



29 February 2016

**Dr. Chaloka Beyani**  
Special Rapporteur  
Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons

Dear Dr. Beyani:

Warm greeting of peace!

On behalf of Karapatan Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights, a non-government organization working for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines, I would like to bring to your attention the recent deliberate and targeted burning of the evacuation camp of more than 700 indigenous people in Mindanao at the compound of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) in Davao City on February 24, 2016. The evacuees came mostly from communities in Davao del Norte and Bukidnon where military operations are being conducted.

Jong Monzon, secretary general of PASAKA, a federation of indigenous people's organizations in the Southern Mindanao region, narrated that at 2:30 a.m. on February 24, 2016, evacuees woke up to the smell of gasoline poured on the canvas roofs of their tents at the evacuation center. Immediately after, the tents were set aflame when a lighted torch was thrown in. Five makeshift houses were already consumed by fire when it was put out. Monzon said that he and other leaders went out after extinguishing the fire to report to the authorities about the incident. On their way, they saw the gasoline container that was used by the perpetrators.

Monzon and several other leaders immediately called the local 911 to report the incident. Media personnel and police officials responded to the scene and interviewed some of the evacuees, including Monzon. Monzon recounted that at the middle of the interview, a pedicab driver approached them to report that another fire has started in the dormitories of the UCCP compound, which was roughly 100 meters from the evacuation camp. The dormitory houses Haran workers and students.

Witnesses said that something was thrown into the vicinity of the dormitory which caused the explosion. Later investigations found that two lines of barbed wires were cut by the perpetrators to enter the UCCP compound. A bag containing a 1.5 liters bottle full of gasoline was also found.

Five were hurt during the incident, with three needing hospitalization, including two children. The children suffered burns when the canvas roofs melted and fell on the children's feet. Some also had burns in their hands. The victims were sent to a hospital, but were denied attention. Hospital authorities claimed there were no recommendations made by the 911 personnel. The injured are now under the care of health

workers and medics inside the Haran compound.

The perpetrators were described by those in the evacuation center as three men, aboard a motorcycle. A white cap, which belonged to the one of the perpetrators was even left behind, stuck in the cyclone wires.

Initial reports from the Bureau of Fire Protection in Davao City pointed to arson.

Karapatan believes that the incident is part of a series of harassments and threats, which are no longer new to the evacuees seeking shelter in UCCP-Haran. Monzon reports that the military and members of the ALAMARA paramilitary group held a rally outside the UCCP once. Monzon stated that as early as December 17 last year, ALAMARA has already threatened to burn the evacuation center in UCCP.

On July 23, 2015, however, Nancy Catamco, representative of the 2nd district of North Cotabato, brought anti-riot policemen and buses to force the Lumad evacuees to return to their communities. The incident resulted in a skirmish between the evacuees and the police and paramilitary elements.

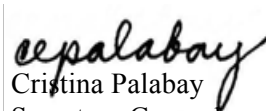
The more than 700 evacuees started to arrive at the UCCP- Haran, batches, starting February 2015. Most them are from Talaingod and Kapalong, Davao del Norte, while a number came from Kitaotao in Bukidnon province. The Lumad fled their communities when soldiers and military-backed ALAMARA militia forces occupied their communities and forcibly recruited them into the paramilitary group.

The continuing harassment on the Lumad evacuees seeking refuge at the UCCP Haran, and the insistence of state agencies to force them back to their communities, show a lack of understanding of their plight and a lack of concern for their safety and welfare.

We are submitting this letter of allegation for your consideration and to investigate, make recommendation/s or take any appropriate action/s regarding the human rights violations committed by the Philippine military in the UCCP evacuation center for indigenous people in Davao City, Philippines.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

Sincerely yours,

  
Cristina Palabay  
Secretary General  
Karapatan