



**DEFEND
NEGROS**
#StopTheAttacks



Final Report
**NATIONAL
FACT-
FINDING AND
SOLIDARITY
MISSION**

MAY 13–14, 2026
TOBOSO, NEGROS OCCIDENTAL





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I. BACKGROUND



A. On the April 19 incident

On April 19, 2026, the 79th Infantry Battalion of the Philippines Army (IBPA) reported through its official social media accounts that an armed encounter with members of the New People's Army (NPA) took place at approximately 4:00 a.m. in Barangay Salamanca, Toboso, Negros Occidental.¹ The military subsequently reported a "series of clashes" and claimed that 19 individuals, whom it identified as members of the NPA's Northern Negros Front, were killed.²

On April 20, the Philippine Army, through its spokesperson, Colonel Louie Dema-ala, issued the initial official confirmation of the incident to national media outlets. He confirmed that 19 individuals were killed during the encounters, whom he claimed were armed members of the NPA. He defended the military's account and disputed reports of civilian casualties. Brigadier General Ted Dumosmog, Commander of the 303rd Infantry Brigade, gave interviews and held press briefings in Toboso and Bacolod City, confirming the death of the primary target, Roger Fabillar (alias

"Jhong"),³ and asserting that all 19 killed were "armed combatants."

Lieutenant General Antonio Nafarrete, Commanding General of the Philippine Army, subsequently issued a formal statement commending the troops of the 79th Infantry "Masaligan" Battalion for the operation and reinforcing the state's position that the casualties were victims of "insurgent deception."⁴

However, reports submitted to and information received by Human Rights Advocates Negros (HRAN) contradict the military's claims and indicate that some of those killed may have been civilians.

Following the incident, the names and photograph of the victims were maliciously posted on social media. At the time, only military and police authorities had access to photographs and information related to the incident, creating the impression that the materials circulated online may have originated from either the police or military. The posts appeared



intended to reinforce the narrative that the victims were armed combatants. They elicited various reactions while simultaneously providing a platform to vilify the victims and their families. The families and friends of the victims experienced online harassment. Among those initially identified and vilified online were student leader Alyssa Alano and peasant advocate Maureen Santuyo.

On April 27, 2026, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) issued a statement confirming that only ten (10) of the 19 fatalities were members of the NPA's Apolinario Gatmaitan Command; while the remaining nine were unarmed civilians. They identified the following NPA fatalities:⁵

1. Roger Fabillar (Ka Tapang), who served as NPA commander of the Northern Negros Front;
2. Sonny Boy Caramihan, 28, from Barangay Bagonbon, San Carlos City;
3. Rene Villarin Sr., 57, from Barangay Marcelo, Calatrava;
4. Pedro Bonghanoy, from Barangay Libertad, Escalante City;
5. Arnel Javoc, 32, from Barangay Lalong, Calatrava;
6. Joeross Caramihan, 18, from Don Salvador Benedicto;
7. Maria Clarita Branzuel Blanco from Cebu;
8. Genevieve Balora, from Bacolod City;
9. Labskie Purisimia Enustacion, 33, of Sitio Tinibawan, Barangay Bugang, Toboso; and
10. Jocel Gimang, 18, of Sitio Bautista, Barangay Malasibog, Escalante City.

Initial reports received following the incident identified RJ Nichole Ledesma, Roel Sabillo, Alyssa Alano, Errol Wendel, Maureen Santuyo, as unarmed civilians. On April 24, 2026, the NTF-ELCAC publicly disclosed that two other fatalities, Lyle Prijoles and Kai Sorem, were American citizens.⁶ Subsequent reports also identified two minors among those killed.

Based on the initial reports, the following are the civilians who were killed during the incident:

1. RJ Nichole Ledesma, 30, a community journalist from Bacolod City;
2. Alyssa Alano, 22, UP Diliman Student Council leader;
3. Maureen Keil Santuyo, 24, a member of the National Network of Agrarian Reform Advocates (NNARA-Youth);
4. Errol Wendel, 24, a member of Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA);
5. Lyle Prijoles, 40, of the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, from San Francisco, California (USA);
6. Kai Sorem, 26, from Seattle, Washington (USA);
7. Roel Sabillo, 19, resident of Barangay Tabun-ac, Toboso;
8. "Ron," 17, Sitio Buklog, Barangay Lalong, Calatrava, Negros Occidental; and
9. "Melissa," 15, resident of Sitio Plarinding, Barangay Salamanca, Toboso.

On April 27, 2026, the CPP issued a statement regarding a video drone footage circulating on social media that appeared to show Roger Fabillar still alive and potentially rendered hors de combat – that is, incapacitated and no longer able to fight – at the time of the incident. Fabillar was later confirmed to be among those killed. The footage has since been removed from social media.

Five of the fatalities – Alyssa Alano, Maureen Keil Santuyo, Lyle Prijoles, Kai Sorem and a male cadaver who was mistakenly identified as "Errol Wendel", were autopsied.⁷

B. On poverty and landlessness in Negros

Negros Island has long been a hotbed of state terror and feudal unrest, conditions deeply rooted in its colonial history.

Successive government agrarian reform programs, each proclaiming an end to feudal bondage, have failed millions of Negrense peasants for decades.

In the 1980s, the Marcos Sr. dictatorship established a monopoly over sugar exports and handed control to Marcos crony Roberto Benedicto, who hailed from Negros Occidental. This contributed to a severe famine on the island. In 1985, paramilitary forces fired upon thousands of protesting sugar workers, urban poor, and church people. Twenty people were killed in what became known as the Escalante Massacre.

The “return of democracy” in 1986 did not bring fundamental change. The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) was fundamentally flawed from the outset. Corporate capture became more systematic after Agribusiness Venture Arrangements (AVAs) were incorporated into CARP in 2006 under the Arroyo administration. “Sugarcane block farming,” a specific type of AVA, was implemented mainly in Negros in 2012, under the Benigno Aquino III administration. Nearly 300 years after the hacienda system was imposed, large haciendas continue to persist on the island.

Today, landlessness in Negros remains among the worst in the country.



According to official government statistics, only 18% of farmholdings on the island are fully owned, while less than 1% of the biggest landowners control more than 30% of the total farm area. As of 2024, CARP’s land distribution backlog in Negros stood at almost 200,000 hectares.

As the domestic sugar industry declines amid import liberalization, large landowners have increasingly turned to other means of profiting from their land, including real estate and other land-intensive projects. These projects entail the conversion of agricultural lands, which in turn affects small planters and farmworkers. Between 2012 and 2022, more than 105,000 farms covering approximately 33,000 hectares were converted for real estate and other projects.

More recently, land conversion and grabbing have increasingly been pursued under a "green" cover, particularly through solar, wind, and carbon projects. The Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) estimates that the 27 awarded solar and wind projects for Negros as of May 2025 could cover more than 480,000 hectares of land and sea area.

Meanwhile, small planters increasingly resort to credit, arrendo (leasing), prenda (pawning), and ultimately the sale of their land. Worsening landlessness pushes more Negrense peasants into wage labor. As the pakyawan (piece-rate) system remains almost universal – with KMP Negros estimates that 97% of sugar workers are under various pakyawan arrangements – hacienderos and labor contractors are able to drive farm wages to extremely low levels. In weeding, rates can be as low as ₱60 per worker per day.

