

OBSERVER

A JOURNAL ON THREATENED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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WANTED



RED BAITING: CIVIL SOCIETY UNDER GENERAL SUSPICION

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EDITORIAL

When no distinction is drawn between terrorists and human rights activists, state actors put the whole civil society under general suspicion. Red-Baiting, the practice of state actors to publicly and detractively classify government-critical individuals and organizations as state enemies, communist terrorists or members of communist front organizations has a long tradition in Philippine politics. The security services still fail to differentiate between organisations that bear arms to fight the state and legitimate unarmed organisations that oppose the government within the framework of their guaranteed rights and freedoms.

However, when Benigno Aquino became president of the Philippines and included several men and women to his cabinet, who were active members of civil society, hopes were raised that the problem of Red-Baiting would be tackled as well. It has been more than one and a half years since the new administration assumed office – time to take a closer look at the issue of Red-Baiting.

The introductory article describes the social phenomenon of Red-Baiting from a theoretical, social, historical, political and legal perspective providing insight into its functional logic determined by the interdependence and interaction of these different fields. IPON emphasised the issue in course of a comprehensive project including the implementation of a baseline study, multi-track networking and a Red-Baiting conference in 2011. The “Conference on Red-Baiting in the Philippines” was organised by IPON to enhance exchange between actors representing state

authorities and different civil society organisations.

The tagging and labelling that mark Red-Baiting have serious consequences for those people and groups working in the frontline of defending human rights. In an interview, a representative of the organisation Karapatan provides insights into a victim’s perspective and emphasises the role of the former and present counter-insurgency programs as tools to silence the dissent of the people. In this regard, she points out that “Oplan Bayanihan” as the current government strategy has to be withdrawn immediately to tackle the issue. Dr. Simbulan, Director of the Philippine Human Rights Information Centre, also takes up governmental measures and describes Red-Baiting as a counter-insurgency tool, which has primarily been intended by the state to achieve certain objectives like sowing terror among the civilian population, immobilizing officers and members of branded groups and destroying the progressive people’s movement. For the Commission on Human Rights, tagging members of the civil society as communists still forms an integral part of the military’s internal security operations which is often accompanied by massive human rights violations.

Knappmann describes another version of political labelling that is directly linked to counter-insurgency operations: Abu Sayyaf-Baiting. While in Red-Baiting victims are accused of being communists, here victims are accused of being members of the Moslem group Abu Sayyaf.

Taking the mentioned measures of fighting state enemies into consideration, Nambula focuses on

these Philippine government efforts to root-out armed rebellions in the country, the closely associated human rights violations and the contribution of the European Union to improve the situation with the EU-Philippines Justice Support Program.

Despite these examples, Red-Baiting is not solely a Philippine issue; also in other countries this strategy is used against state enemies: Examples from Peru and Germany reveal historical and recent dimensions of this phenomenon in non-filipino countries in order to provide international perspectives on this matter.

Despite the issue’s focus on Red-Baiting, we also provide an insight into IPON’s current work. Since the Agrarian Reform Program is to expire in 2014, human rights defenders are facing increasing repression within the next years – for example on Negros Island. Also IPON conducts human rights observations in Mindanao and in her article Albers depicts the struggle of indigenous groups for land rights in Central Mindanao. ■



CALL FOR ARTICLES

Preview of the Next Issue: Forms of Peaceful Protest. Call for articles until April 15th, 2012 (editorial deadline). Articles including a systematic analysis on the international, national and local level with an focus on human rights or human rights defenders are most welcome.