

# Nine activists murdered by police in Bloody Sunday raids in the Philippines

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Police in the Philippines executed nine unarmed activists, whom they accused of being “Communist terrorists,” in a series of pre-dawn raids conducted on Sunday morning. The police killings, which are now being referred to in the press as “bloody Sunday,” took place two days after President Rodrigo Duterte delivered a speech in which he instructed the military and police to “kill all communists and don’t mind human rights.”

The murdered activists were all members of legal organizations in the Southern Tagalog region of Luzon. They were community organizers, union leaders, and human rights activists. The majority were killed in their own homes.

The details of what happened are still emerging. The broad outline, however, is clear, and it is horrifying.

Manny Asuncion was an organizer for Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN, New Nationalist Alliance). A spokesperson for Anakbayan Southern Tagalog, a youth organization tied to BAYAN, recounted that about 30 police barged into his home at 5.30 in the morning. They ordered his wife and associate to leave.

Asuncion’s wife reported that she heard about 10 shots and then saw his body “being dragged down the stairs. There was not even a stretcher.” Photos of the bloody trail left by Asuncion’s corpse featured prominently in the press. Six bullets were recovered from his body, three entered from the front and three from the back.

A separate raid killed Anna Marie Evangelista and Ariel Evangelista, a couple who organized the fishing communities around Nasugbu, Batangas. Their ten-year-old son was later found by neighbors hiding under a bed in the house.

The police claim that they were operating on informant tips, that the accused were “communist terrorists,” and that the warrants with which they had been issued were to search for illegal firearms and grenades.

The raids killed nine and arrested only six. All of those killed were alleged by the police to have resisted arrest, “nanlaban,” a phrase used by the Philippine National Police to justify its campaign of mass murder against the poor over the past four years in the name of a “war on drugs.”

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque was compelled to admit that none of the activists killed were carrying guns.

Under the rule of terror now exercised by Duterte, allegations of unarmed resistance are enough of a pretext to warrant summary execution by the police.

The Duterte administration’s “war on drugs” has brought the murderous might of the state to bear on the poorest and most vulnerable layers of Philippine society. The death toll from this campaign waged by the police, military, and paramilitary organizations is now more than 30,000 people killed in just over four years. Duterte is attempting to implement an apparatus of authoritarian rule through a genocidal campaign against the poor.

Over the past year the crisis of world capitalism under conditions of global pandemic has sharpened the social crisis in the Philippines to the breaking point. Working Filipinos are suffering under the worst conditions of malnutrition and poverty since the brutal period of the Japanese occupation in 1945.

Looking to prevent organized unrest, Duterte has used anti-Communism to reorient the war on drugs to target political dissent. Activists and organizers have been killed by police in raids and arrested on trumped-up charges. The only thing that distinguishes “Bloody Sunday” from events of the past year is that the nine people were executed simultaneously. If the events had been spread out over a week and a half they likely would not have made the front page of the national news.

With the assistance of a super-majority in the Philippine legislature, Duterte secured the passage of the draconian Anti-Terror Law in July last year. The new law authorizes warrantless wiretapping, surveillance, and arrests for up to 24 days of anyone deemed by a presidential commission to be a terrorist. The law is currently being reviewed by the Supreme Court.

The apparatus of repression is organized through the newly created National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). The NTF-ELCAC, funded with a staggering 20 billion Philippine pesos (\$US415 million), brings together a panel of government, military and police forces for an organized violent campaign against political dissent, which it labels “Communist.”

The trigger for the simultaneous executions of Sunday morning was a speech delivered by Duterte on Friday in the

city of Cagayan de Oro. Speaking to a meeting of the NTF-ELCAC, he told the military and police, “If there’s an encounter and you see them armed, kill! Kill them! Don’t mind human rights! I will be the one to go to prison, I don’t have any qualms.” He continued, “make sure you really kill them, and finish them off if they are alive.”

Within less than 48 hours, the police had followed his instructions to the letter.

