



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF THE PHILIPPINES

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EDITORIAL Quo vadis, Duterte?

Perhaps a better question is, “Where are you, Duterte?” In the past months, President Rodrigo Duterte has rarely been seen in public, but instead appears in prerecorded video clips late Monday evenings.

But his regime persists and has become more brutal and oppressive than ever. It is now mostly under the control of high-ranking military and police officers, former military men and some civilian lackeys. Duterte appointed these men to powerful and lucrative posts, allowing them to plunder the country’s natural resources, steal away public funds and smuggle drugs and other contraband.

The unbridled military overspending and corruption at the expense of social services have deprived the people of mass testing, economic assistance, vaccination and other vital services and thus aggravated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have allowed the expansion of destructive mining and logging operations, mostly encroaching on indigenous peoples’ ancestral domains. Expansion of export-oriented monocrop plantations and smuggling of imported food products continue to destroy local food production, even before the onslaught of typhoons and floods.

To curtail increasing protests and other forms of resistance from all sectors, Duterte’s military cabal have imposed a virtual martial law in the guise of its Anti-Terror Law. The CPP and NPA were promptly tagged as ‘terrorists’. Social activists, film and TV personalities, journalists, lawyers, opposition parliamentarians and virtually anyone they fancy are tagged as CPP-NPA members or sympathizers. Many among them have ended up being arrested or killed by state agents.

The Duterte government is practically under the authority of the so-called National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, a military junta that threatens civilian government agencies at all levels to obey or else be red-tagged.

Increasing repression however is further fueling various forms of resistance, and the armed revolutionary forces continue to grow. The revolutionary movement’s regional spokespersons report of expanding areas of operations and formation of new guerilla fronts.

Duterte can take no comfort from the outside world either. The democratic and anti-imperialist struggles of the oppressed peoples are spreading throughout the world, even in the heartlands of monopoly capitalism. The pandemic has further exposed the anti-social and anti-environmental character of the global capitalist system and further aggravated its economic and political crises.

Peace-loving peoples around the world are exposing the Duterte regime’s tyranny and brutality. Sovereign states express dissatisfaction with the regime’s human rights record. The ICC prosecutor has set in motion crimes of humanity charges against Duterte. The new US administration is pressing Duterte to go against his erstwhile protector, China. Cracks are beginning to appear in the ruling clique. Duterte may be too weak physically or politically to last even until next year’s election.

Quo vadis, Duterte? **UP**



*Detained ‘terrorist’ Japer Gurung.
Photo: UMAHON-Central Luzon.*

Duterte government tests ‘anti-terror law’ on indigenous Aetas

Two indigenous Aetas, Japer Gurung and Junior Ramos, are the first persons being charged with terrorism under the Duterte government’s Anti-Terror Law of 2020. Gurung and Ramos, together with two other female Aetas, are also facing charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives, and have been in detention since August 2020.

The four Aetas were arrested together with two children and Ramos’ father within their ancestral domain in San Marcelino town, Zambales province in Central Luzon

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on 31 August 2020 by elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines 7th Infantry Division. They were arrested while fleeing the AFP bombing of their community. They were subsequently accused of being members of the New People's Army, of killing an AFP soldier, then detained on charges of terrorism and possession of firearms and explosives.

Speaking for the accused, volunteer defense lawyers from the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers say they were tortured to force admissions that they are NPA members. Gurung attested that he was mauled, placed in a sack and hung upside down, suffocated with a plastic bag and forced to eat his own feces by his AFP captors. All accused maintain their innocence.

On 31 January 2021, the NUPL discussed with Gurung and Ramos the possibility of signing a petition for intervention to the Supreme Court, in relation to the 37 petitions pending at the Supreme Court to declare the Anti-Terror Law unconstitutional. It was considered that should the Supreme Court strike down the law as unconstitutional, the 'terrorist' charges against the two Aetas can then be dismissed.

