

**Pls. check against delivery**

**UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, 7<sup>th</sup> Session, 13 March 2008**

**GENERAL DEBATE ON ITEM 3:**  
**RE REPORT OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS<sup>1</sup>**

**Oral Intervention by the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL)**

**Supported by the World Council of Churches (WCC), Lawyers Rights Watch of Canada (LRWC), Asian Legal Resource Center (ALRC), Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network (AITPN), Indigenous Peoples' Coalition (IPC), Nord Sud XXI**

Thank you, Mr. President:

I am speaking on behalf of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL). This statement is joined by the World Council of Churches (WCC), Lawyers Rights Watch of Canada (LRWC), Asian Legal Resource Center (ALRC), Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network (AITPN), Indigenous Peoples' Coalition (IPC), Nord Sud XXI, as well as the Dutch Lawyers for Lawyers Foundation.

I come from the Filipino lawyers' groups National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL) and the Counsels for the Defense of Liberties (CODAL).

We wish to address the issue of human rights defenders and would like to take the opportunity to commend once again Ms. Hina Jilani, Special Representative of the Secretary General for her report and salute her for her exemplary and courageous work. We welcome the report particularly on the role of stakeholders in implementing its recommendations.

The addendum mentioned the extrajudicial killing of human rights lawyer Gil Gojol who was killed after coming from a court hearing and of the surveillance of the Prolabor Legal Assistance Center (PLACE) which provides free legal aid to workers.

These attacks violate the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1990 Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

These attacks are emblematic of the continuing attacks not only against lawyers - a significant number of whom are involved directly in human rights lawyering and advocacy. These are also but part of the impunity of the attacks against hundreds of other human rights defenders - human rights workers, peasant organizers, trade unionists, churchpeople and others - within the context of a militarist counter-insurgency approach ironically called Oplan Bantay Laya (Operation Plan Freedom Watch). Suffice it to say that until today, no one has ever been credibly convicted for these attacks.

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered by Atty. Edre U. Olalia, Special Legal Consultant for Karapatan for UN Mechanisms. He is also President of the international Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL).

In addition, the Special Representative correctly pointed out that the attacks may have been related to activities in the defense of human rights. As a foreign lawyer once quipped in shock over the level of impunity, these attacks may indicate that “the Philippines is the worst place for human rights defenders to be.”

Further, these cases are incompatible with the Philippines' pledges as a member of the Council. In this connection, the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) 2nd Session on the Philippines views as “unacceptable” the inclusion of the Philippine government as a member of the Council because “it undermines the credibility of the UN in this field; is an intolerable offense to the victims; and is a denial of the many well documented denunciations of the dramatic violations of human rights.”

Finally, the Special Representative observed that the high incidence of forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of human rights defenders in the Philippines remains a deep concern and that the absence of any credible investigation and resolution of cases may indicate that “human rights defenders in the Philippines are unable to fully carry out their work due to fear of intimidation and reprisal.” Even foreign human rights defenders – prominent personalities, lawyers, churchworkers, trade unionists, social workers, doctors - have been placed on the government's immigration “blacklist/watchlist” for their positions and involvement against human rights violations.

We fully support the recommendation of the Special Representative that the situation of human rights defenders be one of the elements to be examined in the upcoming Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

We request the Human Rights Council to fully support the mandate on Human Rights defenders and encourage the mandate holder to continue the struggle of the people on the ground for the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.

Thank you, Mr. President.#