

Philippines: Moro peace group slams AFP aerial assault in Lanao Sur

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CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY, Philippines — A group of Maranao peace advocates criticize the military's aerial bombing in Lanao del Sur Monday and doubts their claims that the ISIS-Maute group are present in that area.

Military reports said they launched an aerial assault targeting armed insurgents in Barangay Rangayan, Maguing town in Lanao del Sur, around 38 kilometers from Marawi, around 2 am on Monday.

The group Moro Consensus Group questioned the operation as it has forced civilians in the community to evacuate.

"What is the standard operating procedure in employing aerial bombardments, even if its (sic) legitimate operation?" asks the groups chairperson Drieza Lininding in his Facebook post Tuesday.

He questioned if the military has confirmed its claim that "lawless elements" were present in the area or if there was an ongoing firefight in the said village prompting the state forces to launch an air attack.

"Why is it that the community itself didn't know of it? Is that now the new normal - bomb before confirming?" Lininding said.

In its Facebook page, the Army's 103rd Infantry Brigade said troops conducted the operations with the local police against an armed group believed to be aligned with the Islamic State in the hinterland of Maguing.

"Upon reaching on site of the target, close air support was given to protect troops from enemy anti-personnel mines," the brigade said.

The Army's 1st Infantry Division said the soldiers encountered around 60 armed men belonging to the Dawlah Islamiya-Maute Group at the hideout of the insurgents led by Abu Zacharia and DI-Hassan Group Maguindanao, which they claim had been conducting its training and planning.

They claimed two of the armed men were killed and two high-powered firearms were recovered, while a government soldier was also killed in the gunfight.

Lininding said residents were frightened due to the loud sound from the bomb that was dropped that even people in Marawi City and neighboring towns have heard it.

"We hope this were not test fires to try the new weaponries of the Armed Forces of the Philippines," he said.

“Is this another form of terrorizing the People of Lanao Del Sur because of the public clamor regarding the killing incident in MSU/Brgy. Banga where an army engineer detachment is involved?” Lininding said.

Lininding was referring to a local resident who was shot by soldiers from the 500th Combat Engineering Battalion in Barangay Cabigan in Marawi on Feb. 27, 2022.

The Moro Consensus Group is a group of Moro peace activists, and is one of the groups raising concerns on the impact of the government’s Marawi Siege.

The military operations was also questioned by the Bangsamoro Government in its statement on Wednesday.

Bangsamoro Chief Minister Ahod Ebrahim said lives were lost and houses were destroyed.

They remind the government of their ceasefire agreement and hope to operationalize their joint security mechanisms such Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), International Monitoring Team (IMT) and Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) to come out with “positive outcomes” to the situation.

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