

# Duterte orders Bello to talk peace with Sison

**MANILA** – President Rodrigo Duterte on Thursday announced that he has directed Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III to talk peace with communist founder Jose Maria Sison.

The President made the announcement when he presided over the situation briefing on the effects of Typhoon Tisoy in the Bicol Region.

He, however, refused to elaborate on the impending dialogue between Sison and Bello.

“Ang ano ko ngayon (My stance is) I cannot stop. Hindi ko pwedeng sabihin, ayoko nang makipag-usap (I cannot say I no longer want to talk to them). That is not a statement of a leader, of a president,” Duterte said in a speech delivered at the Legazpi City Convention Center in Legazpi City, Albay.

“Now this is the first time I will reveal it. I’m sending Secretary Bello. Komunista naman tala-ga ito siya (He’s really a communist) so he should go there, talk to them, and... I cannot talk about it...but I’m sending him back to Sison and talk to him,” he added.

Duterte dissolved on Mar. 18, 2019 the national government’s negotiating peace panel led by Bello, following the stalled peace negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines’ (CPP) political wing, the National Democratic Front (NDF).

On Nov. 23, 2017, Duterte inked Proclamation 360, formally terminating the peace talks with the communist guerillas, following the string of attacks staged by the New People’s Army (NPA), armed component of

the CPP, launched against the government forces.

The CPP-NPA has been listed as a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the Philippines.

On Dec. 5, 2017, the Chief Executive signed Proclamation 374, classifying the CPP and NPA as terror organizations because of the crimes they supposedly committed “against the Filipino people, against humanity, and against the law of the nations.”

Duterte, in his latest speech, said he cannot close the door on the possible resumption of talks with the communist movement, stressing that the nation is “longing for peace.”

“You should understand that the quest for [or] the longing for peace is always there, and not for the military and the police but for everybody. Kailangan (It is necessary that) the doors must be open always or there must be at least one channel, if everything closes, na pwede mong pakiusapan (that you can tap),” he said.

“Malaman lang ninyo iyang pagdating ng panahon (You will know at the right time) what will happen next. If he (Sison) agrees, ito ang sabi ko (I said this) is the last card. When I say my last card, my time is running out,” Duterte added.

The peace negotiations between the national government and the NDF have been intermittent since it began in 1986.

Duterte had a relatively warm relationship with the communist rebels during his first months in office, but he was enraged by NPA’s

continued attacks against the government troops, despite the ongoing peace talks.

In December 2018, Duterte signed Executive Order 70, instructing the national task force tasked to end local communism to develop measures enabling local chief executives and directing local peace bodies to conduct local peace talks with the communist insurgents.

Creation of 20 new Army battalions ordered

Meanwhile, Duterte also acknowledged that apart from communism, terrorism is also plaguing the country.

He also reiterated his concerns that the Jihadist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) might infiltrate the entire Mindanao.

To combat terror acts, Duterte ordered Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana to deploy 20 new battalions from the Philippine Army in the war-torn region.

“We have been hit with terrorism. Mas maano ito, mas matindi (It’s more intense). And I know it’s still the same, it is a crisis. Pero as far as we are concerned in the government, wala pa naman (it’s not yet totally here). I hope it would not come. Takot lang namin dito (Our fear), the only fear is the ISIS would move inner from the Sulu Islands. It might travel to Mindanao. Iyan ang problema (That’s a problem),” he said.

“We need men and as a matter of fact, I have ordered Lorenzana to move faster sa creation ng mga battalion sa Army. Ideally, I need about 35 but I would be happy in 20 in the meantime,” he added. (PNA)

# Senators weigh in on Pinoy students' poor assessment report

**MANILA** -- Following reports that Filipino students are at the bottom in terms of reading comprehension, and math and science, several senators on Thursday offered various proposals to improve the learning and academic performance of the country’s youth.

For Senator Cynthia Villar, instituting a rewards and incentives system for public schools might be a way to goad them to strive to be better.

“Bigyan ng incentive ‘yung magagaling at bigyan ng disincentive yung mahihina para namang magkaroon ng (Give incentives to top schools and give disincentives to the poor performers so

that they will have a wish to excel or challenged to be better,” Villar said in an ambush interview.

She also proposed that non-performing schools should be disbanded altogether by the Department of Education (DepEd).

Villar said a similar reward system should be accorded to “bright students.”

