

Privilege Speech  
15<sup>th</sup> Regular Council  
January 20, 2009

### RED CROSS ABDUCTION

By Councilor Pilar C. Braga, PhD

Last Thursday, January 15, 2009 - *Andreas Notter*, a 38-year old Swiss worker, *Eugenio Vagni*, a 62-year old Italian water and sanitation engineer and *Mary Jean Lacaba*, a 37-year old Filipina field officer, all of the International Committee of the Red Cross Office in Zamboanga City - were headed to the airport after visiting a jail in Patikul town in Jolo, Sulu when seized by suspected Abu Sayyaf bandits.

The abduction in Sulu is the latest in a string of kidnapping incident in Sulu. Last year, almost 10 persons composed of humanitarian workers, businessmen, students, and children were abducted in separate occasions.

The Red Cross workers are humanitarian workers who carry out their essential work in delivering aid to the victims of war. Under international humanitarian law, personnel, installations and means of transport protected by the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems must be respected and their safety ensured. They have special status as they are protected by international humanitarian law. They are innocent people protected by international treaties under the Geneva Convention.

People like Notter, Vagni and Lacaba are there only to help the people of Mindanao, especially the starving evacuees, without expecting anything in return. They are doing their mission without any tint of partiality, remorse and discrimination. They do not deserve to be abducted or kidnapped. We condemn this kidnapping and the kidnapers for committing this criminal act against humanity.

The incident could cause an international furor should the three victims be harmed and not released immediately.

Many have condemned this despicable act of terrorism and I would like to add my voice in this condemnation because as a member of the Board of the Philippine National Red Cross, Davao Chapter, the kidnapped Red Cross volunteers are personally known to me and knowing them, I know they were in Jolo for a "mission of mercy."

*Harry Roque*, moderator of the Asia Pacific Humanitarian Law Forum based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, condemned "in the strongest possible terms" the abduction which is a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law, calling it a "war crime."

*Romel Bagares*, Executive Director of the Center for International Law (CENTERLAW), a non-governmental organization promoting the binding nature of International Law, warned the abductors that they are committing "a crime against international law" and that they may answer to criminal prosecution for their acts before any court in this planet. Anyone who breaches the International Humanitarian Law is considered an international criminal.

*Sulu Gov. Abdusakur Tan*, embarrassed by the abduction, has even threatened to kidnap the families of the kidnappers in retaliation.

*Richard Gordon*, Chairman of the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) and a governor of the International Federation of the Red Cross expressed overwhelming censure of the incident. Apart from violating domestic law and the right to liberty and security of persons, the abduction is an affront to neutral parties that give assistance to people regardless of political, religious or cultural affiliation. The International Red Cross has nothing to do with any political or security agenda. They should be allowed to continue their work in our country.

Shameful, but according to Ramon Tulfo writing in the Philippine Inquirer, once again, the Philippines is on the world map this time for a very negative image - the abduction of three workers of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Humanitarian workers all over the world, governments who proclaim equality for everyone, local entities and organizations, private citizens, church leaders and every-freedom loving citizens condemn this violation of humanitarian law and personal freedom. We join our voices together with them to denounce the perpetrators of this act in the strongest possible way.

Madame President, allow me to pass the corresponding resolution to cover this issue at the appropriate time. Thank you.

**Councilor Pilar C. Braga, PhD**  
January 20, 2009