

# **Mindanao (Philippines): No to Martial Law - Protect of Human Rights and Collective Rights of the People!**

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**NO TO MARTIAL LAW!**

**PROTECT OUR HUMAN RIGHTS AND COLLECTIVE RIGHTS OF PEOPLES!**

“Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free” - 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama.

On December 11, 2017, the President requested Congress to extend Martial Law in Mindanao for another year citing continued threats from armed groups connected to international terrorists and added another reason, to fight against the communist insurgency. Three days after, both houses of Congress convened jointly and with a resounding majority votes, granted the President's request to extend Martial Law until end of 2018.

Pres. Duterte's more than one year in office showed a systematic attack to human rights: more than 14,000 deaths in its war against illegal drugs; total destruction of Marawi City leading to the displacement of more than 500,000 Meranaos; the increased spate in the killings of Lumad, bombings and militarization of their communities; killings of peasants, workers, women, youth leaders and activists. These attacks were made by commission or omission of government obligation to protect the inherent rights of peoples.

The Marawi siege by local terrorists was used by the President as his foundation for the Martial Law declaration. This was extended when the battle dragged on. Even after the city was liberated five months later, Martial Law was not lifted. Since the war in Marawi broke out, the Meranaos continue to suffer systematic attacks on their rights. Not only they lost loved ones, they were also stripped off of their homes and properties, their homeland totally ravaged. Most of all, their dignities stripped off, the very core of their Meranao identity.

The war on terrorism waged by the government have again subjected the Moro people to persecution. The Meranao's for example were tagged as terrorist because of their ethnic association to the Maute clan. Harassments of individuals and communities were experienced even by the Moros in other areas after the Martial Law declaration in May. The extension of Martial Law will further intensify this situation because as Muslims they are automatically singled-out and associated with terrorists especially since the prevailing misconception of the majority population on terrorists and terrorism are related to the US' definition and policies against terrorism.

The abandonment of the peace talks with the Communist Party of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front with its armed wing the New People's Party (CPP-NDF-NPA) and the subsequent declaration of the NPA as a terrorist organization. This effectively expanded the scope of the government's war against terrorism to also include the communist insurgents and their allied organizations. This is very dangerous for communities in Mindanao as the military and the President claimed that majority of the communist rebels are from Mindanao aside from attributing 75 percent

of them to be Lumad. Grave concern and anxiety ripple through Lumad leaders and their communities with this claim especially now that the Martial Law is extended until next year. Martial Law will greatly allow the state's security apparatus to widen the scope of its witch hunting activities.

Military deployments and tighter checkpoints were already in place in the considered red zones where the Lumad communities are predominantly situated. While there is truth to the claim that the NPA and other rebel groups thrive within the ancestral domains these are mainly due to perennial issues of human rights abuses due to land grabbing and blatant plunder of resources ripening the ground for the blossoming and support of an existing ideology. Added to this, the Lumad ancestral domains are strategically located with the remaining forest covers best suited for guerilla warfare. The Lumad did not take this sitting down as manifested in their constant cries and position: "leave us alone!" and "do not bring your wars inside the ancestral domain".

Recently, Lumad communities in South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Agusan Provinces, Surigao del Sur and Maguindanao again bear the brunt of the government's intensified campaign against the communist rebels and even to supportive legal organizations. Lumad communities are all the more caught in the armed fighting between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the NPA, and in some cases with extremist groups making the Lumad's ancestral domains as battlefields. In either cases, the Lumad are also suspected as supporters to either of the warring groups. Military airstrikes conducted by the AFP displaced local residents, majority of whom are Lumad. Lumad leaders and community members active in the defense of their rights as Indigenous Peoples and defenders of their ancestral domains have become the target of red-tagging associating them as members of the communist rebels or part of terrorists groups making them vulnerable to government troop's red-baiting and witch hunting leading to false arrests and in worst cases, killings. An extension of the Martial Law declaration for a longer period is tantamount to allowing the bloodbath in these communities to persist.

The declaration of NPA as terrorists will not only adversely affect the Lumad human rights and environmental defenders. This will also greatly impact to other sectors who continue to demand for their democratic rights and stand up for the defense of their rights such as farmers, workers, women, youth, among others who will also become victims of the red-tagging. The intensified military operations across the country have targeted active political and human rights activists even civilians and causing numerous deaths. The latest fatalities were the 72-year old retired priest Fr Tito Paez in Nueva Ecija by a riding in tandem assassins and the T'boli leader Datu Victor Danyan and seven of his fellow T'boli in a military operation in Lake Sebu, South Cotabato.

The resistance of progressive and critical social movements against neoliberal policies, corruption in the government and ineffective and poor services have been already judged as an anti-government and equated to as destabilizers, therefore considered security threats. Martial Law will further constrict the democratic spaces for us who are actively participating in building just, dignified, peaceful and sustainable communities.

Given all the above, we the representatives of our tri-people grassroots constituencies of the Bangsamoro, Mindanao migrants and Katawhang Lumad, vehemently oppose the further extension of the Martial Law declaration. We believe that putting Mindanao under military rule will greatly endanger our human rights as individual persons and collectively as peoples. We are deeply disappointed with the both houses of Congress for willfully submitting to the whims and caprices of this dispensation, abandoning their sworn duty to defend and protect the Filipino people and the Constitution.

We demand to genuinely include the Meranaos in the rehabilitation and rebuilding process of their

homeland and their lives. A militarist approach to the rehabilitation efforts in Marawi City would prevent the Meranaos and the IDPs, further displacing them and denying them democratic rights to substantially participate in putting back their lives on track and their homeland in order.

We strongly debunk the false attribution that the bulk of the NPA's and/or rebel groups are Lumad. This is committing another grave injustice to the Lumad people who have since time immemorial suffered from colonization, exclusion, marginalization and dispossession. Perpetuating the above claim is like signing the death warrant of this persecuted people.

We condemn in the strongest term possible all these attacks and killings in the Lumad communities. We echo and reiterate their demand for all armed groups, whether it be from the state and non-state actors, to immediately leave and cease from encroaching into their ancestral territories making them unwilling victims of these wars. We strongly demand accountability and responsibility to all the deaths, destruction and damages sustained by these Lumad communities. We feel their fear and concerns as their communities and members continue to be subjected to all these military and development attacks. We fully recognize and respect the Indigenous Political Structures and systems of the Katawhang Lumad in the exercise of their rights to self-determination for their political future and the protection and management of their territories and the resources therein.

We add our collective voice in strongly condemning the killings and harassment of leaders and activists fighting and asserting for the protection and fulfillment of human rights. We are of the firm belief that in the Mindanao context, terrorism did not emerge as a foreign idea rather it is deeply rooted to social injustice and structural violence such as suppression of the democratic individual and collective rights of persons and peoples aggravated by neglect, chronic corruption and ineffective and inefficient governance fueling social unrest and insurgency. Without substantial political, economic and social responses to these questions, resistance will continue in various forms and means. Martial Law and Militarization are never answers to these deep seated issues instead will foment more unrest.

*Reference Person:* Mr. Rodelio N. Ambangan, Chairperson

**Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM)**

Cotabato City

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