

# **Philippines: Duterte Threatens Communist Peace Negotiators with Arrest, Accuses Them of 'Fucking the Govt'**

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The ongoing peace process between the Philippine communists and the government has faced opposition from U.S.-backed oligarchs and military figures.

President Rodrigo Duterte threatened peace negotiators representing the National Democratic Front of the Philippines with immediate arrest if they set foot in the country, in the latest sign that the peace process between the government and the communist movement is reaching new lows amid the imposition of martial law in the southern island of Mindanao.

“I’m warning the leaders who are talking to representatives of my government. Do not attempt to come home. I will arrest all of you and throw you in the slammer, I will imprison you and all the elderly I will arrest you again” Duterte said in a Davao City speech to the Philippine Navy. “If needed, you will just die there inside the prison. You cannot run anymore ... so, stop fucking the government.”

The president’s tirade comes after days of bitter informal negotiations in the Netherlands that followed the government’s pullout from the fifth round of formal talks with the NDFP negotiating panel. The NDFP represents the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People’s Army, and affiliated national democratic movements.

While the government has pointed to CPP orders that the NPA “intensify tactical offensives” against government targets as a pretext for the pullout from talks, the communists have responded that its order was a response to Philippines military statements specifically naming the leftist guerrillas as threats to be dealt with as part of the 60-day martial law declaration in Mindanao, an impoverished island of 22 million people which houses multiple bases belonging to the rebels.

Days of back-channel talks also failed to produce positive results after repeated government demands that the CPP retract its order to the NPA and adopt a joint bilateral cease-fire in the absence of socio-economic reforms — demands considered “unnecessary, last-minute and unacceptable” by the Philippine communists. To the CPP, government demands that the NPA agree to a cease-fire made little sense while the “AFP’s (Armed Forces of the Philippines) cannons, bombs and heavy gunfire thunder against the people.”

The clandestine communist organization has denounced what it calls “creeping nationwide martial rule” that has led to indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets in Marawi City; the roundup of Moro civilians; the suspension of civil liberties; and the imposition of a heavy-handed military and police presence in areas far from the conflict with allegedly Islamic State group-linked militants in the

Maute group.

Unions representing farm workers have even accused authorities of using the martial law order as an excuse for strike-breaking; on Saturday morning, the Peasant Movement of the Philippines stated that two peasant activists involved in strikes against a Korean-owned fruit company were arrested by the 66<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion after days of harassment by army personnel. According to the workers, soldiers intruded on the workers' picket line and informed the farmers that their strike was "illegal," in a move that violates constitutional guarantees to free assembly put in place following the People Power Revolution of 1986 that ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

NDFP chief negotiator Fidel Agcaoili responded to Duterte's threats of arrest by noting that any such measures will violate the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantee, which would mean the termination of the peace process.

The government, however, hasn't formally annulled the joint agreement. Signed in June 1994 and known as JASIG, the agreement was adopted to ensure that peace talks proceed without the threat of state violence toward NDFP representatives, including surveillance, harassment, incarceration, prosecution, arrest or interrogation. Additionally, the peace negotiators are guaranteed unhindered passage to all areas in the Philippines in connection with their duties. Fourteen political consultants to the NDFP who were released on bail are currently covered by JASIG.

"When the consultants were given visas, it was made clear to them they should not seek asylum (in Europe). With this new development, they may be forced to do so. But it would have to be their personal decision," Agcaoili said, according to independent news outlet Kodao.

The peace talks aim to resolve Asia's longest-running communist insurgency through constitutional amendments, the passage of new laws, an amnesty for 400 political prisoners, and the implementation of major reforms in the poverty-stricken archipelago. Under the auspices of the Comprehensive Agreement on Socio-Economic Reforms communists and progressives are demanding an end to neoliberal laws granting foreign firms control over key industries such as mining; self-sufficiency without Japanese and U.S. aid; real national industrialization; a ban on the U.S. military presence in the Philippines; as well as a deep and thoroughgoing agrarian reform that would break up large plantations and the remnants of feudal social relations in the country.

The peace process, which began in 1998 and has stalled multiple times until its revival by Duterte, has been sharply opposed by U.S.-backed oligarchs and military figures in the country. Philippine elites see the socio-economic reforms as an intolerable batch of concessions to the poor peoples' movements in the country and a direct threat to their interests.

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\* Telesur. 31 May 2017:

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Duterte-Threatens-Communist-Peace-Negotiators-with-Arrest-Accuses-Them-of-Fucking-the-Govt-20170531-0036.html>