

THE PHILIPPINES: A HUMAN RIGHTS SCRAPBOOK

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PREFACE

In the past two years, the Minnesota Lawyers Committee has sent three delegations of lawyers to investigate human rights issues in the Philippines. In February 1987, attorneys Nancy Arnison and Ron Rosenbaum visited the Philippines as part of a study tour led by the Augsburg College Center for Global Education. In July 1988, Minnesota Lawyers Committee Board member Wood R. Foster, Jr. attended an International Lawyers Forum in support of human rights lawyers in the Philippines who had been subjected to grave and continuing human rights violations because of their representation of controversial clients. In March and April 1989, a delegation of 15 Minnesotans spent two weeks in the Philippines on a study tour, again organized by the Augsburg Center for Global Education.

These delegations have gathered substantial information about the complex political and human rights situation in the Philippines since the "People's Power" revolution brought Corazon Aquino to power in February 1986. Contacts with Filipino lawyers, doctors, church workers, mayors, congressmen, and government officials have allowed various members of these delegations a firsthand view of ongoing violations of human rights during the Aquino presidency.

This document is a collection of personal reflections and human rights findings by members of the three Minnesota Lawyers Committee delegations to have visited the Philippines. It does not pretend to be a comprehensive report on the human rights situation in the Philippines but, instead, to present the reader with snapshots of personal experiences that allowed the individual writers to draw their own personal conclusions about the current human rights situation and the prospect the improvement under the current government. Because of the complexity of the political and human rights situation in the Philippines, you will find a significant variety of opinions expressed in the following articles. These opinions belong to the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee.

The Philippines is a study in contrasts: the richness of the land in contrast to the poverty of its people; the kindness and beauty of the Filipino people in contrast to the brutality of human rights violations committed against them. This collection of writings is put together in the hope that more people will become aware of the human rights problems in the Philippines and commit themselves to their solution.

June 1, 1989

MINNESOTA LAWYERS INTERNATIONAL
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

FOREWORD

by Hon. Donald M. Fraser

A study mission from the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee visited the Philippines from March 28 to April 8, 1989. The delegation of 15 spent much of their time in Manila but, for three days, they divided into three groups and visited communities in the provinces of Negros, Mindanao, and Cebu.

The trip was organized by the Augsburg College Center for Global Education. Interviews were conducted with human rights groups, mayors, congressmen, religious leaders, civilian self-defense organizations, victims of human rights violations, and other leading government officials including President Aquino.

I was left with two overall conclusions. The first is that, after 14 years under martial law, the Philippine people have regained basic political rights including a new constitution which strongly emphasizes the protection of human rights, and a functioning, open, multi-party political system, and a vigorous, free press. The second is that rights involving the integrity of the person are being systematically violated by forces operating under the authority of the government. Violations include arbitrary killings, disappearances, and torture. The frequency of serious violations has been increasing as reported by Philippine and international human rights organizations and by the U.S. State Department.

This apparent anomaly of a freely elected government and an increasing number of human rights violations arises from several circumstances:

- (a) The military (and the police which are controlled by the military) operated for 14 years without constraint under martial law and at the end was no longer the professional force it was at the beginning, and continues to frequently operate outside the policies and rules promulgated from the top.
- (b) The judicial system remains anachronistically slow and is often unable to provide timely relief.
- (c) The communist insurgency continues to challenge the government in about 20% of the provinces.
- (d) The effort to replace the Civilian Home Defense Forces, now outlawed under the Constitution because of their role in violating human rights, has not succeeded thus far in effectively curbing the serious rights violations.
- (e) Serious inequities in the social and economic system and widespread poverty along with human rights violations continue to energize "cause oriented" organizations which are too easily and too frequently labeled as communist or communist-leaning, making their members vulnerable to over-zealous military and paramilitary attacks. Of special concern were the killings of human rights lawyers and the lawyers' own perception that they are at risk of death or serious injury.

