

# Philippine Justice Department files charges for just one murder in the Bloody Sunday massacre

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On December 1, eight months after nine activists were gunned down and six arrested in simultaneous police raids on March 7, the Philippine justice department announced that a special investigating team had recommended the filing of murder charges against 17 police officers for one of the killings, that of labour leader Emmanuel Asuncion.

The horrifying events became known as “Bloody Sunday.” The killing of Asuncion was part of a crackdown on legal political and activist organizations staged by the police just two days after President Rodrigo Duterte delivered a speech in the city of Cagayan de Oro in a meeting of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELAC).

Speaking of “communist terrorists” to an audience of military and police officials, Duterte declared, “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.”

Asuncion was gunned down in his office in Dasmariñas City in the province of Cavite. Police separated him from his wife, who they sent to another room, and then shot him repeatedly. According to the Onenews.ph website, Asuncion was shot three times in the front and three times more in the back.

The eight other activists were roused from their beds in the early morning, separated from their families and killed. Ariel and Anna Marie Evangelista were killed outside their bamboo hut in Batangas province while their 10-year-old son hid under his bed. Both were leaders of an environmental organization, composed largely of poor fishermen in their community, opposing mining, land-grabbing and climate change.

Melvin Dasigao, Marklee Bacasno, Abner and Edward

Esto were leaders and members of an urban poor organization fighting for decent housing in Kasiglahan, Rizal province. They were gunned down in their homes as their families were herded outside into the cold dawn. Bascano’s killing was particularly merciless. He was shot seven times.

Their urban poor organization, San Isidro Kasiglahan, Kapatiran at Damayan para sa Kabuhayan, Katarungan at Kapayapaan (SIKKAD-K3), had previously been labelled a communist front group by the military. According to the human rights organization, Karapatan, the four slain activists were publicly portrayed by the government as members or former members of the New People’s Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Puroy dela Cruz and his cousin Randy dela Cruz, farmers and members of the Dumagat indigenous group in Rizal Province, suffered similar horrendous fates. They were shot repeatedly as the police held their families outside their homes.

Out of all of these horrifying crimes, murder charges have only been filed in one. Even that case is likely to be dragged out interminably. Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra told the press that Philippine judicial procedures dictate that the actual prosecution will depend on the preliminary investigation by the Dasmariñas city prosecutor who has reportedly invited the accused police to file their counter affidavits.

Guevarra also announced that the special investigation teams for the killing of the Evangelista couple, Dasigao, Bacasno, Abner and Edward Esto were still conducting their investigations. The killings of Puroy and Randy dela Cruz were not included, he stated, as he claimed that no connection to any cause-oriented or activist group had been established. The murders of these two farmers did

not fall within the remit of the special investigation teams established under a 2012 order of then President Benigno Aquino to investigate the extrajudicial killing of members of cause-oriented organizations, advocates of political, environmental, agrarian, labor, or similar causes and journalists.

In the wake of the justice department announcement, police officials insisted that the killings were the outcome of legitimate police operations servicing search warrants for loose firearms and explosives. All of the victims they claimed resisted arrest, “nanlaban.” “Nanlaban,” is a semi-official term popularized under the Duterte administration for “fighting back against authorities” and any case in which “nanlaban” is reported is widely understood to be a police rub-out, or extra-judicial execution.

Extrajudicial killings, massacres, illegal detention and torture are the pillars of bourgeois rule in the Philippines. In the decades since the military-backed ouster of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos, only one of the many known torturers and killers of that dictatorial regime and of the administrations that succeeded it has been prosecuted. Two leading torturers and killers, former Police General Panfilo Lacson and former special forces commandant Gregorio Honasan, were made Senators. Lacson is now running for president and Honasan is again running for Senate on a shared slate with Duterte.

The Bloody Sunday massacre demonstrates that the ruling elite will use mass murder to protect its interests in confrontations with the working class who are being driven into struggle by soaring prices, abysmally low wages, and the social weight of the pandemic.

Last year, Philippine congress passed an Anti-Terror Law, which was signed into effect by Duterte. The law grants the government the power to arrest anyone without warrant on the basis of unsubstantiated allegations of terrorism. The Anti-Money Laundering Commission announced that it would freeze the bank accounts of any organization accused of supporting terrorism. The Foreign Affairs Department has requested that the European Union stop all funding and donations from Europe to any cause-oriented organization labelled by the government as a communist front.

Under the Anti-Terror Law, government allegations of communism are now sufficient evidence to shut down organizations, freeze their funding, and arrest their membership. If, in the process of arrest, the police claim that the suspects “nanlaban,” the law is sufficient pretext for murder.

The lives of grass-roots activists and of the broader

working class have been gravely endangered. Political responsibility for this peril rests with the leadership of the Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Under the ideological leadership of Jose Maria Sison, the CPP and the numerous organizations that follow its political line, supported Duterte’s bloody rule as mayor of the southern city of Davao, where he oversaw a notorious apparatus of death squads. The CPP endorsed the rise of Duterte to the presidency in 2016 and selected members to serve in his cabinet. Relations with Duterte soured in 2017 as a result of the intervention of the Philippine military, which threatened to carry out a coup d’état should Duterte’s ties with the CPP persist.

Only when all possibility of cultivating profitable relations with Duterte had ended did Sison and the CPP leadership begin denouncing him as “a fascist.”

Following 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.”

In other words, the CPP had no intention of organizing the working class and oppressed masses to defend their democratic rights in a fight for socialism. The party, rather, is attempting to channel and isolate all political dissent into the countryside, while its leaders forge ties with a new section of the ruling class.

Preparations for dictatorial rule in the Philippines are far advanced. The mass murder of workers and the poor and the silencing of political dissent are being codified into the laws of the land. Sison and the CPP have made this possible.



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