Philippines

A new Letter of Concern

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January 15, 2005. Focus on the Global South issued a "Statement of Concern" in response to the publication by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) of a list of 'counterrevolutionary' organizations and individuals where Walden Bello, its Executive Director, and fourteen other activists are singled out. [1]

This issue has to be taken very seriously. For more than ten years now, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has 'sentenced' to death and actually assassinated cadres from other revolutionary and progressive Filipino organizations. In January 2003, this policy took a sharp turn to the worst, prompting me to circulate a first "Letter of Concern". [2] The situation aggravated continuously in 2004, with an increasing number of legal political activists and mass movement organizers killed or threatened.

In the December 7, 2004 issue of its central publication, Ang Bayan, the CPP published a 'diagram' of Filipino 'counterrevolutionary groups' and their supposed international links. [3] In another situation, or in another country, we could dismiss such a publication as a usual expression of ultra-sectarianism with limited implications. Unfortunately, this is not the case here. It announces a new stage in the CPP's policy of threats and assassinations.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF ANG BAYAN'S DIAGRAM?

The CPP 'revolutionary versus counterrevolutionary' framework

First characteristic of the diagram: It includes ALL the Filipino progressive political groups not belonging to the so-called pro-CPP 'reaffirm bloc'. [4] Many of these organizations were labeled in such a way in CPP statements before, but it is the first time that each and all of non-CPP aligned political groupings of the Filipino Left are together listed as class enemies; some of them were never officially named before. The full list of these political groups is given at the end of this letter.

Second characteristic of the diagram: It systematically links each of the Filipino organizations to international counterparts, either Social Democrats or Trotskyists. A number of these links are true, but others are fabricated or oversimplified. For example, the MLPP never sent members to the Amsterdam International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE), while many of the other Filipino groups did; and the RMP-P is not linked to the SWP-USA (which is no longer, since a long time, the US section of the FI). It is also a gross oversimplification to reduce Akbayan's international relations to the Socialist International. The CPP is too well informed for these to be genuine mistakes. Its aim is to picture a global, coherent 'plot' bringing together Filipino and international 'counterrevolutionaries'.

Third characteristic of the diagram: It adds names of individuals to the names of organizations. Since its 1992 crisis, the CPP has labeled 'counterrevolutionary' or 'criminal' an ever-increasing number of activists and leaders of progressive organizations in statements, interviews and articles. But it is the first time that fifteen names are given in one shot, attached to most of the Filipino Left groupings and including people like Walden Bello and Lidy Nacpil, very well-known internationally for their progressive engagement in the anti-war, anti-capitalist globalization, anti-debt campaigns. Even if less known internationally, other named individuals are no less significant in the Filipino context. The full list of concerned persons is given at the end of this letter.
There are two ominous implications to the publication of Ang Bayan's diagram.

1. The completion of the CPP’s ‘revolutionary versus counterrevolutionary framework’ in the Philippines

The ideological background of the CPP policy of threats and assassinations against other Left organizations is the ‘revolutionary/counter-revolutionary framework’. According to such a framework, the CPP and the forces it leads (in the ‘reaffirm’ bloc) is the sole revolutionary current while the others are necessarily counter-revolutionary.

The ‘rev./counterrev.’ framework was first applied to groups which were expelled and/or split from the CPP in 1992 (called the ‘rejects’, see footnote 4). It was later applied to another ‘expulsion/forced split’ which originated in Central Luzon and gave birth to the MLPP. The upper line of Ang Bayan's diagram starts with the regional or national CPP bodies then affected. The list of these is given at the end of this letter; it shows the scope of the 1992 crisis.

For many years, the targets of the policy of death sentences and actual assassinations were former cadres of the CPP, members of underground revolutionary organizations. In January 2003, the killing of Romulo Kintanar, former head of the CPP’s New People’s Army (NPA), meant that well-known personalities, ‘above ground’, could be hit right in Manila. 'Nobody's safe anymore' was the message. Cadres of legal mass movements, for example from peasant movements in the Bondoc Peninsula, were also targeted in 2003 and 2004. It was true as well for officers of Akbayan ('Citizens Action Party'), a legal, broad Left party built by an alliance of political currents.

