

Protesters Send Advanced Team to “Greet” GMA

For Immediate Release:

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Washington DC – A day before their planned action, Katarungan: Center for Peace, Justice, and Human Rights in the Philippines sent an advanced team to greet President Gloria-Macapagal Arroyo and her “junket” at a scheduled dinner organized by the US Chamber of Commerce and the US-ASEAN Business Council.

As dinner guests arrived, they were met by protesters carrying placards and banners that drew attention to the extrajudicial killings plaguing the Philippines, the rampant corruption, and the specific case of still missing activist and agriculturalist, Jonas Burgos.

Katarungan had a rare opportunity in March to host his mother, Edita Burgos, and to hear first hand how the Arroyo administration created legal barriers in her search for her son.

“When Edita Burgos came to DC, she told us her son was abducted in a crowded restaurant by armed men claiming to be police and not one person bothered to intervene or even question what was happening. We vowed never to make that same mistake, so we are dedicating this picket to Jonas and his mother,” explained Katrina Abarcar of Katarungan.

Members and friends of Katarungan decided to come out a day before their planned action when they heard some had received word from the Embassy that the June 25 dinner with the community had been moved to June 24.

“We didn’t want to miss an opportunity to show President Arroyo that she cannot shield herself from public criticism even here in the US,” said Joanna Quiambao of Katarungan. “We were more motivated to appear tonight especially because her talk earlier with President Bush did not even touch upon the issue of human rights.- not that we were surprised.”

So far, President Arroyo has managed to steer clear of US lawmakers concerned about her human rights record. “As far as I know, the co-authors, Representative Pitts (R-PA) and Representative Oberstar (D-MN) of the Congressional Sign-On calling for ‘strong and immediate leadership’ to address the extrajudicial killings in the Philippines have yet to hear a response from the President herself,” said Abarcar. The letter, circulated about a year ago, gathered 49 signatures from members of the US House of Representatives.

Katarungan will conduct their action themed “Airing the President’s Dirty Laundry” June 25 in front of the Willard Hotel. ###