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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
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**CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTIONS OF:  
TORTURE AND DETENTION, DISAPPEARANCES AND SUMMARY  
EXECUTIONS AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY, ADMINISTRATION OF  
JUSTICE, IMPUNITY.**

**Written statement\* submitted by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs  
of the World Council of Churches, a non-governmental organisation in general  
consultative status.**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2006]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) has a longstanding commitment to justice, peace and human rights, rejecting and countering violence and working towards building reconciled communities. In areas of intense conflict and severe human rights violations that have national and international implications, CCIA actively promotes coherent ecumenical approaches and takes a leadership role in coordinating the response of the international ecumenical fellowship. It does so by organising pastoral visits to critical human rights situations, sharing experiences of other churches, offering concrete solidarity and hope to victims and families of human rights violations.

Since early 2005, the CCIA had been receiving regular reports from the member churches of the WCC in the Philippines about the critical human rights situation in Eastern Visayas, Hacienda Luisita, Tarlac City in Central Luzon and in Mindanao as a result of the military operations. Concerned by these developments, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches wrote to H.E. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and expressed dismay at the reports of abductions, detentions without warrants and extra judicial killings that were taking place in the province of Tarlac where workers and peasants in Hacienda Luisita were on strike. The letter expressed deep shock at the killing of Fr William Tadena on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2005, and called on the President of the Philippines to order an independent and speedy investigation in the killing and to ensure that those responsible are brought before the Court of Law to stand trial for the crime committed. As the situation continued to deteriorate the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches received a request from its member constituents and partners in the Philippines including National Council of Churches and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines to send an international ecumenical pastoral delegation to the country at the earliest possible.

The ten member Pastoral Ecumenical Delegation comprising of church representatives from Australia, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Norway, Sri Lanka, Switzerland and the USA was in the Philippines from July 14-21, 2005. It visited Hacienda Luisita, a sugar cane plantation in Central Luzon; Samar and Leyte provinces in Eastern Visayas and Surigao Del Sul, a province in Mindanao. The delegation amongst others took note of the fact that the root cause of the turmoil in the country was: the inadequacies of state institutions such as the judiciary, and other factors that included inequitable distribution of resources, which trapped many Filipinos in abject poverty and monopoly of transnational corporations and other foreign interests in resource exploitation. These shortcomings were pervasive and promises of full enjoyment of human rights often made by government officials remained a far away dream. The members of the delegation raised these concerns in the meetings with the Executive Secretary of the office of the President, Mr Eduardo Ermita and with Commissioner William D. Saurian of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines. The delegation also raised issues regarding the safeguarding of the people's civil, political and social, economic and cultural rights, the need for resumption of peace talks with the National Democratic Front and the lack of government's response to the reports and recommendations of the Commission on Human Rights. Some key recommendations of the delegation that required immediate action were:

- an immediate and impartial investigation in to the on-going extrajudicial killings;
- review of government's military operations for resolving the insurgency to ensure the safety of non-combatants and to avoid indiscriminate destruction of property;

- assertion of civilian control of the military to hold it accountable for its actions that must be in keeping with international human rights and humanitarian law;
- repeal of the 1995 Philippine Mining Act;
- reform of the judicial system to guarantee its independence and integrity;
- promotion of agrarian and land rights reform in order to preserve the integrity of creation.

Since the visit of the delegation in July 2005, the situation in the country has shown no signs of improving. Regular reports are received by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the WCC from its partners documenting disappearances, extra-judicial killings, and detentions without trial for long periods of time. Amongst the more serious crimes committed by the Philippines Security forces are the killings of human rights defenders. According to well documented reports around 21 human right defenders of Karapatan – a local human rights organisation have been killed since 2001. Those killed in 2005 include Mr Rick Ramos (CATLU President), Rev. Edison Lapuz (UCCP Conference Minister), Diosadao Fortuna (Nestle Phils Union President), Attorney Norman Bocar (Bayan Muna - Eastern Visayas), Rev. Raul Domingo (UCCP Palawan and Karapatan), Mr Pepe Manegdeg (Rural Missionaries of the Philippines), Priscilla Esteban (Bayan Muna Nueva Ecija). All these killings have gone unpunished as the government has failed to bring the culprits to justice.

The delegation during its visit were informed by the people that there is a systematic attempt by the authorities to tarnish the image of the churches, the human rights groups and peace activists working in the field particularly, in the critical areas mentioned above. These attempts amongst others include a campaign to brand those churches, related organisations, peace and human rights groups who work for justice and for the poor as subversive or communists. During the meeting with the Public Information officer of the Armed Forces of Philippines (AFP) Northern Luzon Command, the officer shared the AFP's belief that members of the New People's Army (NPA) try to infiltrate churches and therefore some churches have to be watched. The churches and other organisations alleged to "being infiltrated by the Communists" are listed in the book "Trinity of War: Book II – The grand design of the CPP/NPA/NDF". Some persons named in the said lists have been attacked and killed. The mode of operations usually is that two persons riding a motorcycle, wearing ski masks or bonnets to escape identification, use vehicles with no number plates and fire at close range making sure the victim does not survive.

There is presently a growing environment of impunity in the Philippines. The delegation during its visit met a number of families of the victims of those killed – young wives, sisters, mothers and other near relatives. All of them told the group that despite running from pillar to post they were not given any clear answers as to who was responsible for the killings of their near and dear ones – in most cases no progress had been made in the investigation. These stories were backed by human rights defenders and other activists who accompanied the families of the victims. According to a recent report released by Council for the Defence of Liberties (CODAL), there is complete impunity in the Philippines. An average of one person is killed every week. Since January 2005 seven lawyers have been killed and nine journalists have fallen to assassins' bullets. In many of these cases, no suspects were arrested, or witnesses found. There are no leads either according to authorities and other official sources.

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches submits that the government of Philippines should take immediate steps to:

- Enter into a dialogue with the rural communities in Hacienda Luisita, Tarlac City in Central Luzon, Samar and Leyte provinces in Eastern Visayas, Surigao Del Sul province in Mindanao in order to ensure these communities enjoy full civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; withdraw the military as part of the measures to restore stability and peace in the above regions;
- take measures to undertake genuine structural and land reforms in the country;
- take all steps to end the present growing culture of impunity and establish the rule of law;
- guarantee a just and fair share of access to resources to the poor and to revise the existing legislation such as the Mining Act 1995;
- order an impartial investigation into the cases reported during the year 2005, of extra judicial killings in the province of Samar and Leyte as well as other parts of the Philippines;
- take immediate steps to put an end to the practice of torture by the security forces, and to ensure that there are no incidences of detentions without trial and all action taken by the authorities are in accordance with the due process.

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