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“More Unionists Were Killed”: Alliance of Progressive Labor Testifies in Washington Hearing

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Washington, DC -- On the second day of the 2011 Annual Review of Country Practices conducted by the US Trade Representative for the US Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), the Secretary-General of the Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL), refuted claims of the Philippine government representatives that it has done a lot to resolve the trade union killings.

Josua Mata, testifying early this morning (11:00 AM January 25, EST), stated that “Truth is, two years after the visit of the ILO High Level Mission, none of the trade union killings have received justice. Of the 39 cases filed before the ILO, only 3 are currently on trial, and all of them involve only the hired guns, not the real masterminds who are most likely back home right now sitting in their comfortable corporate offices! In the meantime, according to the ITUC Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights, 6 trade unionists have been killed from 2010 to 2011. All these have happened under the current administration of President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino.”

The Government of the Philippines (GPH) delegation to Washington, DC included Labor Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz, Labor Undersecretary Rebecca Chato, and Department of Justice (DOJ) Undersecretary Francisco Baraan III.

“Before we say that the new guidelines with PNP and AFP are working, show us the proof that PNP and AFP violations are no longer happening, or at least are actually going down,” testified Mata. He recommended that clear benchmarks be set by the government to say that the reforms made are actually working. The hearing took up the Philippine case filed by the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) in view of the trade union killings.

Mata also supported assertions by PALEA’s President Gerry Rivera on the first day about the rampant use and abuse of contractual labor in the country, which prevents workers’ from actually enjoying their rights, including their right to join unions. He cited two cases, that of Philippine Airlines and of Hanjin Shipping. “Of the 21,000 workers (Hanjin) now employs, all of them are contractual employees who are hired by 16 subcontractors, (and) many of these companies, have interlocking directorates with the same officials of Hanjin,” testified Mata.

APL demanded for an independent investigating body that can really go after the military and the police who are involved in TU violations. “For a long time, DOJ didn’t bother to do anything about it until this GSP review hearing came,” added Mata in reply to panel questions.

The panel, chaired by the USTR, included representatives from the US Department of Labor, Treasury and Agriculture. The GSP is a development tool used by the US to provide duty-free access to certain products of developing countries that are eligible for this program. The GSP law enumerates the factors for eligibility, which includes that a country “has taken or is taking steps to afford to workers in that country internationally recognized worker rights.”

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