

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Are members of Laban Ng Demokratiko Ng Filipino targeted for harm by agents of the state? Or are they denied protection from non-state harm by the authorities?**
- 2. Is there recent evidence that MILF are able or motivated to target opponents who have relocated away from Mindanao – ie their area of normal activity?**
- 3. Please provide any evidence about the Dimaporo clan – especially their influence outside Mindanao, and whether they are reported to have been involved in attacks on political opponents in Lanao, del Norte, and in other parts of the country.**

RESPONSE

- 1. Are members of Laban Ng Demokratiko Ng Filipino targeted for harm by agents of the state? Or are they denied protection from non-state harm by the authorities?**

In the brief time in which research for this response was undertaken, no reports could be located which referred to incidents in which members of the *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* (LDP or Fight of the Democratic Filipino) had suffered mistreatment in recent years. Overviews of the political landscape of the Philippines make no mention of any such complications and recent news reports refer to the activities of the LDP without, it would seem, any mention of complications of this kind. LDP is presently considered a part of pro-administration bloc. It may be of interest that “former police chief Panfilo Lacson” has been one of the party’s principal figures, though his defection, with others to the Partido Demokratikong Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-Laban) was recently reported in May 2008. Lacson was appointed to the head of the police force in 1998 by former President Estrada and numerous allegations of human rights abuse have been made against Lacson during his time in the position. The LDP has done poorly in recent elections and Edgardo Angara (an LDP leader from a faction rival to Lacson’s own LDP wing) has made statements defending the relevance in response to claims that it is now defunct: “Angara took exception to insinuations that the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino (LDP) is a ‘defunct’ party, saying, ‘in truth, the

LDP may still be considered the largest opposition party. The only difference is that we are aligned with the administration this time around” (LDP’s place as part of pro-administration bloc see: Depasupil, W.B. 2008, ‘Lakas, Kampi unite for 2010’, *Manila Times*, 11 February <http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2008/feb/11/yehey/metro/20080211met1.html> – Accessed 27 June 2008 – Attachment 1; for Lacson and other defections to PDP-Laban: see: Cabacungan, G.C. 2008, ‘Lacson positioning self for 2010?’, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 20 May <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20080520-137633/Lacson-positioning-self-for-2010> – Accessed 27 June 2008 – Attachment 2; for poor showing in 2004 election, see: ‘Asia Pacific Report, Number 60: The Philippine elections’ 2004, *Asia Pacific Report*, 19 July – Attachment 3; Lacson as police chief ‘Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino (LDP)’ (undated), i-site-ph websit <http://www.i-site.ph/Databases/ElectionFiles/FastFacts/Parties/ldp.html> – Accessed 27 June 2008 – Attachment 5; for allegations against Lacson, see: Remollino, A.M. 2003, ‘Unlikely Team’, *Bulatlat.com*, 9-15 February <http://www.bulatlat.com/news/3-2/3-2-unlikelyteam.html> – Accessed 27 June 2008 – Attachment 4; for Angara’s recent comments, see: Lagasca, C. 2008, ‘Noli-Vi tandem a blockbuster in 2010’, *Philippine Headline News Online website*, 15 March <http://www.newsflash.org/2004/02/hl/hl107231.htm> – Accessed 27 June 2008 – Attachment 6; for similar assertions in January 2008, see: Uy, V. 2008, ‘Angara to presidential wannabes: “Keep 2008 politics-free”’, *Inquirer.net*, 17 January <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/nation/view/20080117-113007/Angara-to-presidential-wannabes-Keep-2008-politics-free> – Accessed 27 June 2008 – Attachment 7).

Previous Research

RRT *Research Response PHL30645* of 27 September 2006 provides background on the situation of the Laban Ng Demokratikong Pilipino party at that time. No information is provided that address the issue of mistreatment or state protection for members (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response PHL30645*, 27 September – Attachment 8).

Political violence generally

It may be of interest that the Philippines saw significant electoral violence during its most recent May 2007 elections. According to the People’s Coalition to Monitor the 2007 Elections (or Bantay-Elekasyon 2007):

Bantay-Elekasyon 2007 aggregated reports on election violence as reported by the Philippine National Police (PNP), media and its own field reports.

It has compiled a total of 300 election-related violent incidents (ERVIs) during the election period as of June 12, 2007. Of these, Bantay-Elekasyon 2007 classified 85 as murder/ambush, 71 as shooting, 53 as intimidation/harassment, and 16 as explosion.

