

Pandemic (Philippines): Shoot the NPA... with vaccines; Kill, kill, kill... Covid-19

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Believe it or not, the global fight against this pandemic, and especially the counter-measure of vaccination, is actual a rare common ground between the “Communist Terrorist Groups” and the “U.S.-Duterte fascist regime.”

Stated otherwise, between the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)-New People’s Army (NPA)-National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and the Duterte administration of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP). Both sides actually have called on the Filipino people to get Covid-19 vaccination. The NPA has also “ensure[d] that transportation of Covid-19 vaccines will be provided a humanitarian corridor for safe and unimpeded passage in guerrilla bases and zones.”

That is the least that might be done. Like in 15 other conflict-affected countries around the world where the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is working with Red Cross and Red Crescent partners to support Covid-19 vaccination “to ensure no one is left behind.” Excluding people living in conflict zones, in far-flung areas not under government control, “presents a clear risk since no one will be safe until everyone is safe.”

The least that might be done by both sides is reflected in this customary international humanitarian law (IHL) rule 55: “The parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, subject to their right of control.” There is of course much more than can and should be done in the context of IHL, of the human right to health, and of the Philippine constitutional right to health of the people.

It is unfortunate that there was an “underwhelming collective reaction,” as Nobel Peace Prize laureate and former Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos puts it, to the March 2020 call by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for a “global ceasefire” in response to Covid-19. In the Philippines, the GRP and the NDFP had their respective unilateral ceasefires good only up to April 2020. And then after that, back to *Bang! Bang! Boom! Boom!* Desperate times, as they say, call for desperate measures.

At some point, shooting the NPA itself — as distinguished from its mass base in the countryside - not with bullets and bombs but instead with Covid-19 vaccines has to be considered.

The NDFP leaders based in Utrecht, The Netherlands are presumably fully vaccinated by now. Surely, they would want the same for their own NPA Red Commanders and fighters. As Filipino citizens, not to mention fellow human beings, they presumably would not be begrudged vaccination by the GRP as a government for all Filipinos, including Filipino Communists.

Even from the point of view of the National Task Force to End the Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), the indispensable and good faith cooperation of the Armed Forces of the Philippines

(AFP) and Philippine National Police (PNP) in allowing NPA vaccination would be an excellent conciliatory gesture that would go a long way in ending not the local Communists but the armed conflict with them. You might call it a strategy of “Killing Me [or Them] Softly...” A bit like the NPA Maoist strategy of lenient (including medical) treatment of captive soldiers who are often won over to at least view the hated enemy differently. And what is the point of vaccinating a person to save life if he/she would just be later shot dead in armed hostilities?

On the premise of sufficient vaccine supplies, ideally single-dose Janssen or Sputnik Light vaccine shots can be provided to NPA units in the field on a pilot basis, with whatever necessary security safeguards for all concerned, such as if presumably conducted with ICRC assistance. This would also be an occasion for pilot confidence-building for the larger peace process such as through a local ceasefire or at least a humanitarian corridor. It would “shoot two birds” with a single-dose: health and peace.

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P.S.

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