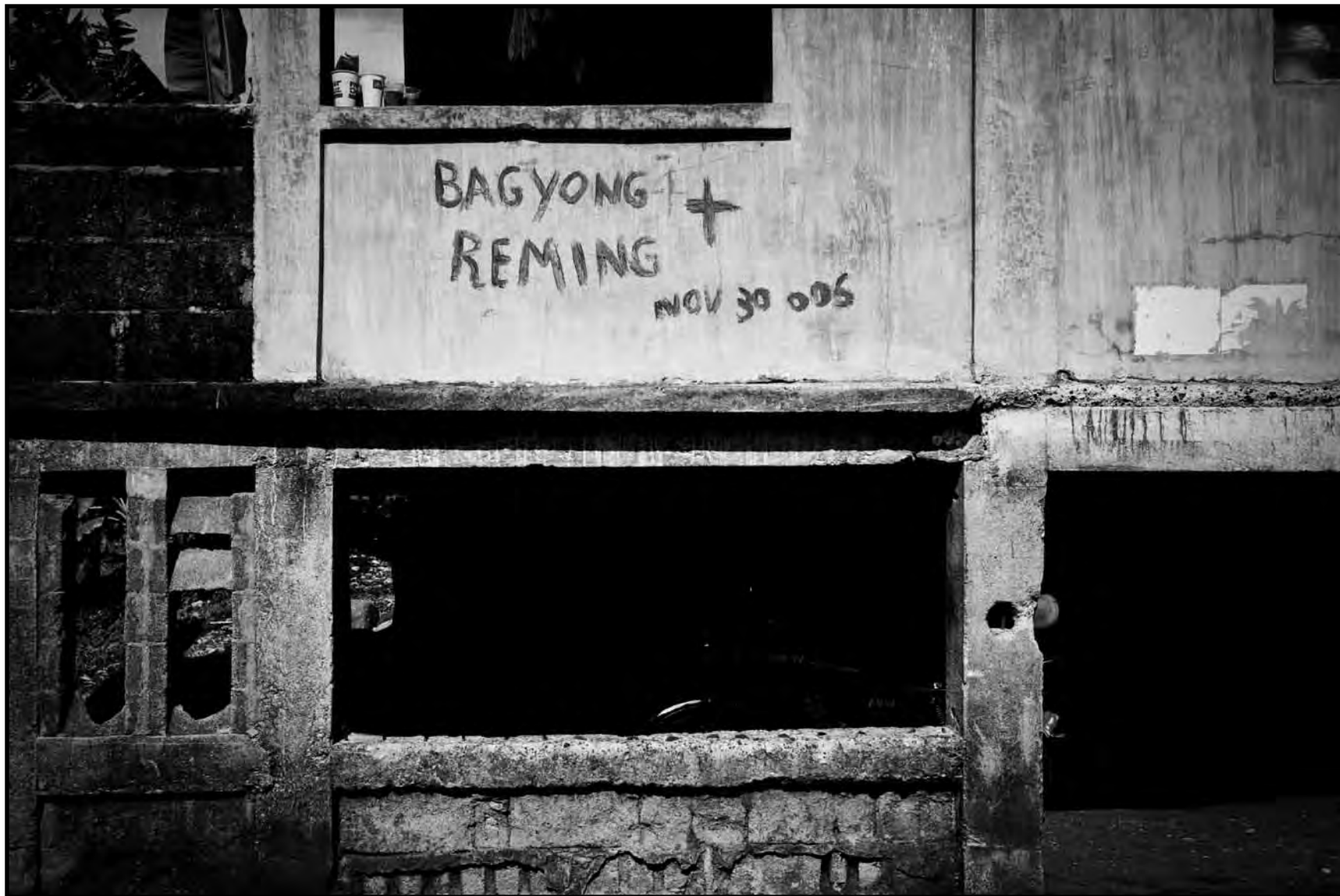
**Karapatan Regional Coordinator Maria Agnes Tacres shows VERA Files documents on the Sta. Rosa case.**



For years, Sta. Rosa's case has been archived for lack of a witness and an interested party to reopen the case.



