

LAWYERS MURDEROUSLY ATTACKED-FROM MARCOS TO MARCOS

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Context

In recent decades many legal professionals have been murderously attacked in the Philippines. Prof. Boehringer began to research the killing of Filipino lawyers in 2009. In 2015, at his suggestion, the International Association of People's Lawyers established a Monitoring Committee on Attacks on Lawyers (including Attorneys, Judges and Prosecutors). We have credible reports of attacks, physical and non-physical, on lawyers in 135 countries.

Regarding the Philippines, we have researched the attacks on lawyers from the Presidency of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. through to the current Marcos Jr. government.

Murderous attacks

President **Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** began his term on July 1, 2022. Under his administration **3** lawyers have been killed (6 survived an attack).

Under President **Rodrigo Duterte**: **70** lawyers killed (21 survived an attack) in 6 years

Under President **Benigno Aquino's** government: at least **49** lawyers killed in 6 years

Under President **Gloria Macapagal Arroyo**: at least **84** were killed in 9 1/2 yrs

In President **Joseph Estrada's** **2** killed in 2yrs 7 mos.

Killed under President **Fidel V. Ramos 0** in 6 years

Under President **Cory Aquino**: at least **9** killed in 5 yrs 10 mos.

The President **Ferdinand Marcos Sr.** Martial Law regime saw at least **7** lawyers killed (in 8 yrs 9 months plus 5 yrs 1 month after in “Martial Law Lite” of one-man authoritarian rule). We have not found any lawyers killed from his election in late December 1965 through to 23 September 1972 when Martial Law commenced officially.

During the years of Martial law and the remainder of his tenure a large number of lawyers suffered other human rights violations, especially their leading human rights and labor lawyers, and lawyers critical of the regime and/or in opposition political organizations. They were imprisoned on false charges, detained indefinitely, often tortured; abducted and “disappeared”; individuals (and their organizations) were labelled/red tagged as Communists or acting for Communists and therefore to be executed; harassed, commonly including death threats; surveilled by state forces; and their offices, sometimes homes, illegally raided and documents taken, and relatives manhandled (e.g. a child’s stomach stood on).

That makes a total of at least **224** lawyers killed since 1972.

List of lawyers killed (and survivors) under President Marcos JR.

Atty. Ariff Lao 6 August 6 2022 Cotabato City, Mindanao

Survived attack by unidentified gunmen riding a motorcycle in tandem (R/T). He had stopped his car to get a burger for his wife. He and his wife were unharmed by the gunshots into the vehicle. Thus far no arrests.

Atty. Lao was the Chair of the Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission.

Atty. Karen Quinanola-Gonzales 1 Sept. 2022 Mandaue City, Cebu

Survived attack as unidentified gunmen shot and wounded her and her son as they were driving in her car.

Police later stated they had “a person of interest” Thus far no arrests made. The Atty. was the Manager of the Business Management and Development Department of the Cebu Port Authority. She also had a private corporate law practice.

Atty. Danny Pondevilla 20 Dec. 2022 Bacolod City, Negros Occid.

Shot dead. He was found in the driver’s seat of his car with a bullet wound in the back of his head. No suspects identified.

Atty. Pondevilla was General Manager of the Electricity Cooperative of Northern Negros.

Atty. Alexander Lacaba 25 January, 2023 Palo, Leyte

Survived a gunshot wound as did the process server who went with him to give notice to a farmer that his home was to be demolished.

A charge of frustrated murder and another under Republic Act 10591 (Comprehensive Law on Firearms and Ammunition) were filed against the farmer.

Atty. Hamilcar Bigornia 29 January, 2023 Bangued, Abra

Survived a stabbing in his office. His aide was also stabbed but was able to shoot dead one of two perpetrators. The dead man and his brother had entered the office and claimed that Atty. Bigornia must give him a “release paper”. Bigornia refused, saying that the man was not a client and asked his aide to show him out. Then the stabbings began and one of the brothers was shot dead.

Atty. Bigornia was the Chair of the Abra Chapter of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines.

A statement was made by the Chapter after the incident:

“The incisive and growing impunity towards lawyers, judges, and officers of the Court has fostered an overwhelming climate of dread” it lamented.

However, it said, “the IBP assured that it will not be cowed or stifled. Lawyers must be able to advocate their clients’ causes free from the corrupting elements of fear and intimidation. For if lawyers who are sentinels of the rule of law and who serve the poor are themselves assassinated or attacked with impunity, no one would feel secure or have faith in our justice system,” it said.

