

Mindanao (Philippines): Statement on the Marawi Crisis and Martial Law

Tuesday 30 May 2017, by [#NeverAgain](#), [#PrayforMarawi](#), [#StandwithMarawi](#), [#SupportPeaceProcess](#) (Date first published: 29 May 2017).

Stand with Marawi. Save the Peace Process. Defend our Rights

Marawi, the “Philippine’s premiere Islamic City” is battered but stands strong.

True to the origins of the name Marawi, it is indeed a “destination point” or “rendezvous”, for much of Mindanao’s Islamic south. The name has also meant “arrival” or “coming” – but these last few days, Marawi’s monicker has had a devastating connotation. The city that has served as a melting pot of peoples from different cultures and histories is now getting razed by bombs and fire into a virtual “ghost town.” The city is occupied by Maute extremist militants on a rampage, sowing terror in different parts of the city – threatening, hurting and even killing innocent civilians, burning buildings and properties, hostageing helpless people and turning them into “human shields” as their forces scamper through the city’s interiors. The armed hostilities prompted President Rodrigo Duterte to declare martial law in the whole of Mindanao to address the crisis situation and specifically wipe out the Aby Sayaf leader Isnilon Hapilon and the remaining Maute militants involved.

We, the convening networks and allied peace partners of the Mindanao PeaceWeavers (MPW), condemn in the strongest terms the terror that is besieging Marawi City. We are deeply saddened that this tragedy occurred during the Holy Month of Ramadhan, a period of spiritual reflection for Muslims. But for the people of Marawi, it is currently a disquieting time when danger, violence, and death are at their doorsteps.

We appeal to the heart and conscience of President Duterte to see the face of humanitarian crisis.

Aside from ensuring the safety and security of civilians in the conduct of clearing operations by the government forces, we invoke the state’s responsibility to protect and fulfill the rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs) during evacuation until their safe and dignified return to Marawi City. In hindsight, we believe that a combination of keen foresight and leadership coupled with political will and military intelligence, the government can address the crisis situation in Marawi without resorting to a declaration of Martial Law.

The prolonged armed engagement between the government security forces and the Maute militants have led to the excessive use of artillery and aerial bombardment, endangering the lives of trapped civilians and violating the rules of engagement in situations of war and armed conflict. Worse, the botched AFP-PNP operation to arrest the ASG leader failed to assess the risks and options impacting on non-combatants; public safety has now been jeopardized when the scenario of pre-emptive and forced evacuation was not prioritized by the government troops just before the conflict flared-up.

We are disheartened with the extent of civilian casualties - most of whom are women and children - caught in the crossfire while fleeing to safer grounds. The government says that as of today, a total of 92 casualties have been recorded – 16 civilians, 15 government forces, and 61 Maute militants.

According to a report, only 5% of the total city population of 200,000, remain trapped inside the city.

The Marawi crisis is considered the tipping point of the Martial Law declaration. But we pray that martial rule won't be the last straw before we lose the gains in the peace processes through the years. Despite the safeguards that are already embodied in the 1987 Constitution, we still dread the thought of Martial Law turning draconian in the days and weeks to come. Because, as a country, we committed to listen to the wisdom of history – “Never Again” – was our collective mantra in the aftermath of the Marcos dictatorship. Yet now in a seeming instance, Martial Law is upon us again.

We are seriously alarmed with the declaration of the 60-day Martial Law in the whole of Mindanao. Appalled by the sudden turn of events, we, as advocates of civil liberties remain wary of the factual basis and intention of this proclamation. President Duterte's brinkmanship in the standoff with Maute militants launched a full-scale combat operation at the heart of a bustling civilian community. A military solution will not address the key drivers of armed conflict, radicalization and violent extremism in the country. Developing sustainable solutions towards durable peace can be derived from the heart of an inclusive political settlement, good governance and multiculturalism. That is why as civil society, we continue to feed the civilian policy lens on matters of peace and security. To sustain this impetus under these trying circumstances, we are respectfully submitting the following recommendations for consideration and immediate action.

OUR URGENT APPEALS:

For President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza, National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon, Jr, DND Sec Delfin Lorenzana, AFP Chief Gen. Eduardo Ano, ARMM Governor Mujiv Hataman, Western Mindanao Command Chief MGen Carlito Galvez Jr, DSWD Sec Judy Taguiwalo, Peace Negotiators in the Bangsamoro peace process and the GRP-NDFP peace process, BTC Chair Ghadzali Jaafar, Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, Senate President Aquilino Pimentel, Jr, Speaker of the House Pantaleon Alvarez, Peace and Order Councils of ARMM, Lanao del Sur and Norte, Reg 10, 11 and Reg 12, and humanitarian groups :

1. Support the appeal towards a “humanitarian passage”— a half-day “cease and desist from all forms of armed action”and invoke universally-accepted protocols on displacement and civilian protection accorded to IDPs and at the same time with deference to the observance of the Holy Month of Ramadhan.
2. Provision of humanitarian corridor/s within Marawi City or adjacent towns where IDPs have sought/can seek refuge, to ensure their safe passage, safety, security and unhampered access to humanitarian aid in these buffer zones.
3. For the security actors, in concert with the Marawi city government and trusted local mediators to address the hostage situation and secure the safety of Fr Teresito Suganob, his staff, parishioners and any other residents who are still being held captive by the Maute militants.
4. Mobilize broad support for prompt and adequate humanitarian assistance in coordination with the ARMM-HEART and the local multi-stakeholder convergence on emergency support and crisis response in the cities of Marawi, Iligan and Cagayan de Oro.
5. Immediately stop the airstrikes, indiscriminate firing and artillery shelling directed at civilian dwellings and public structures wherein trapped IDPs are seeking sanctuary. Forcing them out with the razing of these structures effectively puts them further at risk and in harm's way.
6. We appeal to President Duterte to continue upholding the primacy of the peace process. Corollary to this, we are respectfully requesting that the declaration of Martial Law be rescinded. While the

military action in Marawi and adjacent towns continues, we hope this will not affect the momentum and continuance of both the Bangsamoro and the GRP-NDFP peace tables and the unimpeded implementation of all signed interim and final peace agreements;

7. We urge both the government forces and the New Peoples Army (NPA) to withdraw/reposition their troops and discontinue any armed offensives especially in remote villages and ancestral domains of IPs. Sporadic attacks, harassments and militarization further contribute to an explosive situation in the midst of a Martial Law imposition;

8. Lastly, we call on all citizens to remain vigilant, defend your rights, organize and engage our communities to actively monitor the situation on the ground, and help contribute in conflict mitigation and de-escalation.

Finally, as the President himself recognized and admitted in the past, no military solution can ever resolve the deep socio-economic and political problems that have blighted our land and bred terror and extremism that we are confronting today. What is needed is recognition of the legitimate grievances, historical injustices and ongoing justice issues perpetrated on our peoples and addressing the root causes of armed conflict through structural change.

Stand our ground in engaging the peace process!

Resolutely defend our fundamental rights and freedoms!

#StandwithMarawi

#SupportPeaceProcess

#PrayforMarawi

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