

Letter on the Philippine Crisis

Thursday 2 March 2006, by [NACPIL Lidy](#) (Date first published: 1 March 2006).

Dear Friends,

Finally I am now able to grab some time to scribble some updates on the situation here in the Philippines!

[...]

The declaration of the State of Emergency was Arroyo's response to last weeks events. February 22 to 25 was the 20th anniversary of the uprising that finally led to the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship. It was the occasion for political and social movements to organize massive rallies over the course of several days calling for the ouster of Arroyo. (International media did not cover all mobilizations especially when several were taking place simultaneously, size of mobilizations were also underestimated.) At the same time, military factions opposed to Arroyo and influential over major units (marines, scout rangers, special action forces etc) were about to openly declare withdrawal of support. The Arroyo government was able to frustrate the moves of these military factions with the arrest of some leaders and some other maneuvers, but our sources say that these factions are still determined to make their move at some later time.

Since the State of Emergency, the offices of 2 newspapers have been raided, and subsequently ordered to subject their daily copy for approval before release. Arroyo is also reportedly aiming to take over a major TV station that has been sympathetic to the call for her ouster.

The regime is now actively seeking the arrest of 6 legislators from the Bayan Muna Party. They are temporarily under the protection of the Philippine Congress and holed up at the Congress building since yesterday but the Speaker of the House (who is pro-Arroyo) has already announced that when official warrants are shown, they will be handed over.

We have been warned that arrest warrants have been issued for other leaders of left and progressive groups, though it seems they are not yet immediately pursuing us. However, the situation is fluid, surveillance and harassment has stepped up, so we all have to observe security measures. In any case Presidential Decree 1017 (State of Emergency) provides for warrantless arrests. Media friends have also leaked news to us that Arroyo is now about to "wage war" against all left groups and that this is likely the subject of another presidential decree or order that will come out soon.

The government announced that all rallies and protest actions are banned. (In fact they have been many violent dispersals of rallies for many weeks even before the state of emergency, under the regime's policy of "Calibrated Preemptive Response"). Of course we continue to stage protests and actions of defiance and assertion. It is vital to challenge the regime's effort to constrict democratic space and break the fear it is trying to perpetuate. And so far I think we are succeeding...

The movement calling for Arroyo's ouster has in fact intensified and spread even more in the last days since the State of Emergency was declared. Major unions are launching work stoppage and strikes next week. Yesterday, the faculty and students of the University of the Philippines staged a massive walkout and many teachers and professors announced that they be conducting daily teach-

ins instead of their usual classes. Other universities have started organizing various forms of daily protest activities. More business groups have joined the campaign. On Friday, several law firms and major lawyers organizations are set to hold a protest march to Malacanang (the presidential palace). On women's day on March 8, women's groups have decided to hold a joint mobilization to call for the removal of this woman president.

Demonstrations are not only being held in Metro Manila but in many major cities in Visayas and Mindanao.

Philippine groups are now drafting an appeal for statements to be sent to the Government of the Philippines condemning the state of emergency. We hope to send this to you in the next 24 hours.

Many thanks to all those who have expressed their concern and solidarity! Keep us in your thoughts, just as we think of our friends in Nepal calling for the restoration of democratic processes there, in Thailand mobilizing for the ouster of Thaksin, in Haiti struggling against the political and economic crisis, and in many other places in the South in similarly urgent situations.

I am still quite hopeful to join you in meetings and events scheduled in the coming weeks!