



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF THE PHILIPPINES

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EDITORIAL

Go ahead: Junk the US-RP Visiting Forces Agreement!

The Visiting Forces Agreement signed in 1999 between the governments of the United States and the Republic of the Philippines is an affront to Philippine sovereignty.

Including the US-RP Mutual Defense Treaty and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, these unequal treaties allow US military forces to control the security and intelligence apparatuses of the Manila government, to maintain secret facilities and stockpile weapons on Philippine territory, as well as to commit crimes against the Filipino people, including rape and murder. Philippine revolutionary and patriotic forces have been demanding from Day 1 for the abrogation of the VFA and other unequal treaties, and for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Philippine territory.

But now the government of Rodrigo Duterte is threatening to scrap the VFA. Duterte and his top officials have recently escalated their protests against US intervention after various US officials condemned the Duterte government for gross human rights violations. The US subsequently cancelled the visa of Duterte's police butcher Ronald de la Rosa, causing him greater vexations. Thus, the livid threats.

The revolutionary forces of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the Filipino people are well aware that the Manila government has not suddenly found its patriotic soul. It has already groveled and sold out the nation's patrimony to its Chinese and Russian masters. It feels gratified that China and Russia condone the regime's human rights violations, at the expense of the nation's natural, financial and human resources. It is dangling the VFA merely as a bargaining chip for additional US weapons and military support, in order to fuel its lethal War on Drugs and its war against the Philippine revolutionary forces.

The Filipino people stands firm: Junk the VFA! Junk all unequal agreements between the US and the Philippines! Withdraw all foreign troops from the Philippines! The Duterte government will reap the people's outrage if it backtracks on its threats against the US and the VFA. **UP**



Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Photo: OHCHR

Philippine rights defenders submit reports to UN Human Rights Chief

A broad network of Philippine grassroots and non-government organizations recently submitted its reports on "the worsening human rights crisis besetting the Filipino people" to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet.

Led by the Ecumenical Voice for Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines (EcuVoice), the human rights defenders made the announcement on 31 January, stating that "the extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detention and other rights violations, exacerbate the landlessness, lack of job security and gross inequality faced by poor Filipinos. Such is the situation under the administration of President Duterte."

Groups which contributed to the reports included the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, National Union of Peoples' Lawyers, Rise Up for Life and for Rights, National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, Alliance of Concerned Teachers, KARAPATAN Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights, SANDUGO Movement of Moro and Indigenous Peoples for Self-determination, Peasant Movement of the Philippines (KMP) and the May One Movement (KMU) labor center.

In their reports, EcuVoice and its partners recommended the initiation of UN-led investigation missions to the Philippines, official visits of the UN Special Rapporteurs and the creation of a Commission of Inquiry.

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Ms. Bachelet is scheduled to deliver her report on the Philippines at the UN Human Rights Committee in June 2020.

Also this year, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court Fatou Bensouda is scheduled to finalize her preliminary examination on the Philippines. The examination will determine whether a preliminary investigation will be initiated on the Duterte government's deadly 'War on Drugs'.

Meanwhile, the US Senate approved a resolution on 8 January condemning the Manila government for "state-sanctioned extrajudicial killings by police as part of the 'War on Drugs'; the arrest and detention of human rights defenders and political leaders who exercise their rights to freedom of expression; the harassment, arrest and unjustified judicial proceedings against the media and journalists; and the continued detention of Senator Leila De Lima."

The US Senators called on the US government to impose sanctions against Duterte security forces and officials responsible for extrajudicial killings and for "orchestrating the arrest and prolonged detention of Sen. De Lima." **UP**



*Children forced to flee their communities call for support for their sanctuary.
Photo: Carlo Manalansan | bulatlat.com*

Lumad refugees protest closure of Davao church sanctuary

Indigenous Lumad communities from Davao del Norte, Cotabato and Compostela Valley provinces in southern Philippines protested on 22 January the decision of the Davao del Norte Regional Peace and Order Council to close down a church compound in Davao City serving as sanctuary to some 500 Lumad refugees, including 236 infants and children.

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) sanctuary 'Home and Altar for Renewal, Action, and Nurture' – Haran – has been providing refuge for communities fleeing from harassments and attacks by paramilitary and military units protecting the operations of foreign and local big corporations within the communities' ancestral domain.

On 25 January, members of the Alamara paramilitary group forcibly entered the UCCP Haran compound and started tearing down the walls protecting the sanctuary area. Police and military officials of the Duterte government defended the Alamara, saying that they were 'rescuing' the refugees being held 'captive' by the UCCP.

Protesting the Davao del Norte closure decision, Lumad community leaders said that this will only bring more conflict to their communities.

Datu Mentroso Malibato, himself an evacuee from Kapalong town in Davao del Norte said, "We were forced to seek refuge while we continue to demand the (Manila) government to stop the ongoing militarization and deployment of Alamara in our communities."

"They've already displaced us from our ancestral land. They've also shut down our schools, and now they want to shut down the church that has been helping the poor," he said.

UCCP Haran officials, in a statement said, "We find such resolution undoubtedly offensive against the Church and against those that advocate peace, justice, and human rights – a clear violation of the principle of separation of church and state,"

UCCP Bishop Hamuel Tequis of the Southeast Mindanao Jurisdiction Area said the church would stand firm in its commitment to serve the indigenous peoples.

Duterte's military and police officials are threatening to file charges against UCCP Haran officials.

The refugees currently housed in UCCP Haran came from villages in Talaingod and Kapalong towns in Davao del Norte, Arakan town in Cotabato and some towns in Compostela Valley. The communities have been suffering assassinations, enforced disappearances, aerial bombardments and harassments by military and paramilitary elements, forcing them to leave behind their livelihood and their ancestral lands. **UP**



File photo: ndfp.org

NPA confiscates drone, firearms from police unit

The New People's Army (NPA) in Eastern Visayas recently ambushed heavily-armed elements of the Philippine National Police Regional Public Safety Battalion in Libuton village, Borongan City in central Philippines. The people's army unit was able to confiscate a surveillance drone, two high-powered rifles, a 9mm pistol, and other military equipment from the enemy unit.

The NPA Efren Martires Command of Eastern Visayas reported that the Red fighters successfully ambushed the notorious police unit at 3:00pm on 13 December, killing one and injuring five others. "Two of the wounded eventually died

in the hospital," it reported. "Red fighters were able to retreat to safety after the firefight."

No civilians were within the vicinity of the ambush, according to the NPA. A separate and unrelated vehicular accident involving a van and a tricycle, however, occurred far away from the firefight, causing serious injuries to the civilians onboard the two vehicles.

The NPA condemned officials of the Duterte government "for perpetuating the lie that civilians were hurt in the said ambush to deceive the public and sabotage the peace negotiations between the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines."

"These peace spoilers only wish to terrorize the people into silence, so that Duterte can maintain his hold on power and continue looting public funds, betraying the people to capitalist and foreign interests, and plundering the environment," the NPA said. **UP**



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