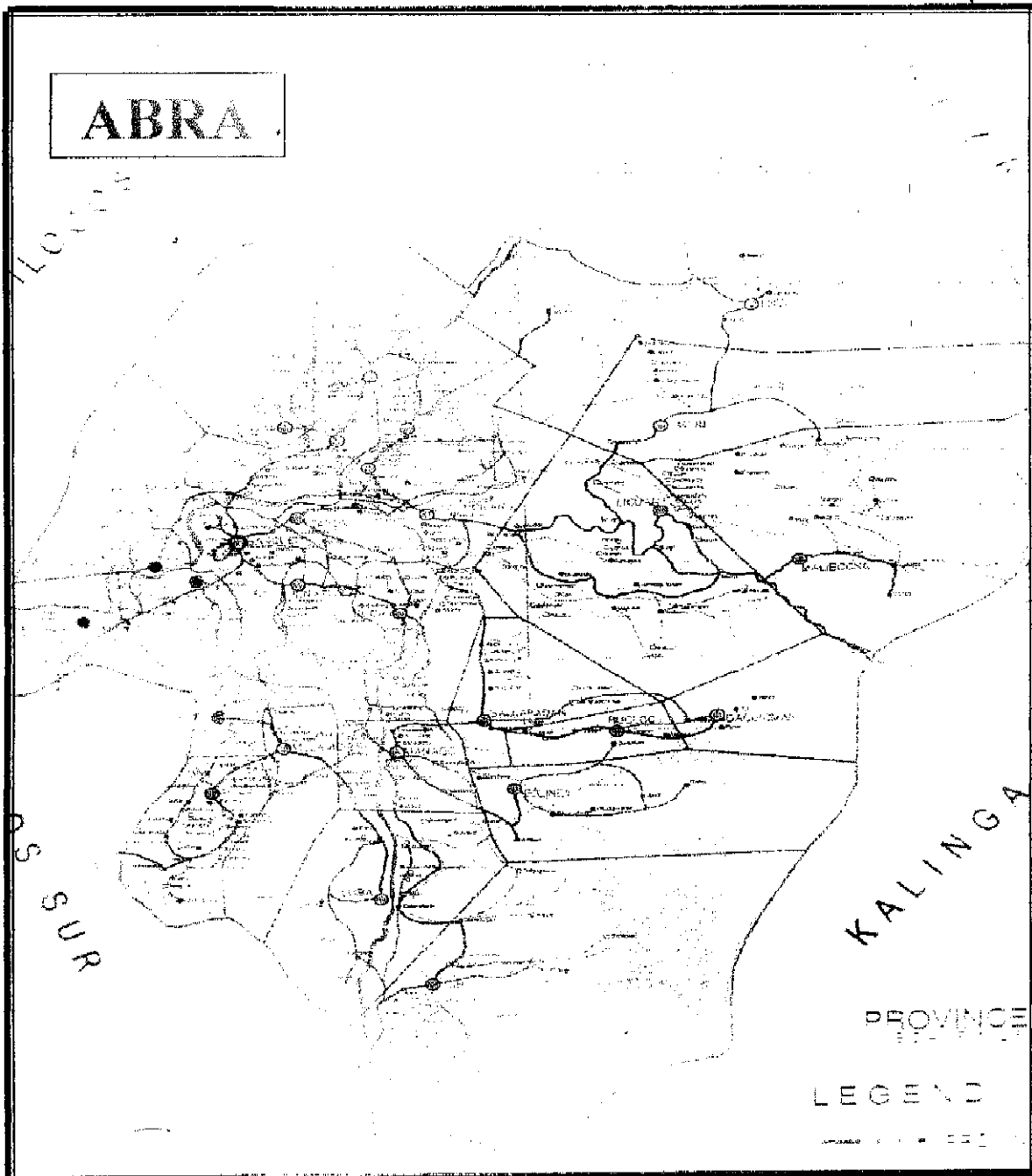


**House of Representative Committee Hearing
Conference Rooms 7 and 8, RV Mitra Building,
House of Representatives, Quezon City
January 29, 2007**



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BRIEFING HANDOUT
CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE HEARING
RE: KILLING OF CONGRESSMAN BERSAMIN
29 January 2007

I. BACKGROUND

Political violence and the propensity to take the law into their hands has long been the perceived culture of the Abrenians. Economic development has been hampered because of this, causing a very much impoverished condition of the countryside.

The creation of Task Force Abra has greatly improved the peace and order situation in the province. The activities of the Partisan Armed Groups (PAGs) have been curtailed. The open display of firearms by politicians and their armed bodyguards have been efficiently checked with the establishment of checkpoints and continuous operations for loose firearm.

II. CRIME SITUATION:

A. CRIME INCIDENTS

Abra has earned the moniker "murder capital" of the Cordillera if not the whole nation because of the very high incidence of crimes against persons. For the year 2005 and 2006, there were one hundred eighteen (118) killings in the province. Fifty five (55) of these were solved while the remaining sixty three (63) are under follow-up investigation.

Killings in Abra

CASES	CY 2005 - 61		CY 2006 - 57		TOTAL
	MURDER	HOMICIDE	MURDER	HOMICIDE	
SOLVED	19	10	14	12	55
UNSOLVED	29	3	30	1	63
TOTAL	48	13	44	13	118

The common causes of this killings are political rivalry, personal grudges and very minor misunderstandings. Supporters and allies of politicians are emboldened to do such acts because of political patronage. This has led to the suspension of the Local Chief Executive's deputation in the operational control and supervision of PNP personnel including the power to choose the COPs.

During the last 2004 elections, a total of twenty seven (27) election related incidents were recorded in the province. After the election, series of post election related violent incidents transpired thus the creation of first Special Task Force Abra.

ELECTION RELATED INCIDENTS

2001	2004
16	27

Among the measures by the Task Force then was to implement "OPLAN BALASA" where all the policemen in Abra were reassigned to the different PPOs in the region. The intention was to do away with political patronage.

B. POLITICAL KILLINGS

Political rivalry is so intense in the province that several sensational political killings involving politicians were recorded. These are the following:

1. FATHER CONDRADO BALWEG:

Father Balweg was a former rebel priest and later chairman of the Cordillera People's Liberation Army. Together with Mr. Nestor Masaoay, they challenged the husband and wife tandem of the Valera's during the 1998 national elections. After the 1998 elections, he filed a kidnapping case against the Valera's. The charge came about because the Valera camp abducted a security guard named Mr. Nestor Masaoay and had him file his candidacy for governor. The intention was to cause the spoilage of ballots intended for Masaoay, Mrs valera's opponent for governorship that time.

After the elections, Balweg and company got hold of SG Masaoay and initiated the filing of kidnapping charges against the husband and wife. Atty. Rodor Gayao who was then the provincial prosecutor was slapped by the Governor because he endorsed the case to DOJ Manila

Father Conrado Balweg was shot to death on 31 December 1999 inside their family house at Buanao, Malibcong, Abra at 4:00 A.M allegedly by CTL PROCOPIO TAURO @KA LITO/PYRO in the presence of his own brother JOVENCIO BALWEG @KA RUDY/DICK and other NPA followers.

A Criminal Complaint for Murder docketed under Criminal Case Number 2000-001 dated January 4, 2000 was filed before the office of the Regional Trial Court against the following suspects:

- **JOVENCIO BALWEG** aka Rudy/Edel/Dick;
- **PROCOPIO TAURO** aka Lito/Pyro (trigger man),
- **MARCELO DAO-AYAN** aka Wangwang;
- **FLORES BALUGA** aka Inar/Bram;
- **MACO GUINNAY** aka Dangkas and others

All suspects are still at large.

