

## **Statement on the U.S. military in the Philippines**

*The position outlined in this statement is shared by the PC(USA)'s partner church, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.—Insik Kim*

Statement of the International Solidarity Mission  
AGAINST U.S. ARMED INTERVENTION IN THE PHILIPPINES  
July 24–31, 2002†

We, the 68 participants in the International Solidarity Mission (ISM) coming from the Philippines, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, China (Taiwan), Japan, South Korea, the Netherlands, and the United States, visited Zamboanga City, Basilan, General Santos City and Manila July 24–31, 2002. †

We came here on a mission: to gather facts, to assess the impact of the presence of U.S. troops and to support the Filipino people's struggle against the U.S. military intervention. We have met hundreds of people, both those who have suffered serious human rights abuses before and during the U.S.-led Balikatan 02-1 as well as supporters of U.S. military presence.†

On our trip we have heard shocking testimony and seen sufficient proof that allows us to draw the following conclusions: †

1. American soldiers were directly involved in the raiding and shooting of an unarmed civilian in his home.
2. Human rights abuses are continuing unabated under the Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo regime and are abetted by the U.S. military forces.
3. The U.S. military support operations that displace and violate the rights of Moro people and other Filipinos, including women and children.†

The most important case, and the one that has drawn national and international media attention, is the shooting of an unarmed civilian by a U.S. soldier in a small village of Tuburan, a town on the island of Basilan. The wife and mother of Buyong Buyong Isnijal stood before a hundred fellow citizens and International Solidarity Mission (ISM) members to denounce what happened just after midnight on July 25, when a composite team of Filipino and American soldiers raided their home without any warrant. The wounded victim was taken by the military after the incident and his family was left uninformed about Isnijal's whereabouts. Other relatives, neighbors and medical personnel corroborated this information. †

Delegates of the ISM decry the fact that U.S. troops have been directly involved in the raiding, shooting and arresting of a civilian. This action, whether or not the victim is guilty of any crime, is in blatant violation of even the spurious Terms of Reference guiding the presence of U.S. troops. It seems that U.S. soldiers have been given free reign to play the role of military and even police in local matters, bypassing the civilian authorities. This portends another Vietnam in the making. †

The behavior and contradictory statements of the Philippine and U.S. military and

governments only led the delegation to give greater credence and weight to the testimony we had heard and seen. They at first denied outright that any such encounter took place, then partially admitted it, and then, in the face of irrefutable evidence, attempted to discredit the ISM delegation, calling us "monkeys" and insinuating we are Abu Sayyaf supporters for daring to reveal this serious case. †

We have learned that it is not only on the ground that U.S. troops are involved in human rights abuses. Witnesses told stories of U.S. spy planes circling overhead for hours, just before Philippine military raided their homes to arrest the residents without any charges. It was reported that a U.S. spy plane provided the information that led to the massacre of three unarmed fisherfolk in Lantawan. The U.S. planes also dropped what appeared to be barrels of toxic waste in the coastal waters of Basilan and the islands of Sulu. †

During our trip we visited communities and heard from families and victims of serious human rights abuses, from the shooting death of a young child, to the arbitrary arrests, torture and imprisonment of dozens of ordinary Moro people and other Filipinos. We saw them held in a crowded prison, some as young as 14 years old, accused of being members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), solely on the word of anonymous informers who receive rewards of up to 1 million pesos for their accusations. The minors, along with many other prisoners, told us they had been severely tortured by the Philippine military. †

At great personal risk and despite heavy military and police presence at all events, dozens of ordinary people, including fisherfolks, farmers, housewives, barangay officials and even police officers from Zamboanga City, Basilan and General Santos City have taken the time to meet with ISM members, often inviting us into their homes. They told their stories of harassment, injury and death of their loved ones before and especially since the joint U.S.-Philippine military operations started in January of this year. †

