



Church People Targeted in the Philippines

April 2022

At around 9:30 pm on 23 February 2022, five community workers were massacred by the 1001st Infantry Brigade soldiers. Those murdered were two volunteer teachers, Chad Booc (pictured, aged 26) and Gelejurain Ngujo II, a community health worker, Elgyn Balonga, and two volunteer drivers, Roberto Aragon and Tirso Añar. They were travelling to Davao City after conducting field research at New Bataan, Davao de Oro.



The bodies of the five victims had been riddled with bullets.

Chad Booc was an environmental advocate, a youth leader and a mentor to fellow youth calling for climate action. He became a volunteer teacher in the Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development (Alcadev) in Surigao del Sur in 2016. In 2020, he joined Indigenous Lumad students in Cebu, where they sought sanctuary in one of the retreat houses of the University of San Carlos-Talamban campus. On 15 February 2021, police raided the retreat house and arrested Chad and six others. Police filed trumped-up charges against them of kidnapping the students. The court eventually dismissed the charges.

After graduating, Gelejurain Ngujo II became a teacher in the Community Technical College of Southeastern Mindanao (CTCSM). In 2018, he volunteered to become a teacher for the Bakwit School in Manila and then Cebu in 2019 and 2020. He was also subjected to threats and intimidation for his work as a volunteer teacher for the Lumad school.

Elgyn Balonga was a community health worker who served in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP)-Haran, a Lumad sanctuary in Davao City, from 2013 to 2018. She facilitated medical students for their internship in UCCP-Haran.

Throughout their years of service, Chad, Jurain, and Elgyn had been subjected to death threats, harassment, intimidation and accusations of being communists. Being labelled a communist is often a precursor to being targeted for assassination by the security forces or their allies.

On 25 February, the army posted a press release on their Facebook page claiming the five were armed communist fighters and had been killed in a firefight with soldiers.



On Sunday, 27 February, United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) elder Filipina Grace America (pictured, aged 60) was shot four times by a gunman while getting into her sport utility vehicle after church, at around 11:15 am. Filipina is also the local mayor. She survived the attempt on her life and was transferred to a hospital in Manila.

She has led her local constituents in opposing quarrying and the construction of a mega-dam, the Kaliwa Dam, which has Chinese financing. The dam project sits on an earthquake fault. The dam will also destroy the ancestral land of the Dumagat tribes.

Filipina had received threats due to her opposition to quarrying in the area and the dam project.

On 17 March 2022, police issued a statement saying they were investigating four suspects



involved in the assassination attempt.

The Uniting Church in Australia has a formal partnership with the UCCP.

What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters or e-mails to:

Her Excellency Mrs Ma. Hellen BARBER DE LA VEGA
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Philippines
Embassy of the Philippines
1 Moonah Place
Yarralumla, ACT 2600

Salutation: Your Excellency

E-mail: cbrpe@philembassy.org.au

Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern at the murder of Chad Booc, Gelejurain Ngujo II, Elgyn Balonga, Roberto Aragon and Tirso Añar by soldiers on 23 February 2022.
- Also, express concern at the attempted murder of Mayor Filipina Grace America on 27 February 2022.
- Ask that both incidents are thoroughly and impartially investigated and those responsible brought to justice.

Also send letters to:

The Hon Michelle Bachelet
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

E-mail: registry@ohchr.org; infodesk@ohchr.org

Salutation: Your Excellency

Points to make in your letter or e-mail:

- Express concern at the murder of Chad Booc, Gelejurain Ngujo II, Elgyn Balonga, Roberto Aragon and Tirso Añar by soldiers in the Philippines on 23 February 2022.
- Also, express concern at the attempted murder of Mayor Filipina Grace America on 27 February 2022.
- Ask that her office seek that both incidents are thoroughly and impartially investigated and those responsible brought to justice.