2. JOSE LEVI SEGUNDO OF TUBO, ABRA:

Jose Levi Segundo, incumbent Mayor of Tubo, Abra, was shot to death allegedly by members of NPA on the early morning of December 27, 2001 at Pacapac, Tuftuba, Tubo, Abra. He was on his way to Dilong, Tubo, Abra to attend a wedding ceremony when ambushed. Prior to the shooting incident, two (2) NPA members were sighted at Tuftuba, Tubo, Abra from December 24, 2006 up to the night of December 26, 2001. The case is still under investigation.

3. CLARENCE BENWAREN OF TINEG, ABRA:

Clarence Benwaren was the incumbent Mayor of the municipality of Tineg, Abra prior to his death.

His father was the former mayor of Tineg and a staunch political leader of Gov Valera. However during the 1998 elections he supported the BALWEG - MASAOAY ticket thus getting the ire of the governor.

In the 2001 elections, Clarence Benwaren together with Edwin Crisologo (now the mayor of Tineg) as his running mate defeated the candidate fielded by the Governor. This further alienated Benwaren from the governor. He was suspended twice by the governor prior to his murder.

He was shot to death while attending a wedding ceremony by an assassin at 09:40 A.M. on October 2002 inside the San Isidro Labrador Parish Church, Calaoan, Laguna. The alleged assassin, **EDBERTO DOYDOY AMONCIO**, 26 years old and a resident of 41

Samar Ave., Diliman, Quezon City, was shot dead by responding policemen.

A Murder charge under Criminal case # 12051-2004-C was filed at the RTC, 4th Judicial Region Branch 34, Calamba City against the following:

- **Ruben Bobila** – employed by Abra Governor Vicente Valera as his security
- **Mary Jane Eduarte** – Municipal Nurse of Tineg, Abra;
- **Peping Bellisario** – Presently detained at the Abra Provincial Jail for Murder;
- **Dennis Garcia** – Bodyguard and escort of Mayor Barona. Incidentally, his father Momoy Garcia, a former member of the NPA, is an SB member of Lacub. He was identified to be involved in the ambush of Mayor Benwaren at Tapayen, Alaoa, Tineg on July 12, 2002 where he sustained injuries.

The murder of Benwaren is clear that politics plus the perks that go with it are the motives that led to the brutal slaying of the mayor. Tineg has the biggest share of Internal Revenue Allotment, the reason why people want to be in power in that municipality.

Meantime, the death of Benwaren paved the way for the NPAs to gain control of Tineg. Benwaren was anti communist. Reports have it that part of the IRA funds of the municipality are being channeled to the NPAs.

4. MARC YSRAEL BLANDO BERNOS OF LA PAZ, ABRA:

March Ysrael Bernos was the incumbent Mayor of the municipality of La Paz, Abra before his brutal murder. He was a vocal critic of the governor and has on several occasions announced his plan to run against the incumbent governor.

He was shot at the back of his head while watching a basketball game on or about 7:15 P.M. of January 13, 2006 at SK Mini Park at La Paz Town, La Paz, Abra.

Case is ready for filing against practically the same set of suspects in the CONG. BERSAMIN CASE namely: Vice-Mayor Freddie Dupo, Salvador Barbosa, Sonny Taculao, and several John Does.

Based on the pieces of evidence gathered, the murders of Mayor Marc Israel Bernos and Cong. Luis Bersamin were likely perpetrated by one group.

5. JAMES BURGOS BERSAMIN:

He was the Incumbent Sanggunian Panlalawigan member of Abra when killed. He was also the Chairman, Committee on Trade and Industry and Tourism of the Sanguniang Panlalawigan of Abra and Chairman of Abra Consumer Net. He was shot to death while jogging on or about 5:15 A.M. of November 11, 2006 at the town plaza of Bangued, Abra by arrested suspects:

- **MISAEEL GATOC Y AQUINO** aka SAEL, 39 years old, single, jobless, RC and a resident of Borbon St, Zone 6, Bangued, Abra; and
- **JULIE ALDACA Y PALMA**, 22 years old, single, jobless and a resident of Brgy. Lubluba, Dolores, Abra.

