Statement on the Killing of Gilbert Paborada

The Philippine Task Force for Indigenous Peoples’ Rights (TFIP), once again express condemnation for the murder of yet another indigenous leader in the person of Gilbert Paborada. He was the chairperson of Pangalasag, a member organization of the regional alliance Kalumbay and an organization of Higaonon indigenous people in Opol, Misamis Oriental. We believe that this killing was motivated by the stand of Pangalasag against the Oil Palm plantation, which invaded the ancestral domain of the Higaonon in the municipality of Opol. It is alarming that Gilbert was the fourth member of Kalumbay who became a victim of extrajudicial killings under the Aquino administration.

For more than two years, the A. Brown Company, Inc. has operated an oil palm plantation in barangays Tingalan and Bagocboc in Opol. These lands were occupied through massive land grabbing committed against the indigenous peoples who reside in these areas. An International Fact-Finding Mission organized by the Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP), Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), Asian Peasant Coalition (APC), and the Kalumbay Regional Lumad Organization found out that there were incidents of harassment and violence committed against the Lumad who refused to give up their lands. Aside from these, adverse effects on the peoples’ health and the environment were experienced due to the chemical-intensive activities in the production of oil palm. Given these facts, there is no doubt that the struggle of Gilbert Paborada and Pangalasag is a legitimate one.

This is a very sad time for the Higaonon tribe, the Lumad of Mindanao and the indigenous peoples in the Philippines. The decades of dispossession of their ancestral lands eroded the culture and customary laws of the Higaonon in Opol. But some of their leaders, including Gilbert, stood up and formed the “Pangalasag” which means indigenous shield. The Higaonon members of Pangalasag viewed their organization as a driving force in the resurgence of their customary laws especially in decision-making and granting of consent, aside from its literal meaning to defend against aggressors.

Like Genesis Ambason, another indigenous leader who was killed about two weeks ago, Gilbert Paborada lived to serve his fellow Higaonon in the defense of their ancestral land. This latest killing highlights the impunity enjoyed by big corporations and the state as they blatantly violate human rights in order to stifle dissent of indigenous peoples against destructive projects aimed to generate profit.

This incident further shows that this government has completely veered off its supposed “straight path” and has further victimized and marginalized indigenous peoples. We call on all concerned agencies to pursue and punish the perpetrators of these heinous crimes and to bring justice to the victims.
We also extend our heartfelt condolences to the family, co-members in Pangalasag and village folks of Gilbert Paborada. Let us strengthen our resolve and turn our grief into indignation as we seek justice for Gilbert and all other victims of extrajudicial killings.