There were a total of 129 persons killed and 177 wounded in these incidents. Of those killed, 34 were incumbents, politicians, or candidates, 62 were political supporters, and 5 were Comelec personnel or deputies. A major percentage of supporters killed were barangay officials.

The official statistics on election violence in the 2007 elections come from the Philippine National Police (PNP). The PNP, through the Task Force Honest, Orderly, and Peaceful Elections (Task Force HOPE), has compiled a total of 226 election-related violent incidents (ERVIs) during the election period as of June 12, 2007. The election period spans the period from January 13, 2007 to June 13, 2007.

Of these incidents, 129 are considered by the PNP as politically-motivated incidents and 97 as non-politically motivated or cases still to be validated. Of the 129 politically-motivated incidents, the PNP classified 8 as murder/ambush, 57 as shooting, 28 as intimidation/harassment, and 5 as explosion.

The PNP also reported a total of 69 persons killed and 116 wounded in these incidents. Of those killed, 23 were incumbents, politicians, or candidates, 35 were political supporters, and 2 were uniformed personnel.

Bantay-Eleksyon 2007 earlier issued a report casting doubt on the handling of the PNP of their own issued statistics. As of May 14, 2007, the Philippine National Police (PNP) had already reported to the media 114 deaths and 132 wounded victims in 191 election-related violent incidents (ERVIs). Of the 114 deaths, 59 were identified to be candidates, 55 were supporters. The PNP issued statements on election day that, despite the reported incidence of violence “the situation is generally peaceful except for some untoward incidents” and “only 30% of the incidents are election related.”

Later, they would only issue the statistics on the “confirmed” politically-motivated incidents. This precluded comparison with earlier issuances based on “election-related violent incidents (ERVIs). The latter had always been used in previous elections.

Whatever statistics are used, the level of election violence is alarming. Election violence is rising and increasingly targets election personalities, whether candidates, government officials or election officers. Special mention must also be made of the stifling atmosphere of fear and intimidation in Maguindanao and other areas of ARMM where armed men are often reported in the vicinity of polling places or in connection with election incidents.

Election violence in the 2007 elections is widespread and affected elections in many local areas up to the provincial level. In the ARMM, the level of electoral violence affects elections in the entire region and can affect results in the national elections. (‘Final Report on the 2007 Elections’ 2007, Bantay Eleksyon 2007 website, 3 July <http://www.iper.org.ph/CER/bantayeleksyon2007/reports/final-report-07-election.html> – Accessed 30 June 2008 – Attachment 9).

The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism’s (PCIJ) i-site website provides the following comparative statistics with figures sourced from the Philippine National Police:

TABLE 1: COMPARATIVE STATISTICS ON ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENT INCIDENTS					
	2007	2004	2001	1998	1995
No. of Cases	229	249	269	267	121
Killed	121	148	111	67	79
Wounded	176	261	293	162	111

Source: Philippine National Police

Majority of those killed were supporters of candidates (49), though the death toll included 26 politicians, 11 candidates, 14 civilians, 20 policemen and a soldier. Candidates’ supporters also topped the list of injured at 62, followed by civilians (54), policemen (34), politicians (17), candidates (7), and soldiers (2) (‘i-site’s 2007 Election Files: Were the 2007 elections less violent?’ 2007, i-site website, 5 July <http://i-site.ph/blog/?p=217> – Accessed 30 June 2008 – Attachment 10)

No reports could be located, during the time in which this research was undertaken, which detailed which candidates and supporters had been targeted specifically. It may be significant that Amnesty International has tended to emphasize concern for the targeting of left-wing politicians and supporters (see: Amnesty International 2006, 'Philippines: Political killings, human rights and the peace process', AI website <http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGASA350062006> – Accessed 16 August 2006 – Attachment 11).

2. Is there recent evidence that MILF are able or motivated to target opponents who have relocated away from Mindanao – ie their area of normal activity?

Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism database provides the following August 2007 assessment of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's (MILF) areas of operation:

Area of operation

The MILF's camps, 46 of which have existed across Mindanao at various times, were not solely military facilities but were extensive guerrilla base areas with civilian populations that became test-cases for the MILF experiment in Islamic governance under sharia law. Of the six main bases, the largest and most important was Abu Bakr on the borders of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur.

Other large base camps include Camp Butig in Lanao del Sur, the Islamic Center near Pikit, North Cotabato and Camp Darapanan, the de facto headquarters of the MILF, near the port of Parang in Maguindanao province.