C. On human rights violations in Negros

Extrajudicial killings in Negros surged again under the Duterte administration as it waged a multi-pronged war against the poor nationwide.



On the night of October 20, 2018, around 10–15 armed men fired upon farmers resting inside a tent after their successful bungkalan (collective farming activity) earlier that day. Now known as the Sagay Massacre,⁸ the incident resulted in the killing of nine farmers. A subsequent fact-finding mission found that the most likely perpetrator were members of a private army of a local landlord, reportedly including members from the Special Civilian Auxiliary Army (SCAA), a paramilitary unit in the Philippines whose members are funded by private corporations, local government units (LGUs), or private industries to provide security. SCAA members function as official reserve/paramilitary auxiliary force under the operational control of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

The Sagay Massacre was among the incidents cited to justify the issuance of Memorandum Order (MO) 32⁹ on November 22, 2018. The Duterte administration subsequently deployed additional AFP and Philippine National Police (PNP) forces in Samar, Negros, and Bicol. Issued after an earlier proclamation of a national state of emergency and empowering state agents to intensify operations, MO 32 effectively placed these regions under martial law.

A few weeks later, Duterte released Executive Order (EO) 70 which formed the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) on December 4, 2018. Alongside this order, MO 32 paved the way for the deadly Oplans Sauron 1 and 2 in Negros.¹⁰ The two operations led to the extrajudicial killing of a total of 20 individuals and the illegal arrest of 47 others.

The grim human rights situation in Negros has continued under the current Marcos Jr. administration. Between July 2022 and the first quarter of 2026, 137 victims of extrajudicial killings (EJKs) have been documented nationwide. Of these, 53 occurred in Negros – the highest number among all other regions. Negros is followed by Bicol with 38 EJK victims, and Eastern Visayas with 17. All three are regions covered by MO 32.

Under Marcos Jr., at least 13 persons were killed in three (3) massacres in Negros, including the following:

- **July 26, 2022 – Canlaon City, Negros Oriental.** At around 5:30 a.m., elements of the 62nd Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army (62nd IBPA), under the 303rd Infantry Brigade, together with members of the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU), fired upon the house of the Jacolbe family in Sitio Natuling, Barangay Budlasan, Canlaon City, Negros Oriental. Killed in the incident were daycare teacher Christina Sandot Jacolbe, who was pregnant at the time of her death; her 16-year-old daughter, Grade 11 student Everly Kee Jacolbe; and Roldan Montero, a family friend.¹¹

In media interviews, Brig. Gen. Inocencio Pasaporte, then commander of the 303rd Infantry Brigade and the mother unit of the 62nd IBPA, admitted that there people had been killed in the incident, which the military claimed as members of the NPA.

• **June 14, 2023 – Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental.** On June 14, 2023, at about 10:00 p.m., gunshots were heard throughout Sitio Kangkiling, Barangay Buenavista, Himamaylan City. Residents subsequently found the bodies of farmers Roly Fausto, 52, and his wife Emelda Fausto, 51, members of Baclayan, Bito, Cabagal Farmers and Farmworkers Association (BABICAFA), sprawled inside their home. Their two sons, Ben Fausto, 14, and Ravin Fausto, 11, who were also inside the house were also killed. According to local human rights groups, Roly and Emelda had been subjected to sustained harassment by soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in the months leading up to their deaths.¹²

• **September 21, 2023 – Kabankalan City, Negros Occidental.** At around 7:50 p.m. in Sitio Lubi, Brgy. Tabugon, Kabankalan City, soldiers from the 47th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army (IBPA) reportedly opened fire on a tricycle carrying several passengers, killing everyone on board.

The 47th IBPA subsequently issued a statement claiming that its troops had engaged members of the New People's Army in Brgy. Tabugon and that six NPA members had been killed.¹³

The following day, the Armando Sumayang Jr. Command of the NPA's Southwest Negros Guerrilla Front strongly condemned the massacre of its medical personnel, a rebel couple on medical leave, and a tricycle driver. Those killed were identified as Ka Rekoy (Bobby Pedro), Ka Goring (Mario Mullan) and Ka Joyce (Janice Flores), both medical personnel of the NPA; Ka Bravo (Alejo delos Reyes) and wife Ka Diane (Melissa dela Peña) who was six months pregnant; and the tricycle driver Ruben de la Cruz Gaitan. Gaitan's wife disputed the AFP's claim that her husband was an NPA member, and stated that he worked for the Southern Negros Development Corp. (Sonedco), a sugar mill operating in Kabankalan City, and drive a tricycle only as part-time work.¹⁴

The 79th IBPA, responsible for the death of the Negros 19, which was involved in the April 2026 incident that resulted in the deaths of the Negros 19, has also been implicated in previous gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Negros.

- **January 13, 2021 – Talisay City, Negros Occidental.** The 79th IBPA took “Baby Marx,” the two-month old son of an NPA fighter, during an early morning raid in Hacienda Ambulong in Talisay City. His grandparents were denied custody of the child despite their efforts to secure his release.¹⁵
- **August 20, 2021 – Silay City, Negros Occidental.** The 79th IBPA reported that poet-turned-NPA fighter Kerima Tariman was killed in an armed encounter in Silay City. NPA Negros disputed the military’s account, claiming that Tariman had only been wounded and was subsequently either “finished off or left to bleed to death” – acts that would constitute violations of IHL.¹⁶
- **October 17, 2023 – EB Magalona, Negros Occidental.** The 79th IBPA killed a farmer-couple in EB Magalona. The couple were reportedly harvesting bananas when they were shot by soldiers, who subsequently claimed that the incident was an armed encounter.¹⁷
- **March 7, 2025 – Bacolod City and Cadiz City, Negros Occidental.** Two individuals identified as NPA fighters were reportedly abducted by the PNP in Bacolod City. They were reportedly hors de combat when they were taken and were reportedly subjected to torture before being executed by elements of the 79th IBPA. Their bodies were later dumped in Cadiz City. The military, again, claimed that the two were killed in an armed encounter.¹⁸
- **November 3, 2025 – Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental.** The disappearance of an indigenous farmer from Himamaylan City since November 3, 2025 has also been attributed by local sources to the 79th IBPA. The circumstances surrounding his disappearance remain under investigation.

D. On the struggle for land in Toboso, Negros Occidental

The situation in Toboso is similar to, if not worse than, that of the island as a whole. Remaining predominantly agricultural, the municipality has one of the highest poverty incidences in the province, reaching 31% in 2023.



In Sitio Sinugmawan, peasants have been asserting ownership and control over the 18-hectare Hacienda Bedonia. Their families have been tilling the land for subsistence since the 1970s. In 2007, the siblings Joy and Ricky Gumban, claiming to be heirs to Hacienda Bedonia, took over the land and placed it under *aryendo* (lease). They cleared the land using tractors, destroying food crops, and converted it to sugarcane production. The affected locals had no choice but to work as hired farmworkers, receiving as little as ₱150 per day.

