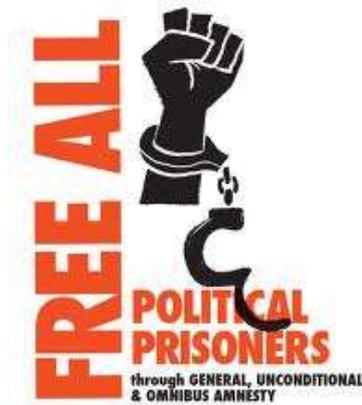


**SETTING UP A FREE COMMITTEE FOR
POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE
PHILIPPINES**



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Brief Background to Free Committees

The formation of “Free Committees” for political prisoners took place in the Philippines under the Marcos dictatorship (1972-1986) when hundreds of thousands of men and women were arrested and detained by the government. These were community-led initiatives to pressure the release of political prisoners and these committees covered all sectors and groups. Post-Marcos governments, including the current one of Benigno “Noy” S. Aquino III, unfortunately have continued to use political arrest and detention to suppress dissent and opposition against government policies and actions and its subservience to American role in the Philippines.

The creation of “free committees” remains as important as ever.

As of July, 2012, there remain 385 political prisoners who are detained in jails, military camps and detention centres all across the Philippines. Of this number, 35 are women, 12 are elderly and 48 are sick and many are long-time prisoners. Of these 107 were arrested under the Aquino government. Many of those arrested were without a warrant, and charged with criminal instead of political cases. Thirteen (13) NDFP consultants to the peace process remain in jail despite the Aquino government’s commitment to work for their release. The Aquino government even denied the existence of political prisoners. (Karapatan Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review, May 2012; available at <http://www.karapatan.org/Karapatan+Submission+UPR>)

The most memorable of these Free Committees during the Marcos dictatorship was the “Free Satur Ocampo Committee” organized by Ocampo’s family, colleagues and media people. The committee campaigned for the release of journalist Satur Ocampo whose case was

then being tried by a military tribunal. While Satur Ocampo made his “self-release,” during his first arrest and detention, the Free Committee definitely highlighted the case of political prisoners, their issues and their demands.

A more recent example is the “Free the Morong 43” Committee which pressed for the release of the 43 health workers (referred to by the media as the Morong 43) who were unjustly arrested, detained and tortured in Feb 2010. The Vancouver Free Morong 43 Committee wrote letters to the Philippine government to voice its concern about the conditions of the detainees, their continuing arrest and detention, helped organized a vigil/picket in front of the Philippine Consulate General and visited the Consulate General to hand their letter addressed to President Aquino III. On Dec 2010, the orders for their release were issued by the Philippine government and the detainees were released soon after. The Vancouver Free Morong 43 Committee was made up of the Lawyers Rights Watch Canada, Alliance for People’s Health, Canada-Philippines Solidarity for Human Rights, Migrante BC, delegates to the Philippine Independent Observers Mission (PIOM) and individual supporters who were moved by the plight of the Morong 43, particularly by the two expectant mothers who later delivered their babies while in detention.

What is a Free Committee?

A Free Committee is a group of individuals willing to “adopt” a political prisoner and in doing so work to highlight the political prisoner and his/her continuing unjust detention, work for the release, improvement of prison conditions, etc. The Free Committee may also be called a “Friends” group, e.g. “Friends of political prisoner(s)”.

A Free Committee can also adopt a group of political prisoners (e.g. women prisoners, the sick and the elderly, nursing or expecting mothers, those with release orders from previous Philippine

governments but still continue to be detained; the 13 NDFP consultants who are covered by the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines; group of political prisoners detained in a common detention centre or group of prisoners who are all charged together in one (or more cases.)

Who can Join or Form a Committee

At least two people can start a committee and invite other members like their friends, family members, classmates, etc. to join them.

The Committee can start writing to their adopted prisoners, introduce themselves and the Committee.

Does a Free Committee have to Formal?

Yes and No.

A Free Committee can be a very informal, meeting around the kitchen table or meeting via Skype, communicating by email, etc. to discuss letter writing strategies, writing to their adopted prisoner, discussing updates on court hearings, etc.

A Free Committee can also be a formal committee under a union local, a church organization, a student group, a women's association etc. As a formal Free Committee, it uses the organization's letterhead, link, etc.

Where do we get names of Political Prisoners?

The Canada Philippines Solidarity for Human Rights, working with its partners in the Philippines: The Association of Ex-Political Prisoners (SELDA), the National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL) and the human rights group Karapatan will provide the list of political prisoners. We have asked our partners for profiles of the prisoners which will include a short biographical sketch, photograph (if available), list of charges and the status of their cases in court, etc.

The Free Committee may send its emails, fax messages, letters of concern or make phone calls to:

H. E. Benigno S. Aquino III
President of the Philippines
2/F Bonifacio Hall, Malacañang, Manila, Philippines
Tel: 733-3010 loc 882/ 887; Fax: (+632) 742-1641 / 929-3968
Email: corres@op.gov.ph ; opnet@ops.gov.ph
Website: [president.gov.ph http://www.president.gov.ph/](http://www.president.gov.ph)

Secretary Teresita Quintos-Deles
Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP)
7/F Agustin I Building,
F. Ortigas Jr. Road, Ortigas Center, Pasig City, Philippines
Tel: 6360701 to 06 / 637-6083 Fax: 638-2216
Email: stqd@opapp.net Website: opapp.gov.ph

Secretary Leila M. de Lima
Department of Justice (DOJ)
DOJ Main Building, Padre Faura Street, Manila, Philippines
Tel: 521-1908 Fax: (+632) 521-1614
Email: doj.delime@gmail.com; soj@doj.gov.ph Website: doj.gov.ph

Secretary Voltaire T. Gazmin
Department of National Defense (DND)
DND Building, Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City, Philippines
Tel: 911-6193 / 911-1746 Fax 911-6213
Website: dnd.gov.ph

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Email: coco.chrp@gmail.com<coco.chrp@gmail.com>chair.rosales.chr@gmail.com,
lorettann@gmail.com

Please send us a copy of your email/mail/fax to the above-named government officials to:



Canada Philippines Solidarity for Human Rights
cps_hr@yahoo.ca
<http://www.canadaphilippinesolidarity.org/>

Useful Links:

SELDA <http://seldapilipinas.wordpress.com/>

Karapatan www.karapatan.org

National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL) www.nupl.net

