

13 October 2009

Atty. Leila M. De Lima
Chairperson
Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines

Dear Hon. Commissioner De Lima,

Gentle breeze ...

My name is Dom-an, widow of Jose "Pepe" Rivalal Mangedeg III. Pepe, who was coordinator of Rural Missionary of the Philippines in Ilocos and Cordillera area was a victim of extrajudicial killing in San Esteban, Ilocos Sur last November 28, 2005.

It is almost four years now since our life had been overturned. We patiently wait for truth as we journey on in peace and seek healing to restore harmony in our lives.

We are ever grateful for all the concerting efforts to stop the killings and desecration of human lives and families. May I humbly seek the assistance of your good office to bring light to my following questions:

1. Why was the lead witness to the incident of the killing of my husband made to retract his statements more than a year after he signed them?

I find it strange that the witness' statement of retraction was notarized by the lawyer of the accused. When I had chance to meet the witness together with the team of the CHR Region I, I sensed a deep sadness when he said before we parted, "I wish I was able to help your husband." I understand his hesitation in being involved further with the case.

2. Why is the photo of Capt Joel Castro among the photo gallery of the police while he was in active service in the Philippine Army, Armed Forces of the Philippines?
3. What did Capt Joel Castro do on the days he was pulled out of his mother AFP unit in Isabel to the national headquarters in Fort Bonifacio "in connection to his schooling" on the same period my husband was assassinated?

In media report, military statements have denied the existence of Joel Castro who is now reportedly promoted.

4. What does the document released by the AFP-Northern Luzon "The Truth Behind the Extrajudicial Killings" pertaining to the case of my husband and another victim sheriff of department agrarian reform – abra mean?

May I beg your office to help me seek enlightenment from the Armed Forces of the Philippines on such report.

5. What does the classification "conflict between the AFP – NPA CPP" mean in the vouchers I signed with the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace Panels when I received humanitarian assistance as I sought help for the educational needs of my children while we fled from Baguio City for safety?
6. Why and who sent dangerously suspicious masked men on motorcycles several times to our place of solace while I was writing appeals for truth on the killing of my husband?

For safety, I had to flee my home together with my children who subsequently left their school. Since then, we never felt secure even as we endeavored to move to restore sanity into our lives.

7. Who ordered a platoon of soldiers in full battle gear to be at the burial site of my husband? Who spread the disinformation that my husband was a member of the New People's Army and spread information that his siblings and his wife will all be killed?
8. Was my husband so marked for death that we were not given one more day for a chance to reunite as I would arrive the following day from Hongkong as an Overseas Filipino Worker?
9. "Is there a chance for peace and justice in our land?" Why did they kill him? Don't they have children? my children's questions deserve answers...

Today, we are separated even as we long to be together... as I endeavor to find and create spaces for safety, for healing, for growth.

10. What mechanisms of restorative justice could we avail from the government to meet our efforts as we free ourselves from victimhood and keep ourselves safe?

Our economic poverty and the pervading atmosphere of impunity and terror constrains us from availing of judicial procedures and asserting our basic rights to security and participation in civilian spaces.

The sorrow and misery that we experience is more than what we could handle. It is with humility that we appeal to humane, divine and cosmic courts for truth, for peace, for healing. It is with clarity that we invoke our sacred right to healing, peace and harmony. It is with peace in our hearts and silence in our mind that we invoke Kasiyana... , our Kankana-ey ancestors cultural heritage of knowing that our wounds will be healed in due time... as we seek to understand, move on with hope and undertake humane loving action towards growth and liberty. We also hold on to the edict of Lawa-Inayan (Do no harm).

It is my prayer then that Capt Joel Castro be allowed a proper forum and venue to prove his innocence of the act of desecrating the life and body of Pepe. Likewise, the respective AFP chain of command to explain why they should not be held accountable for the gruesome murder of a civilian in their counter-insurgency war theater.

As Typhoon Pepeng passed and lingered over Northern Luzon, I was reminded by the passion of Pepe and some of his colleagues I got to know who were also mercilessly killed and some continue to be threatened. They were among the few effective leaders and facilitators for disaster relief and rehab as well as disaster prevention who shared their lives with integrity and selfless compassion with their family and people of all walks of life.

Thank you very much. Blessings of love and light as we continue to cooperate in building a humane world abiding with humanitarian rule of law and order in our fragile environment.

Sincerely,

Florence Macagne-Manegdeg
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