- (f) The constitutionality mandated Commission on Human Rights appears burdened with bureaucratic inertia and has not been able to effectively police or curb serious rights violations.
- (g) Corruption continues to impede the work of institutions important to the maintenance of the rights of the people.

I believe that the outlook for an improved observance of human rights depends heavily upon the will of the top leadership of the Philippines. That leadership appears committed to curbing violations. That is the fundamental difference between this government and the Marcos government. Beginning with President Aquino and including the leadership of the Justice Department, the Commission on Human Rights, the Defense Department, and the Supreme Court, I sensed a desire to see the protections of the Constitution extended to all citizens of the Philippines and a belief that this would help to curb the insurgency.

I found several encouraging signs. During our visit, Congress was actively considering measures to withdraw the police from military control and to abolish or amend the decree which makes the military sole judge of all violations committed by military personnel. The Supreme Court has ordered courts in several areas to speed up court proceedings.

These changes appear to be essential but not sufficient steps to reverse the trend of increasing violations of human rights. Serious institutional and bureaucratic obstacles combined with pressure to take shortcuts, such as the use of torture, in dealing with the threat of insurgency will make further progress difficult. It is here that the will of the top leadership must be translated into more effective action.

The Aquino administration has been in power for three years. That is a relatively short time given the magnitude of the problems faced by this administration. But forceful action is needed now to bring the growing human rights problem under control.

The new Civilian Armed Forces Geographic Units (CAFGU) which are designed to take over from the now-banned Civilian Home Defense Forces (CHDF) are of special concern. The recruitment and training of these forces appear to be seriously deficient. Control of the CAFGUs continues to pose a major challenge to the military under whose authority they operate. The concept of a home defense force to supplement regular military personnel undoubtedly has merit, but wholly irresponsible actions including arbitrary killings by some of these forces appear to generate widespread fear among civilians caught between the insurgents and these units.

Finally, a word must be said about the communist insurgents operating as the New People's Army (NPA). Although the communist efforts began years before Marcos used then as an excuse to impose martial law, once martial law was imposed the use of force to effect a change could be defended since peaceful political change was not permitted. But continued military action by the NPA to overthrow a government which springs from the free exercise of the ballot by the people of the Philippines is totally unjustified.

The political objectives of the communists, including closing the U.S. military bases, are shared by a number of Philippine citizens. There are structural problems in the Philippine society which will not be easily solved. Adequate land reform, improved labor conditions, and more equity including improved housing and social services are needed. But every democratic nation in the world has faced these challenges, and with active political organization and effective campaigning it is possible to make change through peaceful political processes. To use force to accomplish these objectives constitutes a violation of the fundamental rights of the people.

I believe there is almost no prospect that within the next several decades the NPA will succeed in overthrowing the government. But it can succeed in slowing development aimed at overcoming the widespread poverty so evident in the Philippines. With enough effort it might even succeed in destroying democracy in the Philippines by once again eliciting a new authoritarian regime from the right. In the meantime the killing and coercion which are part of the communists' strategy are indefensible in the face of a democratically elected regime which is seeking to improve the lot of the Philippine people. The efforts of the NPA will serve only to make more difficult the restoration of the full observance of human rights in the Philippines.

These are my observations about human rights in the Philippines today. Following are further observations by members of the study mission.

HUMAN RIGHTS VS. THE APPLICATION OF JUSTICE

by Kenneth E. Tilsen

The chairman of the Free Legal Assistance Group of the Philippines (FLAG), the leading organization of human rights lawyers in the Philippines, was invited to speak at a seminar for military officers. The topic they proposed for him was "Human Rights vs. the Application of Justice."

At first blush, the suggested subject appeared shocking; on reflection, I now believe it was entirely appropriate from the military point of view. Furthermore, it embodied within it a central conflict and contradiction which I observed in our study tour of the Philippines.

