



# UPDATES PHILIPPINES

RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF THE PHILIPPINES

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## EDITORIAL Selling out Philippine sovereignty

It was just 12 months ago when Rodrigo Duterte made a huge show of terminating the US-RP Visiting Forces Agreement. US officials were then criticizing the Duterte regime for gross human rights violations, especially the killing of more than 30,000 Filipinos in connection with the regime's so-called war on drugs. The US government also cancelled the travel visa of Duterte's police executioner Ronald de la Rosa, causing him greater vexations.

Thus the bellicose threats and patriotic fervor. But there was no talk about terminating other unequal agreements with the US: the Military Assistance Agreement (MAA), Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) remained sacrosanct.

Just as we've forecasted a year ago, the patriotic sham ended soon enough. Backed up by the grumblings of his US-indoctrinated officials, Duterte flipped over. No more talks of terminating the VFA, he just wants to receive more cash, guns and bombs from the US.

Sorry, Mr. Duterte: the Filipino people's sovereignty is not for sale! We unequivocally denounce the Duterte regime's slavishness to US and Chinese imperialism. And we demand the complete abrogation of the US-RP VFA, and all treaties and under-the-table deals which give foreign powers extraterritorial rights in Philippine territories and which trample on our national sovereignty.

The Filipino people needs the cooperation of all peace loving peoples around the world in rejecting US interventionism in the Philippines and the Asia-Pacific region. Peace loving peoples also need to cooperate to fight the growing hegemonism of China in the region. **UP**



Photo: Save Our Schools Network.

## Arrest of Lumad datus, teachers and students condemned

On 15 February, armed security agents of the Duterte government raided an indigenous Lumad school inside the campus of the University of San Carlos in Cebu City and took into custody 26 students, teachers and community elders. Local police filed charges of child abuse, child trafficking, kidnapping and serious illegal detention against teachers Chad Booc and Roshelle Mae Porcadella, datus Benito Bay-ao and Segundo Milong, and students Jomar Binag, Esmelito Oribawan and Moddie Mansumoy-at.

The raid on the school and arrests are causing a storm of protests by the Lumad communities, Filipinos all over country and human rights defenders abroad.

The Save our Schools Network (SOS), advocates for the indigenous Lumad schools, strongly condemned the raid, "Time and again, Duterte government officials mouth the word 'rescue' but this disturbed the peace of Lumad evacuees and students, just as what happened in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines' Haran Mission Center in Davao City in 2015 and January 2020." The SOS demanded the immediate release of the 26 individuals, including those arrested.

Thousands of Lumad have been displaced from their communities in southern Philippines by the Manila government's military operations. Many have taken refuge in church-based sanctuaries, setting up makeshift schools in the evacuation centers called 'bakwit' schools. They continue to face harassment, however, being accused of supporting the armed revolutionary movement and "kidnapping" their own children into the refugee centers.

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In a joint statement, the University of San Carlos and the Society of the Divine Word declared that the Lumad inside the university campus were carrying out their educational program. "Their presence in the retreat house was for their welfare and well-being... they were nurtured, cared for, and treated with their best interest in mind," said the statement signed by Cebu Archbishop Jose Palma, SVD provincial superior Fr. Rogelio Bag-ao and USC president Fr. Narciso Cellan Jr.

In the House of Representatives, Deputy Speaker Rep. Mikee Romero called on the Philippine National Police to "relieve all involved in this illegal raid." He said the raid was "far from a rescue operation... there was much screaming, cries for help, commotion and struggle. Clearly, the incident led to distress, agony and even trauma to the children," citing photos and videos of the incident shared online by the SOS.

Opposition lawmakers Reps. Eufemia Cullamat, Carlos Isagani Zarate, Ferdinand Gaitan, Arlene Brosas, France Castro and Sarah Jane Elago, jointly filed a House Resolution calling for an investigation into the "Gestapo-like" raid and arrests. "The violent raid and arrest against indigenous people merely seeking sanctuary amid the pandemic is highly condemnable," said the six lawmakers.

The raid and arrests have been met with strong international solidarity. In the US, the Borricua Resistance – New York, an alliance of the Puerto Rican diaspora, the Sunrise Movement – George Washington University, and the National Students for Justice in Palestine, expressed solidarity with the Lumad of the Philippines. **UP**



Image: EILER FB page.

## Dutch missionary ordered to leave the Philippines

The Duterte government ordered the immediate expulsion from the Philippines of Otto Rudolf de Vries, a Roman Catholic missionary from the Netherlands, due to the missionary's involvement in "illegal political activities". De Vries has been given 30 days to leave the country. De Vries was informed of the order on 3 February 2021 when he went to the Bureau of Immigration to renew his visa.

The order stemmed from a 20 December 2019 letter of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency to the immigration bureau, alleging that de Vries was actively participating in protest rallies of "communist-terrorist front organizations". He was also directed to submit his counter-affidavit on 23 January 2020, but de Vries opted

not to do so.

