

PRESS STATEMENT

“Let up war as the Holy period of supplication for our Muslim brothers and sisters is observed”

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The Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) in solidarity with the entire Muslim community, calls on the entire Filipino nation in the observance of Holy month of Ramadan. As an occasion to fulfill the pillars of Islam, the entire Muslim Ummah observes this month-long fasting to gain true sympathy with those who go hungry, impoverished as well as growth in one's spiritual life.

“ O YOU who have attained to faith! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you, so that you might remain conscious of God” 2:183 (Holy Qur'an)

The religious observance opens this September 13, 2007. While historically it is looked forward with excitement and piety by the whole Islam world, today it shall be met with anguish and pain with its hounding blows of discrimination, terror-suspicion, virtual policy of degrading and inhuman treatment as a people of faith. In Zamboanga Peninsula, it shall be observed with fear in a situation of total military offensives and debilitating effects of evacuation. As of today, an estimated closed to 50,000 individuals have been displaced in Basilan and Sulu alone. Classes are disrupted, economic activities are halted, social services are more found wanting. People are dying as the month-long fasting is approaching. Threats to life and further violation of human rights are even more expected as the newly appointed Secretary of National Defense, Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr., unleashed his arrogance to mount massive military operations even during the Muslim Holy month of Ramadan.

It is incomprehensible that such statement is uttered with ease when the government is barking on national unity and peace processes. Even as the peace negotiation between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is stalled because of last month's beheading incidence, it does not provide justification that the whole Muslim populace of the Philippines have to suffer and provided with apprehension to peacefully observe religious rituals and practices in the light of their faith. It is a display of government's insensitivity to highest degree that while the period calls for examination of conscience, war, bombs and soldiers' marches are made as background to the prayerful mood with God or Allah.

Religious tolerance is enshrined in our Constitution. So are the Bill of Rights that calls for equality in promotion, protection and fulfillment of basic civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Be it be Moro, Lumad or Filipino settler, no one shall be subjected to discrimination by virtue of sex, age, belief or religion.

Together with all the peace advocates of the world, Filipino nationals or citizens of foreign lands, we call on the warring parties to let up war as the Holy period of supplication for our Muslim brothers and sisters is observed. For the GRP and the MILF to go back to the negotiating table and bear witness to the situation of people affected by war in designing plans for lasting peace. For the peoples in the Philippines to involve in actions for peace and unity, to serve as glitters of light in the

period of national confusion where politics run berserk. For various religious groupings and churches to engage in truthful interfaith dialogue that we may become true disciples of our faiths through genuine prophetic witnessing to the situation of our time. We call everyone to pray that the whole humanity in one way or another may join us in our struggle for peace and human rights.

Uphold Religious Freedom!

Respect the Holy Month of Ramadan!

Stop the War in Basilan and Sulu!