

My struggle for justice: Living in fear and uncertainty

Myrna Reblando

Good day everyone.

My husband, Alejandro "Bong" Reblando, was one of the 32 journalists murdered in the Maguindanao massacre in 2009. At the time of his death, he wrote for the Manila Bulletin, Reuters and the Associated Press.

I'm one of the complainants of the multiple murders against the Ampatuans, a powerful political clan in Mindanao; and the police, military and paramilitary forces who aided them in the mass murder of journalists. For two years, in pursuit of seeking remedies and redress for my husband and other victims, I openly criticized irregularities of how the police investigation, the prosecution and courts handled the case.

As a result of my intervention, I had become the target myself by those I had prosecuted. A bounty of 3 million pesos was placed on my head in exchange either to silence me or the dropping of the murder charges. To protect myself and my family, I promptly asked for protection from President Benigno Aquino III; however, one of the escorts deployed to me was himself a former bodyguard of one of those who masterminded the massacre.

Although I am a complainant [2013V7N2P3-1.jpg](#) and the risk to me was real, I had no adequate protection. I could not qualify for protection under the government's witness protection program even though I helped the prosecution, encouraging witnesses to come forward. I was told that I am not a witness myself. Thus, the protection given to me was unofficial and de facto. I did not know it was the case.

In May 2011, I decided to leave my country. I feared that should I remain in the Philippines, neither I nor my family would be safe. My death could also undermine the complaints I have filed in court. Now, to live a life in hiding in another country has been very difficult for me. To be away from my loved ones, to hide, have never been easy. I want to go home but I fear that not only me, but the safety of my children and relatives would also be at stake.

In fact, my children who remain in the Philippines have had threats and been the object of overt surveillance at our home in General Santos City, Mindanao since November 2011. They reported these incidents to the local police; however, neither were they given adequate and immediate security protection, nor was their complaint of surveillance investigated.

It was painful to leave my children, for them to live without me. Like me, my children also fear, suffer trauma and deep hurt from the loss of their father. I have asked myself: how long would I and my children have to endure these pain, fear and uncertainties?

How long do we have to wait that all those responsible for this senseless mass murder would be arrested, detained and punished? Because many accused have remained at large, complainants, witnesses and families of the victims, have since been vulnerable to attacks. Apart from me, some others have left the country, their hometown and some now consider accepting the huge bribe in exchange of dropping the murder charges they filed in court.

My struggle for justice is not only for my husband, but also for all the Filipino people who continue to dream and aspire for justice and equality. I do feel guilty sometimes and ask of myself: why did I have to leave my family, why leave my country?

Uncertainty in my life sometimes now is too much to bear. I'm seeking protection from another country because my own country, which claimed to have upheld protection of fundamental rights, could not protect me.

I fight on my own and far away, as a mother to my seven children, I also have to keep an eye on my children. I realized that this is not just about me and my children. This is a quest for Filipinos in our aspiration for possibility of remedies and redress for our loved ones and victims of human rights violations in my country. If nothing would come of my pursuit for my husband's and other victims' case, there is no any prospects for other cases of human right violation to obtain any sort of remedies. It would be bleak.

Living a life that I choose to live now is very hard-away from my own children and in hiding; however, if this is the reality that I have to accept to hope for a possibility that those who murdered my husband and other victims would be punished, I choose not to surrender. I worked hard with my own capacity for what I know is right. This is my life and I have to come to terms with this.

Thank you.

This is the speech given by Myrna Reblando to a UN side event in Geneva organized by the AHRC in September 2012, on the same day that the Philippines was being examined under the UPR. Unfortunately, the Hong Kong immigration department has recently dismissed her and her daughter's torture claims under the Convention against Torture. For more information on Myrna's case, see <http://www.article2.org/mainfile.php/1102/419/> and <http://www.article2.org/mainfile.php/1102/418/>.