The Philippine Task Force on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights (TFIP) denounces the latest incident of killing of an indigenous leader as we observe Human Rights month this December. Rolen Langala, 35 years old and a Higaonon of Opol, Misamis Oriental was gunned down and stabbed at 1AM on December 1, 2013. He was a member of Pangalasag, the indigenous peoples’ organization that opposes the A. Brown Company’s operation of an oil palm plantation in their ancestral land.

This once again shows the blatant disregard by authorities of indigenous peoples’ rights to land, self-determination and human rights. The A. Brown Company since the start of its operations in Opol, has been a constant threat to the Higaonon people’s food sovereignty as large tracts of their ancestral land fell into the hands of the oil palm plantation company, depriving them of their sources of food.

We likewise condemn the local government unit of the municipality of Opol for disregarding the rights and welfare of their Higaonon constituents. Whenever indigenous peoples oppose destructive projects such as the plantation and mining activities in their communities, they are considered as trouble makers, anti-development and members or supporters of the NPA. This is why the perpetrators of this latest crime against a member of an indigenous peoples’ organization are free from accountability and are actually sowing terror among many of the Higaonon tribe members. This killing was done just over a year since the brutal murder of Gilbert Paborada, former chairperson of Pangalasag whose case remains unresolved until today. A culture of impunity reigns in the municipality of Opol and poor indigenous families are at the receiving end of such harassment.

TFIP believes in and supports the struggle of the Pangalasag organization to defend their ancestral territories. This organization was founded through the strong unity of the Higaonon people in Opol, motivated by their will to revive and strengthen their diminishing indigenous knowledge systems and practices that guide their economic activities, decision-making processes and community cooperation. The name “Pangalasag” literally stands for defense and mirrors the aspiration of the Higaonon in Opol to defend their land from further conversion and destruction. The government should recognize the rights of the Higaonon to freely determine the use of their ancestral land and to ensure food sovereignty for generations to come.
The death of Rolen Langala is the 38th case of extra-judicial killing against indigenous peoples in the Philippines since Mr. Benigno Simeon Aquino assumed the presidency of the country in 2010. Not one of these cases has been resolved and none of the perpetrators has been punished. We, therefore demand the national government, especially the Department of Justice and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples to give immediate attention to these injustices committed against indigenous peoples and to ensure that those who are guilty are truly made accountable for their crimes.

Justice for Rolen Langala and Gilbert Paborada!

Justice for all indigenous peoples who are victims of human rights violations! #