



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF THE PHILIPPINES

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VOL IV NO 6

31 MARCH 2022

EDITORIAL War and Peace

The ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine affords us a front seat view of the ravages of war. Intensive and up-to-the-minute video footages, photos and field reporting of the conflict are broadcasted to every news media outlet around the world. We see up close the destruction, economic ruin, death, horrific injuries and the displacement of entire populations. Simultaneous to these, calls for ending the war reverberate, with hopes that peace will soon be restored.

Regrettably, the absence of war does not necessarily translate to peace.

Look around: there might not be armed conflict and war, but widespread and unbearable poverty, unemployment, inhuman working conditions, environmental pillage, social inequality and national oppression prevail. Indeed, the absence of armed conflict more often translates to free rein for the ruling classes and imperialist powers to exploit and suppress the vast majority of the working peoples of the world, rather than peace. The deplorable conditions suffered by the 99% are hardly ingredients for a peaceful society. These are ingredients for social unrest, armed conflict and war. Such conditions prevail in the Philippines.

53 years ago, the Communist Party of the Philippines established the New People's Army. This signaled the resumption of the Philippine Revolutionary War for national liberation and democracy. It signaled a call to arms to the Filipino people to overthrow US neocolonial rule, feudal oppression and bureaucrat capitalism. However, unlike imperialist wars that result in the subjugation of entire nations, the CPP made a clarion call for a people's war that will pave the road for long and lasting peace based on national freedom, social justice and democracy.

The Filipino people and the NPA have answered the call. In the last five decades, giant strides have been made towards these aspirations. Despite the brutality of the Marcos fascist dictatorship; despite the equally heinous counter-insurgency programs of pseudo-democratic regimes after Marcos; and yes, despite the utterly murderous Duterte fascist regime.

The NPA and the people's democratic government now prevail in several hundred villages across the archipelago. The poorest of the poor, peasants and indigenous peoples, reap the fruits of agrarian reform, rural livelihood, social services, ecological biodiversity and genuine democracy. Victories of the armed struggle in the countryside have been inspiring working peoples in towns and cities to intensify their demands for social justice and their vehemence against imperialist domination, fascism and bureaucrat capitalism.

The NPA is the instrument of the Filipino people for attaining their aspirations for peace – peace based on national liberation, social justice and democracy. Paraphrasing a popular revolutionary song: “Lost loves will be rekindled, families will reunite, and from the ashes will arise fresh and new life. After war is happiness... after war is peace.” **UP**



NDFP peace consultants Ramon Patriarca (L) and Esteban Manuel, Jr. Photo: karapatan.org

CPP, NDFP demand release of peace consultants

The Communist Party of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines condemned the recent abduction of four NDFP peace consultants by the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and demanded their immediate surfacing and release.

On 20 March, the CPP reiterated its demand to the AFP 803rd Infantry Brigade to surface and release NDFP peace consultant Edwin Alcid (Ka Veejo) and two other companions. The three were accosted on 8 March in

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Catubig, Northern Samar and boarded into two AFP helicopters. Ka Veejo, 74 years old, suffers from acute diabetes and had already retired from active service in the Party.

On 17 March, the NDFP in Southern Mindanao Region vehemently condemned the abduction and continued disappearance of Ezequiel “Ka Rey” Cortes Daguman, 50. He was unarmed when abducted by elements of the AFP Eastern Mindanao Command.

Daguman, NDFP peace consultant assigned to Davao del Norte and Davao de Oro, has been reported missing since the afternoon of 7 March while enroute to meet with farm workers in New Corella in Davao del Norte. He had been investigating the workers- and peasant situation in the banana plantations affected by the series of typhoons and heavy rains and the militaristic pandemic lockdowns.

Meanwhile, on 19 March, NDFP Negros vehemently condemned the unlawful arrest of its peace consultant Ramon Patriarca along with two youth peace activists in Himamaylan, Negros Occidental. NDFP-Negros Spokesman Ka Bayani Obrero explained that Patriarca was in the area to conduct an in-depth study on how the Cojuangco estates are circumventing existing agrarian reform laws. The study aims to contribute to the second substantive agenda of the peace talks, the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms.

Earlier, on 24 February, the CPP demanded the immediate release of yet another NDFP peace consultant, Esteban Manuel, Jr., who was arrested 16 February, in Villareal, Samar, by the AFP Joint Task Force Storm, along with another civilian. The CPP denounced the AFP and the Philippine National Police for planting a fragmentation grenade and a cal. 45 pistol and then filing trumped up charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives against Ka Esteban, who is around 70 years old. The CPP and NDFP have been emphasizing that the arrests of NDFP peace consultants are flagrant violations of the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantee, which provides all NDFP consultants, staff and personnel involved in the peace process protection from arrest, surveillance and other similar measures that may hamper their work. The JASIG remains in effect, they said, despite the suspension of formal peace talks, and can only be rescinded by a bilateral process clearly stipulated in the agreement itself.