Known as a "pastor of the poor," Sta. Rosa, 47, was ministering to both the spiritual and economic needs of people in Daraga.



**Supertyphoon Reming left many Albay villagers homeless in 2006, including Sta. Rosa's wife and four children who left their home in Barangay Malobago.**



**Aside from being a member of the Albay chapter of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (Philippine Farmers' Movement), Isaias Sta. Rosa was a Methodist pastor. He was the 21st church worker to fall victim to extrajudicial killings under the term of former president Gloria Arroyo.**

# 'KASIYANA'

## **"WHO KILLED PAPA AND WHY?"**

The question has been hanging in the air in search of an answer for years, troubling the thoughts and dreams of the two daughters of slain activist Jose "Pepe" Manegdeg.

One night, 15-year-old Geraldine Nikole, the older daughter, woke up crying because she had dreamt of him, and all her mother could do was hug her, caress her hair and wipe away her tears.

"They still dream of him, and they still ask the same question," their mother said.

The mother is Florence "Dom-an" Macagne Manegdeg, a petite 39-year-old from Sagada in Mountain Province. She stands less than five feet tall with a slender body and a demeanor that bears no trace of the hardship she is going through as a mother and a widow.

For six years, she has been dealing with the violent death of her husband. And for her, this means seeking justice while going through the process of peace and healing.

She tries to show no weakness whenever her children ask the question, remaining the sanctuary of comfort she has always been to them.

"There are times I also feel depressed and tired, but I have to go on. I can never stop seeking for justice for Pepe," said Dom-an over a cup of coffee one rainy afternoon in her home in scenic Sagada. "There were even times when people I know said that I already lost my mind, and that hurt my feelings. But I learned to ignore them afterwards because I thought of my children, I had to be strong for them."

The death of Pepe Manegdeg in 2005 was recorded as a case of extrajudicial killing at the time that Oplan Bantay Laya, a counter-insurgency program of then president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, became the flagship of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Pepe was a church worker, a coordinator for the Rural Missionaries program. A

softspoken person, Pepe died a brutal death: His body bore 22 gunshot wounds. The main suspect was an Army captain from the 50th Infantry Battalion named Joel Castro, who was promoted to major after the prosecutor dismissed the charges against him. The lone witness had retracted his statement.

“After the case was dismissed, I felt that there was no way that I should ever stop. Pepe was dead, but it should never be about a dead case of a dead person. It should be about keeping this case always alive. Pepe was part of an organization, and the bullets came from the military,” Dom-an said in an earlier interview.

She is still hoping that another witness and more pieces of evidence will emerge. She has lawyer friends, particularly human rights lawyers, who are providing her legal advice and moral support. She is talking to government officials, the military and human rights advocates to help her probe more. She joins peace gatherings to share her story, the most recent being a visit to the Department of Justice to ask that her husband’s case be reopened.

Pepe’s killing is just one of the statistics that illustrate human rights violations in the country. But Dom-an will not let him be just another name or number in an already long list of victims.

In the village called Nadatngan in Sagada, the Manegdegs built a house Dom-an has called “Kasiyana.”

A powerful Kankanaey word, Kasiyana is a belief that gives hope and inspires peace and love for a person who went through difficulties in life, said Dom-an.

Dom-an and Pepe started the house long ago, and she continued building it as a product of love. It is now a sanctuary for the wounded; it welcomes those who want to be healed.

