

Philippines: Ceasefire Na, Pwede ba!

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OMICRON. ODETTE. CHRISTMAS. NEW YEAR. ELECTION SEASON. Still no ceasefire on the local communist armed conflict front!

What does it have to take for a ceasefire to happen? What more humanitarian considerations are needed? As Bob Dylan put it, *"Yes, and how many deaths will it take 'til [w]e know That too many people have died? The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind. The answer is blowin' in the wind."* The last blowing wind was that of super-Typhoon ODETTE, and there will be many more natural and man-made calamities. *"For the times [and the climate — natural and political] they are a-changin'."*

Early in the current pandemic, now in its fifth (?) major mutation or iteration, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' in March 2020 called for a global ceasefire in armed conflicts around the world which is facing this existential common enemy COVID-19: "The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war... It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives... Pull back from hostilities. Put aside mistrust and animosity. Silence the guns, stop the artillery, end the airstrikes... This is crucial — to help create corridors for life-saving aid. To open precious windows for diplomacy. To bring hope to places among the most vulnerable to COVID-19... End the sickness of war and fight the disease that is ravaging our world. It starts by stopping the fighting everywhere. Now.... There should be only one fight in our world today, our shared battle against COVID-19."

Can we at least in the Philippines — with more reason after ODETTE, in the advent of this traditionally most joyous season of grace and giving, and in the build-up to what is expected to be a most hotly contested election particularly at the presidential level — can we not reconsider the wisdom, or even just the sanity, of the UN Sec-Gen's ceasefire call when it comes to the bloody local communist armed conflict front? Imagine AFP-PNP and NPA resources and energies better diverted and used for cooperative or parallel efforts in public health especially vaccination and in typhoon relief and rehabilitation, especially in far-flung and isolated areas, including those in NPA guerrilla zones? Aren't NPA guerrillas also part of the Filipino people who ought to be vaccinated in the best interest of our people and our country? The matter of principle involved here is "to ensure no one is left behind" because "no one will be safe until everyone is safe."

It takes two to do this tango; selfie tiktok dancing simply will not do. So, who has the better Christmas spirit? Who can show it by declaring a Christmas season cum humanitarian anti-Covid and typhoon relief ceasefire? Even unilaterally if it has to be. This may seem like a small matter, compared to the oft-repeated (or reaffirmed) big picture of "addressing the root causes of armed conflict" or grand narrative of "national and social liberation." But any respite from the crossfire is a big matter of life-and-death for our rural folk in the countryside. For the armed protagonists, any ceasefire is also a crucial matter of building much needed trust or a "specific measure of goodwill and confidence-building to create a favorable climate for peace negotiations." The coming presidential elections are particularly crucial for the resumption of peace talks — which would best be honest to goodness, and best be accompanied by an honest to goodness ceasefire.

The “little steps” of a ceasefire and humanitarian cooperation where possible, with consequent trust-building, should pave the ground for the big step of renewed peace talks towards a negotiated political settlement. To quote Michael Jackson: “*We may not change the world in one day, But we still can change some things today, In our small way.*”) *Stated otherwise for a ceasefire, “Give love on Christmas Day.” How about it, guys?*

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P.S.

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