



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

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EDITORIAL Penetrating the Night & Fog

In the midst of the Taal Volcano explosion and volcanic quakes just south of Metro Manila, the panic and health risks generated by the COVID-19 virus, the devastation of recent earthquakes in Mindanao island and the political grandstanding about the Visiting Forces Agreement, there has been no letup in the systematic roundup, detention and killings of political dissenters and impoverished Filipinos all over the archipelago.

Just days ago in Leyte Island, five human rights defenders and an infant were detained under cover of darkness, after Duterte security agents planted firearms and explosives where the victims were sleeping. In Mindanao Island, two outstanding community leaders have been detained and warrants of arrest have been issued for 22 more human rights defenders. In Mindanao, Leyte, Samar and Negros islands and in the Bicol region, mercenary military and police units, crooked judges and prosecutors and the local political stooges of Malacañang are being mobilized in concert against organizations and individuals fighting against treachery, corruption and state terrorism.

In Metro Manila and in other urban centers, the systematic killings of the urban poor continue unabated, the dead conveniently labeled as 'drug dealers'. Journalists, civil libertarians and parliamentarians are constantly demonized and threatened with protracted imprisonment.

The Duterte government's 'all-of-nation approach' envelops the nation like Night & Fog. The Filipino people and the rest of the world need to continue their resolute fight against this enveloping darkness. Cases of extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance, illegal arrest and detention, political and judicial harassment, corruption and treachery against the nation need to be continuously exposed and resisted. Those who are fighting defiantly against such state terrorism need the resolute support of the international community. **UP**



NDFP's Fidel V. Agcaoili. NDFP file photo.

Duterte's Peace Office sabotaging the peace process – Agcaoili

Fidel V. Agcaoili, Chairperson of the Negotiating Panel of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) talking peace with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) lambasted the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) of the Rodrigo Duterte government on 6 February, saying "the OPAPP has long been irrelevant in the peace process. It negates the very title of its office, becoming the office against the peace process."

Agcaoili made the statement in the wake of a series of media statements from OPAPP chief Gen. Carlito Galvez, Jr. detrimental to the resumption of the GRP-NDFP peace negotiations aimed at resolving the roots of the 50-year civil war in the country.

Agcaoili accused the OPAPP of attempting to deny the existence of the armed conflict. "It thus sabotages the process of resolving it through peace negotiations with the forging of agreements on basic social, economic and political reforms to pave the way for a just and lasting peace."

He pointed out that Gen. Galvez terminated the appointment of the members of their own negotiating panel and the services of their own Joint Secretariat in the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC).

The JMC is the body mandated under the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law to monitor the implementation of the Agreement. The Joint Secretariat of the JMC was located in Quezon City, in the Philippines, and supported by the Royal Norwegian Government (RNG), the Third Party Facilitator in the peace negotiations.

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Agcaoili likewise denounced the OPAPP for proclaiming the so-called “successes” of Duterte’s Executive Order (EO) 70. “This is nothing but a fascist decree, to put under military supervision the entire civilian bureaucracy, including its resources, in a vain attempt to defeat the revolutionary forces and people.”

He said, “(The implementation of) EO 70 has been terrorizing and wreaking havoc on communities through sustained military occupation and operations; indiscriminate aerial and artillery bombardments of villages; assassination of Lumad leaders, peasant activists, trade unionists, professionals such as lawyers, doctors, teachers, even local government officials; illegal arrests, detention and torture of suspected supporters/sympathizers of the New People’s Army; witch hunting or red-tagging of churches, organizations and mass leaders; and other forms of human rights violations.”

He added, “(OPAPP) is acting against the interest of the people who have been clamoring for the resumption of peace negotiations. Just as the call for the resumption of peace negotiations is gathering strength and the Duterte regime appears prodded back to the negotiating table, OPAPP seems hell bent on derailing every effort to resume the peace talks.”

He concluded: “OPAPP has long lost all credibility as it is exposed to be sinister, corrupt and a saboteur of the Filipino people’s aspirations for a just and lasting peace. It has indeed become irrelevant in the peace process as part of the military’s psywar machinery.” **UP**



US Army Pacific Gen. Robert Brown (R) and Manila’s Gen. Carlito Galvez.
Photo: pacom.mil

Manila government terminates US-RP Visiting Forces Agreement

Nineteen days after threatening to terminate the US-RP Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), Manila government’s President Rodrigo Duterte formally sent a notice of abrogation of the VFA to Washington on 12 February.

Prior to this on 23 January, Duterte threw invectives at the US and threatened to terminate the VFA after the US cancelled the travel visa of Senator Ronald de la Rosa, former chief of the Philippine National Police and chief executioner of Duterte’s ‘war on drugs’, which has now claimed 30,000 lives.