The NICA stated that de Vries was seen in several political gatherings led by the Ecumenical Institute for Labor and Education Research (EILER) and the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU, May First Movement trade union center).

De Vries is a missionary from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rotterdam in the Netherlands. He arrived in the Philippines in May 1991 to work as a lay missionary upon the invitation of the late Bishop Julio Xavier Labayen of the Prelature of Infanta. He was to participate in the mission to live out the "Church of the Poor" and to immerse in the everyday lives of the workers.

For several years, he fulfilled his mission by working in Philippine factories. In recent years, he has worked as a volunteer researcher in EILER, an affiliate of the KMU trade union center. De Vries said his presence in protest actions and visits to workplaces are part of his work as an EILER researcher.

The Duterte government has been expelling foreign religious missionaries, accusing them of participating in "illegal political activities", like joining fact-finding missions and protest actions.

United Methodist Church missionaries Adam Thomas Shaw of the USA, Tawanda Chandiwana of Mutare, Zimbabwe and Miracle Osman of Blantyre, Malawi, were all ordered expelled in July 2018 for their missionary work with the indigenous Lumad of Mindanao. In September 2018, Sr. Patricia Fox of Australia, regional superior of the Religious of Our Lady of Zion, was also forced to leave the country after her outspoken criticism of Duterte and his 'war on drugs'.

Sr. Patricia had been staying in the Philippines for 30 years, working with the poor peasants and indigenous Lumad communities in Mindanao.

Protest actions, both in the Philippines and in the Netherlands, have been held to protest the deportation orders against Otto Rudolf de Vries. **UP**



## AFP bombs crush villages in Quezon and Cordilleras

The Armed Forces of the Philippines has been conducting aerial attacks in scores of rural villages in the southern Quezon-Bondoc peninsula and the Cordillera region, both in Luzon, since the start of January 2021, forcing tens of thousands of villagers to evacuate.

Cleo del Mundo, spokesperson of the New People's Army in Quezon province, said that 22 villages in the towns of Buenavista, Catanauan, Mulanay and San Narciso have been targets of intensive harassment, aerial bombings and machine gun fire by the AFP, after an armed clash between the NPA and AFP in Buenavista town on 5 February 2021.

Human rights group Tanggol Quezon reports at least 26,200 villagers have been forced to evacuate their homes as a result of the bombings. It said that the AFP is also conducting "focused military operations" in 20 villages of Lopez, General Luna and Macalelon, in Quezon province.

About 1,000 armed troopers of the AFP 201st Infantry Brigade, combined with local police units, have been scouring the communities, subjecting residents to illegal arrests, extrajudicial killings and other cases of abuse.

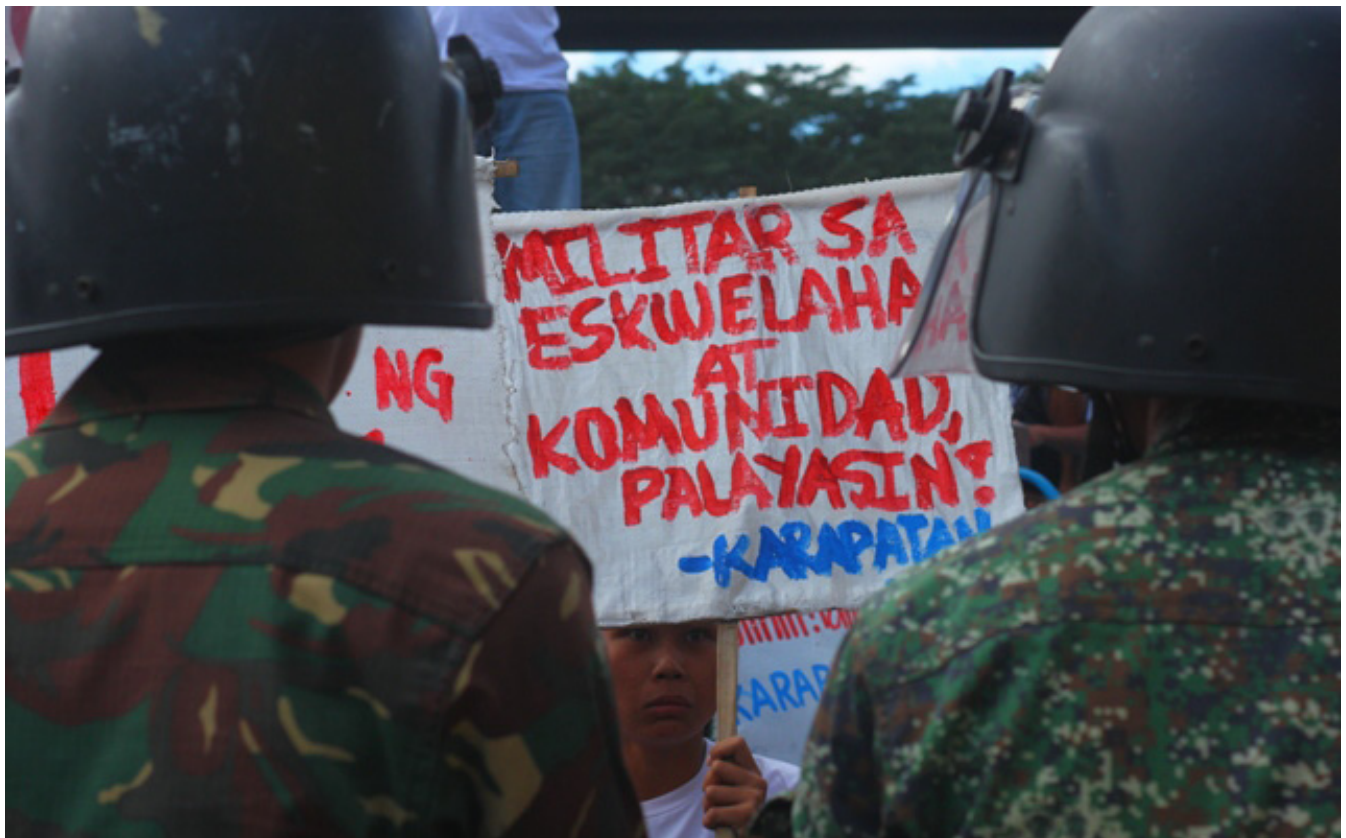
Meanwhile, in the Cordillera region, the AFP Northern Luzon Command has been terrorizing the indigenous Igorot communities with aerial bombings since the onset of 2021. A total of 39 bombs have reportedly been dropped in the communities.