Three years after the overthrow of the Marcos government and the installation of a new government under President Aquino, the Philippines remains a deeply divided society. Our trip explored and revealed to me the extent of that division by focusing on the conflicting attitudes of the human rights organizations and the organs of government.

From the government point of view, the essential problem remains the elimination of the armed insurgency.

The army's program to eliminate the insurgency is described as a "three-tiered defense system." It consists essentially of (1) using mobile military forces to clear areas of insurgency; (2) a "holding phase" to neutralize the political machinery of the resistance involving the use of intelligence networks, the local media, etc.; and (3) a consolidation phase involving, like phase 2, armed civilian volunteer organizations designed to "re-establish democracy."

The army and the government view this program as the application of justice. Some supporters of this program describe it as drying up the sea in which the revolutionary fish swim.

While "hamletting" and bombing of villages and areas suspected of being insurgency strongholds do not appear to be part of this program at the present time, other aspects of the program seem much like the counterinsurgency measures used or developed by the United States in Vietnam and Central America. In urban areas, entire communities have been "zoned" or confined, while house-to-house searches are undertaken for urban guerillas. We were told that hooded informers accompanied the forces and pointed out the enemy, who often were killed or kidnapped on the spot. In rural areas, attacks by army units and armed civilian groups have created thousands of internal refugees.

The army described in detail its program for careful selection and training of members of the armed civilian units which it considers essential to its program. Victims of torture, assaults, and kidnapping, their families, and human rights organizations claim otherwise. They describe the program as giving badges and automatic weapons to goons and hoods -- a license to kill and maim at will. Secretary of Defense General Fidel Ramos described to us the care with which the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGU) program has been undertaken and the requirement that members of the CAFGU wear their uniforms and name insignia at all times. The day after our interview with Ramos, the newspapers described the killing and wounding of

persons at roadblocks in Cebu City. A priest and a counselor were killed by two drunken military men at one roadblock and, at another roadblock, a young woman was killed and five wounded when the car in which they were riding was strafed by security forces in civilian clothes. This was particularly chilling. Just the evening before, we were listening to the families of human rights victims and their attorneys on the second floor of a Catholic church in Cebu while thousands gathered for a "solidarity rally" in the hall below. As we left, our host walked us to the street and expressed concern that it was late and the roadblocks would now be up. She wondered how she would get home but rejected our offer to accompany her.

Nowhere were the different points of view more clearly defined than in the fight for representation of the workers at the Atlas Mine in Toledo City, about two hours' drive from Cebu City. The union (PAMA), alleged by many Filipinos to be communist-led, was engaged in a representation election among the 12,500 miners who work this mammoth copper, silver and gold mine. The mine, owned by various multinationals, once represented 28% of the export income of the Philippines. The head of the PAMA local described the killing of its union leaders, strafing of their offices, and other attacks by CAFGU in the weeks leading up to the election. Nine members of the competing union, apparently its executive committee, were members of CAFGU. A congressional committee took testimony and suggested that these nine persons be relieved by the army of their active duty in CAFGU until after the election. The general in charge of the army disagreed and refused the request, stating, "As far as they (CAFGU) are concerned, there is no reason to disqualify them from the organization since they are effective in our counterinsurgency."

But the dispute over the extent of human rights violations and the proper place to lay responsibility is not the core problem. Sr. Mariani Dimaranan, head of the leading human rights monitoring group, Task Force Detainees; Mercy Countrevas, Deputy Secretary General of the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates; Congressman Bonifacio Gillego; and many human rights attorneys suggest a more fundamental problem: They believe the government's program is destined to fail because it can maintain itself only by escalating human rights abuses and other repressive measures. To support their argument, they presented the following facts: Up to 70% of the people in the Philippines live below the poverty line. This poverty in a nation of rich natural resources has its roots in the status of the Philippines first as a colony of Spain and later as a colony of the United States. It has produced a mass landless peasantry. It has given rise to a resistance movement in various forms dating back to at least the Japanese occupation during World War II.