Duterte security and prosecution officials, however, accused the NUPL of forcing and bribing the detainees to sign the petition of intervention. The two, according to Duterte officials, have since withdrawn the petition and requested the Public Attorneys' Office and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples to represent them instead of the NUPL.

In the meantime, Gurung, Ramos and the two female Aetas remain in detention, their cases pending in a local court in Olongapo City in Central Luzon. Their ancestral domain in San Marcelino town remains occupied by AFP armed elements.

Aeta community leaders claim the militarization of the area is meant to pave the way for mining explorations of the Dizon Copper-Silver Mines, Inc, which their communities oppose. **UP**



China Coast Guard sailing in West Philippine Sea on 25 January 2021. Photo by Philippine fisherman Larry Hugo.

Filipinos condemn China's Coast Guard Law

The Filipino people roundly condemned the Chinese government for recently adopting a law authorizing its coast guard to fire on foreign vessels and destroy structures "illegally infringing on its national jurisdiction", saying the law poses a serious threat to the security, stability and peaceful coexistence of countries in Southeast and East Asia.

In a statement dated 8 February, the Communist Party of the Philippines said, "Imperialist China claims the islands and reefs in the West Philippine Sea as its own, based on

its outdated and baseless 'nine-dash line' map... China is arrogantly ramming this law down the throats of the people of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan, who all have territorial claims in the South China Sea."

China's legislative body National People's Congress passed the Coast Guard Law on 22 January, taking effect on 1 February 2021. It allows the China Coast Guard to "take all necessary measures, including the use of weapons, when national sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction are being illegally infringed upon by foreign organizations or individuals at sea."

It also authorizes the destruction of "foreign structures" on Chinese-claimed areas, including those on the Philippines' Pag-asa Island and Second Thomas Shoal. It gives the CCG authority to board and inspect foreign vessels in Chinese-claimed waters.

The UNCLOS Arbitral Tribunal, in its July 2016 ruling, rejected China's claims over the South China Sea based on its 'nine-dashed line'. It also declared that China's activities in the West Philippine Sea violated the Philippines' sovereign rights with respect to the latter's EEZ and continental shelf.

China has repeatedly refused to recognize the UNCLOS ruling. Duterte had agreed to set aside the ruling "to pursue areas of cooperation" with China.

Speaking against the Coast Guard Law, Pamalakaya, the national alliance of Philippine artisanal fishers said it "contradicts the principle of freedom of navigation recognized by international maritime law."

Fernando Hicap, Pamalakaya Chairman said, "This is a serious threat to Filipino fishers, in our very own territorial waters... this is virtually a declaration of war against countries with legitimate claims in South China Sea."

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Prof. Renato de Castro, Professor of China Studies at the De La Salle University in Manila, said the law presents a threat to the safety of Filipino fishers and to the country's food security. "This is a clear example of how our food security is threatened by the action of China," he said.

The CPP likewise criticized the Duterte government for its "spinelessness and puppetry" in failing to defend Filipino fishers and Philippine sovereignty. It cited the latest harassment on 25 January of Filipino fishers who were intercepted and forced back by six Chinese Coast Guard vessels near the Kalayaan Islands in the West Philippine Sea. The Duterte government had announced that the incident is "under investigation". **UP**



*Military rule in Myanmar and the Philippines.
Image: cpp.ph*

CPP, NDFP condemn Myanmar coup d'etat

Philippine revolutionary forces joined the international community in condemning the 1 February coup d'etat and imposition of national emergency in Myanmar. The Communist Party of the Philippines expressed its support to the resistance of the people of Myanmar and called on Filipinos to "learn lessons from Myanmar where the undemocratic evils of military forces wielding political power are demonstrated ever so clearly."

Myanmar military officials headed by Gen. Min Aung

Hlaing seized political power and imprisoned elected leaders and officials of the National League for Democracy, including its Chairperson Aung San Suu Kyi.

