

Extrajudicial killings in the Philippines: Harassment & Persecution of Opposition Member of Parliament Satur Ocampo

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Armed men reported staking out Satur's house

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MANILA, Philippines—Unidentified armed men believed to be police officers caused alarm among the neighbors and security aides of Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Satur Ocampo after they were seen staking out his residence in Quezon City Sunday morning.

"My morning was disturbed," said Ocampo.

Information gathered by the allied Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) showed that the men had short firearms. Two vehicles and men riding tandem on motorcycles were spotted conducting a surveillance in the vicinity of Ocampo's house.

Renato Reyes, Bayan secretary general, said the presence of the men in the neighborhood could be related to a murder case filed in Nueva Ecija province against Ocampo.

On Friday, prosecutors in Nueva Ecija filed murder charges against Ocampo, fellow Bayan Muna Rep. Teodoro Casiño, Gabriela Rep. Liza Maza and former Anakpawis Rep. Rafael Mariano for the killing between 2001 and 2004 of three rebel returnees - Danilo Felipe, Jimmy Peralta and Carlito Bayudang - who were suspected of being agents of the military.

Back from Canada

Still reeling from a grueling 16-hour trip to Canada, a visibly tired Ocampo spoke with the media inside the 700-square-meter compound owned by the parents of his wife Carolina Malay.

Wearing a checkered shirt, Ocampo, the House deputy minority leader, said the men might have been policemen sent to arrest him.

"There were two teams of motorcycle-riding men who were riding in tandem that followed us," he said.

"They must have been trying to ensure that I wasn't going anywhere," Ocampo said. He

said he didn't have anything scheduled Sunday except lunch at home with his family.

Ocampo said his security detail noticed the men - when he entered the Heroes' Hills community early Sunday after arriving from his foreign trip.

He said plainclothes policemen were also deployed outside his house after a Leyte judge ordered his arrest in a similar case last year.

To fend off any attempts to arrest Ocampo, his staff called members of the media to monitor the situation at his residence.

Ocampo's staff said a Honda SUV and a Toyota AUV that parked a few meters from the house were driven away when members of the media started to arrive at around 10:30 a.m.

Senior Supt. Nicanor Bartolome, spokesperson of the Philippine National Police (PNP), said that as far as he knew, no warrant had been issued for Ocampo.

Panel of prosecutors

Charged with Ocampo and the three other party-list leaders were Eugenia Magpantay of Marikina; Vicente Cayetano of Norzagaray, Bulacan; Delfin Pimentel of Baler, Aurora, and Emetrio Antalan of Pura, Tarlac, who were identified as top officials of the Central Luzon regional committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the Nueva Ecija committee of the CPP, New People's Army and National Democratic Front.

Ten other suspected members of the rebel group in Nueva Ecija, identified only by their aliases, were also named as co-accused in the two counts of murder and one count of kidnapping with murder.

The kidnap-for-murder case was filed by a panel of prosecutors of Nueva Ecija, led by Assistant Provincial Prosecutor Antonio Lapus Jr., in the regional trial court in Guimba, Nueva Ecija. The two murder cases were filed in the Palayan City RTC.

Persecution

The filing of the cases was approved by acting Nueva Ecija Prosecutor Floro Florendo.

Ocampo called the charges "political persecution" intended to stop them from doing their legislative duties. He said the same charges were used against him and his fellow party-list representatives in the Commission on Elections so they would be disqualified in the 2007 elections. These, however, were eventually dismissed.

Ocampo indicated that the new charges against him and his fellow militant lawmakers must have been brought about by the negative publicity they generated last week while abroad in connection with the human rights record of the Arroyo administration.

"The case has been with the provincial prosecutors for a long time. They acted on it only now," he said.

Flawed

He addressed parliamentarians in Canada and told them of the number of extrajudicial killings in the country, while Casiño went to the United Nations in Geneva and to the International Parliamentary Union conference in Cape Town to counter administration reports on alleged improvements on the human rights situation in the country.

Lawyer Romeo Capulong, the lead counsel for Ocampo's group, said the filing of the cases was flawed from the beginning. He said the accused were denied due process while being investigated by the prosecutors.

He said he would file a motion for judicial determination of probable cause. He said the courts have yet to issue arrest warrants.

Capulong saw the hand of the Arroyo administration in the cases' filing, saying this was meant to "neutralize" his clients so they could not lead protest rallies amid the increasing prices of basic commodities, especially rice.

Complainants

The charge sheet identified the complainants as Medelyn Felipe, Isabelita Bayudang and Mayumi Peralta, the wives of the victims.

The complainants claimed the murders were related to their husband's decision to leave the CPP and support the party-list Akbayan during the 2001 national elections.

Danilo Felipe was reported kidnapped on the night of Feb. 17, 2001, in Barangay Narvacan in Guimba town while on his way home aboard his "kuliglig" (hand tractor-driven farm vehicle). Felipe was reportedly taken to Nampicuan town, where he was reportedly tortured and later killed.

Jimmy Peralta was killed on Dec. 23, 2003, while walking along the highway in Bongabon town. His assailants' car bumped and ran over him.

The attackers, however, mistook Peralta for his brother, Ricardo, their actual target.

Carlito Bayudang was shot and killed on May 6, 2004, also in Bongabon town.

Julie Flores Sinohin, who identified herself as the leader of a security group at a meeting of rebel leaders in a house in Barangay Tugatog, Bongabon, sometime in August 2000, said Ocampo, Maza, Casiño and Mariano were present at the meeting.

Sinohin said the four party-list leaders ordered the CPP-NPA officials to kill the rebel returnees who were suspected to be working for the military and who were supporting another party-list group, according to documents submitted to the courts.

The presence of the motorcycle-riding men in Ocampo's neighborhood came just a day before Congress is due to open session. It also came almost a year after Ocampo's brush with the Philippine National Police.

Bartolome said the PNP was willing to give police security to Ocampo "after we evaluate the

threat (to Ocampo's life). If there is an immediate need, then we can deploy immediately."

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez does not think the government was involved in the monitoring of Ocampo's house.

"Why, does he have a lot of rice?" Gonzalez said when asked if he thought the government was behind the reported surveillance on Ocampo's house.

"We are monitoring rice. These leftists, why should we monitor them?" he added. But he said it should be established first if the surveillance was true. ***With reports from Alcuin Papa and Leila B. Salaverria***

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