



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

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EDITORIAL

Duterte squanders billions while people suffer

President Rodrigo Duterte is spending PhP76,5 billion for Hellfire missiles. What the Filipino people demand are mass testing and other measures to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. Millions suffer hunger, military arrests, police checkpoints, curfews and threats to be shot and killed.

Duterte received approval last 30 April from the US State Department's Defense Security Cooperation Agency to buy 200 AGM-114 Hellfire II missiles and other military equipment.

Duterte has used the military to launch attacks against the New People's Army (NPA). He neglects the people's needs to combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite his declaration of a unilateral ceasefire on 19 March to 15 April, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) mounted counterinsurgency operations in over 161 towns and cities in 42 provinces across the country. In 45 days, the AFP deployed troops in at least 446 villages – 43% in the Visayas and Mindanao islands, 31% in the Southern Tagalog region in Luzon, 19% in Bicol also in Luzon and 7 % in provinces north of the National Capital region.

Armed AFP troops roam around communities, enter homes and accuse residents of being members or supporters of the NPA. In one village, they arrested five civilians, brought them to the river and shot them. They arrested 21 hungry people in San Roque, Quezon City, who were demanding food and medical aid. In a televised speech, Duterte speaking about protesters told the police, "Shoot them dead!"

On 12 May, the UN Human Rights Commissioner's Director of Field Operations, Georgette Gagnon pinpointed the Philippines as topping the list of more than a dozen countries violating human rights. She exposed the Duterte government of arresting 120,000 persons for curfew violations in the past 30 days.

Duterte continues to ignore the demands of the people for adequate measures against the Covid-19 pandemic. He squanders people's money and imposes a militarist lockdown. He abuses and insults the people. The demand for his ouster rings ever louder. **UP**



Fidel V. Agcaoili, Chairman of the Negotiating Panel of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines. File photo.

Governments urged to heed UN calls for global ceasefire, release of prisoners

A group of resistance and liberation movements from various nations issued a joint appeal on 11 May for governments around the world to heed the calls of UN Secretary-General António Guterres for a global ceasefire and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet for the release of persons detained without sufficient legal basis, including political prisoners, in order to effectively confront the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fidel V. Agcaoili, Chairman of the NDFP Negotiating Panel engaged in peace talks with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP), signed the joint appeal together with representatives of the Resistance and Liberation Movements Network, Kurdistan National Congress, Basque Movement, Peace Dialogue Delegation of the National Liberation Army (Colombia), Euro-Burma Office and some armed ethnic organizations from Myanmar.

The groups deplored that UN member states "do not abide by the UN calls, and some are using the current global health crisis as an opportunity to intensify their repressive policies."

In their countries, already vulnerable populations are facing displacement, injury and death from military assaults, on top of the continued spread of the virus as it kills thousands each day. COVID-19 strategies of these UN member states, they said, fail the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized communities. "Vulnerable populations, already contending with inadequate health services and poverty, have almost no prospect of receiving additional humanitarian aid to help cope with the threat of COVID-19."

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“This is a breakthrough effort,” Agcaoili said. “For the first time, the undersigned resistance and liberation movements have decided to come together to make this joint appeal in support of the UN calls and submit our recommendations towards a more viable and responsible response to the pandemic.”

They called on concerned governments “to respond positively to unilateral ceasefires enacted by opposition forces and turn these into bilateral ceasefires or at minimum reciprocal unilateral ceasefires... and to immediately release all political prisoners.”

They also called for the demilitarization of humanitarian affairs, provision of UN humanitarian aid directly to local NGOs for populations in zones of armed conflict, and protection of human rights defenders and social justice activists. **UP**



*Georgette Gagnon, Director of Field Operations for the UN Human Rights Office.
Photo: UN News*

Lockdown culture in the Philippines among most toxic – UN

The United Nations (UN) raised concern the “highly militarized” response of the government of Rodrigo Duterte to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has resulted in mounting cases of human rights violations. On 30 April, it stated that “a toxic lockdown culture has impacted drastically on society’s most vulnerable members.”

The statement was issued a week after UN Secretary-General António Guterres called on governments not to use the pandemic as a pretext for repressive measures, and to recognize that the threat is the virus and not people.

UN Human Rights Office Director of Field Operations Georgette Gagnon noted that the Philippines has the highest number of lockdown arrests with over 120,000 apprehended for alleged “curfew violations.”

The UN stressed, “shooting, detaining, or abusing someone for breaking a curfew because they are desperately searching for food is clearly an unacceptable and unlawful response.” It clarified that “the right to life, the prohibition against torture and other ill-treatment, and the right not to be arbitrarily detained” continue to apply even amid the lockdown.

