

Philippines: 'President Leody' to abolish NTF-ELCAC, repeal anti-terror law

Friday 4 March 2022, by [VILLANUEVA Raymund B.](#) (Date first published: 2 March 2022).

Labor leader vows to resume peace talks, fight social injustice if elected

Leody de Guzman will immediately abolish the government's anti-insurgency task force and repeal the controversial anti-terror law if elected president.

In an online peace and justice forum, the presidential candidate said he will immediately disband the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) and ask Congress to repeal Republic Act 11479 he described as twin menaces to the Filipino people.

"Our position is clear. The NTF-ELCAC must be disbanded because it is a concrete expression and legalization of President Rodrigo Duterte's brutal brand of leadership. It breeds all sorts of human rights violations and terror on our people," de Guzman said.

NTF-ELCAC's budget should instead be transferred to agencies that confronts the COVID-19 pandemic and to the education sector, he added.

The task force, the Partido Lakas ng Masa standard bearer said, clearly violates the people's fundamental rights, along with the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020.

"That law should not be called anti-terror. It should be called Terror Law," de Guzman said in Filipino.

De Guzman was the featured presidential candidate of the Peace and the Presidentiables series of online conversations last Monday, February 28.

The forum was organized by the Citizens' Alliance for Just Peace (CAJP) in cooperation with Lasallian Justice and Peace Commission of the De La Salle University system; Father Saturnino Urios University; Silliman University Student Council; St. Scholastica's College-Manila and the University of the Philippines.

No local peace talks

De Guzman said he is not in favor of the government's so-called localized peace talks proposal the National Democratic Front of the Philippines has repeatedly rejected.

"That is their way of trying to fool the other party. It is a divide and rule tactic so they can try to bribe, to show they are talking to some people and to later convince them to surrender without the root causes of the armed conflict being addressed," de Guzman said.

The veteran labor rights activist said genuine and sincere peace negotiations must be held at the

national level.

"The root causes of the armed conflict are not local, they are our national problem. If the government is serious in addressing them, division is not the way to go," de Guzman said.

The former leather glove factory worker also said he is open to studying The Hague Joint Declaration as the framework of the peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines.

He also said he is open to strengthening the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees that should provide protection to negotiators, consultants, resource persons and staff involved in the peace process.

'CPP, NPA and NDFP are not terrorists'

De Guzman said he does not consider the CPP, the NPA and the NDFP as terrorists, adding it is better instead to address their demands through negotiations.

"We should begin with an honest-to-goodness recognition they are not terrorists. We should acknowledge that their issues are legitimate," he said.

The labor leader added that peace negotiations with the NDFP will be easier because he and running mate Walden Bello are clear on their belief the revolutionaries have legitimate reasons to fight.

"It is not like they saw Fernando Poe Jr. or Lito Lapid movies and developed a desire to take up arms. They are not that narrow-minded," he said.

He cited his own experience as a full-time labor rights activist for 36 years who has been the victim of threats and harassments from the police and military.

"It is not easy to attend rallies and hold strikes in workplaces. It is hot. It is not easy to negotiate, especially when the police are there. You may pee your pants from terror," he said.

The revolutionaries are forced by their situation and conviction that injustices must be fought with arms, he said.

Fighter for social and economic reforms

De Guzman said he is the first presidential candidate to have come from a real marginalized sector, unlike his rivals who are billionaires, are popular and representatives of the elite.

If elected, the candidate said his administration will focus on basic social services and ensure food, education, water, electricity, health, among others.

"We will develop the countryside, improve farmers' livelihoods. We will protect the fisher folk and animal-raisers. We will revive the manufacturing sector and not rely solely on importation. We will not solve poverty with neoliberal economic policies," he said.

De Guzman said he will immediately do away with unfair trade agreements such as the World Trade Organization, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and others that keep the country import-dependent and export-oriented.

De Guzman said his candidacy is about overturning the social system that makes rich people richer and the poor poorer.

"The government enacted and implemented laws that put social services in the hands of capitalists with the promise that once they have made more money, the benefits will trickle down to the masses. It did not happen," he said.

Joma says Leody is the best candidate

Jose Maria Sison, National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) chief political consultant, said Leody de Guzman is the best among the candidates in the May 2022 presidential elections.

In a tweet on Thursday, March 3, Sison praised de Guzman's candidacy and said he wishes the labor leader the best.

"Despite his lack of financial resources, he is the best of the presidential candidates in the 2022 elections," Sison wrote on his Twitter account.

"Whatever is the outcome of his electoral campaign, he advances the just cause of the Filipino people in the struggle for national and social liberation," one of the country's most prominent political personalities added.

Sison was reacting to de Guzman's answer to a media interview on what he thinks of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) co-founder who had been labelled as so-called terrorist by the Philippine government.

"I believe he is a revolutionary, not a terrorist," de Guzman told One PH program "'Wag Po!" on Tuesday evening.

"If the issue is that he's called a terrorist, not for me. My view of him is that Joma Sison is a revolutionary individual," the candidate added.

Leody de Guzman is a principled and courageous political leader from the working class. He is the best of the presidential candidates in the 2022 elections. Whatever is the outcome of his electoral campaign, he advances the just cause of the Filipino people. <https://t.co/OkD1GvcZUo>

— Jose Maria Sison (@JoseMariaSison) [March 2, 2022](#)

Sison thanked de Guzman for defending him against the "false charge of terrorism."

"For making his statement below, he is a principled and courageous political leader from the working class," Sison said.

De Guzman is the presidential candidate most open to resuming formal peace negotiations with the NDFP, saying he had been espousing many of the same advocacies as those who were forced by social injustices to take up arms.

He also repeatedly said he does not consider the CPP, the New People's Army and the NDFP as terrorist organizations.

"We should begin with an honest-to-goodness recognition they are not terrorists. We should acknowledge that their issues are legitimate," he said.

If elected, de Guzman said his administration shall try to overturn the social system that makes rich people richer and the poor poorer.

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