The MILF's forces are largely deployed in Central Mindanao with smaller formations found in other parts of the region. The MILF admits to being weak in Tawi Tawi and Sulu. They have a small presence in Basilan, Jolo, Zamboanga del Norte, and in an enclave in eastern Mindanao. The bulk of the MILF's forces are found in the four provinces: Lanao del Norte; Lanao del Sur; Maguindanao; and North Cotabato.

Most MILF are ethnic Maguindanao and Maranao. The Tausig representation is still quite small. The MILF's presence on Basilan in Tipo-Tipo is dominated by the Yaccans ('Moro Islamic Liberation Front' 2007, *Jane's World Insurgency And Terrorism*, 14 August – Attachment 30).

The following entries in the same Jane's report note incidents in certain years in which MILF actions or operatives affected or threatened Manila:

- 2007: On 1 February, security forces killed a suspected member of a renegade faction of the MILF, and arrested two others in Rizal province, 20 km east of Manila. Five other suspects escaped from the house in which troops discovered plastic explosives, bomb parts and grenades.
- 2003: ...fighting escalated with the military accusing the MILF of being behind a pair of bombings on Mindanao's largest city, the overwhelmingly Christian Davao City which killed 38 people in March and April 2003, and attacks on civilian targets in other Christian communities on Mindanao. There were also warnings that the MILF would extend its war with a bombing campaign in Manila. The MILF denies charges of targeting civilians. MILF spokesman Kabula described the MILF posture in early May 2003 as 'active self-defence.'

- 2000: In August, the MILF's senior leader, Salamat Hashim, fled abroad and the organisation undertook a series of bombings in Metro Manila on 30 December which killed at least 22 people and wounded around 100 others ('Moro Islamic Liberation Front' 2007, *Jane's World Insurgency And Terrorism*, 14 August – Attachment 30).

In February 2008 police claimed that the MILF was planning to assassinate the President "also other people...and embassies" in the City of Baguio in northern Luzon.

The top graduates of Philippine Military Academy (PMA) Class of 1974 were no-shows at homecoming ceremonies here yesterday in the shadow of alleged plots to assassinate President Arroyo and fresh protests calling for her resignation.

...Prestoza said police uncovered the assassination plot last week, adding, "It's not only the President who is the target, but also other people...and embassies."

Esperon confirmed the assassination plot in saying former members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) who have allied with the Abu Sayyaf are part of the plot to kill the President.

Esperon said the assassination plot allegedly involved a sniper ready to strike when the opportunity arises ('GMA, Esperon, Teodoro, Razon No-Shows At PMA Homecoming' 2008, *Philippine Headline News Online*, 18 February <http://www.newsflash.org/2004/02/hl/hl107087.htm> – Accessed 30 June 2008 – Attachment 12).

In April 2008 the MILF reportedly "criticized Manila for what it called a "witchhunt" in arresting two Jordanians who had been linked by authorities to al-Qaeda and to a plot to assassinate President Gloria Arroyo". The report continues:

MILF leader Usman Hakim said authorities arrested the two Jordanians during separate operations in Manila last month and deported them only on Friday on charges not related to terrorism, but for violations of Philippine immigration laws.

Hakim was referring to Khalil Al-Ali and Walid Abu Aisheh, who were deported by the Bureau of Immigration to Jordan for working in the Philippines without permits.

"Filipino Muslims and Arabs are always being targeted by the authorities every time they will come up with fake intelligence reports and all these always coincide with huge anti-Arroyo rallies," he said.

"They always blame the Muslims as if we are all criminals and terrorists, just like what is happening in Basilan and Sulu and in Central Mindanao where Muslims are arrested on mere suspicion or false intelligence reports that they are terrorists or supporters of MILF. There is no respect for human rights for Muslims in the Philippines," Hakim told The Manila Times on Saturday.

The two Jordanian men were also linked by the Filipino authorities to an alleged plot to bomb foreign embassies in Manila.

Philippine police chief Avelino Razon had announced the foreigners' arrests the same day that protesters gathered in the capital Manila to demand the President's resignation over allegations of corruption.

Razon said the Jordanians were "suspected of plotting terror attacks, including an assassination (plot) on the President."

...It was unknown why the police and the military did not file charges against the foreigners for violating the Anti-Terrorism Law since security officials announced the two Jordanians were plotting to kill President Arroyo and attack embassies in Manila (Jacinto, A. 2008, 'MILF rebels cry "witchhunt"', *Manila Times*, 6 April <http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2008/apr/06/yehey/prov/20080406pro1.html> – Accessed 30 June 2008 – Attachment 13).