At times the emotion was unbearable as tears flowed from witnesses overcome with grief. One witness was unable to continue as she explained how her 11-year-old child had been abducted by Filipino soldiers and was later reported killed along with three other purported ASG members in what seems to be a summary execution. At times the absurdity of the stories circulated by the Philippine military against the victims was blatant, for example, when an imprisoned Muslim explained that he was accused of being an ASG member despite the fact that his brother had been murdered by these bandits. †

There were chilling stories of women and minors harassed and then arrested and thrown in prison on unsubstantiated charges with no medical care. At least one woman prisoner lost her unborn child. Their only "crime," it seems, along with the others killed, arrested and imprisoned, is that they are Moro people who live in an area where thousands of Filipino troops and hundreds of U.S. troops equipped with tons of the latest in military equipment are sowing terror among the local population. †

We, the participants in the ISM, also heard corroborated testimony of collusion between the ASG, the Philippine military, and some government officials. One very reliable source, Fr. Cirilo Nacorda, who had been held hostage for two months by the ASG, while

in captivity overheard discussions and witnessed meetings between the ASG and military and government officials.

The most shocking example of this apparent collusion was the so-called "escape" of Abu Sayyaf members and leaders from the Dr. Jose Torres Hospital in Lamitan, Basilan, on June 2, 2001. Witnesses testified that ASG members, who were holding hostages in the hospital, were apparently surrounded by Philippine troops but were given the opportunity to walk away unharmed in broad daylight with their hostages.†

It is widely documented that the original founders of the ASG were directly recruited and trained by the CIA to fight in the U.S.-sponsored proxy war in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Reports indicate that the ASG was handled by the Philippine military from its inception to sow terror and discord among the Moro population and to discredit legitimate groups. On top of this, the bandit group continues to provide a convenient excuse for U.S. military involvement in Philippine internal affairs. The U.S. military intervention has therefore not put an end to the Philippine military's collusion with the bandit group.†

While in Basilan we witnessed that abject poverty and hunger are still rampant in the province. The U.S. military's civic action, including medical missions and infrastructure works, does nothing to address the basic problems of the people. To the contrary, as part of a classic counter-insurgency strategy, they serve to gather intelligence, appease the people, undermine their resilience, and seek to make them submissive and dependent. †

The members of the ISM learned that the U.S. military will not be leaving as promised. It has been announced that 160 Special Operations Forces of the U.S. military will be staying behind after July 31 in Basilan and in Sulu, where aerial bombings and massive military operations have already led to mass evacuations with hundreds of houses destroyed and burned.†

Moreover, ISM delegates were informed that U.S. troops continue to frequent other parts of the Philippines, with 1,400 U.S. troops currently active in Central Luzon, carrying out training exercises and rest and recreation, particularly around the former U.S. bases of Clark and Subic. Already there are reports of proliferation of prostitution, child molestation, and displacement of indigenous Aeta communities in these areas.†

In General Santos City ISM participants investigated several facilities, including the local airport, the Makar Wharf, the fish port, and a new luxury hotel, and concluded that they are grossly out of proportion to the actual needs of the people of the city and the region. The fact that these huge infrastructures were built recently with U.S. funding in a region that is strategically favorable for military use raises the suspicion that they were constructed for future use by the U.S. military.†

Equally disturbing is the unlawful arrest and detention, last April 24, of three innocent Moro activists after a brutal raid on a clinic that is known to be within the network of Bayan and Bayan Muna. ISM members visited the detainees, known as the GenSan 3, in the General Santos City Jail and learned that they were linked by the police to the ASG,

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the New People's Army (NPA) respectively, in an attempt to insinuate links between these groups, to instill fear in the people and justify state violence and intensified military deployment in the area.†

The ISM is aware that the return of U.S. troops to the Philippines on the pretext of military exercises and training for soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines is actually part of the bogus "war on terrorism" of the Bush administration. Using the September 11 attacks as a pretext, the U.S. government has intensified repressive policies domestically, virtually abolishing civil liberties and targeting Muslims in particular. Abroad, Washington's increasing aggression and the borderless "war on terror" targets all peoples asserting their sovereignty and opposing U.S. economic and political dominance.†