She said some sort of national exams could be held to show who are the bright students to be rewarded.

“‘Yung magagaling na estudyante, ang school nila dapat may mga national exams tapos na-me-measure mo, and then yung magagaling na estudyante, bigyan natin ng

reward (For bright students, their schools should hold national exams as a kind of measure, then we reward the bright students),” Villar said.

On the other hand, Senator Joel Villanueva said proper nutrition and appropriate learning and play environments as early as pre-school play an important role in the learning and academic performance of a student.

He said it is for this reason he filed Senate Bill No. 858, which seeks to amend existing laws to strengthen the barangay daycare system.

“This is to give them proper care while their parents go to work. This will ensure proper nutrition and development support,” Villanueva said in a statement.

“I hope my proposal will be considered and will contribute to improving not just the academic performance but the overall welfare of underprivileged children,” he said.

Nutrition is also the key to a student’s academic performance, Senator Francis Pangilinan said.

The lawmaker said the low ranking of the Philippines in the PISA

report is “also rooted in hunger” among Filipinos.

“Naniniwala akong resulta rin ito ng gutom sa mga batang Pilipino na marami ay (I believe that this is also the result of hunger among Filipino children, many of whom are) underweight, stunting, or even wasting,” Pangilinan said in a statement.

“Kapag gutom ang bata, paano natin siya ma-expect na makapag-aral nang maayos? (If a child is hungry, how can we expect him/her to study well?),” he added.

The senator urged everybody to support the fight against hunger, as it is the responsibility of everyone and not just the government.

“Tungkulin nating lahat -- nasa loob at labas ng gobyerno -- na siguraduhing merong sapat at abot-kayang pagkain para sa lahat ng Pilipino. Yan ang ibig sabihin ng pagiging (It is the responsibility of everyone -- whether inside or outside of government -- to ensure that there is affordable food for every Filipino. That is the meaning of being) food secure,” Pangilinan said. (PNA)

## Voting simulation for PWDs held in QC

**MANILA** -- The Commission on Elections (Comelec) on Thursday held a voting simulation for Persons with Disability (PWDs) in Quezon City.

Comelec spokesperson James Jimenez said the activity shows the poll body’s efforts to give importance to PWDs.

“First voting simulation for PWD but this is not the first time that we made such effort for them. If you remember, in 2016, we introduced the Emergency Accessible Polling Places (EAPPs),” Jimenez said in an interview on the sidelines of the activity held at the Toro Hills Elementary School in Quezon City.

“We are doing this now as we would like to improve the experience we saw in 2016. (Our EAPP was very successful), it cut the problem particularly inaccessibility but of course, there is still room for improvement which is what is all about. Its like data gathering,” he added.

Jimenez said some 200 PWDs attended the activity.

There are over 500,000 registered voters who are members of the marginalized sector.

Meanwhile, Jovencio Balanquit, Comelec Assistant Regional Election Director in the National Capital Region, said the voter simulation is being conducted to know the pulse of PWDs on how they further improve their voting experience.

“So we need them after all this is for them the output would be whatever suggestions, their comments, or recommendations in the voting procedure that they will experience. It would be probably be considered by the Commission in the next elections. In future elections. Kaya maganda ito kasi (This is good because) this part of Comelec’s involvement or participation in 2019 International Celebration for PWDs,” he said in an interview.

Asked on why the school was chosen to hold the event, the poll body official said, “This is where we held our pilot before and since we want an actual simulation, we want the real voting center.”

## Año unfazed by inclusion on Reds 'hit list'

**MANILA** -- Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año on Thursday shrugged off threats from communist rebels.

“I will not be intimidated by such an evil plot. We are prepared for that. We will get them before they can execute their plan. We’ll keep this country safe against these godless communist terrorists/bandits,” Año said in a text message.

Año’s remarks came after Maj. Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr., a ranking official of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF ELCAC), said he and other government officials are targeted by the communist front groups for leading President Rodrigo Duterte’s counterinsurgency program.

“There is no need because my security measures are enough. Like a soldier, I am always prepared to fight!,” he added.

In a media forum Wednesday, Parlade, also the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Deputy Chief-of-Staff for Civil-Military Operations, said aside from him and Año, included on the ‘hit list’ of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) are National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. and National Commission on Indigenous Peoples chairman Allen Capuyan.

He said also included on the list as well are five former communist leaders who are helping the government’s anti-insurgency campaign.