What is new in Ang Bayan's diagram is that organizations not coming from the CPP are now also officially named. This is especially the case for various components of Akbayan, like Bisig (where Christian Socialists played an important role in its creation), Pandayan (coming from the left of the Social Democrats) and left ‘SocDems’. The names of individual leaders of these currents, of non-CPP origin, are not yet given. But the warning is clear: if the organization is mentioned among the ‘counter-revolutionary groups’, their leaders will also be named in good time - if they do not behave.

The ‘revolutionary versus counterrevolutionary framework’ is now all-encompassing. The whole Filipino Left is concerned, and not only its divided communist wing.

2. Reaching the international level

Already in the past, foreign organizations or individuals could easily be labeled ‘counterrevolutionary’ by the International Department of the CPP. Moreover, since 1992, the crisis of the CPP had a direct international impact within the progressive movements, notably because its mass organizations were affected, while they were often playing a significant role abroad; for example, look at the gravity for Via Campesina of the Philippine Peasant Movement (KMP) implosion. Nevertheless, for a long time, the CPP focused its attacks against other groups within the Filipino political scene. The assassination of Romulo Kintanar was to bring a strong message to the nation ('Nobody's safe anymore'), but was supposed to be a 'non-event' internationally. The CPP seemed genuinely surprised that it actually was considered a major event abroad too, and that it had important international repercussions.

Things have been changing, as we have begun to see at the occasion of the Mumbai January 2004 World Social Forum. Jose Maria Sison, chair of the CPP, is now heading as well the International League of People's Struggles (ILPS). What the Ang Bayan's diagram means is that the ‘revolutionary versus counterrevolutionary framework’ is going to be applied more and more systematically at the international level, against other political currents but also within the mass movements. Ultra-sectarianism is being exported worldwide. This can have very destructive consequences. I'll come back on this question later.
WHO IS AT RISK?

Originating in 1992, the CPP policy of threats and assassinations has become full-fledged, nation-scale in 2003. According to the CPP, only 'criminals' (and never ideological opponents) are submitted to 'revolutionary justice' and 'people’s courts', through a formal legal system. In reality, there are no independent people's courts. Decisions to charge, to sentence and to implement the sentence are taken by CPP leadership organs. To call someone an ideological opponent, a counterrevolutionary, an agent, a class enemy or a criminal is only a matter of convenience for the CPP. There is no space here to dwell on this question, but I can refer to two papers I wrote in 2003, analyzing the CPP's policy of assassinations; the second one being an answer to the response given by the CPP-led National Democratic Front (NDF) to the first one. [9]

In a polemical article written against Walden Bello, Jose Maria Sison pretends that "there is absolutely nothing in the diagram (published by Ang Bayan) to prove or indicate that any of those on the list will be killed by any one or any organization". [6] Really?

Targets. Two in the list are already dead. Popoy Lagman (from Manila-Rizal); the NPA is often suspected but the CPP denies any responsibility. Arturo Tabara (Visayas); the CPP-NPA does claim responsibility for this assassination.

Several others, mentioned in Ang Bayan's diagram, are listed in the Order of Battle of the NPA and are actually being hunted down. They could be killed any time. This is the case for Ric Reyes, current Chair of Akbayan. Sison de facto confirmed it. After having accused Reyes of being a 'criminal', he adds: "I do not know the precise status of the cases against Reyes". Being chairman of the CPP, Sison of course 'knows' what is Reyes' 'status': not to deny that he is in the Order of Battle of the NPA amounts to confirmation. Local officers of Akbayan have been killed in 2003-2004.

In Central Mindanao, Ike de los Reyes is being looked for by NPA operatives; one of his companions was assassinated and there were other attempts. This is also the case for Tito dela Cruz and Caridad Pascual in Central Luzon, where many deaths have been reported. In Manila-Rizal, it may be the case (or could become the case) for Nilo dela Cruz.

Most of the Left activists who are in the CPP-NPA Order of Battle are not named in the Ang Bayan's diagram. Those who are named are not necessarily in it (yet). But several of those named have been assassinated or are presently targeted. It means that to be listed in Ang Bayan's diagram is indeed a very serious matter.

