

SENATE
P.S. Res. No. 128

'19 SEP -9 P 2:51

INTRODUCED BY SENATOR RISA HONTIVEROS

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A RESOLUTION URGING THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON JUSTICE AND PUBLIC ORDER AND DANGEROUS DRUGS TO CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION IN AID OF LEGISLATION ON THE KILLINGS OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE COUNTRY AND TO PROBE THE REASONS AND MOTIVES BEHIND THE SAID KILLINGS, WITH THE END IN VIEW OF ATTAINING JUSTICE FOR THE SLAIN VICTIMS AND ADDRESSING THE VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS THAT THESE DEFENDERS AND ACTIVISTS SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES FOR

WHEREAS, last August 6, 2019, indigenous and environmental rights activist Brandon Lee was shot by unidentified men in front of his house in Sitio Dugong, Lagawe, Ifugao. He has just fetched his daughter from school when the shooting happened. He sustained gunshot wounds on his face and back.¹

WHEREAS, Brandon Lee was suspected by the military as a supporter of the New People's Army.² He is a correspondent of the Northern Dispatch, an alternative online paper³ and a news organization that has been identified by the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) as a communist front.⁴ He is also a volunteer for the rights group Cordillera Human Rights Alliance.⁵

WHEREAS, a fact-finding mission by San Francisco Supervisor Matt Haney revealed that seven of Brandon Lee's colleagues were visited by members of the Philippine Army on the same day of his shooting but were not at home.⁶

WHEREAS, Brandon Lee's mother, Louise Lee, came to the Baguio General Hospital, where he was confined and expressed the need for Brandon Lee's evacuation to a safer location because they were concerned for his safety, stating that his assailants are still "out there and could come back to finish the job."⁷ Mrs. Lee's apprehension regarding her son's safety is legitimate, as Brandon was placed under strict security after suspicious characters were seen in the area.⁸

¹ <https://www.rappler.com/nation/237444-police-task-force-probe-shooting-brandon-lee>

² <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1151555/rights-worker-survives-gun-attack-in-ifugao>

³ <https://www.rappler.com/nation/237444-police-task-force-probe-shooting-brandon-lee>

⁴ <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1151488/baguio-activists-condemn-attack-on-human-rights-worker-in-ifugao>

⁵ <https://time.com/5647219/brandon-lee-volunteer-shot-philippines/>

⁶ https://www.democracynow.org/2019/9/4/journalist_brandon_lee_shot_in_philippines?fbclid=IwAR3DpxEp34Swj_6WIV3HkC4OPWeqeATnoNgXL6FUQcSsF8UJrp3gYA9mt3k

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ <https://www.rappler.com/nation/237444-police-task-force-probe-shooting-brandon-lee>

WHEREAS, Brandon Lee has been the subject of threats and vilification in the lead up to his shooting. In a 2018 video, Brandon Lee identifies himself as a volunteer at the Ifugao Peasant Movement (IPM) and announced that he and his colleagues at the IPM have been “harassed, intimidated, threatened with death threats, vilified, red-tagged, under surveillance since 2010.”⁹ He pointed out that these harassment and incidents were related to their work in “defending the land, life, and resources of the indigenous people in Ifugao.”¹⁰

WHEREAS, Brandon Lee himself is cognizant that his assailants were connected to the Philippines Government.¹¹ Prior to his shooting, he had sent e-mails to his friends in San Francisco, USA and told them that he was being visited at his house and his workplace by military and/or paramilitary forces.¹²

WHEREAS, as early as April 2015, Brandon Lee has been the subject of posters around the Ifugao province and online social media sites which claims that he is a member of the New People’s Army and should be deemed as an enemy of the state.¹³ Communications with his friends and family in San Francisco revealed that he fears for his safety and well-being.

