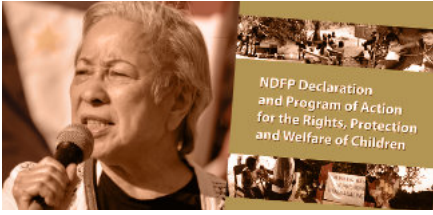


IN FOCUS: The NDFP's Special Office for the Protection of Children | page 4



On Building the People's Democratic Government | page 11



From Martial Law to Marcos Jr.: Defeat instruments of state terror, reject the Marcos-Duterte regime | page 19



More inside

LIBERATION

INTERNATIONAL

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2023



Editorial | page 2

**ADVANCE THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC
REVOLUTION AMID US IMPERIALISM'S
STRATEGIC DECLINE**

Advance the National Democratic Revolution amid US imperialism's strategic decline

In connivance with the current Marcos Jr. regime, the United States is set to build at least four additional military bases and facilities in the Philippines. True to its puppet form, Marcos Jr. wholeheartedly welcomed US demands in accordance with the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) including a ridiculous deadline to defeat the revolutionary armed movement within his term. On the one hand, the push to transform the Philippines into a US military outpost forms part of US preparations for war against China. But in the grander scheme of things, heightened military tensions in the region are symptomatic of US imperialism's strategic decline.

From the late 1960s onwards, a convergence of forces started to dramatically work against the United States, effectively challenging its imperialist hegemony. Its economy was being overheated by military production in its war of aggression in Vietnam which did not result in ultimate gains for the country. The phenomenon of stagflation

emerged alongside the rise of other capitalist countries which have become imperialist competitors.

US imperialism further decelerated in the 1970s when the Soviet Union caught up on war spending and achieved overall military parity. With capitalist restoration engineered by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1980s, China abandoned the socialist centralized planned economy and developed the market according to 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' eventually becoming the second largest economy in the world which put a further dent to US monopoly. The rise of China, Russia and other capitalist countries heralded the emergence of multipolarity in geopolitics and signaled the strategic decline of US imperialism.

In a multipolar world order, the US is on the offensive for self-preservation of its hegemonic global control of imperialism under severe crisis of overproduction and diminishing super profits. Social crisis and unrest



intensify along with political crisis and conflict. In the end, to preserve its financial-economic control of the world's economy, US imperialism is bound to utilize its machineries for war – by engaging in war and warmongering as in the case of the US-NATO war against Russia and its provocations in the South China Sea.

But arguably more important than the shifting of geopolitical tectonic plates, the revolutionary movements in the exploited countries of the world play an even more vital role in changing the balance of strength between the forces of anti-imperialism and imperialism in the entire world. They have the potential to overthrow pro-imperialist reactionary states and build new states that are completely independent; or push the existing states to become more politically independent of US imperialism and press for a new international economic order.

The ongoing armed revolutionary struggle in the Philippines led by the Communist Party of the Philippines therefore warps the US design. At the same time, the objective conditions of multiple social and economic crises are pushing the Filipino toiling masses to take up arms. These conditions are exceedingly favorable for the advance of anti-imperialist and democratic mass struggles. They arise as a result of the intensifying major contradictions in the world capitalist system. Once more they lay the ground for great disorder and turbulence in this system and the resurgence of the world proletarian socialist revolution.

Confounded by the rapidly worsening crisis of their system as a result of the unraveling of a multipolar world, the traditional and new imperialist powers are prone to seek solutions through intensified economic plunder and predation, fascism and wars of aggression. The people have no choice but to fight back with all vigor. 🚩

IN THIS ISSUE

Advance the National Democratic Revolution amid US imperialism's strategic decline
Page 2

IN FOCUS: The NDFP's Special Office for the Protection of Children
Page 4

Duterte and other war criminals face international prosecution at the ICC
Page 8

Ericson Acosta: His weapon was his pen
Page 9

On Building the People's Democratic Government
Page 11

Dealing with urgent economic issues is the concern not only of CASER but of the entire national democratic mass movement
Page 14

Marcos Jr.'s National Security Policy: Christmas Wishlist of Fascist Dictators and Peace Saboteurs
Page 17

From Martial Law to Marcos Jr.: Defeat instruments of state terror, dismantle the NTF-ELCAC, reject the Marcos-Duterte regime
Page 19

Africa's shifting geopolitical landscape
Page 21

POINTBLANK!
Page 23

Poetry: Prometheus Unbound
Page 24

LIBERATION INTERNATIONAL

The NDFP is the revolutionary united front organization of the Filipino people fighting for national freedom and for the democratic rights of the people. Established on April 24, 1975, the NDFP seeks to develop and coordinate all progressive classes, sectors and forces in the Filipino people's struggle to end the rule of US imperialism and its local allies, and attain national and social liberation.

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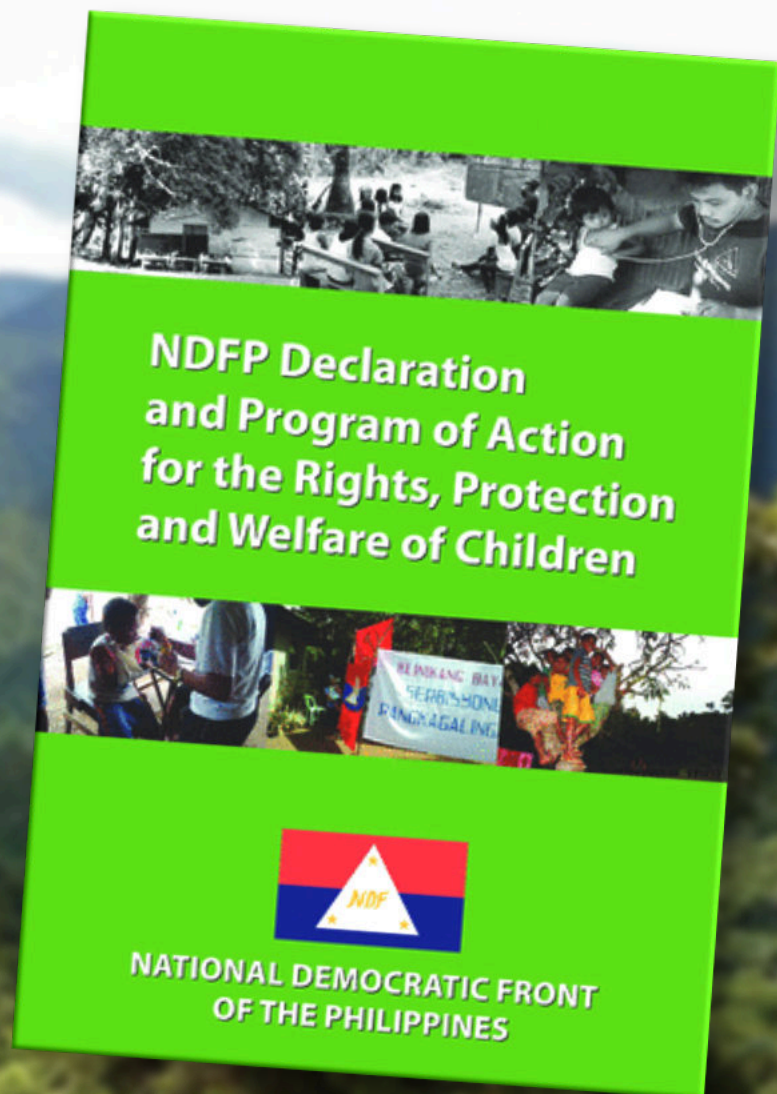
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IN FOCUS:

The NDFP's Special Office for the Protection of Children

By Raya Andres - Montanosa

The National Democratic Front of the Philippines Special Office for the Protection of Children (NDFP SOPC) has documented at least eight cases of minors killed since Marcos Jr. came to power in July last year. Prompted by the recent spate of child murders perpetrated by the GRP (Government of the Republic of the Philippines), we sat down with Ka (Comrade) Coni Ledesma, Chairperson of the SOPC to discuss the work they do, its history, and the NDFP's strict policy against child soldiers.





The NDFP's adherence to international humanitarian law

As a national liberation organization and movement committed to uphold the interests of the Filipino people against foreign domination and local oppression, the NDFP has always adhered to the principle of according full respect for innocent human life in the conduct of its armed struggle. In fact, the NDFP has reinforced this commitment by publicly declaring its voluntary adherence to the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law in general and has taken further concrete steps to ensure that its forces operating throughout the country observe these conventions.

As early as 1988 ahead of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA) categorically adopted the policy prohibiting the recruitment of children below the age of 18 years as regular members or armed fighters of combat units of the NPA. This was again reflected in the 1999 *Memorandum on the Minimum Age Requirement for NPA Fighters* which outlined the revolutionary movement's recognition of the special rights of children in the context of armed conflict.

On 15 August 1991, the NDFP National Council formally declared its adherence to international humanitarian law with particular attention to Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions relating to the protection of victims in armed conflict that includes Article 4 on the fundamental guarantees provided for children. On 5 July 1996, the NDFP officially deposited its *Declaration of Undertaking to Apply the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Protocol I of 1977* to the Swiss Federal Council and to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) which reiterated the CPP-NPA-NDF's compliance to international humanitarian law governing the rules of war. This was once again reiterated in the landmark 1998 Comprehensive Agreement on

Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHIRHL) between the GRP and the NDFP.

These documents formed the basis for the *NDFP Declaration and Program of Action for the Rights, Protection and Welfare of Children* released on 24 April 2012. This program of action initiated the process of setting up the SOPC, marking a "milestone achievement of the revolutionary movement," shared Ka Coni.

"With the goal to bring attention to the situation of children, the NDFP, together with a group of lawyers and legal experts belonging to International Legal Assistance Team (ILAT), carefully crafted this significant document, where one of its programs is to set up the SOPC", Ka Coni explains.

Ka Coni further shares, "The SOPC is under the human rights desk of the NDFP. It is part of the peace talks when the talks are ongoing. But even without the talks, the office continues to function."

Monitoring the situation of children in armed conflict

One of the main functions of the SOPC is the monitoring of the situation of children in the conduct of the armed revolution especially in the countryside. The SOPC regularly produces reports and research on the situation of children in the Philippines. In 2022, the SOPC in cooperation with the CPP's official publication *Ang Bayan* published "The Dirty War on Children" – a two-year report on the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippine National Police's (PNP) grave violations of children's rights under international humanitarian law.

"We are currently researching the life situation of children in the countryside. Likewise, we are busy preparing our report on the violation of children's rights under the last two years of Duterte regime and the current Marcos II regime," Ka Coni explains.

She further notes recent cases of child rights violations including “the brutality inflicted on baby River, the three-month old baby of Reina Nasino of former political prisoner, and victim of illegal arrest and trumped-up charges, who died after they were forcibly separated.”

“There are also the cases of baby Rhea and baby Marx whose parents are members of the NPA. These babies—a newborn and a two-month-old—were illegally taken and held hostage by the military to force their parents to surrender. While baby Rhea is now safe with her relatives, baby Marx is still with the DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development) under the tight surveillance of the military for two years already,” Ka Coni explains.

When asked about the current situation of children in the Philippines, Ka Coni responds, “As with the rest of the large majority of the Filipino people, children are living in poverty. Many are forced to work to survive, infringing upon their right to develop as they enjoy their childhood. In the entire country, their right to education is given scant importance. They lack classrooms and proper school facilities like libraries and laboratories. Their families are burdened with prohibitive school fees.

Health-wise, so many get sick and they don’t get the healthcare they need. There is evidently no significant concern given to uphold the rights and welfare of children.”

In contrast, Coni shares how the People’s Democratic Government (PDG) is providing services to support children and their families in the countryside: “Where there are Organs of Political Power, they have programs for education, health, hygiene, nutrition, gardening, herbal medicines, child protection units, psycho-social support and training especially for trauma, leadership training, arts, music, sports and defence – the basic things in life that the Manila government neglects and fails to provide.

“The children are very much involved in these programs. For example, the education program – has literacy classes, which are not only for children but also for adults who cannot read and write. The schools are set up wherever possible. They have two hundred schools but the reactionary armed forces either burned down or occupied their schools in clear violation of international humanitarian law.”

In the course of monitoring violations of children’s rights since 2012, the SOPC has established relations with international bodies such as UNICEF and the ICRC.

“We have relations with UNICEF. Since the time of the Joint Secretariat of the Joint Monitoring Committee (JS-JMC), the UNICEF would request for a report on the violations of children’s rights by GRP forces every three months. So, we would always give [reports] because complaints were coming in [through the JMC],” added Ka Coni.

Ka Coni further recalls: “when the JMC office was closed, UNICEF continued to ask for reports. In fact, I recently just had correspondence with them [UNICEF]. We’re arranging [to have] a Zoom meeting because instead of them relating with the JS-JMC, they now have to relate directly with the SOPC.”

“We also have regular contact with ICRC. For example, we referred to them the case of baby Marx. The family was informed, and they approached ICRC. There are other cases like that. When we know about such cases, we inform ICRC that the family will contact them, and then they help the family,” Ka Coni elaborates.

The NDFP’s strict policy: No child soldiers

In the past decade, malicious elements from the GRP’s propaganda machinery together with US official agencies and imperialist-funded nongovernmental organizations have thrown numerous allegations against the NDFP for supposedly condoning the recruitment of children to the NPA. Time and again the NDFP has declared that the policy and the law of the People’s Democratic Government (PDG) prohibit the NPA from recruiting children below the age of 18 to serve as combatants.

In the Declaration and Program and Action for the Rights, Protection and Welfare of Children, the NDFP made sure to clearly stipulate in Section 1, under Article III Children in Relation to War the revolutionary movement’s policy on recruitment to the NPA. The said section states: “The NDFP adheres to the decision of the Political Bureau of the CPP’s Central Committee in 1988 stipulating that the New People’s Army may recruit only persons who are 18 years old and older as armed fighters for its combat units.”

According to Ka Coni, the NDFP’s policy can be considered more advanced given that the minimum age of recruitment is at 18 whereas the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the UN CRC permits the recruitment of children 15 years and above as soldiers.

“We were far-ahead of the UN saying the minimum age of recruitment should be 18 years old. And yet,

we are still being accused of recruiting child soldiers. There has been regular monitoring of the implementation of that policy [in the NPA].”

Ka Coni continues, “Thus, the NDFP has a very strict position—no child soldiers.”

Reactionary propaganda however relies on the definition of a so-called child soldier as anyone below 18 years of age, who may simply be in a community under attack by the armed forces of the reactionary state and who even if without arms may be misrepresented as ‘combatants’ for allegedly serving as lookouts, messengers or cooks of the NPA. “The UN,” Ka Coni shares, “follows the Paris principle, which states that children, who are living in areas where the NPA camps are present, are already part of the armed conflict, and can therefore be considered as child soldiers. This definition is clearly prejudicial against liberation movements and others waging armed struggle. They were pressing the NDFP to sign an action program with them, and if the NDFP were to do this, the NDFP would not be put on the list of organisations that have child soldiers.”

The so-called Paris Principles were adopted in 2007 at a UNICEF-organized conference and was built on a set of recommendations by imperialist-funded nongovernmental organizations in 1997. The Paris Principles as an instrument, is primarily an imperialist creation meant to dilute the Geneva Conventions’ guidance in the distinction between combatants and non-combatants. By defining child soldiers as anyone below 18 years of age associated with an armed group in any capacity including “as cooks, porters, messengers, spies,” the Paris Principles dangerously blurs the definition of combatants under international humanitarian law and effectively mislabels children as legitimate targets of armed conflict.

In addition, this UNICEF instrument is highly prejudicial to national liberation movements that exert efforts to protect the rights not just of armed combatants but of entire communities who engage in self-defence against reactionary armed forces. By broadening the definition of child soldiers, it provides the reactionary military, police, and the counterrevolutionary state as a whole the license to consider children in communities fair game for armed assault.

More attention needed on the situation of children

“We continue our work because we feel that it is an important aspect of the revolution to give attention to the children, and to work for their rights, protection, and welfare because they are the

next generation. When they grow up in areas where the People’s Democratic Government exists, the children learn to know what childhood should be. In the process of developing the economic and political life of the area, they also come to know what it means to have their rights respected,” Ka Coni shares.

The SOPC is committed to strengthen its work on monitoring the situation of children in the armed revolution as well as to promoting their rights and welfare. At the same time, in terms of people’s support, Ka Coni concludes, “If they know of any violation of children’s rights, they should report it to the NDFP through its website or the website of PRWC (Philippine Revolution Web Central). These are accessible websites. The more information we get, the better.”

“There is just not enough attention in the Philippines to monitoring and protection of children’s rights yet. That is what I would wish, more attention to the situation of Filipino children,” ended Ka Coni. 📌



Ka Coni Ledesma, Chairperson of the NDFP Special Office for the Protection of Children (SPOC).

Duterte and other war criminals face international prosecution at the ICC

By Jose Emilio Jacinto III

That the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague has pushed for the prosecution of the case(s) filed against former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte and his cohorts for mass murder and war crimes, is strong evidence of the serious concern of the international community on the brutal reign of impunity and state terror in the Philippines.

A 'mass murder' complaint and crimes against humanity case were filed against Duterte before the International Criminal Court in The Hague on 24 April 2017 by a Filipino lawyer who accused Duterte of masterminding the killings of suspected drug users and dealers.

In evaluating the complaint, the ICC said that the so-called 'war on drugs' was not a legitimate law enforcement program, and the killings were neither legitimate nor mere excesses in otherwise legitimate operations. These widespread and systematic attacks against the civilians took place in furtherance of a state policy, they emphasized.

Though facing many stumbling blocks, the ICC investigation serves as a reminder that impunity cannot persist indefinitely, and that those who commit crimes against the people must and will eventually face accountability.

This also represents a glimmer of hope for the thousands of victims and their families to see justice. More than one thousand families have joined the complaints filed at the ICC. The complaint filed at the ICC has named Duterte, his former chief of police, Ronald dela Rosa, Duterte bodyguard Bong Go, and several other former Duterte officials and police officers and called for investigation.

Corrupt and elite politics in the Philippines, together with its "kangaroo courts", serve to protect the rich, powerful, corrupt and fascist.

The ICC has rejected desperate attempts, first by the Duterte fascist regime, when it was still in power, and later by the Marcos Jr. regime, to lodge obstacles and block the investigation.

The ICC has decided to proceed with its investigation and prosecution of the war crimes of Duterte after the rotten and dysfunctional justice system in the Philippines has failed to show that it is able to prosecute those who actually executed the orders of Duterte and his cohorts. More than 30,000 drug suspects, mostly users and small-time pushers, majority of whom came from very poor families and communities, were killed. A number of them were children, women and minors.

Duterte's drug war was a cover for the former president to corner the drug trade, making himself the biggest drug lord who used the drug war to blackmail his political opponents, silence his critics, buy off politicians to kowtow to his bloody rule, and haul the booty.

Deathly scared of losing its political alliance with Duterte and his cohorts and of the very possible prospect of facing similar war crimes, the condemnation of the international community, and of history repeating itself with reminders of the humiliating downfall of US-Marcos Sr. fascist dictatorship in 1986, the US-Marcos Jr. fascist regime is doing all it can to prevent the ICC from doing its work, to defend and protect Duterte and his cohorts and to preserve its filthy political survival. 🚫

He was never conflicted. He knew where he stood in this fight. He was an active participant in the people's national democratic revolution's quest for justice, freedom and democracy and the building of a better social system. He fought for the interest of the exploited and the oppressed. He was firm in his principles. His weapon was his pen, his bullets were his words. They were pointed and sharp. He wrote for the exploited and oppressed. He knew that in their millions they are a force to be reckoned with.

He is Ericson Acosta. The masses' beloved cultural worker whose enthusiasm to bring the stories of the Filipino people's struggle was inexhaustible. Fingers blackened by ink and paint. Colorful burst of art manifesting the people's heroic war. Blank paper suddenly filled with prose, lyrics, poetry. The revolution was his canvas, his landscape.

Thus, the demonic fascists were afraid. They know how powerful the force is when awakened. It has toppled kings, dictators, pretenders. They must silence him. The fascist US-Duterte regime deemed he should cease to exist. And so, he suffered the same fate as his beloved wife and comrade, Kerima Tariman, tortured and killed by soldiers of the reactionary state.

Comrade Ericson was captured alive, tortured then stabbed and hacked to death by elements of the 94th and 47th Infantry Battalion of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in Barangay Camansi, Kabankalan, Negros Occidental on November 30, 2022.

The fascist AFP murdered a poet, an artist, writer, singer, composer, stage play performer, scriptwriter,

peasant organizer, teacher, political prisoner, and narrator of people's stories of the enemy's greed and cruelty, of a people rising up, of bravery and courage, self-sacrifice, aspiration and triumph.

Comrade Ericson was a people's warrior. His arenas of struggle were the environs of school as a student leader, the picket lines as a labor organizer, the stage as a cultural performer and the canvas as historian of people's art. Even the enemy's prison became an arena for his endeavor to trumpet the Filipino people's rich revolutionary cultural heritage. And so was the peace negotiating table.

His experience with the peasant masses of Eastern Visayas, Bicol and Central Luzon that brought life to his prose and his art made him an advocate for the peasants' clamor for land and for genuine agrarian reform and develop within him deep insight and knowledge on the peasant struggle. Thus, he became a consultant of the NDFP for negotiations with the GRP on the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms or CASER.

Comrade Ericson was literary editor (1993-1995) of The Philippine Collegian of the University of the Philippines-Diliman. He was organizer of different organizations and associations such as STAND UP (Student Alliance for National Democracy – University of the Philippines), UMA (Ugnayan ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura), Alay Sining, CAP (Concerned Artist of the Philippines), and Anakpawis Partylist.

Comrade Ericson also excelled not only in cultural work but also in ideological and political work. According to Prof. Jose Maria Sison in his tribute to Comrade Ericson: "...He chose to focus on education

Ericson Acosta: his weapon was his pen

By Ana Rosario



and cultural work, to wield art as a weapon and to write poetry even while doing social investigation and mass work. With his academic training in political science and profound interest in culture, art and poetry, he found it of the highest value to study the Marxist theory and practice in art and literature in order to better serve the Filipino people in their new democratic revolution with a socialist perspective.

...He was fully committed to the Filipino people's new democratic revolution. He was determined to contribute his best to the national and social liberation of his people from the clutches of the semicolonial and semifeudal system, especially from

such traitors, butchers and plunderers as the Marcoses and Dutertes....”

No matter how the AFP and the NTF-ELCAC charlatans tried to malign Comrade Ericson, how they slander people and organizations that paid him tributes and testimonies—they have failed.

For Comrade Ericson will not be silenced. His works proclaim the people's heroic struggle against the oppressors and exploiters that enslaved them and stunt their genuine development. Through his book of poetry “Mula Tarima Hanggang at Iba Pang Tula at Awit” they will continue to reverberate. 📖

AND SO YOUR POETRY MUST

And so your poetry must
be wary you say
of its claims
lest you waive art
to us millions unworthy
of taste and manner
lest you be christened
peddler of images
alien in form
pagan in content
lest your license
be forfeited
your ear for resonance
your feel for the sublime.

And so while you summon
the litany of worlds
your own words fashion
you annul my existence
and those of millions
whose narratives you say
betray poetic tone
make burlesque of beauty
and thus like scarecrows
set even the most heretic
muses scurrying back
to their sanctum of rules.

And so in recollecting
your epiphanies
you elude the void
which is my hunger
the famine of millions
the empty bowl of history.

And so with your eulogies
to passion
your rage against time
your pledge with life's gift
you lull the birth of noise
of revenge
of bloodshow
that shall feed millions
make full of history
and perhaps even poetry

– Ericson Acosta, 1994



On Building the People's Democratic Government

An interview with Marco Valbuena, Chief Information Officer of the Communist Party of the Philippines

By Ricardo Lozano and Raya Andres - Montanosa

Since the re-establishment of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) on 26 December 1968, the concept of a People's Democratic Government (PDG) and the eventual creation of the People's Democratic Republic of the Philippines (PDRP) has always been a clear objective of the national democratic revolution.

In October 1972, the CPP issued the Guide to the Establishment of the People's Democratic Government which outlined the basic principles and structures of people's governance that would eventually form the PDG. One is also advised to read this document alongside the Revolutionary Guide to Land Reform which was released in 1971 by the CPP Central Committee.

But while the documents provide an aspirational overview of what the PDG could look like upon the victory of the national democratic revolution, the New People's Army (NPA) led by the CPP is already constructing the basic building blocks of the PDG in the countryside – in the form of local organs of political power. To learn more about the local organs of political power and ongoing efforts of the CPP-NPA-NDF to build the PDG, we interviewed Marco Valbuena, Chief Information Officer of the CPP.

The PDG as the nucleus of the People's Democratic Republic of the Philippines

When asked to define the PDG, Marco states that “the People's Democratic Government is the emerging state representing the interests of workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie and all democratic classes and sectors in the Philippines. It can be considered a united front government under the leadership of the

working class.” According to the CPP, the basic unit of the PDG is the Barrio People's Government which can take the form of the Barrio Revolutionary Committees (BRCs) in its rudimentary form. The PDG in turn is the nucleus of what would become the People's Democratic Republic of the Philippines (PDRP).

Marco shares that the PDG “is presently in the embryonic stage taking the form of BRCs.” BRCs are formed by calling for barrio general assemblies which then elect officials to lead the functions of the PDG. These local organs of political power are currently being formed in thousands of villages in the revolutionary areas where the NPA operates under the leadership of the CPP.

The formation of BRCs in the countryside however requires a certain level of political development and capacity for self-defense. According to Marco, “the PDG, specifically the BRCs, are established on the basis of the organized strength of the masses. A village general assembly can be convened when majority of the people are organized in peasant associations, mass organizations of youth, women, and children, as well as cultural groups.” It is also important to note that BRCs can only exist in areas where agrarian revolution has reached sufficient achievements in line with the requirements set out in the Revolutionary Guide for Land Reform. Much of this depends on efforts to broaden and deepen the revolutionary mass bases in the countryside through waging agrarian revolution and developing guerilla warfare which is primarily carried out by the NPA.

In guerilla zones where BRCs exist, social services are implemented by BRC sub-committees responsible for economic production, health, education, culture, and defense. Within its capacity, and in coordination with local authorities of the Party and New People's Army, the PDGs (BRCs) carry out economic, health, education and other services and mass campaigns. Because these are planned out by the people themselves, these programs address the specific needs in their villages.

Consistent with the NDFP's 12-point program and the CPP's program for the people's democratic government, the PDG implements basic programs for the upliftment of women and children and the general improvement of community health. The care for geriatric and disabled people are part of the orientation of revolutionary health workers. Peasant associations can address the specific needs (economic support) of single parents, as well as households with disabled people, and martyrs or veterans of the people's war.

"The welfare of the LGBTQ community is also addressed based on recognition of their status as a gender minority. There are instances when people's organizations conduct educational discussions to raise their awareness and consciousness about the oppression and aspirations of the LGBTQ community, to address issues of discrimination and correct misconceptions," Marco added.

Co-existence of PDG and GRP reflects the 'fluid nature of the people's war'

"The PDG or BRCs invariably exist alongside the barangay units of the reactionary government," Marco explains. Indeed, in many areas in the countryside, barrio officials are either members of the BRC themselves or serve as conduits through which the policies of the BRC are carried out. Marco gives an example in the case of one BRC's crop sharing policy which was implemented through a resolution issued by the barangay (basic government unit of the GRP).

In either case, the PDG operates in a clandestine manner in the current stage of the revolution. This is necessary to maintain secrecy and avoid attracting enemy reprisals. "This is a reflection of the fluid nature of the people's war in the country in which there are no well-defined front and rear, and no definite borders between revolutionary areas and reactionary areas," Marco adds.

According to Marco, "the New People's Army can enter and operate at will in areas where the reactionary government exist, in the same way that the Armed Forces of the Philippines can enter and operate in revolutionary areas."

At this point, the question of what happens to PDGs during intensive military operations becomes important to which Marco answers: "Through its committee on defense, the village PDG plans out the defense of communities by mobilizing the people, their militia units and self-defense corps, in coordination with territorial units of the New People's Army. It secures the officers of the BRC and the structures of the village people's government, who are targets of enemy counterinsurgency operations."

Marco also shared how PDGs can coordinate with adjacent village PDGs to carry out "widespread guerilla warfare by mobilizing the entire population in order to mount tactical offensives using all possible weapons to fight and drive away the enemy from their communities." At the same time, the PDGs have demonstrated their capacity to employ revolutionary dual tactics "by asserting their rights under the reactionary laws, and mounting mass actions to expose, denounce and put to task the enemy for their abuses and unlawful actions."

The difference between the PDG and the GRP is 'like night and day'

"The difference between the PDG and the current reactionary government (the Government of the Republic of the Philippines or GRP) is like night and day," states Marco. The PDG represents the democratic rule of the toiling masses which is the complete opposite of how the GRP operates as "a dictatorship of the few exploiting classes" according to Marco.

To emphasize this difference, Marco explains that "under the PDG, the people exercise direct democracy and participate in the daily affairs of the state; while under the GRP, people's participation is limited to electing ruling classes politicians in periodic pseudo-democratic elections. The armed forces of the GRP aim their weapons against the people, while under the PDG, weapons are in the people's hands and used to defend their interests."

Further to Marco's point, the GRP under the current illegitimate president Marcos Jr. professes subservience to US imperialist interests while serving the demands of big landlords, bourgeois compradors and bureaucrat capitalists. By way of example, the GRP has implemented a series of bogus land reforms from P.D. 27 to CARP meant to obscure their disinterest to pursue genuine land distribution. In contrast, the PDG "carries out land reform to address the main democratic demand of the majority of the Filipino people," Marco emphasized.

Another point of departure between the reactionary GRP and the PDG is on the issue of corruption. The

current Marcos-Duterte administration has recently been embroiled in a series of big corruption scandals from the railroading of the Maharlika Investment Fund (a.k.a. the motherlode of Marcos family corruption) and Sara Duterte's confidential fund fiasco. In both instances, their use of the government machinery to rake profit from people's money has been clearly exposed while they roam unscathed with impunity.

When asked how the PDG deals with ill-practices in daily governance, Marco shares that "supervision by the people is the key element." Marco adds how "people's assemblies which elect officials of the BRC to four-year terms have the power to cut short the term or replace their officials, or have their term extended. Those officials who are found to have used public resources for personal gain or have engaged in corrupt practices or other anti-people acts can be immediately removed from their positions, penalized or punished."

The daily operations of the PDG are realized through the mobilization of the broad masses of the people "whether in fighting a militarily superior enemy force or turning idle land into productive fields." Marco shares the process of how to inculcate a more progressive culture of democratic participation in governance compared to reactionary forms of government where citizens are considered as "passive" actors in the government. "The idea that the work of governance is the exclusive domain of officials must be unlearned and repudiated," Marco said.

Marco admits that "not everything is smooth" when it comes to teaching the people the practice of democratic governance especially considering how the people's government "is still engaged in war against the reactionary government." He explains however that "the people have already made great achievements whether in fighting the enemy through armed struggle, or in fighting poverty, disease, social ills through their collective efforts."

A clear example of this is how the PDGs in the form of BRCs responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Marco, "during the pandemic and oppressive lockdowns, BRCs launched production campaigns to plant vegetables and other food crops to ensure food availability to community households."

"Unlike programs of the reactionary government, programs carried out by the PDG are sustained because people themselves are empowered and shoulder the responsibility to carry the programs through," he added.