From 1972 to the fall of Marcos in February 1986, the status quo was maintained by a military dictatorship. The birth of Corazon Aquino's new government gave rise to widespread expectations of fundamental change. Human rights advocates like Sr. Dimaranan were appointed to the newly-formed Presidential Commission on Human Rights. Hundreds of attorneys and others from various human rights organizations entered the new government at various levels. The government entered into negotiation with the insurgents. Untold numbers of insurgents returned to the community from exile, fighting in the provinces or the underground.

Now, three years later, Sr. Dimaranan is out of the government. She and her Catholic Church-based organization are called communists by Cardinal Sin. Few of the human rights attorneys or other representatives of peasants and workers remain in government. Negotiations with the insurgency have broken off. Thousands have been arrested for political reasons, mostly through mass arrests affected during saturation drives in slum areas, breaking up of protest actions, and military operations in rural communities.

There is talk, but little evidence, of real land reform. Indeed, Congressman Gillego, who spoke to us, wrote the original proposed land reform law. He now argues that the proposal has

been so gutted that it is a repressive measure adversed to the interest of the farmers and peasants.

The new Philippine Constitution, President Aquino and, indeed, General Ramos proclaim their commitment to human rights and the need to address poverty, land reform, and the resultant widespread social ills of the people. Sincerity issues aside, there is little evidence or perceived hope for progress. Forty-four percent of the national budget is required to pay the interest on the nation's debt. While there is some disagreement, most reports available to us describe the Philippine economy as a basket case with pervasive graft and inefficiency.

In this setting, human rights organizations see themselves as part of a broad-based movement for social change and the government's and army's efforts to wipe out the insurgency as aimed at preserving the status quo.

The human rights organizations view the government's program as a pacification program. They describe it as simply a new form of the United States "Phoenix" program -- a new progression of death squads to assassinate the leaders of the people who work for social change. They point to the murder of six well-known human rights attorneys in one and one-half years - - the most recent killing on March 21st of this year, a few days before our arrival. Others describe the government program as "low intensity conflict." They argue that the infrastructure which the program is designed to destroy is not the infrastructure of the armed insurgency but rather that of citizens working to promote social change. From this point of view, the army's most successful pacification programs are those which are the most destructive of human rights.

There is little doubt that Secretary of Defense General Ramos understands this problem. He described human rights as the army's "Achilles heel." If he meant to indicate that the army's program and the program of the human rights organizations are inevitably in conflict with each other, then I believe he is correct.

One final question: Is there reason to be hopeful? Can the Aquino government make the necessary changes in the direction of social justice? Or is the country inevitably moving toward greater repression?

I have some lasting impressions. The newspaper cartoon asking a child of five: "What do you want?" The answer: "To be alive." The life expectancy at birth is less than five years. Our visit to "Smoky Mountain," where tens of thousands live directly on a massive dump and hundreds of thousands live in adjoining makeshift shacks. Indescribable. Our visit to Kidapawan, where a 16-year-old described the murder of her 6-year-old sister in her arms to a relatively indifferent local director of the Commission on Human Rights.

At a luncheon, I was asked by a table neighbor my impressions of the Philippines. I made an innocuous statement concerning the high expectations of the people and their apparent disappointment. Response: "What people?" Answer: "Those who helped bring down Marcos." Response: "The people had nothing to do with it. We deposed Marcos. The people have no expectations."

I am not hopeful.

U.S. MILITARY BASES IN THE PHILIPPINES: A PERSPECTIVE

by James V. Roth

The United States operates military facilities in the Philippines at Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base. Although perhaps not a human rights issue in the narrow sense, the relationship between the United States and the Philippines regarding these military bases is an important concern to the people in the Philippines. The issue of the bases was raised again and again as we talked with a great variety of people during our recent trip to the Philippines.

