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PROGRESS Lawyers Network of Belgium urges the Philippine government to release all political prisoners and to institute criminal and administrative cases against major human rights violators like former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and fugitive retired General Jovito Palparan.

For many years PROGRESS Lawyers Network has been monitoring the human rights situation in the Philippines, and we have been taking firm position against the extrajudicial killings, disappearances, torture and other forms of human rights violations under the previous administration.

As a member of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL) we were present at the COLAP V Conference in Manila in 2010. The Manila Declaration stated: *"The conference stressed the need to end impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations and supports efforts to insure that those governments and individuals responsible are held accountable."*

The newly elected President Aquino has not made any concrete step to do address the impunity even after 19 months in office. Only recently his administration has filed cases for electoral sabotage, plunder and graft and corruption against the former President Arroyo which resulted to her arrest and detention.

But the present government has not shown any serious step to make her former administration liable for human rights violations like extrajudicial killings, disappearances and torture. On the contrary, the same situation seems to continue.

The victims, their relatives, human rights defenders organizations and their lawyers have initiated cases in courts, at great risk and with many difficulties, on their own, with no help from the government.

President Aquino had appointed the previous chair of the Commission on Human Rights, Mrs. Leila De Lima, to be his Secretary of Justice. With all her expertise and her criticism against the human rights policy of the Arroyo administration, we had expected her to prosecute the main human rights violators. What is the Aquino administration waiting for?

While there is still impunity for former President Arroyo and retired General Palparan, 356 political prisoners are still detained. Against them, cases can be brought up quickly, charges can be false or improper, they can be arrested quickly and often illegally, even if they have not been heard properly and their case is only based on declarations of unidentified witnesses or

confessions after being tortured. They are often incarcerated for years without a fair trial, because of their political beliefs.

We had expected more from President Aquino, whose father was a political prisoner himself.

PROGRESS Lawyers Network of Belgium calls for:

- the release of all political prisoners in the Philippines through a general, unconditional and omnibus amnesty; and
- prompt action, investigation and resolution of administrative, civil, criminal cases against former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and her top civilian, military and police officials led by retired Major General Jovito Palparan Jr. for serious human rights violations
- immediate capture and arrest of Gen. Palparan and bring him to court for trial for the disappearance of university students Cadapan and Empeno, among others.

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