Statement on the Killing of Genesis Ambason

The Philippine Task Force for Indigenous Peoples Rights condemns the brutal murder of Mr. Genesis Ambason. Genesis was a young indigenous leader who took the responsibility of leading his fellow Lumad in the assertion of their rights to ancestral land and self-determination. During his death, he was the secretary general of Tagdumahan, a member organization of the Kalumbay Regional Lumad Organization in Northern Mindanao.

Genesis was an active anti-large scale mining activist in his community in San Luis, Agusan del Sur. He, along with community members believed that they will be stripped off their livelihood if ever big mining companies take control of their mineral-rich lands. Genesis was also engaged in small scale mining as cash source for his family and actually came from work in the mines when the tragic incident happened.

His and Tagdumahan’s active opposition against large scale mining surely has drawn the ire of mining companies and state agents who act as investment defense force against dissent to mining activities. But we believe that Genesis’ stand and actions against mining were legitimate and reflective of indigenous peoples’ aspirations in the country. It has been learned in countless conferences, forums and public events that mining can bring more damage than benefits to indigenous peoples. It may cause the displacement and the eventual disintegration of indigenous knowledge systems and culture of indigenous groups in the country. The activities conducted by Genesis along with his comrades in Tagdumahan and Kalumbay only showed the sacred duty of indigenous peoples to defend their land and ensure these for the next generation.

A week before the killing of Mr. Ambason, an attempt was made on the life of Timuay Manda leading to the death of his son, 11-year old Jordan Manda. Timuay Manda is also active in the anti-mining campaign in their ancestral land. Again, is this the “straight path” that the government has always been babbling about? This goes to show that the present administration of Benigno Aquino is no different from the former administration. The counter-insurgency plan of President Aquino, OPLAN BAYANIHAN, is touted as pro-people and espouses cooperation by military elements in communities. However, the incidents of extrajudicial killings during the past few weeks and months prove the brutality of State security forces, now even harsher and more deadly for indigenous peoples than before.
Incidents such as these are alarming and more lives of indigenous peoples in communities are at risk. We don’t discount the added risk this poses upon development workers who work in close partnership with indigenous peoples’ organizations and have been supporting their campaigns. Those who conduct campaigns for indigenous peoples, those who provide services that the government can’t provide are vilified and branded as communists causing hesitation and fear in communities.

We therefore call upon the Department of Justice, Commission on Human Rights, NCIP and other concerned agencies to seriously look into these violations of the human rights of indigenous peoples. We call upon the President and the Department of National Defense to demilitarize ancestral domains of indigenous peoples and cease from being protectors of big investors in mining, energy, plantations, among others.

We also extend our deepest sympathies to the families, communities and friends of the victims.

Justice for Genesis Ambason, Jordan Manda, Jimmy Liguyon and all indigenous victims of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines!