

Press Statement

Stop the War in Sulu, Halt State Terrorism, Implement the 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement and Earnestly Pursue Peace Negotiations with the MILF

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Press Statement issued by the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM), April 5, 2005, on the situation in Mindanao (Philippines).

The Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM), a grassroots, tri-people, multi-sectoral coalition/alliance for peace in Mindanao is alarmed and deeply disturbed by the ongoing war in Sulu that has displaced around 50,000 civilians, destroyed properties and resulted in the loss of precious human lives both civilians and combatants.

The MPPM Council of Peoples' Representatives meeting on March 30 to April 1, 2005 at Sultan Kudarat Polytechnic State College (SKPSC), Lutayan Campus in Sultan Kudarat joins the chorus of appeals for the immediate cessation of hostilities in Sulu. We believe that nothing good will ever come out of this bloody conflict. We also think that the refusal of the Government to heed the growing massive appeal to stop the war in Sulu can escalate the war and might lead to its spread not only in Sulu but in the main island of Mindanao. This, in turn, can affect the ongoing peace talks between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The war in Sulu began on February 7, 2005 as a retaliation reportedly by Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) guerillas against alleged military abuses notably the Kapuk Punggol massacre of a Bangsamoro family killing four of its members in the municipality of Maimbung, Sulu. The reaction, however, of the Government and the Military is a case of an overkill. We understand that at least four (4) Marine Battalions of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) are now deployed in the small island-province of Sulu to reinforce the troops already present in the area. The current massive military operation, without taking into consideration the safety and welfare of civilians caught in the crossfire, against a minute force employing land, naval and air bombardment coupled by the obstinate refusal of the government to heed the growing clamor for a ceasefire is akin to using terror tactics on the part of the Government of the Republic Philippines (GRP). This makes the GRP no different from any terrorist group. THIS IS STATE TERRORISM, PURE AND SIMPLE.

MPPM also denounces the current campaign against terrorism in the Philippines characterized by the indiscriminate labeling and arrests of Muslims base on the mere suspicion of being terrorists. A concrete manifestation was an incident last April 1, 2005 wherein two Muslim men were picked-up by the Task Force Tugis under Col. Henry Lomboy, 6th Infantry Division, Philippine Army in Cotabato City onboard the Nora Shipping Lines on the suspicion that terrorists were onboard the said boat. The operatives did not even inform the management of the shipping lines that they were conducting

the operations and subjected the passengers to searches.

We support the State's campaign against terrorism but not at the expense of human rights and the rule of law. We are against all forms of terrorism, whether committed by ordinary criminals, revolutionaries or by the State such as the effect of the GRP's total war policy in Mindanao wherein the civilian population heavily took the brunt of said policy. Further, we pray that the authorities should not be quick to label anyone or any group as terrorists. Let us not be blinded by the US hegemonic leadership in the global war against terror that is a guise to dominate and influence small and weak countries including the Philippines. We perceive that the current anti-terrorism policy of the Philippine Government is part of the United States' global agenda to counter the rising influence and power of Islam which is seen as the new enemy of US hegemonic interests.

In view of the foregoing, we earnestly call on the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to:

1. Declare a unilateral ceasefire in Sulu and let Congress officially investigate the causes of the renewed fighting in Sulu as well as the unresolved conflict in Mindanao as a whole;
2. Reexamine its current war on terrorism policy and to refrain from labeling Muslims or any other group for that matter as the perceived terrorists;
3. Implement the provisions of the 1996 Peace Agreement between the GRP and the MNLF as a manifestation of its sincerity to pursue "just peace" in Mindanao; and
4. Pursue more vigorously the current peace negotiations with the MILF.

April 5, 2005

ALVARO O. SENTURIAS, JR.
Chairperson, MPPM
Midsayap, Cotabato
CP#: 09205619270

AMABELLA L. CARUMBA
Secretary General, MPPM
Iligan City
CP#: 09205065235

The Council of Peoples' Representatives (CPR)

Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM)