

UN noted 70 percent drop in killings – RP mission

by CYNTHIA BALANA
Inquirer.net

MANILA – United Nations Special Rapporteur Philip Alston has noted a 70-percent decrease in the number of unexplained killings in the Philippines, according to the Philippine Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva.

In a dispatch to the Department of Foreign Affairs Thursday, the mission said Alston made the oral statement in his follow-up report to the 11th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Switzerland on May 3.

Alston had been critical of the country's human rights record, prompting the government to issue repeated rebuttals to his reports to the UN.

During the session, Alston stressed that the Philippine Human Rights Commission has been reinvigorated and that a major and "highly credible" investigation of the alleged death squads in Davao has been opened.

"The government continues to announce new initiatives designed to reduce the number of killings and identify those responsible," the mission quoted Alston as saying.

The mission submitted to the HRC a detailed written response to Alston's follow-up report. The response was prepared by the Philippine Human Rights Committee.

During the interactive dialogue in the HRC, the Philippine delegation shared news reports validating that the New People's Army was behind a number of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines.

The Philippine delegation said that such proof was "indicative of the consistent pattern of deception used by rebel groups where the armed wing conducts extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances and other violations of humanitarian law, while the political arm puts the blame on the government."

Aside from the follow-up report on the Philippines, Alston presented a number of reports, including those on his visits to other countries. ■

2nd probe on abduction of Fil-Am activist

by TONETTE OREJAS
Inquirer.net

MANILA – The military ordered a "deeper investigation" into allegations by Filipino-American activist Melissa Roxas that soldiers interrogated, tortured, and incarcerated her in Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija, following her abduction in Tarlac on May 19.

Lieutenant General Isagani Cachuela, chief of the Northern Luzon Command (Nolcom), on Wednesday said he directed Major General Ralph Villanueva, commander of the Army's 7th Infantry Division, the administrator of the military camp, to conduct the probe.

Cachuela said the investigation would be the second he ordered since May 25 when reports about the abduction of Roxas and her two companions, Juanito Carabeo and Edward Jandoc, were reported in the media.

Roxas and Carabeo were released by their abductors on May 26.

According to a police report on May 20, Roxas and her two companions were taken from the house of Jesus Paulo at Bagong Sikat, Kapanikian, La Paz, Tarlac, at around 2 p.m. on May 19.

But Colonel Gene Perino, chief of the Army's 701st Infantry Brigade, which has jurisdiction over that area of Tarlac, said his provincial commander reported that "no such thing happened in his area."

Perino said his troops were helping the victims of Typhoon "Emong" in Pangasinan at the time.

Villanueva, who said he ordered an investigation after he heard about the disappearances, said: "We have reason to believe that the alleged abduction was stage-managed to put the blame on our soldiers who are doing a good job of maintaining peace and order in Central Luzon."

"We have tasked our line units to investigate and gather information on the alleged abduction but the inquiry has so far not come up with information regarding the incident except those pro-

vided by the police," Villanueva said.

"Our inquiry also disclosed that no soldier from our line units was in the area of the reported abduction at that time nor involved in such incident," he said.

In an affidavit that she attached to a petition for a writ of amparo on Tuesday, Roxas, 31, reported being in La Paz as a volunteer health worker.

She said she was blindfolded and handcuffed during the five days that she was held.

She described hearing "construction activities – blowtorching, hammering, and the construction bustle – and these stopped in the late afternoon and I also heard gun firing as though in a firing range and planes taking off and landing and it was loud and I could also hear goats bleating."

Fort Magsaysay does have an airstrip, a hospital, firing ranges, and a gas station, as noted in past media visits.

Roxas said her abductors identified themselves as being with the "Special Operations Group."

Aside from the 7th ID, the other Army units based in the 45,000-hectare camp are the Special Operations Command, Special Forces Regiment, Artillery Regiment, Training and Doctrines Command, and Military Intelligence Bureau.

Nolcom, as a unified command, has operational control over the 7th ID, 5th ID, First Air Division, and Naval Forces North, Cachuela said.

It has no direct control over other Army units in Fort Magsaysay, he added.

Marie Hilao-Enriquez, secretary-general of the Karapatan human rights group, said she welcomed the second investigation ordered by Nolcom.

"That's what we want them to do. It's what they should really do – a diligent, thorough investigation, and I hope the probe would come out with results," she said. ■

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