Policy. Why is someone named at a given time, and not others? To answer this question, one has to understand that we are not confronting a succession of individual 'criminal cases', but a policy in the fullest meaning of the word. Death condemnations of leaders of dissenting blocs began more than a decade ago. Step by step, since 2003, the CPP is widening its policy of threats and assassinations. The decision to name for the first time a 'counterrevolutionary' or a 'criminal' in CPP statements is always politically motivated. It can be a warning addressed to the individual named ('behave or else!'). The main aim may be to tell others how much the threat is expanding to new quarters. Or it can be a way to lay the political ground for actual assassination.

Why was someone as Walden Bello listed in Ang Bayan's diagram? The question deserves to be addressed &mdash; it was out of the routine. We can guess that it was a way to show urbi et orbi that, really, no one can feel safe and protected, even by notoriety. Naming Walden (and Lidy Nacpil) confirms also that one of the aims of the 'diagram' is to lay the political ground to the implementation of the 'counterrevolutionary versus revolutionary framework' at the international level (and may be a way to explain to the CPP-led activists why they have lost so much influence in the world networks: it can only be the result of a plot, and a plot needs plotters).
Walden issued, together with Etta Rosales, a strong statement in response to the publication of Ang Bayan's 'diagram'. [7] In the public polemics that followed, Jose Maria Sison and Fidel Agcaoili (one of the highest-ranking leaders of the CPP stationed in Europe), tried to dismiss the very idea that anyone, especially Walden, could be threatened by the simple publication of a diagram! According to them, this diagram of counterrevolutionary organizations was nothing more than a matter-of-fact description of the political scene, and only ideological confrontation was the agenda.

But in the very same statements, Sison and Agcaoili give us all the reasons to worry: Walden Bello is accused to be an 'agent', 'highly paid' by 'imperialist funding agencies'. Together with other 'ringleaders of Akbayan', he is branded as one of the 'special anti-communist agents of the United States and the local Filipino reactionaries'. Their goal would be nothing less than 'the destruction of the CPP and the entire revolutionary movement of the people'. Walden Bello and Etta Rosales 'are obviously engaged in a spin or psywar operation. This is orchestrated with similar operation of the military propaganda mill'. Such accusations do not lay the ground for ideological debates, but for 'people’s court', 'revolutionary justice' and summary execution. [8]

As Ronald Llamas and Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel, from Akbayan, put it, "Sison skewered himself on his own contradictions. On one hand, he claimed that there was a distinction between 'counterrevolutionaries in words' and 'counterrevolutionaries in deeds', implying that Bello and Rosales were the former and thus did not have to fear physical extermination. On the other hand, Sison threatened to launch a CPP probe of alleged criminal activities of Bello and Rosales, a move that would set the stage for their elimination on 'criminal grounds'". [9]

**WHY ARE WE CONCERNED?**

The CPP leadership would like us to believe that only two or three ‘criminals' have been killed while 'resisting arrest' (a ludicrous assertion!). The picture is much darker, as we have seen.

Many of us, abroad, have been actively engaged in solidarity activities with the CPP-led anti-dictatorial struggles in the 1970s and 1980s. The CPP at that time indeed deserved to be supported, while it paid a very high price for its revolutionary engagement. But things have changed, unfortunately for the worst. Today's CPP has little to do with what it was twenty years ago, and we have to respond to present realities.

1. An elementary duty of solidarity

We have, first of all, an elementary duty of solidarity toward the Filipino progressive and revolutionary movements.

The pluralist character of the Filipino Left, progressive movements and people's organizations bloomed in the 1980s and 1990s. It is precisely what the present CPP leadership cannot accept. Its ultimate aim is to impose its own control over the overall movement. It is not an exaggeration to say, that to reach this goal, the CPP leadership deploys a policy of terror over the independent Left, backed by its military might, unmatched by any other group from the revolutionary underground. Activists from Left parties, mass organizations, grassroots movements and NGOs tagged ‘counterrevolutionary’ can all fear to be targeted, one day or another.