Marco Valbuena, CPP Chief Information Officer, said on 3 February, "The military coup preempted the opening of parliament which was elected in the November 2020 elections. The military leaders refused to recognize the results of the November elections where the military-backed party lost by a landslide to the NLD."

Valbuena said that the coup has brought back the monopoly of power of the military which has dominated Myanmar for more than 50 years. Under absolute military rule, the broad masses of Myanmar have suffered untold abuses, human rights violations, genocidal wars, plunder of economic resources and corruption by military officers.

The military junta agreed to a 'power-sharing' arrangement with elected civilian leaders in 2016, after being guaranteed of parliamentary seats and granted the power to appoint the vice president, defense, internal affairs and other key officials.

In the Philippines, Valbuena said, "the political power of the military generals has grown under the Duterte regime. To establish himself as a strongman, Duterte has expanded the powers of the military and police, enlarging the budgets of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, mounting wars and appointing former military officers to key government agencies."

He called on the Filipino people to resist the growing powers of the military. "If the military's expansion of powers continues, the Philippines is not far off from going down the bloody path of Myanmar's military dictatorships," he said.

In a separate statement on 5 February, the National Democratic Front of the Philippines also condemned the coup d'etat and reiterated its support for the resistance of the Myanmar people against military rule. It noted that "the military dictatorship is rousing the people to fight back, gain their democratic rights and put an end to oppression."

The NDFP likewise called on the Filipino people to resist military rule in all its forms like the people of Myanmar. **UP**



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Safe and unimpeded passage of vaccines assured – CPP

The Communist Party of the Philippines on 9 February assured that the delivery of Covid-19 vaccines will be provided “safe and unimpeded passage” through the guerilla bases and zones of the New People’s Army.

Marco Valbuena, CPP Chief Information Officer, said, “It is a matter of principle for the NPA to respect all humanitarian undertakings that benefit the masses.” The NPA, he said, will ensure that the transportation of the vaccines “will be provided a humanitarian corridor.”

Valbuena added that in rural areas, “The transportation, distribution and inoculation drive should be handled by the International Committee of the Red Cross, Philippine Red Cross and other civilian humanitarian agencies whose personnel are properly trained.”

Using armed personnel of the Armed Forces of the Philippines for the vaccination drive, Valbuena said, “will not encourage people to be vaccinated, especially in many areas in the countryside where people are traumatized by military garrisoning of their communities and AFP helicopter gunships firing missiles.”

The Filipino people, he said, are worried that the AFP might use the vaccination drive for the Duterte government’s counterinsurgency operations and demand “surrender before vaccine”.

Philippine revolutionary forces are calling for the free and safe distribution of Covid-19 vaccines. At the same time, they condemn the Duterte government for its “slow, anomalous and corruption-ridden procurement of vaccines.”

In a separate statement, the National Democratic Front of the Philippines chapter in Eastern Visayas said, “After smuggling Chinese vaccines to secretly inoculate his security group, no one believes Duterte has any plan for mass vaccination or he wants to decisively stop the spread of the pandemic in the country... As governments across the world distribute millions of doses for their citizens, Duterte has made sure to save only himself and leave the rest of Filipino people fighting over limited supply.”

In its 2021 national budget, Duterte allotted a measly PhP 1 billion (US\$ 20.85 million) for vaccine procurement, the NDFP said. It however allotted at least PhP 85.3 billion (US\$ 1.778 billion) for the AFP, ‘intelligence funds’ and its anti-communist campaign. “He cannot fund mass vaccination but will buy more fighter jets, attack helicopters and planes, drones, tanks, 500-pound bombs, artillery weapons and other war toys,” said the NDFP.

A recent survey conducted by the ASEAN Studies Centre revealed that 53.7% of Filipino respondents disapprove of the Duterte government’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic – the highest disapproval rating among the ten Southeast Asian countries. The survey was conducted from November 2020 until January 2021 with respondents coming from academia or research, business or finance, government, civil society groups, media, and regional and international organizations. **UP**



NDFP healthcare teams in Philippine rural communities. Photo: cpp.ph