Further information

A November 2007 report may be of interest insofar as it notes a bombing assassination in Manila carried out by the Abu Sayyaf group, with which the MILF has been linked in the past. The report also relates that "Nearly 140 people are believed to have been killed in congressional elections in May, and a senior election official was recently shot dead in Manila":

On Tuesday evening, a suspected nail bomb blast ripped through the south entrance of the Philippines' House of Representatives, killing a congressman and two others.

...At least 11 people, including two legislators, were wounded in the blast, which occurred as congressmen and -women left the building following Tuesday's session. ...Investigators said at a police press conference that the trigger is similar to those used before by Abu Sayyaf, an Islamic extremist group linked to al-Qaeda.

Representative Wahab Akbar, one of the bomb's victims, is believed to have been the target of the attack – making it an apparent assassination rather than a wider attack on the Philippines political establishment. Akbar, whose body was flown home for burial Wednesday, was a prominent figure in the Philippines' restive Basilan province, the stamping ground for Abu Sayyaf as well as Muslim separatist groups like the MILF and MNLF. He was elected governor of the province twice before becoming congressman in May; ...Akbar was widely rumored to have strong ties with Abu Sayyaf, with some reports even claiming he was a founding member and a commander until he had a falling-out with the group.

But despite the connections drawn between Akbar and Abu Sayyaf, political violence is nothing new in the Philippines, and the true motives behind the blast may never be known. Nearly 140 people are believed to have been killed in congressional elections in May, and a senior election official was recently shot dead in Manila. "We're used to this here. It has always been part of our electoral and political situation," Ramon Casiple, executive director of the Institute for Electoral and Political Reform, told TIME. "Politicians get killed before, during and after elections." Still, "there is a bitter political fight going on down there in Basilan," Casiple acknowledges. "Throw the terrorism situation and Akbar's alleged links to Abu Sayaf, and then his public statements denouncing them. It all makes him an obvious target." (<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1683792,00.html?xid=feed-cnn-topics> ;

Report produced by the International Crisis Group (ICG) provides background on the manner in which previous attacks by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) have been made possible by the safe haven in the south which the MILF has provided to the ASG and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in previous years:

The terrorist attacks on Superferry 14, and on a bus in Makati on Valentine's Day 2005 illustrate the links among Philippine and Indonesian jihadist groups. Both were apparently executed at the primary direction of ASG leaders Kadaffy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman by Balik-Islam converts connected to Ahmed Santos's Rajah Solaiman Movement and trained by JI operatives under MILF protection. (p.16) (for background on the complicated

relationship between the various factions of the MILF, the Abu Sayyaf Group and JI in relation to these attacks, see pages 2 to 18 of: International Crisis Group 2005, *Philippines Terrorism: the Role of Militant Islamic Converts*, Asia Report no.110, 19 December – Attachment 14).

A more recent ICG report provides background on the complex manner in which the MILF has, to some extent, distanced itself from both ASG and JI, cooperating with Philippines authorities to marginalize their operations as part of the peace process. It should be noted that the relationship is said to be complex involving a range of factions within MILF whose willingness to dissociate the MILF from the activities of groups like ASG and JI can vary (see the section ‘Islands, Factions And Alliances’, pages 3 to 10, in: International Crisis Group 2008, *The Philippines: Counter-insurgency vs. Counter-terrorism in Mindanao*, Asia Report np.152, 14 May – Attachment 15).

3. Any evidence about the Dimaporo clan – especially their influence outside Mindanao, and whether they are reported to have been involved in attacks on political opponents in Lanao del Norte, and in other parts of the country.

Reports of the involvement of the Dimaporo clan in acts of suspected political violence could only be located for Lanao del Norte and other southern areas such as the neighbouring province of Lanao del Sur and also the province of Zamboanga del Sur in the Zamboanga Peninsula region. Little information to suggest influence in Manila could be located beyond a long standing association with President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. An overview of the available information follows below.

The Dimaporo family and political violence

On 6 January 2006 it was reported that the Dimaporo clan was involved in an incident in which: “At least 10 people were slain in clashes between the private armies of two warring families in the town of Tuburan in Lanao del Sur”. The report continues:

A village chief in the area told reporters in Camp Aguinaldo that at least 10 people had been killed in the fighting, a figure that military officials had yet to confirm.

According to the village chief, who refused to be named for security reasons, the fighting started on Wednesday when supporters of the Dimaporo and Papandayan families attacked the supporters of the Kibad and Balt clans in Tuburan.

“This morning, a band of about 200 armed men belonging to private army of the Dimaporos and led by Macapanton Masigay burned the houses in Masibay, Tubaran,” the official said.