It is not an accident that the raids were conducted in the Southern Tagalog region, which is known as Calabarzon. Calabarzon is under the jurisdiction of Lt. Gen Antonio Parlade Jr. who heads the AFP Southern Luzon Command. Parlade speaks as a deranged anti-Communist, and is at the center of the NTF-ELCAC. He has denounced anyone with a dissenting political opinion, including journalists and beauty queens, as “Communists.”

In late January Parlade publicly threatened opponents of the Anti-Terror Law on Facebook, writing: “The Day of Judgment is upon you... Very soon, blood debts will be settled.”

Phil Robertson, deputy Asian director at Human Rights Watch, issued a statement declaring, “The fundamental problem is this campaign no longer makes any distinction between armed rebels and non-combatant activists, labor leaders and rights defenders.”

Vice President Leni Robredo, head of the minority bourgeois opposition to Duterte, declared, “There is no other way to describe this: It was a massacre.... We strongly condemn the killings in Calabarzon, in the same way we condemn the killings of so many innocent people under this administration.” She termed the Duterte administration a “murderous regime.”

The statement was a marked escalation in the rhetoric of the vice president, who has generally been fairly reserved in her criticisms, and indicates the advanced state of the crisis of elite rule in the country.

Political responsibility for the endangered lives of activists and grassroots organizers rests with the leadership of the Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Jose Maria Sison, founder and ideological leader of the party, led the CPP and the various organizations that follow its political line to support and enthusiastically endorse the rise of Duterte to the presidency in 2016.

Relations between Duterte and the CPP soured in 2017 as a result of the intervention of the Philippine military, which threatened to carry out a coup d’état should the ties with the CPP persist. When it became apparent that it was no longer possible to cultivate profitable relations with Duterte, Sison and the CPP leadership began denouncing him as “a fascist.”

By early 2020 Sison was reaching out to what he termed “pro-US and patriotic” sections of the military leadership to carry out a coup, withdrawing support from Duterte and installing Robredo as president. The party is looking to ally with a rival faction of the elite.

There is no section of the ruling class that has any interest in

defending democracy. Confronted with the crisis of capitalism and the growing threat of mass unrest, they are all turning to authoritarian forms of rule.

The faction around Robredo, which is organized in the Liberal Party and with whom the CPP is cultivating ties, are opposed to Duterte as a means of reorienting Philippine foreign policy away from China and back towards Washington. They are not a democratic force.

It was in fact the Liberal Party, which in the elections of 2010 and 2013 under then President Benigno Aquino III, transformed Duterte into a national political figure when he was a member of their party.

Far from defending democratic rights, the CPP welcomes the repression.

On February 28, the week before the events of Bloody Sunday, Sison delivered an online lecture to Anakbayan in which he told his audience of young activists, “The best thing that can happen for the revolution is for Duterte to impose fascist dictatorship on the people. He’ll be finished in one or two years.”

The Stalinist Communist Party depicts state repression as the mechanism for the building of the armed struggle. The armed struggle in turn is the party’s leverage in negotiating ties with the bourgeoisie.

In response to the Bloody Sunday massacre, CPP chief information officer, Marco Valbuena, published a statement that “the targets of Duterte’s state terrorism can be absorbed by NPA units or provided safe haven within the NPA’s guerrilla base areas.”

Rather than organizing the working class for the defense of democracy in the fight for socialism, the CPP is attempting to channel all political dissent into the countryside, while the leadership arranges new ties with a section of the ruling class.

The preparations for dictatorial rule in the Philippines are far advanced. The mass murder of the poor and suppression of political dissent are being codified into the laws of the country. None of this will stop simply by replacing Duterte with Robredo or another representative of the elite. It is driven not by the personal brutality of the president, but by the crisis of global capitalism.

The only way that workers, peasants and the poor can defend themselves against dictatorship and fascism is through their own independent fight for socialism. The critical first step to be made is a complete break with the Stalinist nationalism of Sison and the CPP which made possible the rise of Duterte and now welcomes the possibility of dictatorship.



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