“Hired killers and their masterminds have no place in a civilized society. Violence directed towards the members of our justice system must never be tolerated,” it declared.”

Atty. Gerome Tubig April 17, 2023 San Fernando, Pampanga

Survived a gunshot to the head, impairing his vision. Was parking his car in a hospital parking lot about 0730 when gunmen R/T approached and shot him.

On August 10, 2023 an alleged gunman was arrested in Mariveles, Bataan, Zambales Province. He had been in the custody of the police in Bataan for some time and was scheduled for a hearing in relation to another criminal case.

Atty. Tubig was at the time the Legal Officer of Pampanga Province

Atty. Maria Rochelle Melliza Melendez 5 June, 2023 Pasay City, Metro Manila

Survived an ambush in which she and her driver were both wounded. They were traveling in her car near her residence at about 0810 when unidentified motorcycle riding gunmen ambushed them. After the shooting the gunmen fled while releasing leaflets upon which was written “Partisano” (Amadong Operatiba ng Marxist-Leninista ng Pilipinas”). Translated to “Armed Operatives of the

Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines” which is a party that split from the Communist Party of the Philippines about 3 decades ago.

Thus far no arrests.

Atty. Melendez is a lawyer of the Department of Public Works and Highways, National Capital Region.

Atty. Elmer Mape 22 August, 2023 nr. Villaba, Leyte

Shot dead. Mape had gone to his farm at about 1600 to collect the harvest of corn. According to the police narrative, based allegedly on a witness statement, a lone gunman approached Atty. Mape and shot him dead. The suspect was named as a “rebel returnee” aka an NPA soldier who had left the NPA and given himself up to state forces.

However, an Atty. Friend of Mape said he was not convinced, having “some reservations” about the suspect named by the police. He said that “politics may be involved” and that his friend and fellow lawyer “was a known critic of a former official in the province.” Such criticism has led to the death of lawyers and journalists as well as political opponents of the official criticized. Local politics in the Philippines is a very dangerous game.

No arrest at this date.

Atty Maria Saniata Alzate 14 September, 2023 Bangued, Abra.

Shot dead by unidentified gunmen R/T as she was parking her car in front of her residence at about 1700. Unusually the perpetrators did not wear masks. CCTV footage caught them in the act, and their faces are visible but the police say they cannot be identified from it. Police are calling for assistance from the public to make an identification.

Yet in a parallel probe by the National Bureau of Investigation it seems that suspects can be identified somehow:

“Probers have identified the suspects in the killing of a woman lawyer in Abra, Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla reported yesterday.

“The NBI is on top of this,” Remulla said in an interview over dzRH, referring to the National Bureau of Investigation.

Remulla said the NBI launched a parallel probe and is looking at footage of closed-circuit television cameras at the crime scene.”

Atty. Alzate was a human rights lawyer. Latterly she had brought a Writ of Amparo against the PNP.

The police have said they have not established a motive.

According to the human rights defender organization Karapatan:

“Atty. Alzate, former president of the Abra chapter of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP), had handled a case for writ of amparo for a man who was abducted, tortured and illegally detained in Bangued, Abra in January of this year. Impleaded in the petition for a protection order which was granted in February were eight high-ranking PNP officers in Abra, six of whom are currently under investigation.”

Atty. Alzate was commended by the IBP for the writ of amparo case, citing her “brave efforts” for “lawyering for the public interest” despite “great risks to herself.”

Executive Secretary to President Marcos Jr. and former CJ of the Supreme Court Lucas Bersamin, also from Abra province, issued a statement saying that Atty. Alzate’s death was a “tragedy” for the province of Abra and the legal profession.

“We join our brothers and sisters in the legal profession in condemning the killing of Atty. Alzate,” Bersamin said.

“We will ensure that our law enforcement agencies will work relentlessly to bring to justice those behind this heinous act,” he added. “Pursuit operations are ongoing. We call upon our citizens to remain vigilant.”

Bersamin described Alzate as “fearless, steadfast and principled” in her law practice and “unrelenting” in her pursuit of justice.

Alzate was immediate Past President of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines-Abra Chapter and a former chair of its Legal Aid Committee. She was recently appointed national IBP Commissioner on Bar Discipline.

Lists of lawyers killed under all Presidents may be obtained by a request to Prof. Boehringer at: gill_boehringer@hotmail.com