WHEREAS, also in 2015, Brandon Lee and other IPM leaders were the recipient of a death threat: a photo of an Ifugao burial blanket with messages that they will face the same fate as Human Rights defender William Bugatti, who was killed last March 2014.¹⁴

WHEREAS, in an official statement of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance, it was revealed that officers and members of the 54th Infantry Battalion Philippine Army (IBPA) visited the IPM office last July 29 to seek a partnership with the peasant organization. It was reported that they were also insisting to ask information about IPM’s activities and members in the community. These officers were identified as 1Lt. Karol Jay Mendoza and LTC Narciso Nabulneg Jr.¹⁵

WHEREAS, in response to the 54th IBPA members’ insistence, Brandon Lee allegedly told them: “I will just give you two names you can tell your boss on why we are reluctant to partner with you, William Bugatti, and Ricardo Mayumi and your boss should understand why. Tell them, if you want a better relationship with the farmer organizations, you shouldn’t threaten them.”¹⁶

WHEREAS, Lee is not the first human and environmental rights defender from the IPM to be shot by unidentified gunmen. In 2018, his colleague, 52-year old Ricardo Mayumi died from multiple gunshot wounds in his home.¹⁷ He was a staunch oppositor of the Quad River mini-hydro projects in Ifugao. In 2014, another of Lee’s colleague, William Bugatti, was gunned down after a court hearing.

WHEREAS, Brandon Lee have written articles that were critical of military presence in rural farmlands.¹⁸ IPM, a peasant and farmers’ group where Lee volunteers, actively

⁹https://www.democracynow.org/2019/9/4/journalist_brandon_lee_shot_in_philippines?fbclid=IwAR3DpxEp34Swj_6WIV3HkC4OPWeqeATnoNgXL6FUQcSsF8UJrp3gYA9mt3k

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ ibid

¹² ibid

¹³ <https://news.abs-cbn.com/global-filipino/04/08/15/chinese-american-ph-tagged-enemy-state>

¹⁴ <http://cpaphils.org/official-statement-of-chra-on-the-brutal-shooting-of-paralegal-volunterr-brandon-lee-in-ifugao.html>

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/972927/activist-opposed-to-hydro-project-killed-in-ifugao>

¹⁸ <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-human-rights-worker-brandon-lee-shot-at-home-philippines-2019-8>

opposes the military presence in the Cordillera region and a hydropower project in Ifugao.¹⁹

WHEREAS, last May 24, 2019, the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police launched a counter-insurgency program titled Oplan Kapanatagan. The ceremonial signing of the program between the Police Regional Office Cordillera and the Armed Forces of the Philippines Northern Luzon Command took place in Camp Dangwa in La Trinidad, Benguet.²⁰ The said program identified Ifugao as a priority area in the Cordillera Region.²¹ The program was envisioned to harmonize the AFP and the PNP in defeating threat groups, suppress criminality, secure communities, and attain an overall peaceful environment.²²


WHEREAS, Myra dela Cruz of the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance has affirmed that the shooting of Brandon Lee was part of Oplan Kapanatagan's implementation.²³

WHEREAS, the shooting incident involving Brandon Lee is only one of the latest cases that illustrates the dangers faced by environmental and human rights defenders in the Philippines. A 2019 report of the U.K.-based Global Witness reports that the Philippines is the deadliest country for environmental defenders in 2018, with 30 environmentalists killed.²⁴

WHEREAS, in 2017, 48 environmental defenders were killed in the country, the highest in Asia.²⁵

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, to urge the Senate Committees on Justice and Public Order and Dangerous Drugs to conduct an investigation in aid of legislation on the killings of environmental and human rights defenders in the country and to probe the reasons and motives behind the said killings, with the end in view of attaining justice for the slain victims and addressing the violations of human and environmental rights that these defenders and activists sacrificed their lives for.

Adopted,


RISA HONTIVEROS
Senator

¹⁹ <https://time.com/5647219/brandon-lee-volunteer-shot-philippines/>

²⁰ <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1807085>

²¹ <https://www.bulatlat.com/2019/08/06/journalist-rights-defender-shot-seriously-wounded-in-ifugao/>

²² <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1064849>

²³ <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1151488/baguio-activists-condemn-attack-on-human-rights-worker-in-ifugao>

²⁴ <https://time.com/5638438/global-witness-environmental-activists-murdered/>

²⁵ *ibid*