As Lidy Nacpil puts it: "Several former leaders accused of being counterrevolutionaries and agents of the state have been killed by the CPP while others are harassed and pursued. But former colleagues are not the only targets ~ organizers and activists from people's organizations and movements not within the sphere of influence of the CPP are also being threatened and attacked. Many of us who have given our youth and much of the best years of our
lives in advancing the national democratic struggle, many of us whose loved ones have died for that struggle, and those of us who dare follow a different path toward revolutionary change witness what the CPP leadership is doing with a mixture of deep sadness, frustration and anger. They are squandering whatever gains and successes have been achieved in all these decades of struggles." The CPP accusations and actions "have caused loss of lives and danger to individuals, as well as terrible harm to the socialist cause." [10]

The consequences of the present CPP course can be extremely harmful for people's struggles. People live in fear. In the Bondoc Peninsula, for example, in recent years, cadres of peasant organizations have been killed and hunted down both by the landlord's goons and by the NPA. [11] A journalist reports: "A 30-year-old farmer from the Bondoc Peninsula in Quezon province has been in hiding for a year now for fear that communist-led New People's Army rebels might liquidate him and his family. Dioscoro Tejino, his wife and four young children, the youngest of which is two years old, have been living mostly in Metro Manila with the support of non-governmental organizations." [12] In an interview, CPP spokesman Gregorio 'Roger' Rosal, has confirmed the fear of Dioscoro Tejeno: "Yes, that's true. The NPA María Theresa de Leon Command in Bondoc Peninsula area will really kill him once there is an opportunity." [13] In the above-quoted article, Sison called this peasant movement a 'gang', showing once more his own responsibility in the current CPP policies.

Activists of the 1970s, veterans of the anti-dictatorship struggles who were usually members of the CPP at that time, and who are now members of the 'First Quarter Storm Foundation' have expressed their alarm: "Reports reaching us indicate that around thirty people (30) have been felled by their comrades or ex-comrades' bullets since four years ago. (!) All these are the consequences of the great splits which rocked the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) beginning in 1992. In these killings, there is no doubt that the initiative has come from the section of the movement (known by the nickname Reaffirm group or RAs) which ultimately took over the franchise and retained the name of the CPP-NPA-NDF after the splits. (!) This year, what extremely alarms us is the fact that what has increased is not only the numbers of those killed but also the likelihood that more will be killed. (!) All of us in the FQS community know that once a CPP comrade or ex-comrade is tagged as counterrevolutionary, he or she is deemed a traitor and should thus be meted the penalty of death. That he or she may not be executed at all can be attributed more to certain circumstances like the inability of the Party to case the person, or that other priorities may have taken over, or that the political fall-out of executing such a person maybe such as to offset the supposed gains from killing the person." [14]

Faced with this situation, we have the moral and political responsibility to express our solidarity with Filipino progressive movements.

2. Direct international implications

It is absolutely normal that political, strategic and programmatic differences are expressed and debated within the world anti-war and anti-capitalist globalization movements. It is also perfectly normal that different organizations, in different countries, approach in a different way the social forum processes. No one, among us, disputes the right and necessity of political confrontations. But we are faced with two opposite evolutions within the radical wing of the overall movement.

On one hand, most of the progressive, radical and revolutionary organizations accept in a more consistent way than in the past the pluralist character of the Left and of the people's movements. On the other hand, some parties, as the CPP, are evolving in the opposite direction. In itself, such an evolution is already quite damaging for the people's struggles. But what makes it terribly destructive is the use of violence, including military violence, within the progressive movement. An essential principle and political limit is then breached. That is precisely the question we are confronted with in the Philippines.
We can already feel the consequences of the implementation of the 'counterrevolutionary versus revolutionary' framework at the international level. A lot of efforts have been deployed to open a space where organizations and movements participating either in the WSF or in Mumbai Resistance 2004 (or in neither of the two) could meet. Unfortunately, to no effect. One of the main reasons for this failure was the role that the CPP-led forces played in the Mumbai-2004 process. Things are going to get worse now that Sison is heading the International League of People’s Struggle (ILPS) and built it on the foundation of the ‘counterrevolutionary versus revolutionary framework’.

We better act politically now. If not, the ‘ultra-violence’ of the Filipino situation could well be ‘exported’ to other countries.