Both Clark and Subic Bases were established close to the beginning of this century, during the periods of the Philippine-Spanish War and the Philippine-American War. The original agreement provided the United States with a 99-year lease. The agreement has been renegotiated several times. In 1979, the bases reverted to Philippine "control", purportedly confirming Philippine ownership and sovereignty. The 1979 agreement also provided for a review of the Military Bases Agreement every five years. The current extension of the agreement will expire in 1991. Unless there is a new agreement, it is contemplated that the existing arrangement may be terminated by either side on one year's notice. The United States government and the Philippine government are currently in the process of negotiating a new agreement.

There is some strong opposition among certain groups of people to renewing the agreement. One of the primary arguments against the bases is that the agreement was never truly an arms-length negotiation between two sovereign governments. In fact, the Philippines was a United States possession following the Philippine-United States War when the bases were initially established. Many argue that the military bases now constitute an infringement on the national sovereignty of the Philippine government. Other arguments against renewing the bases agreement are that the land would be more economically useful for other purposes, that the presence of the military bases increases the likelihood of a nuclear attack or nuclear accident, and that numerous social problems such as prostitution and drug abuse are caused by the presence of the bases. Our brief visit to Olonogapo, the site of the Subic Naval Base, confirmed that the base has a negative social impact on the local people with serious drug and prostitution problems tied to its presence.

The arguments in favor of continuation are that the location of the bases continues to be strategically important for defense purposes, that the military bases are a significant benefit to the local economies and a source of jobs, and that the United States has paid and will continue to pay a substantial amount of money for their use (an average of \$180 million per year over the period 1985-89). Although the U.S. position is that the U.S. aid is not tied to the military bases, it is highly unlikely that the current level of aid would be continued in the future without the existence of the military bases.

We encountered strong feelings on the part of most people we talked to regarding these issues, including peasants, people living and working near the bases, human rights groups, local government officials, national government officials, and even vigilante group leaders. Of those I spoke to, most were against continuing the military bases. The issues are further complicated by the change in leadership from Marcos to Aquino and the ongoing warfare between the military and the insurgents. Accordingly, despite the fact that it is not a human rights issue

in the narrow sense, it is an issue which must be resolved as part of an overall effort to re-establish the Philippine government as a democratic and sovereign government.

In the final analysis, the issue of the bases must be decided by the elected officials of the Philippine government in response to political pressures from their constituency. Only in this manner will the Philippine people feel that their status as a sovereign nation has been acknowledged and respected. President Aquino herself seems uncertain over the issue. While campaigning, she spoke against continuing the military bases. More recently, she has been neutral on the issue.

Unfortunately, the years of martial law under President Marcos enormously eroded the respect of many Philippine people for the United States government. Despite systematic and widespread human rights abuses by the Marcos government, the United States government continued to pay millions of dollars in foreign aid to the Philippines. Many Philippine people blame the United States government for propping up a corrupt dictatorship. Persuasive evidence exists that Marcos and his political friends, family, and cronies diverted enormous sums of money from the United States and a variety of other sources to their own benefit.

Because of this unfortunate background, the Philippine people continue to look with skepticism and, in some cases, anger and hostility, toward the United States' role in the Philippines. The future of U.S. military bases in the Philippines, and of U.S.-Philippine relations, largely depends on the ability of government officials -- both U.S. and Philippine -- to take a strong stance against the human abuses and corruption which have plagued the U.S.-Philippine relationship in recent years, and to nurture democracy and economic development. While I believe the weight of the evidence, from a Philippine perspective, supports discontinuing the U.S. military bases, I firmly support the idea that the issue be decided by the Philippine people and their government through their own democratic political process.

EXCERPTS FROM A REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS FORUM

by Wood R. Foster, Jr.

I. Introduction

In July 1988, the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee was urgently requested to send a delegate to a hastily planned International Lawyers Forum in Manila, Republic of the Philippines, to focus domestic and international attention on human rights violations against Filipino human rights lawyers in recent months. Minneapolis attorney Wood R. Foster, Jr., a member of the Minnesota Lawyers Committee's Board of Directors, was chosen to represent the Committee in the Philippines.

