



APWLD

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

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Women Human Rights Defender Murdered in the Philippines

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development mourn the loss of two brave women, human rights defenders. Concepcion 'Connie' Brizuela and Cynthia Oquendo were among the 57 people murdered on November 23 in Maguindanao, Philippines.

Connie and Cynthia joined several family members of Vice Mayor Ishmael Mangudadatu of Buluan and approximately 40 other people, including journalists, to the government Commission on Elections office in Maguindanao, in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). They were going to file Mangudadatu's candidacy for governor in the 2010 elections. It has been reported that 100 armed men stopped the group's convoy on a remote section of highway near the town of Ampatuan where they were abducted and brutally murdered. There is also evidence that some of the victims were sexual assaulted.

Concepcion 'Connie' Brizuela was a passionate defender of women's rights. She was also a caring grandmother who refused to abandon her advocacy work despite death threats. She was a founder and treasurer of the Union of People's Lawyers in Mindanao (UPLM). She was a well known and respected women's human rights defender who worked tirelessly to end State violence against women in the Mindanao region, particularly violence committed by military officials, the police and civilian armed groups.

Cynthia Oquendo, a young artistic mother, was also a human rights defender, lawyer and member of UPLM. She was active in social justice movements and was well known for her activism in health-related causes.

This latest incident is an all too familiar reminder of the long history of extra-judicial executions that have occurred with impunity in the Philippines. Since President Arroyo took office in 2001, hundreds of left-wing political party members, human rights activists, journalists, and outspoken clergy have been killed or abducted. Out of those, only six cases have ever been successfully prosecuted even though the military has been implicated in many of them.

On Tuesday 24 November 2009 President Gloria Arroyo ordered the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police to deploy units to conduct immediate pursuit of the perpetrators of the gruesome massacre'. She further stated that 'civilized society has no place for this kind of violence'.

Tell President Arroyo that the world is watching.

Send the attached letter to her office, government officials and embassies.

APWLD is a regional women's human rights network of 180 members in 26 countries of the Asia Pacific region committed to enabling women to use law as an instrument of social change, equality and development.

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