Music is part of Dom-an’s healing process. She gravitates toward serenity whenever she plays the bamboo flute. Her music floats with the morning breeze in the whole village of Nadatngan. **Written by Desiree Caluza**

# FACT SHEET

**Name of victim:** Jose "Pepe" Manegdeg

**Profession:** Coordinator, Rural Missionaries in the Philippines-Cordillera

**Date and place of incident:** November 28, 2005 in Barangay Apatot, San Esteban, Ilocos Sur

**Name of suspect:** Capt. Joel Castro of the Army's 50th Infantry Battalion

Dom-an Manegdeg, 38, then an overseas Filipino worker in Hong Kong, was on her way home to the Philippines aboard a plane. Her husband, Jose "Pepe" Manegdeg, was supposed to fetch her at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport at 5 a.m. on Nov. 29. He was instead shot 10 p.m. of November 28 while waiting for a bus ride along a national highway in Barangay Apatot. His body bore 22 gunshot wounds. Manegdeg has told—and retold her story—in various arenas in the last six years. She has not given up the fight for justice for the senseless killing of her husband.



A roadside marker in memory of Jose "Pepe" Manegdeg marks the spot in San Esteban, Ilocos Sur where he ended up dead after he was shot by a group of unidentified men as he was waiting for a bus ride to Manila to fetch his wife.



**Now San Esteban chief of police, Supt. Marcelo Soliva Martinez was the first investigator of the Manegdeg case in 2005. The case against the main suspect Capt. Joel Castro of the 50th Infantry Battalion would later be dismissed for lack of a witness.**



**Both the National Bureau of Investigation and the Philippine National Police have promised to reopen investigations into the death of Manegdeg.**



Friends described Pepe, then 37, as a gentle person and a loving husband and father.



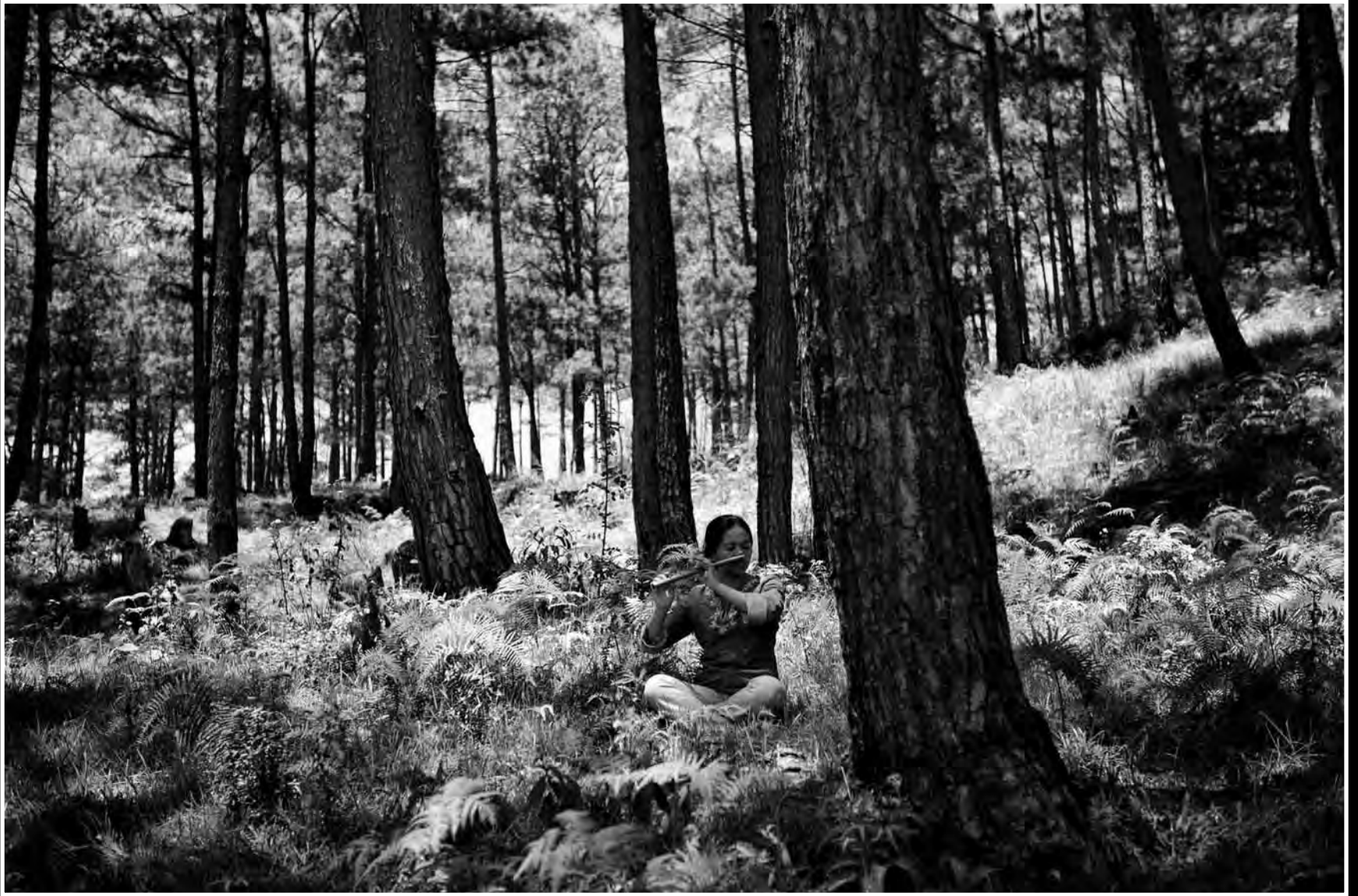
**“He was excited to become a father because he missed his father so much,” said his widow Dom-an. When Pepe was very young, his father was also slain by a gunman in what was considered a political killing in Ilocos.**



