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Release Chantal! Stop all U.S. aid to the Philippines

written by Andrew Matatag
January 16, 2026



Pictured above, article author Andrew Matatag and Chantal enthusiastically share a meal from the Philippine restaurant chain, Jollibee.

Chantal Anicoche is a friend of mine.

We have shared meals together, gone to protests together, and sat together in meeting after meeting figuring out how we can help our people in the Philippines.

On Jan. 1, 2026, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, supplied and supported by the United States, rained bombs indiscriminately on the island of Mindoro.

The AFP's stated reason for the bombing was to kill members of the New People's Army. When the people's movement condemned the bombing as indiscriminate, they asserted that "its security operations against suspected New People's Army (NPA) rebels in Abra de Ilog, Occidental Mindoro on New Year's Day, Jan. 1, were a legitimate response to armed threats despite criticisms from human rights groups and progressive lawmakers."

Of course, this is a tired, recycled justification the Philippines government uses to scapegoat the people's movement as justification for its repressive measures.

Chantal was there. She was in the Abra de Ilog area, working with peasants and peasant advocates to truly understand life in the Philippines. She was there to learn from the communities impacted the most by the social and economic crises that arise from the relationship between the United States and the Philippines. She was there with friends and family.

By the standards of international law, this was humanitarian work.

After the bombing on Jan. 1, which separated and displaced the communities in Abra

de Ilog, Chantal was missing. The international people's movement mobilized immediately, raising the demand to surface Chantal.

A week later, on Jan. 8, the AFP could no longer ignore the international public outcry and scrutiny. They released to the public photos of Chantal in their custody.

I was relieved to know she is alive, but still troubled to see her looking afraid and confused in AFP custody. I know what the AFP is capable of — torture, indefinite detention, all manner of inhumane treatment.

The public pressure also forced the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) to publish a [hit piece](#) on Chantal and staged video mischaracterizing the situation. Feigning concern and respect for her well-being, the NTF-ELCAC predictably blames the Communist Party of the Philippines for putting her in danger.

The Malaya Movement published a [comprehensive statement](#) on the hit piece, completely debunked the myths pushed by the NTF-ELCAC, excerpted here:

“It is unbelievable and illogical that the AFP found Chantal 7 days later hiding in a hole only 400 meters from the site of the attacks and crying out ‘help.’ It is basic medical knowledge that a person can only survive 3 to 5 days without water. How many takes did the AFP have to do on this poorly scripted and staged film shoot? The video editing is so amateurish that the video they released even included two instances of the soldiers supposedly ‘finding’ her. Our hearts go out to Chantal for being clearly coerced to act in this idiotic video.

“Due to the overwhelming international outcry, the NTF-ELCAC’s rabid online troll army has been unleashed to spew the most vile attacks on Chantal and the organizations tirelessly working to free her from the captivity of these AFP monsters. Aside from the obviously staged videos of her “rescue”, the AFP and these

trolls have produced clearly AI-generated photos attempting to project the false narrative that she was an NPA rebel who is now smiling happily in the custody of the military.”

To date, there is no movement on the part of the Philippines government to release Chantal from custody and back to the United States.

For me, this has been yet another all-too-real illustration that the imperialist relationship between the United States and the Philippines must end. The bombings, the extrajudicial killings, the ravaging and pillaging of the Philippines are not possible without the complete neo-colonial control of U.S. monopoly corporations of Philippine labor, land, resources, and government.

Whatever the Philippine government may say about the Communist Party of the Philippines, the National Democratic Front, and the New People’s Army, it pales in comparison to the actual violence and exploitation perpetrated by the Philippine government.

I may not speak for all Filipinos, but I am *for* the people’s democratic revolution that will sever U.S. control of the Philippines. I am *for* the self-determination of my people. Neither the U.S. nor its stooges in the Philippine government will bring this to the Filipino people.

I think it can be cliché to sing the praises of a friend who has come under attack. So I say without hesitation or exaggeration that Chantal is one of my favorite people I have ever met. She is genuine, compassionate, silly, and kind. She is dedicated to the Filipino people. She is dedicated to uniting Filipino communities across the world. She is a fighter for the people. Her sincerity and kindness are infectious.

Chantal’s friends, family, and allies in the U.S. are asking everyone and anyone who wants to help to check out the following:

- Sign & share the petition: tinyurl.com/chantal-advocacy-toolkit
- Use the advocacy toolkit to contact your legislators: tinyurl.com/chantal-advocacy-toolkit
- Report your outreach here to amplify pressure: tinyurl.com/SurfaceChantalForm