In late 2025, farmers in Sitio Sinugmawan learned that they could be eligible to become agrarian reform beneficiaries. Intent on asserting their land rights, they formed the Hacienda Bedonia Farmers and Farmworkers Association (HBFFA) in November 2025. As they studied their case, they discovered that Hacienda Bedonia was not titled in the name of the Gumban siblings or any of the various *aryendadors*.

On December 10, 2025, HBFFA began its petition for the property to be placed under agrarian reform coverage. That same month, the farmers informed the then-*aryendador*, June Son, that they intended to reclaim and cultivate a portion of the land for food production. On January 5, 2026, the farmers filed a Petition for Agrarian Reform Coverage at the DAR Negros Occidental. In February 2026, the farmers occupied and cultivated a four-hectare portion of the hacienda through a *bungkalan* action, planting monggo, cassava, kamote, larutob, and other food crops.

In March 2026, the Baynoso siblings filed a complaint against the farmers before the barangay. The complaint was subsequently dismissed after the siblings failed to provide legal documents establishing their ownership of the land.

Members of the HBFFA suspect that the siblings subsequently reported to the municipal government that NPA rebels were allegedly taking over sometime in the second week of April 2026. According to the farmers, this report may have directly contributed to the events that led to the killings on April 19.

II. METHODOLOGY

This report consolidates facts and insights gathered from the reports of the Quick Reaction Team, the National Fact-Finding and Solidarity Mission, initial autopsy findings, and various public statements and reports concerning the April 19 killings in Toboso, Negros Occidental.

A. Quick Reaction Team

The Quick Reaction Team (QRT) was organized to assist the families of victims, facilitate the identification and retrieval of their remains, and gather initial information and reports concerning the incident. The QRT was deployed to Negros Occidental on April 22 to April 25, 2026.

It was composed of about 40 delegates from Human Rights Advocates Negros, Manindigan Negros, Tanggol Magsasaka, KARAPATAN, UP Diliman University Student Council, Kabataan Partylist, Center for Environmental Concerns, Altermidya, Bulatlat, and various youth, church, and environmental groups.

B. National Fact-Finding and Solidarity Mission

A National Fact-Finding and Solidarity Mission (NFFSM) was organized to establish a factual record of the April 19, 2026 incident. It was organized by Manindigan Negros, Defend Negros, and KARAPATAN.



The delegation was composed of 117 participants from international, national, and local organizations, namely Manindigan Negros, KARAPATAN, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), Defend Negros, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN), National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL), Tanggol Magsasaka, Unyon ng Mangggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA), Human Rights Advocates Negros, AMIHAN National Federation of Peasant Women, Pambansang Lakas ng Mamamalakaya sa Pilipinas (PAMALAKAYA), Scholars for Peace, MAKABAYAN, Gabriela Women's Partylist, ACT Teachers Partylist, Kabataan Partylist, Kalikasan, Gabriela, UP Diliman Student Council, Anakbayan, League of Filipino Students (LFS), NNARA-Youth, Rural Women's Advocates (RUWA), ARPAK, Panday Sining, Sentro para sa Tunay na Repormang Agraryo (SENTRA), Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education & Research (EILER), Center for Trade Union and Human Rights (CTUHR), BPO Industry Employees' Network (BIEN), International Coalition for Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines (ICHRP), All UP Academic Employees Union (AUPAEU), International Action for Peace (IAP) Catalunya, Altermidya, Bulatlat, Promotion for Church Peoples Response (PCPR), and individual filmmakers and members of the academe.

The NFFSM was conducted from May 13, 2026 to May 14, 2026. It carried out an on-site investigation, interviewed witnesses, documented and gathered physical evidence, and conducted dialogues with local officials.

Members of the mission interviewed about 30 residents from Sitios Sinugmawan and Plarinding. A brief psychosocial debriefing session was also conducted in Sitio Sinugmawan. Physical evidence was documented and gathered from both sitios where the alleged encounters took place.

C. Forensic Examination

Arrangement were made for the forensic examination of the remains of some of the victims. The services of forensic pathologist Dr. Raquel Fortun were engaged for this purpose. She conducted autopsies on five of the 19 victims.

Volunteers were also engaged to search for and gather relevant reports, public statements, and other available information concerning the incident.

The facts and information gathered and elicited through these various sources, including the QRT, NFFSM, forensic examinations, and review of public reports and statement, were used as materials in the preparation of this report.

D. Children's Rehabilitation Center (CRC) Children's Activity

The Children's Rehabilitation Center (CRC) conducted a Children's Activity (CA) to enable the children to:

- Share their current situations, the impact of their experiences, and their appeals amidst incidents of gunfire, killings, forcible evacuation, indiscriminate firing, and other forms of violence in the context of intensified militarization in Negros;
- Play with other child participants as a way to express themselves and ease any heavy emotions they may be carrying; and
- Be guided in processing and understanding what they are feeling and experiencing.

III. SUMMARY OF REPORTS

A. Quick Reaction Team

The Quick Reaction Team (QRT) was deployed to Negros Occidental from April 22 to 25, 2026, to contact and assist the relatives of the victims.

Upon arrival, the QRT was informed that, based on the initial verification efforts of Fr. Melvin Fajardo of Manindigan Negros, the remains of the 19 fatalities had been brought to two local funeral homes: nine (9) to Shekainah Funeral Home in Escalante City and ten (10) to Niniel's Funeral Home in Toboso.

On April 22, the identification and retrieval of the remains began. The QRT assisted the victims' relatives throughout the process, while Atty. Rey Gorgonio and Atty. Lidio Apawan of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers-Negros Chapter provided legal assistance.

During the deployment, QRT members were subjected to aggressive surveillance and interference by police and military personnel. Niniel Funeral Homes in Toboso was heavily guarded by armed police and military personnel, who prevented the taking of photographs and initially refused to allow a pastoral blessing for the victims. Funeral home staff also refused to open and unseal the remains identified as those of Errol Wendel, citing the advanced stage of decomposition. Instead, they showed photographs of three unclaimed bodies.

Relatives of Maureen Santuyo identified her remains through a tattoo. On April 23, the remains of Alyssa Alano were released and transported directly to Metro Manila. By April 25, the relatives of Lyle Prijoles and Kai Sorem had identified their remains. Together with Maureen Santuyo's remains and the cadaver previously identified as Errol Wendel, these were transported to Metro Manila and brought to the UP College of Medicine for autopsy.

Forensic pathologist Dr. Raquel Fortun conducted autopsies on the five remains. She subsequently reported that the body presented as Errol Wendel did not correspond to his physical description, establishing that the funeral home had released the wrong cadaver to his relatives.

On May 11, 2026, a search team composed of members of HRAN, UMA, Tanggol Magsasaka, and Bayan was dispatched to Negros Occidental to assist Errol Wendel's family in locating and identifying his remains and securing their release. The team sought assistance from the Commission on Human Rights–Negros Island Regional Office (CHR–NIR), which assigned two investigators to join the search.

Together with the CHR–NIR investigators, the team proceeded to Niniel Funeral Homes in Toboso. Funeral home staff showed Wendel's relatives photographs of all ten bodies they had embalmed, including the seven bodies whose photographs had not been shown to the family on April 22. The relatives positively identified Errol from one of these photographs. Funeral home staff confirmed that his remains had been released to and retrieved by Merliza Caramihan, mother of Joeross Caramihan, another fatality from Sitio Magasin, Barangay Bago, Don Salvador Benedicto, Toboso.

