

Maguindanao: The Blood of Martyrs

Saturday 28 November 2009, by [BELLO Walden](#) (Date first published: 26 November 2009).

Eulogy delivered by Rep. Walden Bello of Akbayan at the wake of Cynthia Oquendo and Catalino Oquendo, Polomolok, South Cotabato, Nov. 26, 200.

I did not know Atty. Cynthia Oquendo and her father, but from the recollections of their colleagues and friends gathered here this evening, I have the picture of two individuals that cared about people and loved their families.

This is a tragic and sad occasion. Nothing I say will assuage the grief of those who have lost a loved one, and this is especially so when we consider the horrible manner in which the lives of Cynthia and her father were snuffed out.

It may be small consolation to the grieving, but let me point out nevertheless that Cynthia died in the line of duty—a lawyer dedicated to human rights till the bitter end. It may do little to lessen the pain, but it must be said that Cynthia, her father, and all those who were part of that fateful convoy were heroes of democracy.

The people who carried out the massacre of 57 defenseless individuals were monsters. But we must remember that they were people that became monsters because they were coddled, fed, and nurtured by successive administrations desperate to have their votes to stay in power. The worst practitioner of this art of nurturing violent warlords as a base of support is the current occupant of Malacanang.

Local warlords and national elites have combined to subvert and shake to its foundations the democratic system that was restored in our country in 1986.

Yet there is hope, and it is hope that is nurtured by small but significant acts such as that which Atty. Oquendo undertook on the last day of her life: a mission to ensure that a candidate would be able to file his certificate of candidacy despite the efforts of warlord clan to thwart it.

The Maguindanao Massacre may yet be a turning point in our history. It may be the spark that will finally create an angry citizens' movement to reclaim our democracy from the clutches of the warlords and corrupt national elites that threaten to suffocate it.

I do not normally deploy religious sayings to make a point. However, I do

not think that there is a more apt description of the significance of the 57 victims' sacrifice of their lives than the words "the road to salvation is watered with the blood of martyrs." In giving up their lives, Cynthia Oquendo, her father, and their companions in that fateful journey to Sharif Aguak gave this despairing country hope and maybe the courage to act.

Walden Bello