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) spokesman Eid Kabalu said the clashes had started from a family feud that took place last year.

“And there has been a series of killings between the two families,” Mr. Kabalu added. Lanao del Sur province is a known MILF bailiwick.

In a television interview, Col. Luisito Marcelino, deputy commander of the First Marine Brigade based in the area, said the clashes started at around 12:45 p.m. on Wednesday.

He added that the warring parties were armed with M203 grenade launchers, M16 and M14 rifles. “I think the motive is revenge from the previous incident that happened last Dec. 15

wherein one side suffered fatalities while the other side suffered injuries,” Mr. Marcelino said.

The clan war between the Lanao del Sur families started almost a year ago when 12 members of the Kibad-Balt families were killed by government troops who reportedly mistook them for bandits.

The Jan. 29 incident was reported to the Marines by members of the Papandayon-Dimaporo families.

In retaliation, the Kibad and the Balt families killed 12 and wounded seven family members of the Dimaporos and Papandayons in February 2005 (Alave, K.L. 2006, ‘10 people killed in family wars in Lanao del Sur’, *BusinessWorld*, 6 January – Attachment 16).

A subsequent report of January reported continued claims of tensions and related varying claims about the number of casualties caused by the feud:

No one was hurt in Thursday’s clashes between two feuding families in Lanao del Sur province, according to Brigadier General Benjamin Dolorfino, deputy commander of the military’s Southern Command.

Dolorfino said on Friday that one of the warring clans have reported that 10 of their men were killed so they could get sympathy from the government.

“The report is not true. There was no casualty on both sides,” Dolorfino said.

He said the source of the report about fatalities was a tribal leader, who picked up the rumor spread by one of the warring parties.

“I talked to our ground commander in Lanao and he told me the Kibad and Balt families were trying to exaggerate the report to get government attention,” Dolorfino said.

He said as of Saturday afternoon, the claimed casualty figure decreased to two.

“But this morning, we received feedback that there was really no fatality,” he said.

On Thursday, violence erupted in Tuburan town when members of the Kibad and Balt families clashed with the Masigay and Dimaporo clans.

In recent months, more than 20 people from both sides have died because of the feud.

“We will dispatch emissaries anytime to pacify both sides,” Dolorfino said.

He said the military describes the latest confrontation as an “acoustic war” because although the two sides have been fighting, there were no casualties (‘No deaths in Lanao Sur clan war, Southcom exec says’ 2006, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 9 January – Attachment 17).

In February 2001 reports speculated about the possible involvement of the Dimaporo clan in the assassination of a police in the southern city of Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur.

Unidentified gunmen assassinated a police colonel in front of his wife in the southern Philippine city of Pagadian Tuesday in a suspected family feud.

Superintendent Mitumadum Enca died instantly after he was shot in the head at close range by two armed men while a third acted as a lookout. They fled into a crowded market after the attack, police said.

Relatives of Enca told police that a family of a prominent Muslim leader whom he had been accused of killing in Manila in 1993 may have ordered his murder in retaliation.

Enca was jailed for two months for alleged involvement in the murder of former town mayor Sultan Naga Dimaporo but was freed after a court acquitted him.

Police said they were looking into that angle but said they were not ruling out other possibilities ('Philippines police chief assassinated in suspected family feud' 2001, *Agence France-Presse*, 6 February – Attachment 18).

In August 1993 *The Economist* noted of Ali Dimaporo:

Ali Dimaporo, for instance, was governor of Lanao del Sur province in Mindanao under Marcos. Corazon Aquino, who deposed Marcos as president, ordered Mr Dimaporo to surrender his guns to the police. He handed over a few rifles, but said he feared he would be killed by communists if he gave up all his weapons. He still holds sway over at least two provinces and is widely regarded as the country's most powerful warlord ('Warlords in the Philippines' 1993, *The Economist*, 14 August – Attachment 19).

In December 1992 Francisco Abalos was gunned down and the Dimaporo clan was suspected of carrying out a vendetta. Abalos was a prominent Christian politician and former governor of Lanao del Norte who had been recently defeated at election by Abdullah Dimaporo. Abalos was also reportedly suspected to be responsible for the death of a Dimaporo clan member. Two reports follow:

Kyodo News:

Five heavily armed men shot dead a former governor of the southern Philippine province of Lanao del Norte on Tuesday in what appeared to be a political vendetta, police said.

Francisco Abalos, his wife Marietta and a male companion had just arrived at Abalos' gasoline station when five men fired at them from motorbikes, Iligan police chief Keith Singian said.