On May 12, the team contacted Merliza Caramihan and brought her to Niniel Funeral Homes to identify Joeross' remains. She was shown the photographs previously presented to the team but was unable to positively identify Joeross.

The team also learned from Niniel Funeral Homes that the ten bodies arrived at the facility on April 20 at approximately 8:00 p.m., after the mayors of Escalante and Toboso agreed to share funeral expenses. According to funeral home personnel, the ten bodies had initially been brought to Shekainah Funeral Home in Escalante, where PNP Scene of the Crime Operations (SOCO) personnel conducted post-mortem examinations. Shekainah personnel allegedly decided which bodies would remain in Escalante and which would be transferred to Toboso.

Niniel personnel stated that the bodies arrived naked, with their clothes and personal effects wet, foul-smelling, and wrapped in plastic. The plastic bags and the bodies themselves allegedly bore no identification tags, and the personal effects could not be reliably matched to individual bodies. The bodies were reportedly extremely bloated and in an

advanced stage of decomposition. In response, Niniel personnel assigned number tags to the bodies and photographed each one before embalming and rewrapping them. They stated that these numbers and photographs became the basis for subsequent identification, and that photographs of claimed bodies were no longer shown to succeeding families.

Niniel personnel further stated that SOCO operatives visited the funeral home the day before and instructed them to ensure that the bodies were transferred properly and with proper identification tags. This account directly contradicts the funeral home's claim that the bodies had arrived without identification tags.

The team subsequently proceeded to Shekainah Funeral Home and interviewed its owner regarding the reported switching of the remains. He stated that all 19 cadavers arrived at the funeral home in the late afternoon of April 20 and that PNP-SOCO personnel initially handled the bodies and conducted post-mortem examinations. The owner showed the team photographs taken during the examinations.

The owner maintained that SOCO personnel followed prescribed procedures and properly tagged the bodies, and specifically instructed funeral home personnel not to remove the tags. However, when asked to describe the tags and their markings, he could provide no specific details and was uncertain of their location, describing them only generally as similar to hospital identification tags placed around a patient's wrist.

The owner also claimed that the bodies were fully clothed when received from SOCO. However, some bodies appeared naked in the post-mortem photographs shown to the team. The team was further informed that the victims' clothes had been cut off during embalming and subsequently burned.

The owner attributed the switching of the bodies to the relatives and maintained that SOCO personnel had followed proper procedures. Before the team departed, he insisted on taking a photograph with a member of HRAN using his cellphone.

On May 13, the team, accompanied by CHR-NIR personnel, proceeded to the PNP-SOCO office in Bacolod City to request copies of the post-mortem examination records and other pertinent documents that could assist the forensic autopsy team in identifying the remains. PNP-SOCO personnel declined to answer the team's questions and instead referred them to the Investigator-on-Case, PSSg Richard Consulta of the Toboso Municipal Police Station, for requests for the documents.



B. National Fact Finding and Solidarity Mission

Prior to the arrival of the National Fact-Finding and Solidarity Mission (NFFSM) delegation in Barangay Salamanca, Toboso, Negros Occidental, residents reported the presence of personnel from the 79th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army (79th IBPA) in the community.

During the conduct of the NFFSM, delegates also reported incidents of surveillance. Individuals in civilian clothing, suspected to be connected with the military, were observed following the vehicle convoy and taking photographs of delegates at various points during the mission.

The NFFSM delegation first proceeded to Sitio Sinugmawan, where residents reported hearing the initial volley of gunfire on April 19. The delegation then traveled on foot to Sitio Plarinding, where the bodies of

the 19 individuals killed in the incident were reportedly recovered. Both sitios are located within Barangay Salamanca, Toboso, Negros Occidental, and are separated by approximately three kilometers of rugged and hilly terrain.

The delegation was divided into documentation teams to facilitate data collection. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews served as the primary methods of gathering information, enabling the delegates to collect testimonies, verify information, and assess the experiences of affected residents and witnesses.

During the mission, the delegates interviewed approximately 30 respondents from Sitios Sinugmawan and Plarinding, including residents, witnesses, and family members. A brief psychosocial debriefing session was also conducted in Sitio Sinugmawan by the Children's Rehabilitation Center (CRC) for seven children who had been affected by the incident and the ensuing military operations.

Accounts gathered

Sitio Sinugmawan

Residents reported that military presence in Sitio Sinugmawan had been observed as early as 2025, when unidentified armed men in civilian clothes were seen eating at local carinderias. Residents said they did not recognize these individuals as members of the community, noting that local dogs would bark at them. According to multiple accounts, military presence intensified in the days immediately preceding and during the April 19, 2026 armed encounter.

Residents recounted several incidents involving armed government personnel prior to the encounter:

- April 16, 2026. Armed individuals in civilian clothes reportedly appeared at a birthday celebration where a baile (a community dance party) was being held and questioned the owner of the house about the purpose of the gathering.

- April 18, 2026. A farmer who was feeding his carabao was reportedly surrounded by three armed soldiers who pointed their guns at him and questioned him about the presence of the New People's Army (NPA). That evening, military presence reportedly intensified. One witness saw approximately 24 soldiers dressed in black take positions in front of the farmer's house, where they remained until around 1:00 a.m. At approximately 9:00 p.m., soldiers reportedly visited another resident, pointed their guns at him, and ordered his family not to leave their home. Between 11:00 p.m. and midnight, another resident was awakened by barking dogs and saw soldiers passing by the house.
- April 19, 2026. Residents reported hearing bursts and barrages of gunfire beginning at approximately 3:24 a.m. and 3:58 a.m., with some accounts indicating that gunfire continued until around 7:00 a.m. Some residents reported hearing gunshots until approximately noon or even 2:00 p.m.

By early morning, residents observed soldiers deployed in battle positions throughout the sitio. Multiple residents reported house-to-house searches, the pointing of firearms at civilians, and questioning regarding the presence or movement of alleged NPA members.

A 63-year-old resident reported that, shortly after 5:00 a.m., approximately ten soldiers entered her family compound and searched three houses. Soldiers pointed their guns at her and asked whether she had seen armed rebels. They also interrogated her 14-year-old son at gunpoint, repeatedly asking whether he had seen armed men or anyone passing through the area the previous night. The boy, who had just awakened, said he had seen nothing. The resident also observed drones hovering near a mango tree. Outside, drones hovered near a mango tree.

Around the same time, five soldiers reportedly arrived at a resident's house. While the soldiers were on the veranda, two of them aimed their rifles at the husband and pressed the muzzles against his body. They asked whether he had seen anyone passing through the area. Out of fear, neither the farmer nor his wife, who witnessed the incident from inside the house, could respond. Meanwhile, two or three other soldiers positioned themselves prone in front of the hut, with their rifles aimed toward the road.

Residents reported that bullets grazed the roofs of some houses, forcing them to lie prostrate on the floor. They said the gunfire came from the same direction. A total of 24 houses were reportedly searched.