On revolutionary taxation

Revolutionary taxation has been the subject of much controversy in recent years as the GRP continues to throw its old-age media spins of "unlawful extortion" or "terrorist financing" activities. But in reality, the PDG is the representation of a belligerent people's government co-existing with the current reactionary state. Marco explains that "as a state, the PDG has the inherent right to collect taxes as a means of raising revenue to defray the costs of governance and public services."

The PDG raises revenues from the economic production of its mass bases, and from the business operations within the scope and territory of the revolutionary government. Big businesses owned by allies of the PDG or by big bourgeois compradors and other class enemies are taxed based on their net profits and/or income. This process is guided mainly by united front principles "meaning, taxpayers are urged to pay for their dues by way of recognizing the political authority of the PDG," according to Marco.

"The coercive use of arms is reserved as means of compelling business operations to follow environmental, labor, or other economic and social policies in areas where they are allowed to operate, or as way of penalizing them," he added.

On revolutionary justice

"The PDG upholds a system of justice that protects the interests of the broad masses of the people against exploiters and oppressors," says Marco. In the context of the Philippine countryside, the main source of injustice can be rooted in class contradictions between landlords and the peasant class.

Marco however explains that "the PDG differentiates conflicts or contradictions between the people and their enemies, and those contradictions among the people." In cases of small inter-personal or other forms of minor disputes among the people, the PDG implements a system of arbitration to address such conflicts which can be settled through mutual agreement. "In fact, majority of cases involving the dispensation of justice by the BRCs are mostly settled through arbitration, in contrast to full trials," Marco said.

The PDG implements revolutionary justice through a system of people's courts which spans from the national down to the barrio level. The people's court acts as the highest authority of justice at their level of governance by accepting complaints, carrying out investigations and holding trials or hearings. "For simpler cases a jury of at least three people can be

formed to hear a case. For more complicated cases, especially if the possible penalty is capital punishment, a jury of at least nine people must be formed. Hearings are to be held publicly," added Marco.

It is also important to note however that the armed agents of the reactionary state are also responsible for many forms of injustices as they commit atrocities against people's civil and political rights during counterinsurgency operations. They too are subject to penalties and punishments meted out by the PDG.

The success of the PDG rests on the support of the masses

The PDG operates on many levels but at its most basic form, it could not exist without the support of the masses. Specifically, "the success of the PDG

rests on the participation or mobilization of the peasant masses and national minorities, and its various strata and groups," explains Marco.

This is a crucial point in the advance of the people's democratic revolution and the continuing development of the PDG. By waging a broad antifeudal struggle, the peasant masses and national minorities can win over the middle and upper middle peasants and neutralize the rich peasants to isolate and defeat the power of the landed class.

Peasant associations must then consciously unite with other democratic forces under the leadership of proletarian revolutionary cadres. By linking the antifeudal struggle to the antifascist and antiimperialist fight, the advance of the people's democratic revolution is ensured. 🚩

Dealing with urgent economic issues is the concern not only of CASER but of the entire national democratic movement

LI: CASER says that the goal is "free land distribution as a means of achieving social justice." Further, CASER acknowledges that the "policy of expropriation with compensation shall be adopted to encourage landlords to invest in industrial and other productive enterprises." These points are consistent with the GRP Constitution, but what about its (GRP) law on the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program?

JL: CARP stipulates that the Land Bank of the Philippines shall compensate the landowner for landholdings designated for distribution to peasant beneficiaries. However, the beneficiaries shall also pay the Land Bank for the land awarded to them.

Under our Draft CASER, expropriated land shall be redistributed for free to all tillers, farmers, farmworkers, agricultural workers, fisherfolks, and all others willing and capable to till the land, with preference given to those who have been occupying the lands as beneficiaries, tenants and leaseholders as the goal of agrarian reform is free land distribution as a means of achieving social justice. The policy of

Hard talk interview with NDFP Peace Panel interim chair Julieta De Lima on CASER and the Peace Negotiations

By Jose Emilio Jacinto III

expropriation with compensation shall be adopted to encourage landlords to invest in industrial and other productive enterprises.

LI: Current statutes can address the CASER position of subjecting to confiscation "sullied landholdings or lands proven to have been acquired through illegal and fraudulent means...and through the use of violence". What about those landowners who decided to convert their landholdings for non-agricultural use?

JL: CASER stipulates that sullied landholdings or lands proven to have been acquired through illegal and fraudulent means including but not limited to land-grabbing, misrepresentation, circumvention of agrarian reform laws, distortion of the history of tenancy, and through the use of violence shall be subject to confiscation.

Conversion of agricultural lands devoted to food production is prohibited and that converted agricultural land but still suitable should be returned for agricultural use.

LI: What is behind the CASER position allowing the “sale, mortgage, or any other encumbrance or mode of transfer of lands,” after a period of 10 years from distribution so long as the land is not converted to non-agricultural purposes or mortgaged to former owners, money lenders and local officials?

JL: This provision is to prevent the reconcentration of land previously distributed. It usually happens that because of the absence of support to land reform, beneficiaries under the current system are forced to mortgage or sell the land awarded to them.

LI: What will happen to land areas that produce crops such as sugarcane, tobacco, coconut and those that produce crops for export and controlled by foreign big businesses?

JL: Land ownership and control by foreign big businesses shall be eliminated. Expropriated landholdings of foreign big businesses shall be transferred to and run by peasant cooperatives and not broken up for distribution to individual peasants. In this regard, the agrarian reform beneficiaries as well as peasants and farm workers shall be encouraged, trained and supported to form cooperatives for the purpose of consolidating the gains of agrarian reform, raise production and promote rural development.

LI: Can you cite examples on how the People's Democratic Government (PDGs) actually implement the revolutionary agrarian reform program?

JL: The People's Democratic Government implements agrarian reform according to the strength achieved by the people's army and the peasant movement or the peasant organizations in particular areas. The minimum is land rent reduction negotiated with the landlords in areas where the

peasant organizations have achieved some strength. In areas liberated by the people's army, the PDG can undertake maximum agrarian reform by confiscating the landholdings of despotic landlords and distributing them to the landless tillers but at the same time protecting the interests of enlightened landlords.

LI: What is the rationale behind CASER's position “to amend, suspend or terminate, as applicable and necessary, all bilateral investment treaties, and agreements bilateral and regional free trade arrangements (FTAs), and agreements under the multilateral World Trade Organization (WTO) that are disadvantageous to achieving agricultural and rural development? Does this preclude joining other multilateral economic formations?

JL: No, for as long as such multilateral economic formations do not have provisions disadvantageous to Philippine economic development, including agricultural and rural development.

LI: CASER demands that the value-added tax (VAT) and excise taxes on basic goods and services consumed by the working people be abolished.” Should this happen, wouldn't a deficiency in taxes have a direct effect in financing rural development and national industrialization?

JL: Abolishing the VAT and excise taxes on basic goods and services consumed by the working people is very feasible and would even benefit the economy. Any deficiency in the collection of taxes as a result can be more than compensated by the increase in taxes on luxury goods and services as well as on alcoholic drinks, tobacco products, gambling and other socially or economically undesirable items. Freeing the ordinary consumers, especially the



peasants, has the potential of enabling them to have more funds for production.

LI: Does the Philippines still have a significant number of national bourgeoisie, given the stranglehold of the big compradors and landlords on the economy?

JL: The national bourgeoisie in the Philippines is an endangered class and there are no policies to save them from extinction in the near future, unless they join the national democratic movement to fight for their survival. Unless a CASER agreement is forged, a national bourgeoisie would not be generated from among the compensated landlords who will invest the compensation for their lands into national industrialization.

LI: Why do you think that the efforts of the GRP to supposedly recover and confiscate the ill-gotten assets of bureaucrat capitalists, ie. the Marcoses and their cronies, have been unsuccessful?

JL: The government has not exerted any effort nor implemented any policy in this regard. Wherever you may have read as any effort or policy to recover and confiscate ill-gotten assets of bureaucrat capitalists are mere lip service. The Marcoses and their cronies have been very successful in increasing their ill-gotten wealth by getting back the reins of government.