The precipitating events leading to the call for the International Lawyers Forum were the assassinations of three human rights lawyers¹ in a span of 12 days in late June and early July. In one of the cases, an assassin had turned himself in and had admitted receiving 500 pesos from a Major in the Army Security Forces to murder Cebu City attorney Alfonso Surigao. In the other cases, no arrests had been made. Overall, five human rights attorneys had lost their lives at the hands of assassins during the eight months preceding the July 7 Forum, a death toll which human rights organizations quickly pointed out exceeded the total number of comparable deaths during some 20 years of Marcos administrations.

The conference was convened by several Filipino lawyers organizations with primary logistical support coming from the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG) and the Protestant Lawyers League of the Philippines (PLL).

II. Background Information

The popular impression in the United States is that after Corazon Aquino took power in early 1986, the Philippines emerged from a dark period of dictatorship to a bright new era of political freedom and opportunity. Because President Aquino supports and pays regular homage to the importance of human rights, herself a victim of one of the world's most well-known human rights violations, it is assumed that human rights for Filipinos must be in much better shape now than under the Marcos government.

This impression is quickly dispelled upon immersion in the Philippine reality:

1. The civil war in the Philippines is very real and involves large numbers of combatants and casualties. Some 300,000 soldiers bear arms for the Armed

¹ "Human rights lawyers" as used in this report, and by the Filipinos themselves, are those who represent popular organizations in land disputes; who civilly prosecute human rights violations on behalf of victims or their families; who seek the release of political detainees; and who accept unpaid cases referred from the central offices of the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), and the Protestant Lawyers League of the Philippines (PLL) and related groups. All or most of these lawyers also maintain general private practices to earn a living. They sometimes receive modest compensation for human rights cases.

Forces of the Philippines (AFP); armed "New People's Army" (NPA) troops are estimated at between 15,000 and 25,000. Skirmishes, ambushes and encounters occur virtually daily in various parts of the country.

2. No part of the country seems to be spared from the war, which has found its way to all the larger islands. NPA "Sparrow Units" (assassination squads) operate in larger cities. In 1987, Manila "Sparrow Units" claimed the lives of nearly 100 Manila police and army personnel. (Police in the Philippines are a branch of the Armed Forces.)
3. Despite the war, life seemed to go on "normally" in the areas I visited. Inter-island flights are not carefully screened; people are free to move about without restriction. Domestic travel security precautions are lax at best, and extremely lax compared to current international flight security precautions.
4. Due to raging poverty and unemployment, crime is rampant. Murders and other serious crimes are frequent; economic crimes are a fact of life. Nearly all stores and eating establishments in portions of the cities visited employ armed security guards. At one of the ubiquitous McDonald's restaurants in Makati, an affluent section of Manila, four armed guards patrolled one small area. Hotel doormen are often armed guards. Visitors are warned about use of taxis, and taxi cab license numbers are recorded by many hotels as a measure of protection for their patrons. Homes of affluent citizens are often surrounded by high walls topped with barbed wire or broken glass.
5. Perhaps most frightening is the rise over the last two years of armed vigilante groups. Much has been written about these groups, and their purposes and legitimacy are the subject of spirited public debate. Almost all are right-wing and anti-communist. Some are allegedly funded by private land owners. In some areas, armed vigilante groups are actually billeted on large plantations. Many such groups are paramilitary organizations which assist the AFP on counterinsurgency missions against suspected NPA enclaves. Many are involved in shrill anti-communist "education" efforts. Some are more blatantly threatening. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights published an exhaustive and well-documented study of these groups which documented case after case of "salvagings" (the Philippine euphemism for extra-judicial executions), threats, assaults, strafings, and other activities by numerous vigilante groups. Prior to the International Forum in July 1988, President Aquino had not taken an unequivocal stand against these groups, but rather chose to refer to them as "civilian volunteer organizations." Her government had promulgated official "guidelines" for such groups (they must be defensive, unarmed, contain no "criminal element", etc.) of questionable effectiveness. At the same time, the NPA has itself indulged in numerous human rights abuses. Civilian non-combatants have been similarly executed, hostages have been taken, and violence has been used to enforce involuntary "taxes" levied by the NPA.
6. The combination of civil war, high crime, dire poverty, high unemployment, and vigilante groups is rapidly polarizing Philippine society. Leftist, labor-oriented, and "peace and justice" groups are liberally branded "communists" by extremists. "Death lists" are rumored and sometimes surface. Organizations of the left have been heavily mauled by salvagings, disappearances, and threats. The right tends to shrug off the killings and blame them on internal rivalries within the NPA, of which organization most such victims are alleged to be members. Salvagings and other human rights violations are rarely investigated at more than a cursory