One 58-year-old woman recounted that four to six soldiers entered her house. One soldier allegedly grabbed her husband by the back of his shirt, pointed a gun at him, dragged him outside, and shouted, "Get out now!" The soldiers were reportedly looking for alleged NPA members.

A 71-year-old woman was harassed by soldiers, who accused her of accommodating members of the NPA, and accused her of the NPA had funded the construction of her concrete and painted house. The gunshots were heard until about 12 p.m., 1 p.m., and 2 p.m.

Residents further reported the presence of four to six drones in the community in the days leading up to and following April 19. They said the drones repeatedly hovered over the area, contributing to fear and insecurity. One elderly resident saw two drones circling her house, while another reported seeing a drone hovering outside her home.

Residents also reported that cellphone and Wi-Fi signals were unavailable or disrupted on April 19, preventing them from conducting Facebook Live broadcasts. Some residents believed that the signal disruption was caused by the drones they observed, which they described as approximately the size of large black water jugs.

The military presence reportedly continued for days after the encounter. From April 19 to 23, soldiers allegedly stayed for four nights in one resident's house. The daughter of the household had recently given birth and was reportedly traumatized and unable to sleep because of the soldiers' presence. Residents also reported that a drone followed them whenever they went to the sugar plantation during this period.

On April 24, soldiers reportedly returned to the house of the 71-year-old woman and told her they would stay there because she had a hammock. They allegedly asked her to cook a chicken for them. She refused, saying that she was saving it for her birthday, after which the soldiers reportedly obtained a chicken elsewhere. The soldiers allegedly remained camped on her property until April 27.

The continuing military presence has affected residents' sense of safety and their livelihood activities. Residents reported that they now avoid leaving their homes after 4:00 p.m. and are reluctant to go out alone for fear of harassment or being caught in crossfire. Many residents depend on broom-making and cow herding for their livelihood and said that the heightened military presence has made these activities more difficult. A resident who returned home on April 22 reportedly encountered government soldiers still present in the community. Residents said the military presence became particularly noticeable after the incident was featured on television and after the area was visited by the Commission on Human Rights.

Residents also confirmed that they had encountered Alyssa Alano, Kai Sorem, Lyle Prijoles, RJ Ledesma, Maureen Santuyo, and Errol Wendel. They fondly remembered Alyssa as a lawyer. They said Kai, Lyle, and their companions helped with farming activities, including planting bananas. Youth residents described Roel Sabillo as cheerful and always smiling, and said he frequently made vlogs and rode his large motorcycle around the area. Residents consistently stated that they had never seen these individuals carrying firearms when they visited the community.

Residents identified RJ Ledesma as a journalist and said that his visits to communities such as theirs were consistent with his work of documenting and learning about local conditions. They therefore expressed disbelief at claims that RJ and the other individuals were members of the NPA.

The families of the two minors have likewise publicly maintained that they were civilians. Public statements attributed to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) also identified the two minors as non-combatants.

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Sitio Plarinding

Residents reported hearing the first burst of gunfire in Sitio Plarinding between approximately 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. on April 19, 2026.

Prior to the gunfire, at around 6:00 to 7:00 a.m., soldiers from the 79th IBPA reportedly entered the community through the barangay road. Approximately 20 soldiers, divided into two groups, took separate routes. One group proceeded along a shorter route toward the top of the hill overlooking the fishpond area, while the other traveled by van along the concrete road leading to the fishponds.

At around 7:00 a.m., a resident saw a large number of soldiers arriving in the sitio. When the shooting began, she and her children fled to an evacuation center, where they remained until April 22. Her husband stayed behind and later recounted witnessing soldiers retrieve the bodies on April 20, a process that reportedly lasted until approximately 4:00 p.m.

Another male resident, accompanied by a 14-year-old boy and the boy's mother, was reportedly accosted by soldiers while they were on their way to the fishpond to harvest shellfish. The three were questioned about the presence of the NPA. The male resident maintained that they were civilians and knew nothing about the armed group. The soldiers then brought them uphill and ordered them to stay beside a large tree, where four soldiers remained to guard them. The three also observed another group of soldiers positioned near the cemetery at the top of the hill.

At around 10:00 a.m., the male resident reported seeing soldiers firing toward the direction of the fishponds. The soldiers ordered the three civilians to lie on the ground. The 14-year-old boy reportedly screamed in fear. At some point, approximately 12 soldiers took over guarding them and again questioned the male resident about the whereabouts of armed men. When he said he knew nothing, one soldier allegedly struck him on the shoulder with the butt of a rifle. The commanding officer reportedly warned him against filing a case, saying that the soldiers would return for him if he did so.

The three were reportedly released only at around 8:00 p.m. Meanwhile, the resident's family, having heard the gunfire, became worried that he had been injured or killed. His children reportedly told their mother that something might have happened to him, causing her to cry.

Approximately 800 residents evacuated from April 19 to April 22. Residents reported that soldiers prevented them from leaving the evacuation center to harvest shrimp and other food from the river and fishponds. The military operation therefore disrupted the community's primary sources of food and income, particularly fishing and harvesting from the fishponds. Residents also reported seeing at least three drones during the incident.

C. Autopsy Initial Findings

On May 7, 2026, forensic pathologist Dr. Raquel Fortun held a media briefing to present preliminary findings from the autopsies she conducted on five of those killed: Alyssa Alano, Maureen Santuyo, Lyle Prijoles, Kai Sorem, and a male cadaver that had been mistakenly identified as Errol Wendel.

Three of the five bodies examined had sustained multiple fatal gunshot wounds (GSWs). One of the female victims had four GSWs, including a gunshot wound to the leg that caused fatal bleeding. According to Dr. Fortun, if the victim was still alive and incapacitated when the injury was inflicted, the failure to provide medical treatment could constitute a potential war crime against an injured person who should have been afforded medical care. Dr. Fortun also noted that the bodies bore multiple GSWs from behind, raising questions about the military's claim that the deaths resulted from an hours-long armed encounter.

She also raised concerns about the improper and irregular handling of the bodies, the crime scene, and other pieces of evidence. The mishandling tragically resulted in the wrongful release of one cadaver to the family of Errol Wendel, after the funeral home refused to open the body bag for his relatives to verify the remains.

Dr. Fortun further lamented the lack of independence in the investigation of killings in the Philippines, noting that those responsible for the killings are often also tasked with investigating them.

Calls for justice for the Negros 19 have since broadened, drawing support from humanitarian organizations, academic institutions, legislators, and even government officials.

As of this writing, other families have also expressed interest in having the remains of their relatives exhumed for autopsy and further forensic examination.

Mishandling of remains

According to the account of Merliza Caramihan, mother of Joeross, she learned about the death of her son through online news postings on April 21, 2026. That afternoon, she immediately went to Niniel Funeral Homes. The identification of the body was made through photographs. Merliza showed the funeral home personnel a photograph of her son, which they compared with photographs of the retrieved bodies. The funeral home employees then identified one cadaver as Joeross and released it to Merliza at around 7:00 p.m.

She shared that she was unable to see the actual body released to her because the funeral home refused to open the sealed body bag. Despite noticing that the cadaver appeared “taller” than her son—Joeross was 5 feet 2 inches tall, while Errol was 5 feet 8 inches—she nevertheless took the body home, noting that the funeral home was heavily guarded by armed soldiers and police. Joeross was interred on April 23, 2026, after a two-night wake.