Abalos died from multiple wounds on arrival in a nearby clinic. His wife escaped unhurt but the male companion was wounded. There was no immediate word on the extent of his injuries.

Abalos, a strong supporter of defeated presidential candidate Ramon Mitra, lost his reelection bid to incumbent Lanao del Norte Gov. Abdullah Dimaporo of the influential Dimaporo clan in last May's election.

The patron of the clan, Sultan Alih Dimaporo, is a member of the House of Representatives and a longtime political warlord allied with the late President Ferdinand Marcos.

Sources who refused to be identified said the Dimaporos suspected Abalos of being behind the killing last month of Alih Dimaporo's younger brother ('Former Governor Killed in Suspected Political Vendetta' 1992, *Kyodo News*, 28 December – Attachment 20)

Agence France-Presse

Francisco Abalos, one of the most prominent Christian politicians in the Moslem-populated southern Philippines, was assassinated in the nearby southern city of Iligan on Tuesday, police said here.

Police are investigating the possibility that the murder was linked to Abalos' long-running rivalry with a Moslem politician, former congressman Abdullah Dimaporo, Superintendent Indo Ho told reporters.

He said no arrests have been made.

The 56-year-old Abalos, the former governor of Lanao del Norte province, was shot dead by motorcycle-riding gunmen as he sat inside his car at a gas station while waiting for his wife, television stations reported in Manila. They said a bodyguard was also wounded.

Ho said they were looking into the possibility that Abalos was killed in retaliation for the murder of a younger brother of Dimaporo in Manila last month, which the clan blamed on Abalos supporters.

Abalos lost to Dimaporo's son, Abdullah Dimaporo, in the gubernatorial election last May 11 ('Prominent southern Philippines politician assassinated' 1992, *Agence France-Presse*, 22 December – Attachment 21).

In 2004 Abdullah Dimaporo was reportedly the subject of a grenade attack:

One person died and seven others were injured when a man threw a grenade during a political rally in the southern city of Iligan. The intended target is believed to have been House of Representatives member Abdullah Dimaporo, who was addressing local officials when the attack occurred. The man threw the grenade onto the stage where Dimaporo was delivering his speech, before escaping. This is the latest incident related to general elections, which are scheduled for 10 May (Mills, E. 2004, 'One Dead in Political Violence in Philippines, as Authorities Step Up Security Ahead of Poe Rally', WMRC Daily Analysis, 19 February – Attachment 25).

The Dimaporo family and political influence

The Dimaporo clan would appear to have been long time supporters of President Arroyo. According to a February 2008 report:

In Lanao del Norte, Governor Mohamad Khalid Dimaporo, whose family had always been supportive of the President, met Friday with his mayors, village and Sangguniang Kabataan officials, and asked them about their stand amid the growing calls for Arroyo to resign.

After the meeting held at the provincial capitol, Dimaporo and the other local officials came out with a manifesto declaring full support to the President.

"The provincial government recognizes President Arroyo as the duly constituted President of the Republic of the Philippines. In the midst of the political situation that the entire nation is facing, it is our firm belief that the present administration of President Arroyo has led the country to more prosperous and economically stable nation," part of the manifesto reads.

In an interview following the meeting, Dimaporo told the Philippine Daily Inquirer that the officials of the province will be in Malacañang to join Arroyo if deemed necessary.

“The officialdom of the province firmly believes that the alleged scandals in the national level are products of the opposition’s machinations and an evil design to destabilise the ever-strong national leadership,” he said.

The support for Arroyo did not come as surprise though. Early this year, the provincial government conferred to her the title “Bae Lawanen” (daughter of Lanao del Norte).

“If we do not oppose this obvious political plot against the duly-constituted authority, we shall likewise fall victims to this evil design geared only to put the nation in turmoil and we will kiss goodbye development opportunities,” Dimaporo said (‘Mindanao governors affirm support for Arroyo’ 2008, *Inquirer.net*, 22 February <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/regions/view/20080222-120626/Mindanao-governors-affirm-support-for-Arroyo> – Accessed 30 June 2008 – Attachment 22).

A report of 27 January 2006 also notes this relationship:

ILIGAN CITY – A big number of politicians and local leaders in the countryside are keen on defending President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo from any attempt by rebellious soldiers to depose her.

This was the opinion expressed by Rep. Abdullah “Bobby” Dimaporo of the second district of Lanao del Norte, a long-time member of the Lakas-CMD.

