

Kakailian Salakniban Ta'y Amin a Nagtaudan

(KASTAN – Cordillera Peoples Alliance Abra Chapter)

Press Release, 9 November 2017

The Military are the Terrorists!

During the past few months, the 24th Infantry Battalion of the 7th Infantry Division, Philippine Army has been waging a smear campaign against KASTAN and threatening its leaders and staff with lawsuits. The 24th IB has alleged that KASTAN is nothing more than a terrorist front; that its staff and at least one of its community leaders are recruiters for the “terrorist” New People’s Army; that the services KASTAN renders to communities are just means for luring these communities into the “terrorist” movement.

KASTAN is a legitimate federation of Abrenian people’s organizations who are committed to the defense of land and life. Although it mainly consists of indigenous Tinggian community organizations, numbering 44 at present, it counts among its members six Ilocano peasant community organizations. Provincial sectoral formations of the peasantry (Tumakder), youth (Anakbayan), and women (BIDANG) are also affiliated with KASTAN, as is the multi-sectoral Abra Human Rights Movement (AHRM).

Since it was founded in 1998, KASTAN has helped its member-organizations protect their lands and assert their socio-economic, civil, and political rights. Although it has done this mainly by channeling information and providing education on relevant issues, KASTAN has also directly engaged in dialogue, confrontation, and protest regarding projects and activities that are harmful to communities, such as large mining and so-called civil-military operations in which human rights violations are common. KASTAN and its member-organizations have been instrumental in preventing the destruction of Abra by global mining giants such as Newmont and Newcrest, and relatively smaller Philippine mining companies such as Lepanto, Philex, and Golden Lake.

KASTAN has also strived to help communities gain access to government and non-government projects and services, such as irrigation and waterworks, health education and medical care. In the aftermath of major calamities, such as Typhoons Pepeng (2009), Juan (2010), Ineng-Lando (2015), and Karen-Lawin (2016), KASTAN has served as a channel for the delivery of relief goods to Abrenian communities from non-governmental organizations and the Church. Now the 24th IB is accusing KASTAN of using socio-economic projects and disaster relief as gateways for the “terrorist infiltration” of villages.

It is not KASTAN but the military – especially the 24th IB and the 81st IB, both outfits of the 7th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army – that have been behaving like terrorists in Abra. It was the military that bombed Malibcong in March and laid siege to Boliney in July, terrorizing civilians instead of going after the combatants of the New People’s Army who had engaged them and the police in battle in these municipalities. It was the military and the police who, on October 27, raided the home of Pastor Eugene Antonio in Dolores, carrying a search warrant for a gun that was never there and seizing instead the legal records of the local community organizations. It is the military who have been illegally detaining and interrogating civilians in various parts of the province, and intimidating them into surrendering as NPA combatants.

We condemn these actions of the military and assert our legitimacy as a federation of Abra citizens’ organizations!

Timpuyog ti Umili a Mannalon ti Abra, Depensaran ti Rekursosna (Tumakder)
Babbai Itandudo Dasig nga Anak ling-et ken Nawaya a Gimong (BIDANG, Innabuyog Abra Chapter)
Anakbayan Abra Chapter
Abra Human Rights Movement
and the 50 community organizations who are members of KASTAN