LI: How would CASER address important economic issues plaguing the country, for instance, the incessant increase in the prices of basic food commodities eg. rice, onions, tomatoes, vegetables, etc.?


JL: Dealing with important and urgent economic issues plaguing the country is not only the concern of CASER. These are concerns of the entire national democratic mass movement. The people have to

be aroused, organized and mobilized in a mass movement by using the NDFP Draft CASER as guide to deal with important economic issues. Thus, it is important for all national democratic activists to study the NDFP Draft CASER.

LI: In the first place, how are the proposals contained in the NDFP CASER to be implemented if there are no wide-ranging social and political changes in the Philippines?

JL: The implementation of CASER depends on the agreement between the GRP and the NDFP. Otherwise, implementation would necessitate the victory of the national democratic forces in the national democratic revolution. Only in these two instances or circumstances can CASER be implemented.

LI: The final CASER (as in the CAHRIHL - Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law) is supposed to be an agreement to be forged mutually by the GRP and NDFP. Has the NDFP Peace Panel received, read and prepared its comments on the GRP CASER draft?

JL: The NDFP Reciprocal Working Committee on Social and Economic Reforms (RWCSE) has submitted to the NDFP Peace Panel its comments on the GRP CASER draft. Further, the NDFP Reciprocal Working Committee has submitted for further negotiation at panel level parts of CASER, specifically agrarian reform and rural development, where consensus had been reached by both reciprocal working committees as well as parts where the reciprocal working committees had not reached consensus. However, no negotiations has occurred at the panel level. 





Marcos Jr.'s National Security Policy: Christmas Wishlist of Fascist Dictators and Peace Saboteurs

By Ricardo Lozano

Last 10 August, the Marcos administration unveiled its National Security Policy (NSP) 2023-2028 which supposedly outlines the country's priorities "to protect national interests, including sovereignty and territorial integrity." Far from defending Philippine sovereignty and upholding national interests however, the NSP is essentially a Christmas Wishlist of a fascist dictator and peace saboteur. The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) expects nothing but heightened state terrorism and more violations of people's rights in the years to come.

Empowering machineries of state terror

The NSP undoubtedly seeks to further empower the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), and the NTF-Elcac – two of the primary instruments of state terror under the current US-Marcos regime. The NSP will be implemented by National Security Adviser (NSA) Eduardo Año who was responsible for the manhunt operations leading to the disappearance of Jonas Burgos in 2007.

Under the 2024 General Appropriations Act (GAA), the NTF-Elcac is set to receive P9.7 billion in funding whereas the Department of National Defense (DND) including the AFP is set to secure a P222.9 billion budget for 2024. In addition to existing machineries of repression already funded through the reactionary government's budget, the Marcos-Duterte tandem is geared to use billions from their Confidential and Intelligence Funds (CIFs) for corruption as well as campaigns of suppression against democratic forces.

US Counterinsurgency Guide Redux

Under the guise of 'combatting insurgency,' the NSP eerily mirrors the US counterinsurgency guide – a blueprint infamous for its fascist tactics and human rights atrocities in the name of defeating revolutionary movements. This is unsurprising considering the fact that the Philippines by far remains the largest recipient of US military aid in Southeast Asia. Between 2016 to 2018, the US

government has provided \$15 billion in security sector assistance and arms sales to the GRP. In the first quarter of 2023 alone, the Philippines received \$600 million in military assistance from the US.

The US counterinsurgency guide's central tenet involves the concept of a 'whole-of-nation' approach which combines military repression with the co-optation of civilian functions. Prior to the NSP, the US-Marcos regime already appointed cabinet secretaries as Cabinet Officers for Regional Development and Security (CORDS) operating within the auspices of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-Elcac). This is the latest in the GRP's efforts to weaponize the civilian bureaucracy consistent with the US counterinsurgency guide.

The NSP seeks to end the armed revolution by "targeting the financial apparatus" of the CPP-NPA-NDF. The NSP however fails to recognize that the reactionary armed forces remain the single biggest supplier of arms to the NPA through the seizure of weapons during tactical guerilla operations. In line with their counterrevolutionary objectives patterned after the US Counterinsurgency Guide, the GRP instead targets civilians and legal democratic organizations making no distinction between armed combatants and local populations.

False promises of peace

The NSP declares "the Peace process will always be preferred over war" and commits to observing "civil and human rights, and the international humanitarian law (IHL)." The NDFP remains open to the possibility of resuming the peace negotiations with the GRP. But from their relentless violations of IHL in the form of aerial bombings and indiscriminate attacks against communities, to their complete disregard of landmark agreements made during the GRP-NDF peace negotiations such as the Hague Joint Declaration, the Joint Agreement on the Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL), the US-Marcos regime's anti-peace character thus far betrays its own pronouncements.

The NSP claims it "prefers" peace process over war but does not outline any concrete plan to address the problems at the root of the civil war in the country and achieve a just and lasting peace. It does not change the old deceptive "localized peace talks" that is nothing but a campaign of suppression in the guise of a "surrender" and "amnesty" campaign.

Subservience to US interests

The NSP attempts to cloak Marcos Jr.'s kowtowing to US and China by claiming to pursue an "independent foreign policy" that protects the territorial integrity of the West Philippine Sea. And yet, the AFP begs its US imperialist masters for more EDCA-sanctioned US military bases across the country. Through the NSP, Marcos makes false claims of defending the country's territory when it cedes vast tracts of Philippine land to US military control. Growing US military presence is being justified as a "deterrent" to China's interference. On the contrary, the increasing menacing US presence on Philippine land and seas is inducing China to encroach upon and occupy an increasingly wide part of the country's maritime territory. The NSP is heightening the risk of the Philippines being drawn in a possible outbreak of an inter-imperialist war between China and the US.

Marcos Jr.'s inclination towards serving US imperialist interests not only violates the country's sovereignty but also threatens the lives and livelihoods of the toiling Filipino masses. By allowing the Philippines to become a US military outpost, Marcos Jr. advertently embroils the Filipino people in the middle of inter-imperialist conflict in the region.

Impossible dream: ending armed struggle within the current administration

Perhaps the most audacious claim of the NSP is its ambitious target to end the armed revolution within the current term of the Marcos-Duterte regime. The NSP's target to "achieve strategic victory over the CPP-NPA-NDF within the current administration" is ridiculous. The enemy's claims of the surrender of around 25,000 NPA members is absurd considering they themselves declared a few years ago that the NPA had only 4,000 fighters or less. In fact, most of these "surrenderees" are unarmed civilians subjected to constant military pressure, harassment, and threats. If anything, this US-led AFP public relations line is meant to justify years of squandering billions of pesos of people's money to fund relentless military abuses and fatten the pockets of military officers and government officials.

The US-Marcos regime may be equipped with the modern weapons of war but like his predecessors, Marcos Jr. will inevitably fail in his attempts to crush the revolutionary movement. It does not have the most important and decisive weapons for war – the participation and support of the Filipino people. 🚩



From Martial Law to Marcos Jr.: DEFEAT INSTRUMENTS OF STATE TERROR, DISMANTLE THE NTF-ELCAC, REJECT THE MARCOS-DUTERTE REGIME

**Statement of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines
on the 51st anniversary of Martial Law**

The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) enjoins the Filipino people to fight and defeat instruments of state terror unleashed by the Marcos-Duterte regime. From enforced disappearances, fake surrenders, political killings to widespread corruption amidst the economic and social crises – the Filipino people find themselves in a nightmarish moment of déjà vu as we commemorate 51 years since the declaration of fascist martial law and the abuses committed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and police forces during the 14-year reign of terror.

Escalating attacks, rising cases of enforced disappearances

The recent disappearance and eventual resurfacing of two environmental activists Jhed Tamano and Jonila Castro clearly exposed the NTF-Elcac's (National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict) insidious agenda. In typical fascist fashion, Jhed and Jonila were presented to the public as 'surrenderees' to hide the fact that military elements abducted the two activists. Jhed and Jonila's defiance in the face of direct military intimidation is a major blow to the Marcos-Duterte administration and its fascist minions in the NTF-Elcac and AFP.