On May 13, the team received a report that the family of Arnel Javoc was also raising concerns about the possible misidentification of the body released to them.

D. Children's Activity (CA) by the Children's Rehabilitation Center (CRC)

Seven girls from Barangay Salamanca, aged 10 to 14, participated in the Children's Activity (CA). Five of them were from Sitio Sinugmawan, while two were from another sitio.

The Children's Activity (CA) lasted about one hour and focused on psychosocial processing and documentation. It began with introductions, an explanation of the activity's purpose, and games such as Bata, Bahay, Gyera (Child, House, War) and Bugsay, Bugsay (Row, Row).

After establishing rapport, the children engaged in a Community Mapping activity, during which they drew their homes, schools, playgrounds, barangay hall, and their parents' farmlands, while noting the types of crops grown and the locations where they heard gunfire.

This mapping activity allowed the children to express their conditions, experiences, and feelings related to the gunfire and the killings of 19 individuals in Barangay Salamanca, Toboso, Negros Occidental.

After sharing their experiences and emotions, the young participants were guided through breathing exercises. The activity concluded with the validation of their feelings and the provision of a brief context on war and conflict. Due to time constraints, the discussion of the children's accounts was limited, but their conditions, experiences, and feelings were documented.

All participating children reported attending school, with some in Grade 2 and others in Grade 7. Most of their parents work as farmers, while others are cargo loaders, sugarcane cutters, or truck drivers. They typically grow vegetables such as eggplant, squash, okra, malunggay, string beans, mangoes, and sugarcane.

Despite economic hardships, the children reported eating three meals a day. They often spend their free time hanging out at the basketball court or playing on their mobile phones at home. One student takes a tricycle to Toboso Central School, while the others walk 30 to 40 minutes to reach Toril Elementary School.

All the children either heard about or directly experienced the gunfire in Barangay Salamanca and were aware that people had been killed during the incident. According to their stories and drawings, the gunfire came from the mountainous area, which is somewhat distant from their homes. They reported feeling fear and anxiety (“naguol”) when they heard the shots, with some hiding under their beds and lowering the volume of their cellphones. They stayed indoors, feeling their hearts race, while a few expressed sadness about not being able to go outside.

Due to time constraints, the discussion of the children's accounts was limited, and there was no opportunity to speak with more children because of security concerns involving local residents and the FFM delegation. Additionally, community members in another sitio reported that soldiers were present, observing and monitoring the movements of both residents and the team.

Overall, the children are aware of the events in their community and felt fear due to the gunfire and the killings of 19 people in Brgy. Salamanca, Toboso, Negros Occidental.

Given these events and observations, there is reason to be alarmed by the potential intensification of the military presence in Toboso. Concerns arise regarding the normalization of this presence, the worsening culture of fear in the community, and the lack of accountability for human rights violations. This situation is not isolated to the Negros region; it is occurring in various parts of the country, particularly in impoverished communities facing landlessness, low wages, and inhumane working conditions.

IV. FACTUAL FINDINGS

Based on the interviews conducted, evidence gathered, and observations made by the National Fact-Finding and Solidarity Mission (NFFSM), the following factual findings were established:

A. Sequence of Events

1. The initial incident occurred between approximately 3:00 and 4:00 a.m. on April 19, 2026, in Sitio Sinugmawan, Barangay Salamanca, Toboso, Negros Occidental.
2. Based on accounts gathered by the mission, following the initial clash, the alleged NPA members retreated toward Sitio Plarinding and regrouped at the fishpond area. Accounts indicate that civilians were present during the initial incident and were among those who subsequently fled toward Sitio Plarinding.
3. Residents of Sitio Plarinding reported that groups of soldiers from the 79th IBPA entered the community at approximately 6:00 to 7:00 a.m. One group took a route leading to the top of the hill overlooking the fishpond, while another group traveled by van along the concrete road leading to the fishpond area.
4. The soldiers went after the retreating NPAs and the civilians.
5. A second incident occurred at approximately 9:00 a.m. in the fishpond area of Sitio Plarinding.
6. According to residents and other witnesses, the retreating group was pursued by government soldiers. The group included both alleged NPA members and civilians.
7. At the second incident site, one group of soldiers was positioned on the hill overlooking the fishpond, while another group was positioned at ground level near the fishpond. A male resident who was detained by soldiers was held near the top of the hill and reported seeing soldiers firing toward the fishpond.
8. Residents reported that the retreating individuals had to traverse muddy, waist-deep water in the fishpond area. The terrain was largely exposed, with little to no forest cover or other places where those fleeing could seek concealment.

9. The male resident reported seeing soldiers positioned on the hill firing toward the direction of the fishpond. He also reported that soldiers at ground level fired toward the same area.

10. Residents reported that the muddy terrain hampered the movement of those attempting to flee. They further reported that some firearms carried by the retreating individuals became soaked in muddy water.

11. Nineteen (19) individuals were killed during the incident. Based on information gathered by the mission, nine (9) of the fatalities were civilians who did not participate in the armed encounter.

12. Residents consistently reported that several of the individuals who were killed—including Alyssa Alano, Errol Wendel, Maureen Santuyo, RJ Ledesma, Kai Sorem, Lyle Prijoles, and Roel Sabillo—had previously visited the community and were known to them as civilians. Residents stated that they had never seen these individuals carrying firearms during their visits.

13. The families of “Melissa,” 15, and “Ron,” 17, denied the military's allegations that the two minors were members of the NPA. Jolinda's parents stated that, to their knowledge, she had been looking for employment and that they were shocked to learn that she had died in Sitio Plarinding. Dexter's parents likewise denied that their son was an NPA member.

14. The leadership of the CPP–NPA issued a statement acknowledging that ten (10) of its members were killed in the encounter and asserting that the other nine (9) fatalities were civilians. This assertion is consistent with accounts gathered from residents identifying several of the deceased as civilians.

B. Physical and On-Site Findings

1. At the first reported “encounter” site in Sitio Sinugmawan, NFFSM delegates observed broken trees with large bullet holes, damaged banana plants, and snapped bamboo branches.

2. Since the sugarcane in the area had already been harvested, the mission was able to examine the site. The delegates observed bullet damage to trees and vegetation extending as far as approximately 200 meters. They also found spent bullet shells and unspent ammunition lying on the ground.

3. Based on their observations, the delegates estimated that the gunfire had been directed toward the edge of the cliff, away from the sugarcane fields.

4. A local farmer whose house was nearest to the site said that he heard the gunfire clearly. Although his house was not hit, its proximity to the shooting caused him to fear that his family could be injured.

5. At the second reported “encounter” site in Sitio Plarinding, NFFSM delegates proceeded to the hill near the cemetery and located the area described by the male resident who had been detained by soldiers. The area overlooked the fishpond.

6. The team also traversed the area leading down to the fishpond, where it found additional spent bullet shells, ammunition clips, and a gun magazine.

7. Based on the physical configuration of the site, the mission observed that soldiers had positions on both elevated and ground-level areas surrounding the fishpond. The fishpond area offered limited cover for people attempting to flee from the gunfire.