As ISM delegates shared during a public forum, the people of Palestine, Iraq, Colombia, Afghanistan, Cuba, and other countries have suffered greatly from this intensified belligerence. Meanwhile the "war at home" is targeting migrant workers, immigrants, people of color, workers and activists in Korea, Japan, the United States, and other countries that are falling in line with Bush's policies. They also testified, however, about the brave and heightening resistance by the peoples of these countries.†

U.S. military presence in the Philippines is directed against all domestic forces opposed to U.S. domination and exploitation, including the New People's Army (NPA), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), factions of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and even the legal democratic mass movement. Over the past months, for example, 23 members of the legal political party Bayan Muna have been murdered and 6 have disappeared.†

At the same time, Washington's military intervention in the Philippines is part of an intensified drive for further consolidation of U.S. world hegemony. It is intended to secure and tighten U.S. corporate control of land, markets and natural resources in Mindanao, the rest of the Philippines, and Asia. Its agenda is the establishment of permanent military presence and bases so the Philippines can be used as a launching pad for attacks against the peoples of Asia and beyond.†

U.S. Foreign Secretary Colin Powell is expected to finalize the new U.S.-Philippines Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) during a trip to the Philippines August 2 and 3. This will extend, expand and consolidate the growing U.S. presence in the archipelago and secure the stationing of U.S. military troops and war material. †

The ISM participants believe the government of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is responsible for submitting to the Bush regime's plan to export its bogus "war on terror" to the Philippine soil and giving the American military free rein to directly intervene in internal affairs. She is likewise accountable for the massive violations of human rights and the sovereign and democratic rights of the Filipino people.†

Just over 10 years ago the Filipino people were victorious in driving out the U.S. bases

and all U.S. troops. The Filipino people, with assistance from the peoples of the world, can and will drive the U.S. troops out of their country once again. It is just a matter of time!†

Therefore we, the ISM delegates, in concluding our mission today, July 30, 2002, resolve to maintain and strengthen the solidarity links that have been forged and to develop concerted initiatives to end U.S. military intervention and to heighten worldwide resistance to U.S. imperialism in the Philippines and around the world. We unite to fight for: †

- the immediate, total and permanent withdrawal of all U.S. troops from the Philippines
- justice for the Filipino people and all victims of human rights atrocities committed by U.S. and Philippine troops
- an end to U.S.-led aggression and intervention under whatever pretext it occurs.

With this in mind we have adopted the following plan of action:†

- to demand the prosecution of U.S. soldiers involved in the Tuburan shooting and other human rights violations
- to campaign for the unconditional freedom for the Basilan 73 detainees and the GenSan 3
- to organize protest actions against the upcoming Balikatan
- to oppose the approval and implementation of the MLSA
- to launch coordinated and broad information campaigns (forums, workshops, publications and other grassroots actions) in our respective countries and localities to expose and oppose U.S. aggression and armed intervention in the Philippines
- to create and popularize Web sites and publications that will monitor U.S. troops in the Philippines and other related information
- to strengthen our links and solidarity with the people of Basilan, Zamboanga, and Sulu, Bayan affiliated people's organizations, and people-oriented service institutions
- to undertake networking with solidarity groups, international solidarity formations and in particular the International League of People's Struggles (ILPS), human rights organizations, church institutions and individuals, peoples of color, progressive political parties, international conferences, anti-war/anti-racist alliances, and other solidarity groups such as those working for Palestine, Colombia, Iraq, etc.
- to conduct and organize militant mass actions in front of U.S. embassies to condemn U.S. armed intervention
- to launch internationally coordinated actions on the issue of U.S. armed intervention in the Philippines and U.S. aggression in other countries.