The regime's desperate attempts to blame the revolutionary movement for its dirty tricks are inflicting the worst human rights violations on unarmed and defenseless civilians. Jhed and Jonila's defiance is proof that the people will not be cowed by the regime's dirty tactics of linking progressive legal organizations to the revolutionary underground in futile attempts to legitimize the abductions, killings and enforced disappearances. Neither will this fascist regime's vilification of revolutionary forces justify its war crimes of murdering, torturing, and disappearing revolutionaries who are unarmed or hors de combat.

As the US-Marcos regime continues to unleash more vicious and widespread acts of state terrorism against the people, the military establishment continues to tighten its control over the entire bureaucracy through the NTF-Elcac, where the AFP directs civilian agencies and functions in the name of its 'whole-of-nation approach.'

In the countryside, campaigns of repression against the people intensify. Marcos' military, police and paramilitary forces aim their guns, howitzers, jet fighters and helicopter gunships directly against civilian communities. Bombings of entire

communities kill and displace civilians and are acts of terrorism.

The military and police target people's organizations active in advancing the struggle for land reform, environmental defense and those who fight for the rights of indigenous communities for their ancestral lands. Extrajudicial killings and massacres of civilians and non-combatants by military and police forces are on the rise, with at least 100 victims in the past year, or almost two victims every week, including at least 9 children.

Widespread corruption amid crises

Amid surging prices of basic commodities and depressed wages plaguing the toiling masses, the Marcos-Duterte regime systematically robs the people's coffers through its so-called 'confidential and intelligence funds.' Questioned on how she acquired and spent P125 million worth of confidential funds, Sara Duterte instead resorted to ad hominem attacks to evade explaining how she spent those millions of pesos of people's money in just 19 days.

A few months before the confidential funds fiasco, Marcos Jr. himself was embroiled in his own corruption scandal in the form of the Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF). Railroaded in the Marcos-controlled congress, the MIF was exposed as an institutional "Ponzi scheme" meant to support the Marcos dynasty's crony capitalism using public funds to extend favors to big bourgeois comprador business operations in exchange for political support and profit shares.

Instead of cavalierly spending and wasting billions of taxpayers' money, the Marcos administration could better address the economic crisis through the important reforms outlined in the NDFP's Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (CASER). This substantive agenda in the peace talks includes the calls for genuine land reform, national industrialization, urban and rural development, recognition of the rights of national minorities and women, nationalist and mass-oriented education for the youth, and an independent foreign policy among others.

But like his father, Marcos Jr. has no interest in pursuing the path to peace by addressing the roots of the armed conflict. Instead it resorts to US-directed and supported military solutions as shown in his administration's new National Security Policy (NSP) patterned after the US counterinsurgency guide. Instead of pursuing genuine solutions, Marcos Jr. instead provides bogus land reform programs as in the case of his New Agrarian Emancipation Act (NAEA) which only continued the same flawed

policies of CARP including the failure to enact free land distribution for farmers.

Kowtowing to US imperialist agenda

Akin to his father's foreign policy, Marcos Jr. demonstrates his propensity of kowtowing to US imperialist interests. In exchange for promises of US business investments and loans from the World Bank and with the acquiescence of the Marcos-Duterte regime, the US military has expanded its permanent presence in the Philippines. Under the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), US soldiers enjoy extraterritorial rights that make a mockery of Philippine sovereignty, affirming the country's status as a US military outpost to the detriment of the Filipino people.

The current Marcos regime is under pressure from their US imperialist master to hasten its counterrevolutionary war in order to focus its attention against China. With an increasing number of US troops and war materiel stationed on Philippine soil, Marcos Jr. puts the Filipino people closer to the crosshairs of inter-imperialist conflict.

Historical revisionism

The Marcos-Duterte regime is carrying out a shameless campaign of deception to prevent the crimes perpetrated by state forces from being exposed in public. It scams the public with disinformation and false news, and issues threats against media and alternative media outfits which do not willingly comply with the military narrative. Human rights defenders are vilified and targeted for armed suppression.

Recently, the Department of Education (DepEd) under the leadership of Sara Duterte released a memorandum directing publishers to remove the name "Marcos" to pertain to the "Marcos Dictatorship" from grade school textbooks. The so-called memo reeks of historical revisionism meant to deodorize the Marcos family's reputation and threatens to erase more than a decade of human rights abuses and atrocities during the fascist Marcos Sr. regime.

Indeed, state terror continues. Fascist repression continues today as we live under an undeclared state of Martial Law and persistent attempts to rehabilitate the image of the Marcoses. The broad masses of workers, peasants and the rest of the Filipino people have no other option but to wage militant resistance, including armed struggle, to defend their rights and advance their aspirations for genuine national freedom and democracy. 🚩

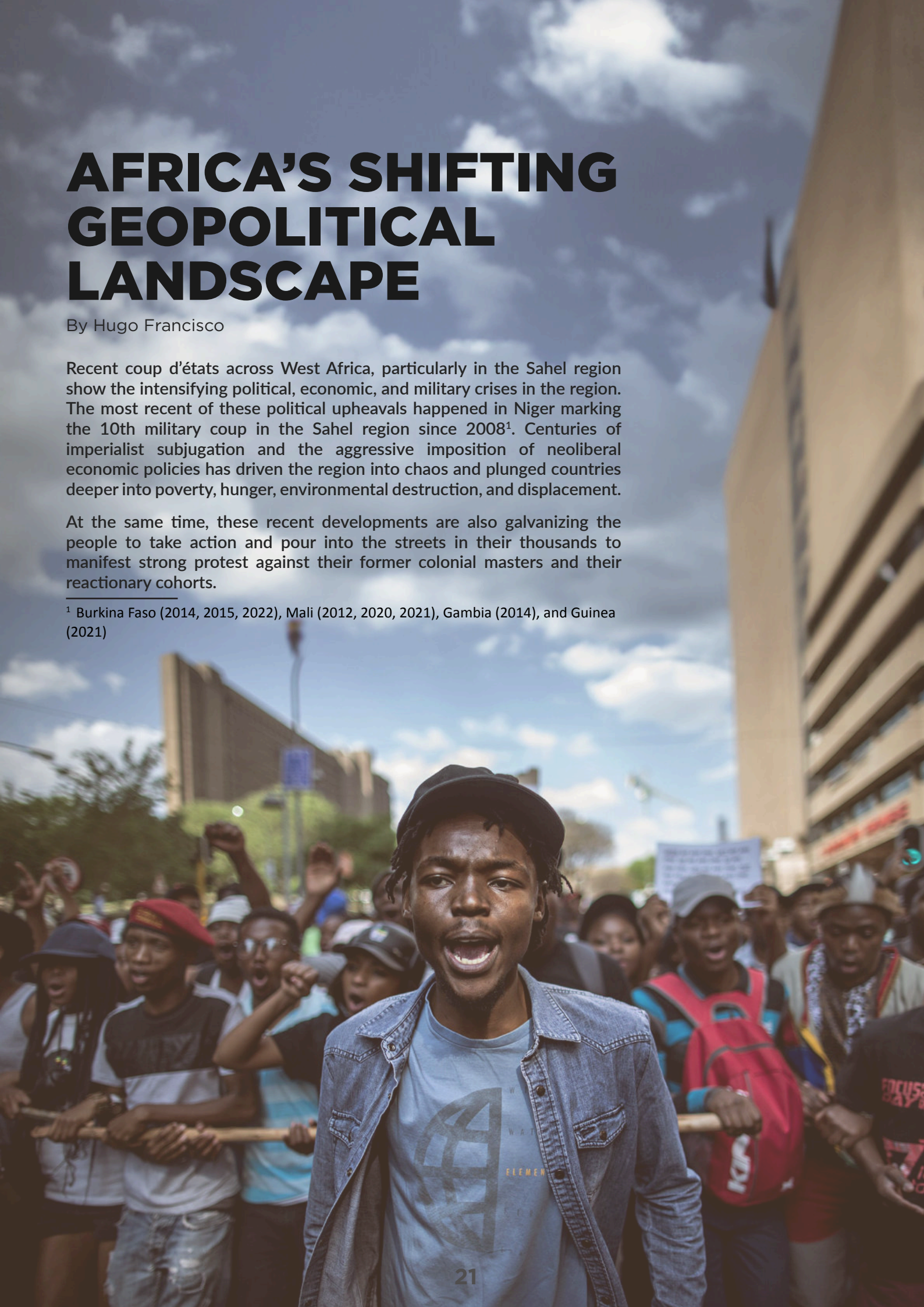
AFRICA'S SHIFTING GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE

By Hugo Francisco

Recent coup d'états across West Africa, particularly in the Sahel region show the intensifying political, economic, and military crises in the region. The most recent of these political upheavals happened in Niger marking the 10th military coup in the Sahel region since 2008¹. Centuries of imperialist subjugation and the aggressive imposition of neoliberal economic policies has driven the region into chaos and plunged countries deeper into poverty, hunger, environmental destruction, and displacement.