Philippines human rights alliance Karapatan called on the Duterte regime to surface Alcid and Daguman, and to free Manuel, Jr. and Patriarca. “The attacks on the peace consultants not only spoil efforts to advance just peace but instead perpetuates militarism, violence and injustice,” Karapatan said. **UP**



Vice President and candidate for President Leni Robredo. Photo: ovp.gov.ph

Candidates bat for resuming GRP-NDFP peace talks

Vice President and candidate for President Maria Leonor Robredo reiterated her commitment for the resumption of peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, if she wins in the 9 May 2022 elections. Robredo spokesperson Atty. Barry Gutierrez made the assurance on 23 March, during the Peace and the Presidentiables interview series organized by the Citizens Alliance for Just Peace.

Four other candidates had earlier expressed their willingness to reopen peace negotiations with the NDFP should they get elected. Aside from Vice President

Robredo, Manila Mayor Isko Moreno, Sen. Manny Pacquiao and trade union leader Leody de Guzman also affirmed their commitment to pursue peace negotiations.

“If these four presidential candidates are committing to the peace talks, that’s a welcome for us peace advocates and churches as well,” said Bishop Felixberto Calang, head of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente in Cagayan de Oro, and Sowing the Seeds lead convener, in a phone interview.

Robredo said that she would avoid the militaristic and top-down strategies, in favor of addressing the roots of the armed conflict and institutionalizing people’s participation to enable marginalized sectors to have a role in governance and decision-making processes.

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Atty. Gutierrez outlined the principles that a Robredo government would pursue, including the primacy of protecting civilians from violence, a peace framework that is in line with national socioeconomic goals and social justice, and the strategic role of the international community, including longstanding partners such as the Royal Norwegian Government.

Robredo is also committed to upholding previously signed agreements between the GRP and NDFP, including the Hague Joint Declaration, Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees and the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. She would also resume the bilateral discussions on the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms because this is fundamental to the peace process.

The Communist Party of the Philippines welcomed the pronouncements of the candidates for President. Marco Valbuena, CPP Chief Information Officer said, “These statements add to the mounting calls of peace advocates and progressive organizations to resume the NDFP-GRP peace negotiations after the proven failure of the Duterte regime’s all-out war against the revolutionary movement.” **UP**



*'RED-TAGGED'. Popular Bookstore in Quezon City, Philippines.
Photo: Ronalyn V. Olea | bulatlat.com*

Anti-communist vandals deface Metro Manila bookstores

In the early hours of 22 March, unknown vandals defaced the signage and doors of two prominent Philippines bookstores, Popular Bookstore and Solidaridad, with red painted graffiti of 'NPA' and 'terrorist'. NPA stands for New People's Army, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

Both bookstores are renowned for selling rare books written by progressive, nationalist and revolutionary authors, aside from mainstream books.

Geraldine Po, Popular Bookstore store manager, said that their selling of books written by CPP Founding Chairman Prof. Jose Maria Sison might be the reason behind the vandalism committed by “the usual suspects”. She said

that the Duterte government’s National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict and its allied groups might be behind the vandalism.

Ms. Po stressed that their customers and guests are “usually intellectuals” and added, “Reading books about communism will not make you a communist.” Aside from Prof. Sison’s books, they also sell books by former journalist Cecilio Arillo, whom Po described as a loyalist of the Marcos family.

The National Book Development Board condemned the twin incident. “We along with our friends and partners in the book publishing industry condemn in the strongest terms these vicious acts,” they said. “We believe this is an attack on institutions of knowledge and harmful to the democratic values that we, along with the rest of the government, are bound by duty to protect,” the NBDB added.

Earlier from September 2021, the NTF-ELCAC has been ordering the removal of reading materials authored by Prof. Sison and those relating to the peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines from the libraries of state universities.

Reacting to the censorship, the Book Development Association of the Philippines said, “The removal of books with sensitive or challenging content is a violation of freedom in publishing and freedom of thought and impedes critical thinking and empathy.” They stressed, “We need to remember that the goal of subversive literature is to encourage people to think for themselves, while having access to different perspectives and possible ideals.”

The bookstores are seen as the latest victims of government ‘red-tagging’: individuals and groups accused of having links with the CPP and NPA. Red-tagging victims become targets of threats, harassment and vilification by government security agents. Many among them have suffered trumped-up charges, prolonged detention and extrajudicial killing. **UP**