C. Treatment and Recovery of the Remains

1. The NFFSM documented concerns regarding the handling and recovery of the remains of the deceased.

2. According to accounts gathered by the mission, the bodies were not immediately retrieved and were transferred to funeral homes only on the second day after the incident.

3. The delay reportedly resulted in advanced decomposition. Family members reported that, based on photographs shown to them, the remains were severely bloated and unrecognizable, with some appearing to have burned skin.

4. The condition of some of the remains was reportedly consistent with prolonged exposure to heat and water, although the precise cause of the condition would require forensic determination.

D. Integrity of the Crime Scenes

1. During the on-site inspection, the NFFSM found bullet casings and other physical evidence still present at the two reported encounter sites.

2. The mission raised concerns regarding the integrity and preservation of the crime scenes. According to accounts gathered by the mission, the areas had been cordoned off for several days, but a group affiliated with the NTF-ELCAC, Buklod Kapayapaan, was nevertheless allowed access to the sites before police investigators processed them.

3. The presence of uncollected bullet casings and other evidence at the sites raised concerns that the areas had not been immediately and adequately processed as crime scenes in accordance with established investigative protocols.

E. Military Presence and Impact on Civilians

1. Residents of Sitio Sinugmawan reported an unusually heavy military presence on the evening of April 18, 2026, hours before the reported armed encounter.

2. Residents reported that soldiers were already positioned in and around the community before the hostilities occurred. They also reported the presence of drones in the area in the days preceding and following April 19.

3. The NFFSM documented accounts of military personnel entering and searching civilian homes, interrogating residents regarding the whereabouts of alleged NPA members, and holding some residents at gunpoint.

4. In Sitio Sinugmawan, residents reported that at least 24 houses were searched. Residents also reported incidents in which soldiers pointed firearms at civilians and questioned them about alleged NPA members.

5. In Sitio Plarinding, a male resident, together with a 14-year-old boy and the boy's mother, was reportedly accosted and detained by soldiers while they were on their way to harvest shellfish. They were brought uphill and held beside a large tree while soldiers questioned them about the presence of the NPA.

6. The male resident reported that, while they were being held, he witnessed soldiers firing toward the fishpond. He further reported that one soldier struck him on the shoulder with the butt of a rifle and that a commanding officer warned him against filing a case.

7. Following the incident, approximately 800 residents reportedly fled their homes between April 19 and April 22. Residents reported that the military operations prevented them from accessing the river and fishponds, disrupting their sources of food and livelihood.

V. ANALYSIS

It is an undisputed fact that the nineteen (19) individuals were killed by the 79th IBPA on April 19, 2026, in Barangay Salamanca, Toboso, Negros Occidental. The 79th IBPA, the 3rd IDPA, as well as AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Romeo Brawner, called the operation a success, claiming that troops had engaged in consecutive, legitimate firefights with suspected communist rebels.

The killing of the nineteen (19) victims can be described as a massacre, since even the armed NPA members were rendered utterly defenseless while fleeing and wading through muddy waters. They were indiscriminately fired upon, resulting in their deaths.

Accounts from the community and physical evidence indicate that the incident that led to the deaths of the nineteen (19) victims was not a legitimate military operation.

Based on the available information, the nineteen (19) victims were all killed at the fishpond in Sitio Plarinding.

The incident timeline, reconstructed through witness testimony, establishes that, at approximately 9:00 a.m. on April 19, multiple accounts corroborate a specific sequence of events. Central to this reconstruction is the account of a male resident from Sitio Plarinding who, while detained by soldiers on a hill overlooking the area, directly observed soldiers firing toward the fishpond below. This eyewitness evidence is critically supported by the physical findings of the fact-finding team, whose inspection of the encounter site confirmed that the retreating group was indeed trapped within the fishpond.

The tactical reality faced by the ten (10) alleged NPA members rendered any effective defense impossible. As noted in the investigation, the group was in full retreat, wading through waist-deep muddy water with no access to forest cover or concealment. Under these conditions, the resident's recollection that soldiers fired indiscriminately upon the fleeing individuals is consistent with the site analysis.

Lacking cover and immobilized by the terrain, the group presented an undefended target, leading to the conclusion that they were systematically struck by gunfire without the capacity to return fire.

Further, accounts from the community and physical evidence strongly suggest grave violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL). Accounts from the community directly challenge the narrative of the AFP. First responders, families of the victims, and the initial findings of Dr. Fortun note that the physical condition of the bodies of the deceased casts serious doubt on the AFP's version of events. The nature and apparent pattern of the fatalities raise grave concerns that some of the victims may have been subjected to summary execution or the excessive use of lethal force after having been rendered hors de combat—captured, wounded, or otherwise incapable of defending themselves.

VI. VIOLATIONS COMMITTED

Based on the above factual antecedents culled from the QRT Reports, the NFFSM findings, and available public statements and reports, it is clear that the Philippine Army committed serious violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The following are the violations:

A. IHL Violations

a. Targeting civilians in violation of Article 48 of Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions on distinction, and Article 57 on proportionality.

Government soldiers did not distinguish between civilians and combatants. Based on the facts gathered, soldiers were seen firing indiscriminately toward the fishpond where the NPAs and their civilian companions were retreating. The soldiers positioned on the hill had an unobstructed view of where the retreating group was located. From their vantage point, they could easily see who was armed, who was firing back, and who was unarmed.

Instead of exercising caution, the soldiers fired at will without distinguishing their targets. As a result, nine civilians were unnecessarily killed.

b. Targeting armed combatants who were no longer in a position to fight back and who had transitioned into hors de combat.

A combatant is treated as a protected person once he or she is rendered incapable of fighting back. In this case, the armed NPA members were in retreat, surrounded by a superior force armed with sophisticated weapons and aided by drones. They were wading through waist-deep muddy water, which hampered their escape.

The government soldiers were strategically positioned in such a way that they had an unobstructed view of the fleeing group. The NPAs were easy targets and were within the range of the soldiers' high-velocity firearms. On the other hand, they were not in a position to inflict any harm on the soldiers, who were well protected by their strategic positions.

By reason of their condition, the armed NPA members had transitioned into hors de combat and could have been easily captured. But the intention was obvious. The order given was not to take prisoners. This resulted in the killing of nineteen (19) individuals who were no longer in a position to fight back.

c. IHL violation in the death of Roger Fabillar

The most glaring IHL violation documented involves the death of Roger Fabillar. Drone footage captured prior to his death explicitly shows Fabillar alive, submerged in a fishpond, unarmed, and clearly posing no imminent threat.

Under customary IHL, individuals placed hors de combat (out of combat) due to surrender, capture, or helplessness must not be made the object of attack. Despite being defenseless and effectively under the control of military forces, Fabillar was subsequently declared by the military to have been "killed in an encounter." This strongly indicates an extrajudicial execution rather than a legitimate combat fatality.

B. Violation of the Right to Life

The right to life, as defined under Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), is applicable even in situations of armed conflict (Paragraph 2, ICCPR General Comment No. 36, September 3, 2019). This right protects every person from the arbitrary deprivation of life. In the context of the Negros 19 massacre, there are clear indications that the killing of the victims was arbitrary and unjustifiable, considering the attendant facts and circumstances.