At the same time, these recent developments are also galvanizing the people to take action and pour into the streets in their thousands to manifest strong protest against their former colonial masters and their reactionary cohorts.

¹ Burkina Faso (2014, 2015, 2022), Mali (2012, 2020, 2021), Gambia (2014), and Guinea (2021)



For instance, Burkina Faso's current interim leader and youngest serving president in the world (aged 34) Ibrahim Traoré described the conflict in his country "as the violent, barbaric manifestation of imperialism, neo-colonialism and slavery continues to impose on us." While the specific circumstances and reasons for each coup may vary, these countries have a common denominator – all have been subject to foreign military intervention either via US or France's military operations.

Unsurprisingly, the US and the European Union (EU) quickly condemned these actions as they have historically supported these governments, not to mention their vast stake in the region's resources.

These African governments have historically maintained ties with the West, particularly with its first colonial master, France and its second colonizer the US. The US alone has at least 29 known military bases in the African continent located in 15 different countries including at least 6 outposts in Niger, and one each in Gabon, Ghana, and Burkina Faso. France on the other hand have military bases in at least 10 countries in the region hosting 1,500 French soldiers in Niger, 1,000 in Chad, 900 in the Ivory Coast, 350 in Senegal, and 400 in Gabon along with tactical support from drones and warplanes according to reports.

The value of the Sahel region from the perspective of Western imperialism cannot be overstated. The region is rich in uranium and gold - an industry currently controlled by French conglomerates. Niger, for example, according to the World Nuclear Association (WNA), is the world's seventh-biggest producer of uranium producing 3% of world uranium output in 2022. Currently, uranium production in Niger occurs mainly through a French majority-owned company called Orano which owns 63.4% of SOMAIR, Niger's national mining corporation. Burkina Faso and Mali on the other hand represent the fourth and third largest gold producers in Africa respectively, along with significant deposits of copper and other rare earth minerals.

Nigerien coup leader Abdourahamane Tchiani has faced condemnations and threats from African governments that maintain ties with European-linked institutions such as the Economic

Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the EU, and the African Union.

But the military governments of three African states in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, which all deposed their Western-backed leaders in recent years, have agreed to assist each other, individually or collectively, in case of external aggression or internal threats to their sovereignty. This mutual defense pact, known as the Alliance of Sahel States binds the three countries to assist each other militarily – in the event of an attack on any one of the signatories.

"Any attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one or more contracted parties will be considered an aggression against the other parties," according to the charter.

But despite the negative portrayal from the West, citizens have taken to the streets to cheer the overthrow of West-supported governments. In Niger, stadiums have been filled by supporters of the military government after its July 26 coup. In 2021, there was also jubilation on the streets of Conakry after the Guinean military removed Alpha Conde.

Across the African continent, anti-government protests have been sweeping nations, marking a notable surge in spontaneous people's movements against Western-allied governments. Various social, political, and economic grievances are driving these demonstrations. Electoral justice, the increased cost of living, and a narrowing democratic space headlined the various mass actions.

The recent formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) and their assertion of independence also lends evidence to the growing consolidation of sentiments against imperialist intervention in the region. Philippe Toyo Noudjenoume, President of the West Africa Peoples' Organization, says this sentiment is especially strong in the Sahel region but common throughout French-speaking Africa.

Amid a constantly changing geopolitical landscape in the continent, one thing is for sure: US imperialism and its allies in the West require a subjugated Africa in order to sustain itself amid a period of strategic decline. 🚩

POINTBLANK!

By Jose Emilio Jacinto III

News: Marcos Jr. won't allow US to use bases for 'offensive actions'

- > How would you know? Filipinos aren't even allowed to step foot on EDCA sites!
- > As if magpapaalam sila? 🤔🤔

News: Malacañang justifies 1,095% increase in 2022 travel expenses: admin wants better ties abroad

- > Better ties abroad? More like Marcos family world tour to repair family image!
- > Sanaol may travel budget diba?

News: P125M OVP confidential funds were spent in just 11 days, not 19

- > Kudos to Sara for spending it much faster than we thought! LOL 🤔🤔

News: Communist insurgency to end during Bongbong Marcos' term, says Año

- > Año should worry more about whether Bongbong can finish his term before he gets ousted!

News: Vice President Sara: Good governance key to ending communist insurgency

- > Cut the crap and explain how you spent P125 million confidential funds in just 11 days!
- > Good governance? Ask the NTF-Elcac where the monies for 'barangay development' went
- > Now we know why 'communist insurgency' continues. No good governance!

News: Sara had 433 security escorts in 2022 – COA

- > Sounds like a private army using public funds. Duterte Death Squad anyone?

News: Marcos Jr. in Singapore to celebrate birthday

- > Careful, Bongbong. Singapore has tough laws on drugs! Ask Rodrigo Duterte

News: Almost 200 students in Bohol 'possessed' by evil spirits

- > Something for Halloween? The DepEd itself is possessed by an evil spirit!

News: Marcoses donated 1\$M to Harvard University for Filipino language course

- > "If Harvard really sees the importance of including the teaching of Filipino in its curriculum, why do Filipinos need to fund it? Why should the money come from us, from a poor country to the richest university in the world?...the funds came directly from the thief's family..." – martial law survivors and academics.

News: DICT: We need P300 million secret funds vs scammers

- > The CIFs of BBM and Sara are available
- > Speaking of scammers, the DICT is strongly advised to look into the COMELEC

News: 'We felt betrayed, hoodwinked,' NTF-Elcac says after 2 activists' bombshell revelation

- > How's that for a taste of your own medicine?
- > NTF-Elcac: betraying and hoodwinking the Filipino people since 2018

The poem Prometheus Unbound was written by Jose "Pete" Lacaba under the pen name Ruben Cuevas in 1973 and published in Focus Magazine, a pro-martial law dictatorship newsmagazine. Pete Lacaba is a poet, screenwriter, journalist and former political prisoner during the Marcos dictatorship.

The poem is an acrostic poetry in which the first letters of each line when read downwards transmit a message different from the rest of the poem. Thus, with Prometheus Unbound, the message is MARCOS HITLER DIKTADOR TUTA (Marcos, Hitler, Dictator, Puppet).

Prometheus Unbound

"I shall never exchange my fetters for slavish servility. 'Tis better to be chained to the rock than be bound to the service of Zeus." –Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound

Mars shall glow tonight,
Artemis is out of sight.
Rust in the twilight sky
Colors a bloodshot eye,
Or shall I say that dust
Sunders the sleep of the just?

Hold fast to the gift of fire!
I am rage! I am wrath! I am ire!
The vulture sits on my rock,
Licks at the chains that mock
Emanicipation's breath,
Reeks of death, death, death.

Death shall not unclench me.
I am earth, wind, and sea!
Kisses bestow on the brave
That defy the damp of the grave
And strike the chill hand of
Death with the flaming sword of love.

O Orion stirs. The vulture
Retreats from the hard, pure
Thrust of the spark that burns,
Unbounds, departs, returns
To pluck out of death's fist
A god who dared to resist.

- Ruben Cuevas

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