These individuals trooped recently to the office of Dimaporo to express their sentiments, telling Lourdes Ardon of Dimaporo’s office that they would never allow anyone to unseat the President, who spent several years in this city and nearby towns.

Ardon quoted the local leaders as pledging to “defend the President at all cost.”

The leaders who sought Dimaporo backed the line of yet-to-be-appointed presidential chief of staff Mike Defensor, who said Arroyo was ready to “fight fire with fire” if coup plotters insist on imposing their will.

Defensor is on leave from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), where he was originally appointed secretary.

The tough stance of Malacanang in the face of a looming civilian-military uprising has instigated feverish preparations among the ranks of rebellious soldiers, who have been encouraged by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People’s Army (NPA) to rise up in arms against the Arroyo government.

Arroyo allies insist that blood would certainly be spilled in the event of a power grab, but the opposition has quickly doused this tough talk by saying that it is not interested in taking up arms to oust Arroyo, who has steadily lost support from the people, based on the surveys undertaken by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) and Ibon Foundation.

Dimaporo appealed to the opposition to respect the law, the 1987 Constitution and the people who are in authority.

“It is unfortunate that the opposition has spread rumors and fomented destabilization against the Arroyo administration even as the country’s country has improved against the US dollar, largely through remittances by overseas Filipino workers (OFWs),” Dimaporo said.

Instead, he asked the opposition and disgruntled soldiers to unite behind Arroyo to win the peace and achieve prosperity. This plea has not been heeded by the opposition, which simply

boycotted the meeting of the Council of State last Tuesday, January 24, arguing that they find the exercise futile, pointless and a waste of time ('Politicians vow to fight any oust-Arroyo attempt' 2006, *Manilla Bulletin*, 27 January <http://www.mb.com.ph/issues/2006/01/27/PROV2006012754828.html> – Accessed 30 June 2008 – Attachment 23).

During the May 2007 elections a rolling back of the Dimaporo clan's political dominance was reported:

One after another, famous political families are losing their grip and influence in this year's elections, as indicated by the increasing popular support for their adversaries.

This is the case of the Dimaporo clan, which had previously dominated every local election in the province.

In the effort to continue the family's unbroken rule in the province, the Dimaporos had sought election in every position available but were apparently shut out.

In the gubernatorial race, Khalid Dimaporo is losing in the initial count to Maigo town mayor Rafael Lizarda.

On the other hand, a virtual unknown is leading over Khalid's mother, outgoing Lanao del Norte Gov. Imelda Dimaporo in the congressional race in the first district of the province.

Iligan City councilor Vicente Belmonte Jr. is leading the congressional race with 58,916 votes, followed by Angelique Badelles, daughter of incumbent Rep. Alipio Badelles, with 45,080 and Gov. Dimaporo with only 42,957 votes.

On the other hand, Rep. Abdullah Dimaporo, Imelda's husband, may avert a total political shutout as he seems to be well on his way to his last term as congressman of the province's second district, increasing his lead over another Dimaporo, his stepbrother Marcos (De La Cruz, L. 2007, 'Bad day for Nur, Dimaporos, priests', *ABS-CBN News*, source: *Philippine Star*, 18 May <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/storypage.aspx?StoryId=77592> – Accessed 30 June 2008 – Attachment 24).

The following reports may also be of interest:

- In 2007 the Dimaporo clan reportedly obtained a court order to prevent the airing of a news story considered detrimental in its allegations about the Dimaporo family (see: : Jimeno, J.F. 2007, 'Imbestigador story on Dimaporos slapped with TRO', *Daily PCIJ*, 13 May <http://www.pcij.org/blog/?p=1677> – Accessed 30 June 2008 – Attachment 26).
- Also in 2007 there were reports of attacks on a journalist who had been speaking against the Dimaporo clan's rival, "First District Congress representative Vicente Belmonte, who beat [Imelda] Dimaporo in the elections" ('Suspects charged with attempted murder of radio broadcaster' 2007, International Freedom of Expression website, source: Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, 12 October <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/86928/> – Accessed 30 June 2008 – Attachment 27).

Further background

A 2005 report provides background on the nature of clan politics in the southern Philippines. The following complexities may be of interest insofar as the Dimaporo is referred to specifically:

Although the powerful Muslim families use the conflict as a resource and try to instrumentalise it for their political purposes, they also see, however, the MNLF and now the MILF as a clear threat to their political hegemony. Some of them see a danger to their traditional secure position as aristocracy in the ideology of the MILF and reject the MILF version of Islam in favour of a stronger integration of Islam with local practices and traditions, which would also ensure them a dominating role in the future.

