

***“THE EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS ISSUE”***

***By Ambassador Albert del Rosario***

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**Our country has been the unfortunate focus of attention on this issue of extrajudicial killings. It has gained attention, both here at home and in other countries and Filipino communities overseas.**

**This is a deeply distressing development for a country that prides itself at having created the first Republic in Asia. As long ago as 1899, our Malolos Constitution, our first constitution and the first Republican constitution in Asia, recognized explicit national and individual rights for every Filipino that are mocked by political murders of our time.**

**Alleged extrajudicial killings have been laid at the door of some of our military, both by our Melo Commission and by Philip Alston, the U.N.’s special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions. Groups on the Left and human rights organizations have expressed the same views.**

**Clearly, this may not be balanced. The New Peoples Army and criminal elements are responsible for many murders. Whether these murders are politically inspired or not is irrelevant. They are all outside the law and we should all condemn them.**

**However, it is another thing to issue a blanket denial disclaiming any military responsibility as several officials have done. Without question, our military has a proud tradition of defending our motherland. The vast majority of its members are men and women of the most outstanding patriotism, courage and integrity.**

**The Philippine press gives far too little coverage of their self-sacrifice, their stoic heroism and their achievements in serving our nation and in protecting our citizenry. There should be a regular weekly portion in every newspaper and in every TV station devoted to these heroes of ours.**

**Notwithstanding, the handful of undesirables among our military should not be allowed to tarnish the image and standing of our valiant men and women in uniform. There is too little substance to some accusations that Alston and even the Melo Commission are somehow biased or poorly informed. To begin with, it is the responsibility of government to provide information to explain the full picture of what is happening.**

**There is no reason why Alston would be biased against the Philippines. We know the foreign entities that have a definite political agenda and their allies in the Philippines, but not all foreigners probing the issue have such viewpoints.**

**In fact, we should not wait for the foreigners to get to the bottom of this problem. An engaged Filipino Civil Society should ask questions and should be given answers. The truth is never hurt by questions. It will only shine brighter with closer scrutiny.**

**The question of why there is an apparent climate of impunity should obviously be among those to be addressed.**

**What we need is a concentrated effort on the part of our government, of our judiciary, of our official and private human rights bodies, and of our military to sift through the reports, the testimonies, the accusations and the witnesses to get to the truth...or to as much of the truth as possible. At the very least, it is important that all known facts should be brought to the fore in order to ensure transparency. We must move forward, and we must move forward together because this issue affects, not just the security forces, but most importantly our whole country.**

**We must furthermore act to disprove allegations that Filipino Civil Society is somehow being cowed by a climate of fear to muzzle opinion. We should demonstrate that we are not intimidated. Indeed, as participants and beneficiaries of the People's Power Revolution more than 20 years ago, we should have no hesitation to speak out on this or any other issue of national interest.**

**The rule of law, being sacrosanct, is what we should rally around, now as in the past. Doing so is a true test of a responsible citizenry in a strong democracy. END**