**WHAT SHOULD WE AIM AT?**

The aim is not to ask the CPP to change its program; it is to uphold one basic principle on which we should all agree: no assassination of labor, of people's movements and of Left parties activists, cadres, can be tolerated. Military capacity must not be turned against the components of a plural progressive Left.

These were already the conclusions of my previous papers:

[-] Assassinations have to stop. The CPP leadership must officially and publicly announce that all 'death sentences' pronounced against its former members and other Left activists are forever lifted. That it will no more use threats and physical violence against other progressive organizations.

[-] All those representing, associated to or identified with the CPP must clearly condemn the killings and call on the CPP to radically change its policy. The matter is too serious to allow ambiguity.

[-] This need for clarity on one of the most essential principles concerns, first of all, the organizations belonging to the 'Reaffirm bloc' in the Philippines. They often protest when they are identified with the CPP. They have here a good occasion to show their independence!

1. **Bayan Muna and the parliamentary field**

The need for clarity on such a matter was precisely the question that the European United Left / Nordic Green Left (EUL/NGL) Group in the European Parliament addressed to Bayan Muna after the assassination of Romulo Kintanar in January 2003 (Bayan Muna was then the only electoral party belonging to the 'Reaffirm bloc').

The EUL/NGL had links with Bayan Muna as well as with other Filipino Left parties with a parliamentary representation: at that time Akbayan and Anak Mindanao (Amin) (now the Workers Party, PM, also won one seat in the Congress). The EUL/NGL had been very actively campaigning for the CPP not to be put by the European Union on the 'terrorist list'. Kintanar's assassination jeopardized this campaign.

The EUL/NGL president sent a letter to Bayan Muna and Satur Ocampo to ask their stand on the issue of the CPP assassinations, making it very clear that the group could not keep relations with any organization which would not condemn such acts. Satur Ocampo refused to condemn the killings; in fact, his answer amounted to justification. Relations between the EUL/NGL and Bayan Muna were actually cut off. [15]

In 2004, five new electoral parties, belonging to the 'Reaffirm bloc', were added to Bayan Muna, including Anak ng Bayan, Gabriela (women), Anakpawis or Migrante. The same question is then addressed to all of them: do they condemn the killings?
2. Should we not speak out?

The Asian Student Association (ASA) issued a violent statement against Focus on the Global South's call. Focus should not have "dropped names of organizations" associated to the CPP "and appealed for their sense of decency": In doing so, Focus was putting their members at risk, they argued. [16]

The principal argument of ASA would have been more convincing if the signatories had begun by condemning the CPP for doing precisely so; and much more. It is the CPP which first 'dropped names' of both organizations and individuals. It is the CPP which first endangered members of other organizations, to the point of killing them. In ASA's statement, the victims become the culprits.

As it was already mentioned, the CPP's death condemnations and assassinations began in 1992-1993. For many years, right or wrong, we restrained from bringing out the issue in public in the hope that reason would come back to the CPP leadership. This hope was dashed with the killing of Kintanar: Ten years after the splits, the CPP policy of assassination was escalating instead of fading away. It is now more than time to speak out.

The CPP cannot criminalize other groups, 'drop' names, threaten and kill activists! and ask us to stay put, mouths shut, for them and their friends not to be 'endangered'!

More than any others, organizations and leaders from the 'Reaffirm bloc' are in a position to apply moral and political suasion on the CPP for it to stop the killings. They are and have to be put in front of their responsibilities, even if it means to 'drop names'. The lives of many activists and the future of the Filipino Left is at stake.

3. Bayan and Ibon

Bayan is the 'reaffirm' bloc of sectoral organizations. Ibon Foundation is especially known for its socio-economic studies of the Philippines. Together, they are used to play, in the international movement, the game of 'bad cop' (Bayan), 'good cop' (Ibon). For example, Bayan mobilizes outside, often explicitly against the social forums, while Ibon works from within the process &mdash; but to the same aims as Bayan.

