

Philippines: Hostage Killings - PLM calls for an independent inquiry

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Partido Lakas ng Masa commiserates with the families of the eight Chinese nationals killed in the tour bus hijacking in Manila on Monday, August 23. The blunders of the Philippine police and officials in the hijacking crisis, which led to the deaths of the eight tourists, are indefensible from many aspects.

* Why do the authorities order the arrest of the hijacker's brother, a blunder seen on TV by millions of people, including the hijacker himself, during the crucial period of negotiations? This only escalated the tension and enraged the hostage-taker.

* Why was the Philippine SWAT team untrained and unprepared to handle the emergency, and had no necessary equipment even to smash the glass windows? If they have the equipment, why were they not able to use it?

* Where were President Noyonoy and other top government officials during the crucial period of the negotiations? Why didn't they put themselves on the line to ensure the decisive and quick resolution of the crisis which had already become an international political issue?

These are just a few questions that not only the Hong Kong residents are mulling over, but so are many Filipinos who are also indignant at the reckless manner in which the authorities have handled the life-and-death crisis of the Chinese tourists. We are compassionate people who have time and again demonstrated our sense of decency, responsibility and duty toward our fellow human beings. But, unfortunately, the Filipino people's values are not emblematic anymore of the state institutions in this country - from government institutions to its law enforcement agencies.

On the contrary, the experience of ordinary people is the systematic violation of their rights by these institutions that have acquired a reputation for being corrupt, inefficient, anti-people and inhumane with respect to the treatment of ordinary citizens. Members of the law enforcement agencies, for example, are known to break the very laws that they are meant to enforce. Instead of protecting the rights and even the lives of the masa, they wantonly violate these rights as exposed in recent TV footages of demolition or urban poor houses and the torture of a petty criminal at the hands of the police in Manila.

We share the indignation of the Hong Kong residents and we assure them that we will always be in solidarity with them to rid both our societies of inept, corrupt, vile and criminally-inclined institutions and elite forces who do not value people's rights. We support the solidarity activities on this issue by our brave OFWs in Hong Kong who are also bearing the brunt of the anger and frustrations felt by the people of Hong Kong. As usual, it is the poor who suffer from the ineptitude of the government. We also agree with the position of the Hong Kong media that the occasion should not be used to curtail the rights of the media in the Philippines, local or foreign, to expose the ineptitude of the Philippine authorities on this issue.

Finally, we call for an independent inquiry, with participation of independent experts and security

analysts who will be able to more competently draw out the necessary actions and lessons of this unfortunate event compared to our very own authorities.

Sonny Melencio

Chair, Partido Lakas ng Masa

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