

Duterte liable for 'negligence'—CHR

by NIKKO DIZON
Inquirer.net

MANILA—If only for the “negligence” of the police force of the city that he heads, Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte should be held accountable for the authorities’ failure to stop and solve the nearly daily vigilante killings, the human rights head said.

“He cannot simply escape responsibility for the fact that the killings have been unresolved by the police force of Davao and the local government has been banking on the peace and order in the city,” CHR Chairman Leila de Lima told the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* by phone.

De Lima said that “at the very least, there was negligence” on the part of the law enforcers for their failure to arrest suspects.

However, while Duterte’s “bold statements” against criminals at the public inquiry earlier this week “appalled” the commission, De Lima said there was no “hard evidence” that the killings were state-sponsored.

De Lima said the Davao police simply reasoned that the lack of witnesses prevented them from pursuing investigations.

Duterte, once President Gloria

Macapagal-Arroyo’s consultant on peace and order, on Tuesday gave up his supervisory role of the Davao police force and resigned from the National Police Commission (Napolcom) to give the CHR a free hand to investigate the killings that were allegedly carried out by a death squad.

Malacañang rejected his resignation and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) explained that Napolcom has been deputizing all governors and mayors as its representatives to supervise the police forces in their jurisdiction.

Meanwhile, the Philippine representative of the Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) expressed disappointment that the CHR’s public inquiry focused on Duterte instead of getting evidence and prioritizing the protection of witnesses.

“As you can see, the focus was once again on Duterte. And as usual, he had taken this opportunity (to pull) popular support and sympathy (from) the people of Davao which he is good at. In a sense he had trivialized and deviated from the issue,” Danilo Reyes, head of the AHRC’s Philippine desk, said in an email sent to



Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte

the *Inquirer*. Reyes said the CHR should focus its inquiry “to ensure (gathering) evidence and testimonies that could stand in court.”

“Because if we just keep on saying Duterte and (there’s) condemnation solely of him, the issue would be trivialized and fade away as it was before,” Reyes said.

De Lima said Reyes and the AHRC had a point.

She said the CHR has been trying to reach out to witnesses and even death squad insiders whom other human rights organizations spoke to and gather evidence.

That Duterte ended up being “magnified” in the inquiry was because of his “persona,” De Lima said.

“The inquiry was aimed to encourage witnesses to come forward and to obtain hard evidence. But to be honest, I had no illusions even before reaching Davao. I know that no witness will be willing to publicly testify,” De Lima said.

The CHR has been working on “ways and means” to establish a protection program for witnesses understandably hesitant to execute testimonies, De Lima added.

De Lima said the CHR has been scheduled to return to Davao City on April 17 to continue the public inquiry where barangay (village) chairmen in areas with a “high concentration of killings” would be invited to participate.

Human rights organizations have placed the death toll at more than 800, including minors, since the first killings began in 1998.

Most of the victims had been accused of petty crimes, but local groups said there had been cases of “mistaken identity” as well, not to mention that the Davao Death Squad appeared to have encouraged copycats in neighboring cities.

De Lima added that the victims were from impoverished families, citing a seeming “discrimination”

by the vigilantes.

“The drug addicts in Davao only come from the D and E classes?” a sarcastic De Lima noted.

De Lima reiterated her concern over the seeming public acceptance in Davao City of vigilantism in the name of peace and order.

“I saw it in the body language, the expressions of many of those who attended the public inquiry. Most of them seem to accept it. There were very little local non-government organizations that had strong feelings against the vigilante-style killings. I’m wondering what that means,” De Lima said.

Unraveling the mystery of the Davao Death Squad, in one aspect, was aimed at preventing people from getting desensitized to the killings, De Lima said.

At the public inquiry, De Lima said a participant narrated the story of a man who caught someone in the act of breaking into his car inside a church compound.

“He was heard telling the thief, ‘Ipapa-DDS kita!’,” De Lima said.

If the death squad was an organized group now, De Lima feared it could become “uncontrollable” in the future where ordinary citizens might end up executing suspected criminals themselves. ■

Convergys plans to open 2 more BPO sites

MANILA—With a continued boom in business process outsourcing (BPO), Convergys said Monday it was constructing two new sites in the Philippines and open them within the year.

The company said it remained committed to an expansion plan, announced last year, which would provide as many as 7,000 new jobs.

The company will formally open this April 8 three new sites. These will bring to 12 the number of Convergys’ operational contact center facilities in the Philippines. The company now has around 16,000 employees.

The UP-Ayala Land center, the company’s seventh in Metro Manila, can hold up to 1,000 employees. Another 1,000 employees can be housed at the Convergys facility in Cebu i3, the company’s third in Cebu City. The Nuvali site is Convergys’ first in Sta. Rosa, and can hold 900 employees.

With the opening of these three centers, Convergys can fulfill almost half of its job commitments for the year. (*Inquirer.net*)

Baguio kept in the dark on casino deal

by MAURICE MALANES, DONNA DEMETILLO
Inquirer.net

BAGUIO CITY—The city government has been kept in the dark on a casino agreement embedded in a restructured lease contract for Camp John Hay, and has asked the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) to explain why.

Vice Mayor Daniel Fariñas invited the BCDA to the April 13 session of the city council following an ecumenical rally led by Baguio Bishop Carlito Cenzon Jr. to protest the agreement that was not disclosed by BCDA for eight months.

The deal was part of a July 1, 2008, restructured lease agreement between BCDA and the developer, Fil Estate-owned Camp John Hay Development Corp.

(CJHDevco).

Cenzon led at least 300 Roman Catholics, Protestants, Evangelical Christians, Pentecostals and Muslims, who were organized by the ecumenical Baguio Multi-Sectoral Group.

Some of the rally participants held rosaries and chanted prayers as they walked down Session Road, the city’s main street.

Cenzon also faced the council, during its March 30 session, where he said: “Today we are making a stand for righteousness. Today we demand justice for families that have been broken because of gambling. Today we stand for those who have lost hope. Today we stand for future generations.”

The key issue raised by the pro-



Camp John Hay

testers was the BCDA’s failure to reveal the casino deal. “What is the real score? Why weren’t we informed? Why weren’t you informed?” asked lawyer Alex Bangsoy, the group’s spokesperson.

The church groups asserted

shall ensure only wholesome, family-oriented entertainment and recreational activities are conducted within the (John Hay Economic) Zone” and that “no casino operations shall definitely be allowed under any guise or form.”

Bangsoy said the BCDA violated this condition when it signed the casino agreement on July 1 last year, the same day BCDA and CJHDevco finalized its restructuring deal.

CJHDevco had acquired new venture capital from the Ayala Corp., a detail that was added to the revised John Hay agreement.

In the document, the parties agreed that BCDA needed to secure an exclusive license from the Philippine Games and Amusement Corp. to operate a casino and other gaming facilities within CJH.

City Resolution 362 issued in 1994, which the city council listed as a prerequisite in the environmental compliance certificate of Camp John Hay (CJH).

The second condition of that resolution states that “the BCDA

It also waived all contractual obligations of CJHDevCo, including payment of rentals, should BCDA fail to secure the license.

The contract was signed by retired Armed Forces chief of staff, Gen. Narciso Abaya, now BCDA president; Robert John Sobrepena, chair of CJHDevCo; and Ferdinand Santos, president of CJHDevCo.

“We know for a fact that there was a 2003 resolution to allow casinos in John Hay. Are we being prepared for another change of mind?” Bangsoy asked.

He was referring to City Resolution 248 issued in 2003. This resolution was overturned by the city council last year.

Fariñas assured religious leaders that the council would not allow casinos or gambling in any guise or form. ■

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