Members of Ibon's board can be independent and critical of the CPP, but have little to say about (and possibly little knowledge of) the actual policy followed by the Foundation. Ibon is a trump card for the CPP. Isn't Antonio 'Tony' Tujuan one of the highest-ranking CPP cadres engaged in the international scene (he used to sit in the Central Committee, notably to represent the National Urban Commission)? Any illusion concerning Ibon's independence from the CPP should now be dispelled with the publication of its statement in answer to Focus on the Global South. [17]

There is not one word of criticism of the CPP assassination policy in Ibon's statement. Not one word! Again, the victim becomes culprit. "By this appeal, Focus has effectively toed the US-RP line of communist witch-hunting that is happening in the current military campaign, and which has served to attack legitimate institutions and people's organizations." Ibon even plays the tune of the CPP's policy of threats: "For his security, we urge Walden Bello and Focus to desist from being used by the Tabara and Lopez factions". Against all evidences, Ibon is mouthing the words of the CPP: "a public clarification has already been made by Jose Ma. Sison that no such hit-list exists or be inferred from the CPP's Ang Bayan article".

I do not intend to review here the positions of all the organizations belonging to the 'reaffirm bloc'. But they should be pressured to take a clear stand against the use of violence within the people's movement.
A new Letter of Concern

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

What is at stake? The security and the lives of many activists, who are going to be forced into exile or killed if nothing is done. The future of the whole Filipino Left, which remains quite rich and active in spite of past and present odds. The dynamics of the international movements we are engaged in, laying new foundations for radical change. The very legitimacy of our fight: how to give a second breath to socialist alternatives if we prove unable to defend our most basic principles?

In more than one way, the solidarity with the Filipino progressive and revolutionary movements threatened by the CPP is a death or life question.

List of the Filipino organizations and trends included in Ang Bayan 'diagram' of 'counterrevolutionary groups':

Akbayan, Bisig, Alab Katipunan, Alex Boncayano Brigade (ABB) 'bloc', Solidarity of Filipino Workers (BMP), the 'old' Communist Party of the Philippines (PKP), Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA), Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD), Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines (MLPP/RHB), Padayon, Pandayan, Popular Democrats (PopDems), Proletarian Democratic Party (PPD), Revolutionary Communist Group (RGK), Revolutionary Workers Party-Mindanao (RPM-M), Revolutionary Workers Party-Philippines (RPM-P/RPA-ABB), Sanlakas, Siglaya, SocDems, Socialist Party of Labour (SPP), Workers Party of the Philippines (PMP and later PMP 'merger').

List of the 15 Filipino activists named in Ang Bayan 'diagram' of 'counterrevolutionary groups':

Walden Bello, Sonny Melencio, Boy Morales, Caridad Pascual, Nilo dela Cruz, Tito dela Cruz, Popoy Lagman, Manjette Lopez, Caridad Pascual, Ike de los Reyes, Ric Reyes, Etta Rosales, Lidy Nacpil, Gani Serrano, Arturo Tabara. In other documents, many more names of 'counterrevolutionaries' are given, including some fairly well known outside the Philippines as Nathan Quimpo and Joel Rocamora.

List of the regional and national CPP bodies affected by the 1992 and 1997 crisis, as mentioned in Ang Bayan 'diagram':

In 1992: National United Front Commission (NUFC), International Department-Home Bureau (ID-HB), Peasant Secretariat, Manila-Rizal-Regional Political Committee (MR-RPC) (it's the region of the capital), Visayas Commission (VisCom) (the Visayas is the groups of islands in the middle of the Filipino archipelago), Central Mindanao Regional Political Committee (CMR) (Mindanao is the main island in the South of the archipelago). In 1997: Peasant Secretariat, Central Luzon Regional Political Committee (Central Luzon is to the North of Manila).


At the time of its 1992-1993 crisis, the CPP leadership 'reaffirmed' the 1968 traditional line of the party, while dissenting elements 'rejected' it. Since then, in the Philippines, the term 'reaffirm bloc' (or RAs) is used to design the various organizations identified with the line of the CPP; and the term 'reject' (or RGs) designs the groups formed after the 1992 process of expulsions and splits.

My two papers and the CPP-NDF one:


The post-1992 CPP...


See, among other writings:


See the following exchange of letters:


Asian Student Association (ASA) Regional Secretariat, 'Red-baiting and Baseless Accusations have no place in the People's Movement', January 17, 2005.

Ibon Foundation, letter signed by Rosario Bella Guzman, executive director, January 18, 2005.