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Contact Person : LORENA R. VILLAREAL
Company Name : ALAY BAYAN-LUSON, INC.
Voice Phone Number : 0908-4386233/09266862110
Email Address : alaybayan@gmail.com

**FARMERS KILLED IN FORT MAGSAYSAY ARE CALAMITY SURVIVORS
SEEKING SAFER GROUNDS AND FOOD SECURITY**

Angeles City, Pampanga, 07 September 2016 - Poor families from Gabaldon, Nueva Ecija survived the landslide and flashflood caused by Typhoon Lando's heavy rains in 2015. However, they did not survive the man-made disaster in Fort Magsaysay that killed four of them in the September 3, 2016 massacre.

The casualties, all from Barangay Bagting, were Gaudencio Bagalay, Emerenciana "Baby" Mercado-dela Cruz, Violeta Mercado-de Leon and Eligio Barbado. They joined the land cultivation activity (*bungkalan* or collective farming) of the ***Alyansa ng mga Magbubukid na Nagkakaisa*** 3100 (ALMANA). This is part of the disputed 3,100 hectares inside Fort Magsaysay Military Reservation in Nueva Ecija.

Angelita Milan, a resident of Barangay Calabasa, was wounded by bullets and is still seeking for assistance for her operation in the hospital. Many others from Barangays Bagting, Calabasa and Ligaya suffered cuts and bruises and bullet graze as bullets whizzed by them in the carnage.

Nanay Patricia "Patring" Sumawang, a **Disaster Preparedness Organization (DPO)** member from Calabasa, is now in severe trauma after she saw how armed men wearing bonnets continuously fired at the two women farmers who were already down. Bagting DPO member Cardo Cayabyab recounted that when they heard volley fire, they rolled down in the sloping portion of the farmland they are tilling, resulting in bruises.

The victims are ordinary, unarmed farmers who were resting after their farming chores when armed men opened fire at them between 2:00 and 3:00 PM, Saturday.

Alay Bayan-Luson, Inc. (ABI) learned from leaders of the DPO in different barangays of Gabaldon that some of those who joined the *bungkalan* are actually members of the DPOs in different barangays of Gabaldon town who wanted to leave their landslide-prone communities and longed to have lands to till to survive.

The Fort Magsaysay Military Reservation (FMMR) was awarded to farmers under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). On November 5, 1991, the administration

of then president Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino allotted 3,100 hectares of the Fort Magsaysay Military Reservation to over a thousand landless peasants, as well as to families evacuating from Pampanga after the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo. The awarding was formalized with the issuance of a Deed of Transfer between then Defense Secretary Renato de Villa and then Agrarian Reform Secretary Benjamin Leung.

Poverty and disaster risks brought these farmers to Fort Magsaysay. The lack of immediate government action to address the continuing threat of landslide in these areas forced the farmers to look for safer ground and land to cultivate.

It can be remembered that the communities of Gabaldon, located near the Sierra Madre mountain range, were affected by landslides and flash floods at the height of Typhoon Lando's wrath. The town became a scene of disaster, with mud, boulders and trees covering its streets and rice fields destroying the landscape of the hard-hit barangays. The effects of Typhoon Lando on the town of Gabaldon can be compared to what happened in New Bataan, Compostela Valley in 2012 when it was hit by Typhoon Pablo. Dr. Mahar Lagmay of Project NOAH (Nationwide Operational Assessment of Hazards) of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) commended the local government unit of Gabaldon for doing the right thing when they did forced evacuation.

Disaster Risk Reduction is not only doing preemptive evacuation to avoid casualties. It is also ensuring that the source of hazards is being addressed like the rampant logging in the Sierra Madre mountains. Prior to the landslide in 2015, around 600 residents of Barangay Bagting protested the cutting of trees by the Segum Upland Farmers Association Incorporated. The DENR and local government permitted the association headed by Silvino Calonzo to cut trees in the 353-hectare watershed area.

We call on the new administration to immediately address the root cause of disasters in these areas and cater for the rehabilitation needs of the calamity survivors.

We join the people in demanding justice for the slain famers whose only hope is to protect their families from hunger and disasters. #