Notably, the capability of the armed NPAs to fight back had been diminished. They were fleeing and wading through muddy waters. While the ten NPAs were armed, they were not in a position to inflict any harm on the soldiers, who were strategically positioned.

At that point, there was no justification for the use of lethal force. As established in the initial autopsy report, one of the victims, Alyssa Alano, was shot in the knee. She did not sustain a fatal wound but died due to the lack of medical treatment. She bled to death.

Alyssa's case indicates that the soldiers had the option not to kill the victims. They had the capability to simply incapacitate them and render them unable to fight. As defined in Article 12 of General Comment No. 36, the use of lethal force is the last resort and may be employed only after all other options have been exhausted. In this case, there was no need to use lethal force. The victims could have been easily captured.

The soldiers and their superiors should likewise be charged and prosecuted for violation of the Revised Penal Code for Murder and other crimes.

C. Desecration of Remains

The bodies recovered from the funeral home showed severe burns, bloating, and decomposition due to neglect and prolonged exposure to extreme heat, with some having been submerged in fishponds. This reflects a failure in the care and lawful handling of human remains, revealing unprofessional management by the military and police forces.

D. Violation of Domicile through Illegal Search

Residents recounted that at least twenty-four (24) houses were visited by the military. Soldiers entered their homes and demanded information regarding the whereabouts of members of the NPA.

E. Endangerment of the Civilian Population: Militarization of Communities and Other Forms of Threat and Harassment, Including Interrogation, Surveillance, Red-Tagging, and Encampment

Sitio Sinugmawan

There was sustained military presence and surveillance in the communities of Sitio Sinugmawan and Sitio Plarinding, Barangay Salamanca.

There are recorded accounts showing that the active military presence of the 79th IBPA and the 303rd Infantry Brigade of the Philippine Army began as early as 2025. This escalated into a heavy military presence by April 18, 2026.

Several drones were documented hovering over the community in the days prior to April 19 and continued thereafter, causing widespread fear and tension.

On April 19, military firing began early in the morning (with recorded times of 3:24 a.m., 3:25 a.m., 3:30 a.m., and 3:58 a.m.) and continued until approximately 7:00 a.m. Residents of at least twenty-four (24) houses were subjected to military visits and searches. At approximately 5:10 a.m., three military personnel entered and searched a private home without consent, repeatedly questioning the occupants. Soldiers also entered residential homes and interrogated residents regarding the whereabouts of the New People's Army (NPA) while holding them at gunpoint.

Sitio Plarinding

In Sitio Plarinding, between around 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. on April 19, a volley of gunfire was heard. Intermittent firing from the direction of the fishpond continued until later in the afternoon, at around 12:00 noon, 1:00 p.m., and 2:00 p.m. There was also a heavy military presence as early as 6:00 a.m.

F. Illegal Arrest, Illegal Detention, Coercion, Use of Civilians as Shields, and Physical Assault

A resident of the sitio, together with a 14-year-old boy and his mother, went to a fishpond to harvest shellfish. Along the way, they were reportedly accosted and illegally detained by soldiers, who interrogated them regarding the alleged presence of the NPA in the area.

The three residents were then brought uphill and ordered to remain beside a large tree. Four soldiers stayed with them while they observed another group of soldiers positioned near the cemetery atop the hill. At about 10:00 a.m., the male resident saw the soldiers indiscriminately firing toward the direction of the fishpond. He also reported that a soldier struck him on the shoulder with the butt of a rifle.

G. Forcible Evacuation

Residents of Sitio Plarinding reported that at least 800 people fled their homes in fear after hearing gunfire. They likewise reported that most of them returned home by Wednesday, April 22.

H. Trauma

Mothers recounted that their young children refused to be separated from adults, even when using the bathroom. Daily routines were also severely disrupted, with residents returning home much earlier than usual out of fear of military operations in the community.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Fact-Finding and Solidarity Mission (NFFSM) recommends the following:

1. Justice should be rendered for the nineteen (19) individuals who were killed in Barangay Salamanca, Toboso, Negros Occidental. Criminal and administrative charges should be pursued, where warranted, to ensure accountability for all military personnel involved in the operations, including their immediate superiors.
2. The families of the deceased and their legal representatives should be granted full access to all documentation in the possession of the 79th IBPA and the AFP, including the mission order, drone footage, after-operation reports, and all other relevant records. All physical evidence, including the clothing and personal belongings of the deceased, should likewise be properly documented and turned over. Full transparency regarding the incident must be ensured.
3. The immediate pull-out of the 79th IBPA and other military units and assets from Toboso should be undertaken. The entry of individuals and organizations affiliated with the AFP and the NTF-ELCAC into affected communities should likewise be disallowed while investigations are ongoing. Residents and potential witnesses remain vulnerable to intimidation, harassment, and reprisals that may hinder the free and voluntary giving of testimony.
4. The AFP, the NTF-ELCAC, and individuals acting on their behalf should immediately cease approaching, intimidating, or harassing the families, relatives, and friends of the deceased.

5. Psychosocial services and other forms of humanitarian assistance should be made available to affected residents, particularly women, children, and bereaved families. Such interventions should be provided by independent organizations that are not affiliated with the NTF-ELCAC. Further in-depth psychosocial processing for children and their parents should be conducted in a safe and secure environment at an appropriate time.
6. The CRC recommends that, if possible, further in-depth processing of the thoughts and experiences of the children and their parents be conducted in a safe space and at an appropriate time. Future efforts should also explore whether they knew the two minors among those killed by the AFP and labeled as NPA members. The CRC supports the call for justice for the Negros 19 and the withdrawal of military forces from rural communities.
7. Local government units should assist the families of the deceased in the proper identification of the remains of their loved ones by facilitating exhumation, independent forensic examinations, and autopsies where necessary.
8. Further investigations and documentation should continue among community residents. Efforts to recover, exhume, identify, and conduct independent autopsies on the remaining fatalities should likewise continue, together with the completion and release of the corresponding autopsy reports.
9. Future documentation efforts should also examine the circumstances surrounding the two minors killed during the incident, including gathering additional information from community members who may have known them, to establish the facts regarding their civilian status and the circumstances of their deaths.
10. The rightful land claims of the members of the Hacienda Bedonia Farmers and Farmworkers Association (HBFFA), as well as the thousands of other pending agrarian cases before the Department of Agrarian Reform–Negros Island Region (DAR–NIR), should be resolved without further delay.

11. The abolition of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) through the repeal of Executive Order No. 70, as well as the rescission of Memorandum Order No. 32, should be pursued. The NFFSM finds that these measures have facilitated prolonged military encampments and operations in civilian communities and have contributed to the commission of human rights violations.
12. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines should fully comply with and adhere to its obligations under the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL).
13. The NFFSM reiterates its support for the call for justice for the Negros 19, accountability for all human rights violations committed in relation to the incident, and the withdrawal of military forces from rural civilian communities.



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**NATIONAL FACT-FINDING AND
SOLIDARITY MISSION**

MAY 13-14, 2026

TOBOSO, NEGROS OCCIDENTAL