Most recently, on 11 February, the AFP dropped two bombs and strafed farmlands in the village of Tamboan, Besao, Mountain Province. There were no reported armed encounters between the NPA and AFP in the area at the time.

From 5 to 7 January, 23 bombs were dropped in the production areas of the villages of Lacub and Malibcong towns, Abra province. And from 24 to 25 January, the AFP dropped 14 bombs in the forested boundaries of Tubo, Abra and Besao, Mountain Province. Like in southern Quezon province, AFP armed troopers have been carrying out intense military operations in Abra, Mountain Province and Ilocos Sur.

Meanwhile, the revolutionary armed forces have been responding with increasing tactical offensives. According to the CPP Information Bureau, three NPA tactical offensives in January in the Cordillera have resulted in 16 casualties among the AFP mercenary troops.

AFP Southern Luzon Command chief Lt. Gen. Antonio Parlade, Jr. boasted in January the acquisition of new Black Hawk attack helicopters, as part of a large shipment of sophisticated war materiel from US. The NPA-Quezon said the AFP is using the bombings to test its new equipment. **UP**



Expel the military from schools and communities! Photo: bulatlat.com

## Barangay development funds is military pork barrel, says CPP

The Communist Party of the Philippines asserted on 14 February that the PhP 16.4 billion (US\$ 336.4 million) Barangay Development Program funds of the Duterte government's National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) is nothing but military pork barrel -- discretionary funds subject to corruption by military officials.

Marco Valbuena, CPP Information Officer, said "like Congressional pork barrel, the BDP will be subject to corruption in the form of kickbacks in infrastructure projects, pocketed by both local government officials and military officers in connivance with the contractors."

Duterte's National Security Adviser Gen. Hermogenes Esperon earlier announced that the BDP aims to dissuade poor Filipinos from supporting the CPP and New People's Army. He said the funds will go to the construction of roads, schools, water systems, sanitation facilities and health centers and to reforestation activities. He denied that the BDP funds will be pocketed by Duterte's military and local officials.

Valbuena noted however, that Duterte's hometown Davao City will get the lion's share of the BDP funds. 82 villages in the city are listed as recipients of project funds. "Next to Davao City," he said, "nine of the ten top provinces with the biggest number of villages in the BDP are all in Mindanao." Davao City is in Mindanao island.

Valbuena said that the BDP plan for "uniform distribution of PhP 20 million (US\$ 410,000) to each village regardless of population size, reveals that the amount is merely to give local officials equal kickback opportunities." Populations in Philippine villages or barangays range widely from several hundred to tens of thousands.

"Lastly, the NTF-ELCAC claims that at least PhP 3 million of the funds going to each barangay will go to constructing schools," Valbuena said. "However, 26% of these barangays have already at least one school. In Region II, 89 barangays have schools, in Region XI, 83 barangays and in Davao City, 70."

He said the Duterte program does not address the problems of landlessness, widespread hunger, oppression and exploitation of poor peasants, land grabbing and usurpation of the ancestral domains of minority communities. Social discontent and the armed conflict in the country are rooted in these problems. **UP**



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