Earlier on 21 April in Quezon City, a policeman gunned down retired Philippine Army corporal Winston Ragos who was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder for allegedly violating quarantine protocols. On 6 May, a 13-year-old boy sustained abrasions on his back after being beaten by a policeman with a rattan stick. A day earlier, lockdown enforcers were caught on camera beating up and dragging a fish vendor whom they arrested afterwards. In Agusan del Norte, a 63-year-old man who complained about government food packs was shot dead by a policeman at a checkpoint on 5 April.

Meanwhile, dozens of Metro Manila police officers gathered for the birthday party of Police Maj. Gen. Debold Sinas in Camp Bagong Diwa on 8 May. Despite numerous photos of the crowds posted online, national police Gen. Archie Gamboa declared that “there was no party”, no violations of community quarantine took place and no arrests of the quarantine violators will take place. *[From [Ang Bayan](#)]* **UP**



NDFP hailed as defender of oppressed and exploited

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People’s Army (NPA) extended warm revolutionary greetings to the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) on the occasion of its 47th founding anniversary on 24 April.

In a statement issued on the same date, the CPP paid tribute to the heroes of the national democratic revolution, mentioning “those who stood up against the dictatorship and tyranny, who fought for land and social justice, who defended the environment, who marched against US military bases and who defended the rights of all the oppressed and exploited”.

The CPP statement recognized that national democracy is a continuing cause of the Filipino people because their aspiration for national and social liberation remain unfulfilled. It said that as long as imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism continue to oppress the Filipino people, the national democratic movement will continue to advance.

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It stated that the NDFP has played an important role in the revolutionary movement. A broad section of society has been brought together by the NDFP. It has served as a solid foundation for the people's struggles in both the cities and the countryside. It has represented the Filipino people's cause both in and outside the Philippines. It has represented the people's democratic government in peace negotiations and forged important agreements with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP).

At this time of Covid-19, with the humanitarian crisis brought about by the militarized response of the Duterte government, it has become more urgent that the NDFP continue to strengthen itself and expand. It called on the NDFP to help in advancing the rights of health workers, as they battle the pandemic at the front lines, as well as defend the democratic rights of the people against the militarized response of the pandemic.

The statement concluded by saying that today, the task of the NDF and its allied organizations is to continue raising the people's revolutionary consciousness by exposing the root causes of the Filipino people's oppression, the injustice, their poverty, hardships and sufferings. It urged the NDFP to continue fighting for the people's national and democratic aspirations until victory. **UP**



Philippines' biggest broadcast network ordered closed

ABS-CBN, the biggest entertainment and media network in the Philippines, was ordered by the National Telecommunications Commission to stop its television and radio broadcasting activities on 5 May after the lower house of Congress failed to approve the renewal of its broadcasting franchise.

The order came after Pres. Rodrigo Duterte's repeated criticisms of the media giant's news reporting and his threats

about the non-renewal of its franchise since becoming president in 2016. He had accused ABS-CBN of not airing his campaign advertisements during the 2016 election. He had also said that the network's owners should just sell the company.

Philippine Congress is controlled by a 'super majority' who are loyal to Duterte.

ABS-CBN's closure earned widespread criticism inside and outside the country, with the National Union of Journalists in the Philippines (NUJP) saying that "it is clear, with this brazen move to shut down ABS-CBN, that (Duterte) intends to silence the critical media and intimidate everyone else into submission," the NUJP warned.

The Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines (FOCAP) meanwhile said, "The move is clearly a case of political harassment against a pillar of Philippine democracy that employs thousands of Filipinos whose livelihoods are now at risk with the order."

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) also condemned the closure, saying that the move "is part of Duterte's scheme to establish a fascist dictatorship."

The CPP hailed the outpouring of opposition to the move, saying that Duterte failed "to stop thousands upon thousands of people from expressing their disgust... One protest statement after another was posted on the internet and became a trending topic in social media."

The CPP added, "It is also a publicly known secret that Duterte's constant haranguing of ABS-CBN aims to induce the Lopezes to give up the media company to allow one of Duterte's cronies to take over ownership and control in behalf of the tyrant and his foreign partners."

The US-based Committee to Protect Journalists said that "Philippine regulators should reverse their closure order against ABS-CBN and allow the news broadcaster to continue operating until its application for a new franchise is decided by Congress."

The closure highlights the state of press freedom in the country, which has consistently ranked as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. Duterte has called the country's journalists "sons of bitches" and has made death threats against them, saying they are not exempted from assassinations. Since he came to power in 2016, 16 journalists have been victims of extra-judicial killings.

His government prosecutors also filed several charges against online news site Rappler and its CEO Maria Ressa. Online news sites Bulatlat, Pinoy Weekly and others have been targets of cyber-attacks, and community journalists are routinely arrested. **UP**