However, many in Duterte’s cabinet, including Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin, Jr, National Defense

Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and top military officials, expressed dismay at the treaty’s termination, warning of “far-reaching dire consequences” to the country’s defense capabilities.

A local TV commentator, Jose Custodio, pointed out, “there will be a buildup of unrest in the Armed Forces of the Philippines... and may lead to an attempt to overthrow the government.”

The US government, through its embassy in Manila, said on 12 February that abrogating the military pact would have “significant implications” on relations between the two countries.

Patriotic and progressive forces are pointing out that termination of the VFA was the right thing to do, but for all the wrong reasons. They have long demanded that the VFA and other treaties that curtail the country’s national sovereignty be abolished.

Meanwhile, the Chief Political Consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines Prof. Jose Maria Sison pointed out, “The VFA notice of termination takes effect after 180 days. The people cannot be sure that Duterte will not change his mind within that lengthy period. Previously, Duterte postured about terminating the VFA but after a few months allowed Balikatan (joint military) exercises to take place.

“In the meantime, there are other military treaties with the US: Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) and Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). The EDCA allows the US military to rotate more of its troops in the Philippines and build facilities in Philippine military camps, using the Filipino puppet troops as security guards.”

He stressed, “Duterte is beggarly dependent on US military supplies and advice. One telephone call from Trump can fix Duterte. His own pro-US military officers trained in US military forts and organized as assets of the US DIA and CIA will tell him to comply with US orders or else.” **UP**



NDFP file photo.

NPA Negros: Revolutionary movement growing in strength

The Apolinario Gatmaitan Command of the New People's Army (NPA) in Negros Island refuted on 6 February the claims of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) that the revolutionary movement in Negros is weakening. According to Juanito Magbanua, Spokesperson of the NPA Apolinario Gatmaitan Command, "With the current strength of the revolutionary movement, the reactionary military and police no longer have the capacity to destroy it."

"It cannot be denied that there are five guerrilla fronts from the northern to southern parts of Negros", Magbanua said. "One regime after another have unleashed efforts to decimate the NPA, (but) it continues to grow in strength and is firmly rooted among the broad masses."

Col. Inocencio Pasaporte, commander of the AFP's 303rd Infantry Brigade recently boasted to local media that the NPA is weakening due to thousands having surrendered and arrested.

Magbanua said that Duterte's officials are parading fake surrenderers "as a money-making scheme for military and local government officials." The 162.5 million pesos allocated by the Manila government as cash assistance for the alleged surrenderers end up in the pockets of the Duterte officials, according to Magbanua.

He also reiterated that arrested members and leaders of community organizations are not NPA members or recruiters. "They are militant activists who bravely criticize the rottenness of the tyrannical and terrorist US-Duterte regime. In order to silence them, their offices were raided, arms and explosives were planted and they were charged of trumped-up cases," Magbanua said.

"The NPA has the capacity to face whatever armed enemy campaign and sabotage of peace talks pushed by Gov. Eugenio Lacson to divide and destroy it," he said.

Magbanua expressed confidence that the broad masses of the people and the entire revolutionary forces will grow stronger "through mounting tactical offensives, strengthening mass organizations and launching anti-feudal struggles to improve the economic situation of the peasants in the Island." **UP**



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HANDS OFF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS!

Rights defenders, infant detained on firearms charges in Leyte

Combined elements of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) conducted simultaneous attacks on local offices of community

organizations critical of the Duterte administration in Tacloban City, east-central Philippines, in the early hours of 7 February, and arrested five human rights defenders and a one-year old infant on charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives.

The PNP arrested Alexander Philip Abinguna, National Council member of Karapatan human rights alliance; Marissa Cabaljao, Spokesperson of People's Surge disaster response network; Ms. Cabaljao's one-year old infant; Mariell Domanquill of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines; Frenchie Mae Cumpio, Executive Director of Eastern Vista news media organization; and Mira Legion of BAYAN-Eastern Visayas (New Patriotic Alliance).

The armed police and military elements swooped down on the offices, forced the occupants out of their beds and buildings and produced firearms and improvised explosives allegedly found in the rooms of the offices. Karapatan denounced "the Gestapo-like police raids" and the arrest of the human rights defenders.

"(These) arrests should enrage those who stand for civil liberties, human rights, social justice and lasting peace in the country," said Karapatan Secretary General Cristina Palabay. "We are calling on all advocates and communities to defend the rights of defenders against these attacks by the Duterte administration."

The five denied the allegations against them and asserted that the so-called evidence were planted. In a joint statement, the five said, "Our arrest is a manifestation that President Duterte's administration and his cronies in the Armed Forces of the Philippines are trembling in fear (of) activists... Never will they succeed in silencing the masses now facing a crisis because of anti-people policies."

As of this writing, the five and Ms. Cabaljao's baby are still detained at the Palo Municipal Police Station in Leyte Island. **UP**