level by the army or the civil authorities; even more rare is a prosecution. When a warrant is issued for the arrest of suspected perpetrators, the army/police frequently fails or refuses to serve the warrant. Conviction for such crimes is almost unknown.

It is in this climate of fear, accusation, charged rhetoric, intimidation, and privatization of military functions that the judicial system is forced to operate. Not surprisingly, the system has failed to respond. Nonetheless, Filipinos appear to place great faith in lawyers and the rule of law. There are many lawyers and many courts. There are private judicial remedies for families of human rights victims. The new Philippine Constitution places the protection of human rights and due process at a more exalted position than does the U.S. Constitution. Defendants' rights are constitutionally well-protected. Human rights lawyers report that they have enjoyed a measure of success in defending persons detained as NPAs or without warrant. More than once, comments were heard from persons who have been labeled communists to the effect, "If they think I am a communist, let them bring their case in court." Such cases are not, however, usually seen in the courts. The would-be plaintiffs in such cases seem to prefer to seek extra-judicial "verdicts" written in blood.

Further contributing to the plight of the human rights lawyers is the fact that many of them formally represented the Communist Party/NPA or various factions thereof during formal peace talks in 1986. When peace talks broke down, these lawyers were left "high and dry" and were, thenceforth, viewed by rightists as the "legal front" for the NPA. President Aquino's present stance toward the NPA is one of "total war". Under the circumstances, these lawyers are natural targets for vigilante groups and right-wing elements in the military.

It is in this context that five Filipino lawyers have been killed and many others terrorized during the past two years. The purpose of the International Lawyers Forum was to draw international attention to the harsh realities and to bring pressure on the Aquino government to take strong measures to protect human rights lawyers and other activists.

III. The International Lawyers Forum

The International Lawyers Forum formally took place on July 21 and 22, 1988 at the headquarters of the National Council of Churches of the Philippines in Quezon City, the Philippines. Attending the Forum were lawyers and judges from Asia, Europe, and the U.S. See Appendix I for entire list. The entire first day of the Forum consisted of the presentation of testimony and case histories by lawyers directly affected by the increasingly dangerous political atmosphere. Some attempt was made to allow family members of assassinated lawyers to make presentations with respect to the lawyers' cases, but this system broke down quickly when the widow of attorney Ramos Cura was unable to speak due to her fragile emotional condition.

It was my impression that the lawyers involved were competent, serious, and dedicated. While some were quite young, several had obviously been involved in human rights work for most of their careers. The murdered lawyers were all members of FLAG or PLLP. In each case except the case of Alfonso Surigao, investigation has stalled. All were shot by one or more assassins, usually at home or in a vehicle. They practiced law and made their homes in widely varied parts of the country, ranging from Laoag City in the far north to Davao City in the far south.

In some of the cases, there are witnesses who believe they can identify the killers but are afraid to come forward and will not testify, feeling that they cannot and will not be protected if they do.