

Philippines: Statement on 'state of lawlessness' - Stop the killings! Stop the bombings! For peace, not a war strategy!

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The dangerously deteriorating situation that the country now faces, marked by the killings and bombings resulting in the meaningless death of thousands of people, is a result of the 'war' strategy followed by the Rodrigo Duterte regime. The war strategy, which began as a 'war against drugs', has now been extended and intensified with the 'war on terror' in Mindanao.

The 'war' against drugs has led to mass killings mostly in urban poor communities. The death toll of suspected pushers, users and innocent civilians has reached more than 2,000 in a span of less than three months of the Duterte administration.

The war against the Abu Sayyaf, a small bandit group, led to the bombing and destruction of villages in Mindanao. There is an ongoing AFP military offensive against Abu Sayyaf groups in southern Sulu province, an intensified attack called by President Duterte after the beheading of an 18-year old hostage. At least 30 of the Abu Sayyaf gunmen were killed in the week-long offensive, according to the AFP.

It is reported that the attack against Abu Sayyaf territories in Sulu and Basilan has triggered the bloodbath in Davao City which killed at least 14 civilians. Abu Sayyaf first owned up to the bombing in Davao, but it later clarified that the killers were from another group sympathetic to them.

Partido Lakas ng Masa (PLM) calls for a stop to the mass killings of suspected drug users and pushers in the urban poor communities. The campaign against drugs could simply be an intensified police operation, targeting the biggest drug lords and their protectors.

The Abu Sayyaf bandits can also be curtailed with targeted military operations, instead of bombing entire villages. The bombings have resulted in massive loss of lives and the retaliation of increasingly desperate communities wanting to hit back against forces they deem to be supporting the government operations.

The human casualties of this war strategy - its so-called collateral damage — are very high. It plays into the hands of the US 'war on terror', which has been rightly condemned by President Duterte in his recent speeches. It also plays into the hands of the rightist forces, including the 'war hawk' generals.

A war strategy has its own dynamics, which cannot be easily controlled. The war itself is a declaration of a state of lawlessness, a state of belligerency; the imperative being the extermination of the combatant forces engaged in war. If the war continues, it will also create a scenario leading to the declaration of martial law, from the current 'state of lawlessness' declared by the government.

This war strategy is clearly not in the best interest of the masses.

The PLM calls instead for a strategy of peace in Mindanao, an inclusive process of all the

Bangsamoro forces and not only the MILF and the MNLF. A strategy that addresses the basic causes of the conflict, based on the Bangsamoro people's right to self-determination.

We reiterate our call for a 'peace strategy' with the CPP-NDF-NPA. Such a strategy must address the root causes of the insurgency, including urgent measures to address the impoverishment of the masses, implementation of genuine agrarian reform, and labor rights.

Lastly, we call for an end to the terror sown by the war on drugs in the urban poor communities. We call for a 'peace strategy' that stops the killings in the communities and arrests and prosecutes the big drug lords and their protectors.

Partido Lakas ng Masa (PLM)

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* <http://www.masa.ph>