

**LETTER OF CONCERN
FROM FILIPINO SCHOLARS IN THE U.S.:**

**ON THE ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE OF
JAMES BALAO (CORDILLERA PEOPLES' ALLIANCE)**

Thursday, October 9, 2008

We are alarmed and disturbed with the enforced disappearance of Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) member James M. Balao since September 17, 2008. His family has no information of his whereabouts up to this moment. We urgently call for the immediate and unconditional surfacing of James, in the spirit of upholding our basic human rights, very basic of which is the right to life and security which must not be denied to anyone.

His enforced disappearance is being attributed to his work with the legal people's movement advocating indigenous peoples rights, human rights and social justice. Balao has reported that he was being surveilled since June and this heightened until his disappearance last week. The CPA and the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance (CHRA) point to military intelligence agents as the perpetrators of this violation.

Since the Arroyo government implemented its Operation Plan Bantay Laya in 2001, members and leaders of legal and legitimate people's organizations such as the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) have been targeted for neutralization by agents of the state and are unjustly labeled as communist fronts and terrorist organizations. Innocent lives have already been claimed as a result of this State policy of political and extrajudicial killings, and Balao is the second case of enforced disappearance to a CPA member or officer, since Ama Daniel Ngayaan was abducted in 1987.

We ask the Philippine National Police, the Armed Forces of the Philippines to fully assist the family, the Cordillera Peoples Alliance and the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance in the search for James Balao.

The State policy Oplan Bantay Laya which has labelled legal progressive organizations such as the Cordillera Peoples Alliance as "sectoral fronts" of the Communist Party of the Philippines, National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the New Peoples Army should be immediately terminated. We call on President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to sincerely implement the recommendations of United Nations Special Rapporteur Philip Alston - "As Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, the President must take concrete steps to put an end to those aspects of counterinsurgency operations which have led to the targeting and execution of many individuals working with civil society organizations".

We call on the Philippine Government to observe the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) and other international human rights laws and declarations such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The search for James Balao gets more and more urgent by the minute. He must be immediately and unconditionally surfaced.

Sincerely,

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