A Criminal case of Murder was filed against the suspects before the Office of the Provincial Prosecutor, Bangued, Abra on November 12, 2006 docketed under I.S. Case No. 2006-K-381. Suspects are now detained at the Abra Provincial Jail.

He had plans to run either as Mayor of Bangued, or Vice Governor of the Province.

6. LUIS "CHITO" PURUGANAN BERSAMIN:

He was the incumbent Representative of Abra at the time of his death. He had a falling out with the Valera's because of his intention to finish his term as congressman. Reportedly the Valera's wanted him to slide down as Mayor of Bangued so the husband and wife tandem can be Governor and Congresswoman respectively.

He was gunned down outside the Mt. Carmel Church in Quezon City on December 16, 2006 after attending the wedding of his niece.

7. BOTCHED PLOT TO ASSASSINATE MAYOR CECILIA LUNA:

One sensational case pending investigation in the Ombudsman is the Attempted Assassination/Murder of MAYOR CECILIA LUNA of the Municipality of Lagayan.

On March 8, 2005, Mayor Cecilia Luna of Lagayan, Abra filed charges for attempted murder against Governor Vicente Valera

and Col. Noel Mislang, Commander of 41st IB, PA. The charge came about when Col. Mislang ordered Cpl. Eduardo Barcelona and Cpl. Antonio Rosqueta, both members of the 41st IB, PA, to conduct a "special mission", the liquidation of a certain Cecilia Luna and family, alleged supporters of NPAs in Abra on orders of Governor Valera. They were instructed to get two (2) assets, Mauro Dorwin and Florencio Baharin, in Cauayan, Isabela to join them in the liquidation plot. However, they did not execute the planned mission special mission was because they found out that there is no truth to the information given by Gov. Valera and Col. Mislang.

On December 23, 2004 in Isabela, Cpl Edwardo A. Barcelona and Cpl Antonio R Rosqueta were gunned down by assets of the 41st Infantry Battalion to silence them. Cpl Rosqueta was killed while Cpl Barcelona suffered five (5) gunshot wounds.

Relatives of Cpl Rosqueta and Cpl Barcelona filed criminal charges of Murder and Frustrated Murder against Gov. Valera, Col. Mislang, Mauro Dorwin and Florencio Baharin.

Mauro Dorwin and Florencio Baharin, Military Intelligence Group (MIG) agents, are currently detained at Isabela Provincial Jail, Ilagan, Isabela.

Cases filed against the governor are still pending with the Ombudsman.

I. OBSERVATIONS/COMMENTS:

1. When power was shared by different political leaders/personalities, no violent political incident was ever recorded.

2. The presence of a Special Task Force not beholden to the local politicians in the province is effective in the maintenance of peace and order.

3. Patronage politics rules the province. Out of fear, majority of the mayors gravitate towards the governor. The civil populace are likewise afraid to speak openly. The rule of law is overpowered by the power of the gun.

4. The suspension of the DILG deputation in the operational control and supervision of the PNP personnel has somehow negated the practice of some politicians in using the PNP as their Private Armed Group.

5. The perceived "Non-Action" of the cases filed against the governor and other government officials further bolster the fear and apprehension of the populace in standing up for what is right.

6. The Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) is primarily the bone of contention in every political exercise. Special audit on IRA funds and a strict monitoring mechanism on its disbursement should be put in place. IRA funds are conveniently being used to support the local communist movement especially in the far flung municipalities of the province.

7. A change in the political system in the province is very much needed. The political largesse, the IRAs, pride, power, territory and the pervasive culture of the corruption are trophies difficult to give away.

8. The continued lack of effective governance, delivery of basic services to the people, loss of lives, impoverished and backward economies will be fertile grounds for mass discontent and revolution.

9. Any sound peace and order development plan cannot take off where the politico-socio-economic environment is not prepared to revolt against the tradition of Warlordism and political patronage.