This can also lead to informal alliances with Christian politicians (during the 70s and early 80s between Ali Dimaporo and Ferdinand Marcos, and in the not so distant history with Maria Clara Lobregat and Emmanuel Pinol), when these are seen as opportune for the purpose of obtaining power. The traditional Muslim elite acts in two ways: as agents of the interests of the Muslims, and as agents of their own “class” as well. It is this quest for continued economic and political power of a ruling class which the national government has known how to use for decades (pp.18-19) (Kreuzer, P. 2005, ‘Political Clans and Violence in the Southern Philippines’, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt website, PRIF Report No. 71 <http://hsfk.de/reports/PRIF-71.pdf> – Accessed 30 June 2008 – Attachment 29).

Research Response PHL31974 refers to an October 2004 study on corruption in the Philippines, authored by the journalist Steven Rogers, which notes the power that local political families can exert in the Philippines through local government. According to Rogers: “local positions are dominated by a small number of tightly interconnected families, a structure of elite control that grew out of the colonial-era dominance of large landowners”. Rogers underlines the importance of local governance in the day-to-day life of “average Filipinos”, stating that: “[v]irtually all government services are delivered through city, provincial, and municipal authorities; local and regional administrators of national agencies are more closely connected to local officials than to their nominal chain of authority”. According to Rogers, it is the entrenched nature of these regional networks of power that has curtailed the “[t]op-down reform of the government” attempted by several national administrations. The relevant extract follows in detail:

From the perspective of foreign observers and Manila-based analysts, the national government appears to play a dominant role. To average Filipinos, though, government in every practical sense means local government. Virtually all government services are delivered through city, provincial, and municipal authorities; local and regional administrators of national agencies are more closely connected to local officials than to their nominal chain of authority. These local positions are dominated by a small number of tightly interconnected families, a structure of elite control that grew out of the colonial-era dominance of large landowners. Business interests and positions in government and the military have largely replaced control of land as the source of elite wealth. The cast of characters has changed in many regions, with old aristocrats displaced by politically connected upstarts. Yet the overall pattern of elite domination has not changed, and most municipal and provincial governments remain effectively controlled by either a single family or a narrow cast of competing elite factions.

Philippine presidents hold extensive powers, particularly over the budget, and are in theory well positioned to exert control over the fractious local and regional political machines. In practice, however, the nonstructural checks severely limit the president’s structural powers. Transient national coalitions cannot generate votes without the cooperation of local overlords, and national candidates invariably find themselves forced into alliances with dominant local elites. Most national administrators and the vast majority of those who hold seats in the

national Congress come from these local elites, which are connected through family, business, and organizational relations that cut across and often transcend the temporary alliances of electoral politics. Attempts at political or economic reform that pose a significant threat to this class are generally obstructed or diluted; if the promulgation of such reforms cannot be blocked, they are derailed in the implementation phase. The central government – even under the relatively enlightened leadership of a Ramos or a Macapagal-Arroyo – has not succeeded in significantly weakening this entrenched network's grip on the functional apparatus of governance.

...The prerogatives of the Philippine elite are sustained through a dense web of family, social, and professional connections held together by loyalty, tolerance, and ties of mutual obligation. Applied to the political arena, these cultural virtues become a potent force opposing progress. The essentially similar interests of elite factions impede ideological differentiation among political coalitions, and the constant shifting of alliances means that most well-connected individuals have influential associates within the party of power. With informal, cultural obligations taking precedence over formal, legal ones, those within the governing class enjoy a legal immunity that draws strength from another and highly untoward aspect of interconnectedness: The proliferation of skeletons in Philippine political closets makes it difficult to take legal action against someone without risking unsavory revelations about oneself and one's allies.

...Agencies charged with investigating and prosecuting corruption have shown little will or ability to penetrate the web of elite privilege. Sporadic enforcement efforts are usually aimed at bureaucrats in the Manila offices of national agencies and seldom yield tangible results. At the local, provincial, and regional levels, where corruption is most severe and its impact on the population most dramatic, governments and legislators remain immune from investigation and prosecution. A number of foreign-funded anticorruption efforts have focused on restructuring operations to reduce opportunities for corruption. Such adjustments are necessary, but in the absence of effective enforcement, every step forward will be hard won. Where reward is high and risk is absent, there is no system that cannot be corrupted, and no effort to prevent corruption will succeed until corruption among the elite is punished (Rogers, S. 'Philippine Politics and the Rule of Law', *Journal of Democracy*, vol.15: no.4, October, pp.112-125 – Attachment 29).

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