

Brief Guide Notes on the Extrajudicial Killing of Bishop Alberto B. Ramento (Public Interest Law Center)

Almost exactly one year after the brutal murder on 03 October 2006 of Bishop Alberto Ramento of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, his relatives and co-workers in the churches and in the peace movement and human rights community worldwide continue to raise serious and valid questions about the police investigation, findings and judicial actions taken by the Macapagal-Arroyo government on this heinous crime.

Was the investigation conducted by the Philippine National Police (PNP) fair, objective and thorough? Or was it a sham whose objective was to frame scapegoats, whitewash the case, cover-up the motive and identities of the masterminds and absolve the government of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of culpability and accountability?

Was the killing a simple case of robbery with homicide? Or was it another case of political killing of a prominent crusader for peace and justice and vocal critic of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo?

These are the central issues commonly asked and which we intend to address in a separate paper. And the only way to answer them is to examine closely the evidence gathered by the PNP and upon which the public prosecutor who conducted the inquest proceeding based her action charging Raimond Perez y Regis aka "Raymund Tagalog," Joel April Rose y Padilla aka "Bakbak," Michael Quitaig y Soriano aka "Bembol" and Michael Biado y Lacap aka "Ponga" of the crime of robbery with homicide in Criminal Case No. 14590 of the Tarlac City Regional Trial Court. Necessarily, we will also examine closely in another paper the manner and method employed in the conduct of the police investigation and the evaluation of the evidence by the public prosecutors and the progress of the criminal case in the Tarlac Regional Trial Court against above-named suspects.

The Single-Minded, One-Sided Theory of the PNP

Within hours after the killing was reported to the police and right from the start of the police investigation, the PNP prematurely adopted the theory that the incident was a simple case of robbery with homicide, completely ruling out other possible angles and motives in the commission of the heinous crime of murder. In a "spot report" sent by Police Superintendent Rudy Lacadin, Chief of Police of Tarlac City, to Tarlac Provincial Director Nicanor Bartolome, Lacadin narrated the details of the incident of alleged robbery with homicide committed "early dawn of 03 October 2006 against Bishop Ramento in the Aglipayan church located along Espinosa Street, Barangay Poblacion, Tarlac City." Thereafter, the PNP proceeded to conduct the investigation single-mindedly on this one-sided theory. In violation of standard practice and universally accepted rules on police investigation of heinous and complex crimes, the PNP obstinately stuck to the robbery with homicide theory and considered the case solved and closed on 6 October 2006, barely three days after the crime was committed. On this date, without sufficient evidence, and of course, without any warrant of arrest or search warrant, joint intelligence operatives of the Tarlac City and provincial police swooped down and arrested four suspects whom they later charged with robbery with homicide in the Regional Trial Court of Tarlac City. Strangely, the entire PNP establishment, from the lowest ranking Scene of the Crime Operatives (SOCO), the investigators and intelligence officers assigned to the case, their immediate superiors in their respective units and territorial commands up to and including the Director General of the Philippine National Police have stuck to the robbery with homicide theory. Even the ill-informed officials and allies of the Macapagal-Arroyo government in Malacañang and in Congress callously echoed the same theory, dismissively ignoring as mere propaganda widespread demands for a thorough investigation to determine whether it was another case of political killing of a suspected leftist and prominent critic of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Our Position on the Sham Police Investigation and Legal Proceedings

At the outset, let me point out that the duty to investigate, prosecute and punish the killers of Bishop Ramento, particularly the masterminds, rests squarely on the government of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. The relatives, friends and co-workers of Bishop Ramento would naturally expect and welcome all sincere, determined and well-meaning efforts from the government to

render justice to Bishop Ramento and his family. Unfortunately, none has been shown or exerted. What we see is a systematic whitewash of the case, a cover-up of the masterminds and their political motives, and the scapegoating of ordinary street-corner thieves.

In this situation, we adopted the following positions:

1. On December 6, 2006 we entered a Special Appearance in Criminal Case No. 14590 (For Robbery with Homicide against Raimond Perez, et.al.) in the Regional Trial Court of Tarlac City. In this pleading we said: "The widow and the family of and the church to which Bishop Ramento belonged hereby inform this Honorable Court that they find the investigation of this case conducted by the Philippine National Police to be utterly unsatisfactory and unconvincing. Nevertheless, since a criminal case has already been filed in court, they find it necessary to critically participate therein with reservations."
2. It has become clear to us that the government of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo lacks the political will to prosecute and punish the killers and masterminds in the brutal slaying of Bishop Ramento;
3. For that matter, our historical experience as human rights lawyers and advocates has taught us the lesson that no government will ever render justice to the victims of its own human rights violations;
4. It will be a mere illusion to think that the present case in the Tarlac Regional Trial Court is the proper forum that deserves the participation and support of the lawyers, relatives, friends and co-workers of Bishop Ramento: Any active participation on our part in the actual prosecution of the accused therein will merely co-opt us into a sham proceeding and bind us to a result that will be a gross miscarriage of justice;
5. Nonetheless, we must continue to gather and preserve our evidence for future proceedings when the political climate becomes favorable;
6. After one year of fruitless search for truth and justice, we should now seriously consider foreign for a and venue such as the United Nations; and
7. We must continue to maintain and raise the consciousness of the entire human rights national and international community, the churches and the people to our continuing quest for truth and justice in the brutal killing of Bishop Ramento.

Attorney Romeo T. Capulong
Public Interest Law Center
Lead Counsel for the Family

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