**In her quest for justice, Dom-an chose to dedicate her life to peace and healing for her family and for others who like her have suffered from pain and violence.**



**“I have gone through so much violence in my life, and I have already reached the tipping point and I cannot be the person who should go on life agonizing.”**



**Through her music, Doman-an speaks from her soul about peace.**



**Dom-an and Pepe Manegdeg started building their sanctuary in Sagada with 10 lemon trees. “We were talking about starting a new life....”**

**In Kasiyana, one can  
seek healing and learn  
through organic farming,  
art and music workshops,  
meditation, tai chi and  
yoga.**







**Dom-an remains hopeful that President Benigno Simeon Aquino III would “give utmost attention” to Pepe’s case, since both Pepe and the president lost their fathers to political killings in the 1980s.**



**After Pepe's passing, Dom-an found courage to continue with what she and Pepe had started. "I am glad that there are people who are willing to help me in this journey."**





# SILENCED

## EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS AND TORTURE IN THE PHILIPPINES

THE two young daughters of a women's rights advocate try to live normal lives even as they attend the trial of their mother's murder in Tagbilaran City almost every month. A Lumad family in Davao continues to bereave the death of their patriarch while seeking ways to hold on to their ancestral land. A wife in North Cotabato wrestles with the fact that her husband is a bombing suspect and a victim of torture.

These are only three of the 14 photo essays featured in *Silenced: Extrajudicial Killings and Torture in the Philippines*. Fourteen stories of lives changed because of extrajudicial killings and torture. Fourteen stories that have been forgotten or have fallen out of media attention.

VERA Files revisited these cases through the Human Rights Case Watch project. Community journalists who partnered with VERA Files wrote the stories while I took the photos: of torture victims inside a prison camp, a mother sitting in the exact spot where her son was shot, a home long abandoned by terrified kin, a bullet-ridden car where a judge met his untimely death.

We returned to the field with the magnificent Mayon Volcano in the background where a Methodist pastor was killed. In Davao, while traveling the road to a creek where the body of a schoolteacher was dumped, we were stopped and questioned by heavily armed policemen looking for drug dealers. A police escort accompanied us when we visited the families of the victims of a serial killer in Pampanga.

The victims or their families bared to us their anguish and anger, and their dread, desolation and despair. But hope that justice would come one day also shone through the faces of some of them. The collection of photo essays in *Silenced: Extrajudicial Killings and Torture in the Philippines* is a humble attempt to document this rich range of experiences and emotions.—**MARIO IGNACIO IV**



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