

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 35/001/2007 (Public)  
News Service No: 037  
23 February 2007

## **Philippines: All parties must act on political killings ahead of elections**

The release of the Melo Commission report, together with the initial findings of the UN expert on extrajudicial executions, should give the impetus to the government and all political parties and groups to act decisively to end the political killings in the run up to legislative and local elections in May.

"The body of evidence is now so compelling that it can no longer be ignored: there is substantial confirmation of the pattern of political killings in the Philippines," said Natalie Hill, Deputy Asia Pacific Director for Amnesty International.

"The election period will be fraught with its own tensions. It is essential that the manifestos of all political parties commit to working strenuously to put an end to the ongoing killings and so minimise the risk of a further escalation of violence during the polls."

Responding to the Melo Commission report, the government has announced a six-point action plan, the implementation of which will be crucial to ending the killings. It includes the establishment of special courts to speed along the trials of suspected perpetrators. A lack of accountability for such political killings remains a critical challenge: to date there has not been one conviction, despite the hundreds of killings, primarily of legal leftist activists, over the past six years.

One major obstacle to stopping the cycle of political executions is the lack of effective witness protection. Witnesses are afraid to come forward to report killings because of threats and intimidation. The government must ensure effective witness protection for all those involved in court proceedings, including victims and their relatives.

"As the Philippines enters the period of Lent, all political parties and civil society groups need to reflect on the numerous human lives that have been lost and resolve to end these killings. Those responsible for or complicit in the killings, particularly military elements identified by the Melo Commission and the UN expert, must fully support the remedial measures implemented by the government and cooperate with investigators," said Natalie Hill.

Philip Alston, the UN expert on extrajudicial executions, stated in his initial findings that: "*The AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines] remains in a state of almost total denial of its need to respond effectively and authentically to the significant number of killings which have been convincingly attributed to them.*" He made a point of speaking to all sides, including leftist parties, during his investigation.

"We should remember that most of the victims were not even members of armed groups, even though they may have sympathised with their ideology. It is a matter of importance for everyone in the Philippines that individuals should be able to affiliate with the political party or group of their choice and not be subject to politically motivated violence as a result."

For further information see Amnesty International Report "Philippines: Political Killings, Human Rights and the Peace Process" :

Summary: [http://web.amnesty.org/library/pdf/ASA350092006ENGLISH/\\$File/ASA3500906.pdf](http://web.amnesty.org/library/pdf/ASA350092006ENGLISH/$File/ASA3500906.pdf)

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