

Philippines: Militarizing the Youth?

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Walden Bello responds to frontrunner Vice-Presidential candidate Sara Duterte's proposal to introduce mandatory military training for all 18 year olds

Sara Duterte's signature legislative initiative is out, and she is right to be extremely defensive about it because it is one that should greatly alarm all of us, especially our young people.

Does she really think that our youth would be so stupid as to accept her panicky explanation that the purpose of mandatory military training is not to learn how to kill but to engage in disaster relief, physical education, or character building?

How can Ms. Duterte be running for vice-president when, like her father, she doesn't realize that what the Philippines needs are not more soldiers, but more educators, artists, engineers, scientists, doctors, nurses, farmers, and workers to develop our country?

How can she not know that what we need is not a badly-led military and police that is further bloated by the compulsory conscription of young people but a military and police that is freed from the clutches of corrupt and undisciplined leadership and decrepit ideologies?

How does she not know that, under such an undisciplined and corrupt leadership, the one and only role of the Armed Forces post-independence has been to repress not foreign invaders but Filipinos under various pretexts, such as their allegedly being "communists" or "insurgents" ?

Is she so shielded from reality as not to know that—as a result of being used as de facto private army by our elites—the military has targeted not foreign troops but hundreds of thousands of ordinary Filipinos simply fighting for their democratic rights?

Is Sara Duterte unaware of the fact that her own father has consistently said he does not want our troops to offer even the slightest show of resistance to the provocations of China in the West Philippine Sea threats on the grounds that they would be "massacred" ?

Ms. Duterte, you accuse me of being unpatriotic in opposing your militaristic initiative. If you and your team had done even a modicum of research, you would have realized that I have done more to assert the sovereignty of the country with respect to China than many generals.

Let me school you on the facts: I authored the resolution renaming the South China Sea the West Philippine Sea (House Resolution 1350), a recommendation that was accepted by the previous administration.

Despite threats from Beijing, as member of the House of Representatives, I led a congressional mission to Pag-Asa Island in the Spratlys in July 2011 to assert our sovereign rights there and led the brave people of that beleaguered outpost in a ceremony to raise and fly our flag.

Contrast this to the behavior of your father, who went back on his promise to "jetski" to Pag-asa

Island to plant the Philippine flag when Xi Jin Ping warned, indeed, ordered, him not to go.

Unlike the Duterte, I come from a family that has defied foreign aggressors, be they Chinese, Japanese, or Americans. My uncle Buenaventura Bello was bayoneted and left for dead by the Japanese when he refused to follow their orders. My father Jesse Bello was tortured by the Japanese in Fort Santiago for being a guerrilla intelligence agent.

And aside from standing up to the Chinese, I have consistently opposed the US presence in this country, having, among other things, co-authored two joint resolutions with the late Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago, seeking the abrogation of the VFA.

You owe the country an apology for advancing a foolish proposal that would derail our youth from their pursuit of civilian careers and dreams simply because you want to pander to the generals by offering them another channel to increase their share of the budget.

Walden Bello

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