

12 NPA rebels, including young mother, surrender to gov't

MALOLOS CITY, Bulacan -- At least 12 members of the New People's Army (NPA) in Central Luzon have surrendered to authorities on Wednesday after being heavily exploited by the communist group.

The returnees were given immediate cash assistance and other forms of aid during the special Regional Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (RTF-ELCAC) meeting presided over by Presidential Peace Adviser Carlito G. Galvez Jr., the Cabinet Officer for Regional Development and Security (CORDS) for Region 3.

"Walang pakialam ang mga komunista sa mga batang katulad nito, pero kami sa gobyerno, pinangangalagaan namin pati mga bata. (The communists have no regard for the young ones like this baby, but we in the government, we protect them, including the children)," Galvez said, referring to one of the returnees, an 18-year-old girl who had a two-month-old child in tow.

Concerned government agencies will be further assessing the returnees to determine the interventions to be provided to the former rebels.

The six firearms and other weapons turned over by the returnees were presented to the media earlier in the day.

Galvez also encouraged the returnees to convince their comrades who are still in the mountains to return to the folds of the law.

"Magbalik-loob na sila. Wag na silang mani-wala sa mga komunista kasi puro kasinungalingan ang sinasabi nila. (They should return to the government. They should stop believing the communists because what they are saying are all lies)," he said.

Galvez said among the key areas the government is focusing on in the fight against the communist insurgency in Region 3 (Central Luzon) is preventing the recruitment of cadres, particularly among the youth.

Recruited at 15

Among the returnees is Jane (Not her real name) who was recruited at age 15 by the urban poor organization Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap or Kadamay.

"Ang sabi po sa amin, may libre pong pabahay, wala daw po kaming babayaran (We were told that there would be free housing, that we would not pay a cent, Jane said.)," Jane narrated.

Shortly after joining the group, she and her fellow recruits were assigned in hinterland communities.

This didn't come as a surprise, as she demonstrated leadership qualities which enabled her to rise from the ranks as a youth organizer for Anakbayan, a left-leaning group.

Jane believed she was serving her countrymen when she joined the NPA. But when their leader prevented her from returning to the city, she knew that something wasn't right.

"Pag bumaba daw po kami, totorturin at papatayin daw po kami ng militar. 'Yun po ang sabi nila (If we go down to the city, we will be tortured and killed by the military. That's what they [our commanders] said.)," she said.

Jane, who is now 18, also shared her ordeals when she was up in the mountains.

"Mahirap kumain, pagod, hirap, binubuhay nga namin bag namin, may bigas pa. Sa bag po kasi namin, 40 kilos yung pinakamabigat. Bukod pa po yung baril namin. Ganun po kahirap doon, tapos 'yung dinadaan po namin, diretso po siyang paakyat, 'yung hahawakan lang namin damo-damo po. Tapos 'yung sa baba niya, baton, may kawayan pa," she said.

(It's difficult to eat, we are tired, burdened, we carry our bags filled with rice grains; in our bags, 40 kilos of rice is the heaviest. That's aside from our guns. That's how difficult it is there, plus the trails that we cross are all vertical. We would just cling on to the grass.

Downwards, there would be rocks and bamboo.)

By the time she became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy, she decided that her son, who is now two months old, will not suffer the same fate.

"Nagliliinis po kasi ako ng granada noon, sabi ko [sa commander namin], pasabugin ko na lang kaya itong granada na ito kung ayaw niyo rin akong pababain (I was cleaning a grenade that time, then I told our commander, 'why don't I just detonate this grenade, since you won't let me go anyway,' Jane recalled.)," Jane recalled.

Now free from the clutches of the NPA, she has a message for those who are planning to join the rebel group.

"Sana 'yung iba ko pang kasamahan na mga kabataan na gusto pang sumampa, itigil na po nila 'yun, dahil wala naman pong patunguhan 'yung buhay nila. (Hopefully, other youths that still plan to go to the mountains, would abandon such plans, because their lives up there would end up nowhere, she said.)," Jane said.

Presidential Peace Adviser Carlito G. Galvez Jr. poses with local chief executives and members of national, regional and provincial agencies after signing pledge of commitment to end communist movement in Central Luzon. (Photo courtesy of OPAPP)

Pledge to end communist movement in Central Luzon

At least four governors and five mayors of Central Luzon, along with top officials of the region signed a pledge of commitment that will leverage government resources "to defeat a scourge that is instilling fear, mistrust and hate among our people."

"As local chief executives, members of national, regional and provincial agencies, we shall take the lead in creating a conducive environment where long-lasting peace and

sustainable development can flourish," Galvez said.

ledge of Commitment (OPAPP photo)

Among the governors who signed the pledge of commitment were Gerardo A. Noverras of Aurora; Daniel R. Fernando of Bulacan; Hermogenes E. Ebdane Jr. of Zambales; and Dennis G. Pineda of Pampanga while the mayors were Ambrosio C. Cruz Jr. of Guiguinto, Bulacan; Edgardo G. Flores of Minalin, Pampanga; Francis Anthony S. Garcia of Balanga City, Bataan; Maria Cristina Angeles of Tarlac City, Tarlac; and Nestor Alvarez of Muñoz, Nueva Ecija.

Other officials who signed the pledge were Galvez, Maj. Gen. Ramiro Manuel A. Rey, commanding officer of Northern Luzon Command; Maj. Gen. Leonard M. Agustin, commanding officer of the 7th Infantry Division, Philippine Army, and co-vice chair, Regional Peace and Order Council 3; Julie J. Daquioag, regional director, Department of the Interior and Local Government - Central Luzon, and RPOC secretariat; as well as heads of government agencies under RTF-ELCAC 3.

The council also approved the implementation plans (IM-PLANS) of the 10 clusters, which were formulated during the two-day convergence workshop in Pampanga last September.

The cluster IM-PLANS detail the programs and activities that will be undertaken in support of Executive Order 70 or the Whole-of-Nation Approach in ending the local communist armed conflict.

Fernando noted that the IMPLAN contains key measures that aim to put an end to the communist insurgency in their areas.

"Kapag malaya at ligtas na nakapamuhay ang mga mamamayan, nagiging mas aktibo ang ekonomiya. Mas mabilis dumaloy ang kabuhayan. Walang alinlangan ang mga

SC orders ERC to review nod on Meralco 'unbundled rates'

MANILA -- The Supreme Court (SC) voided orders of the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) approving the Manila Electric Company's (Meralco) unbundled rates that were used as the basis for a PHP0.168 per kilowatt-hour increase in power rates in 2014.

In an October 8 decision penned by Senior Associate Justice Antonio T. Carpio, the SC said the orders violated the ERC's statutory mandate to approve rates that will provide electricity to consumers "in the least cost manner."

The SC remanded the case to the ERC to determine the valuation of Meralco's regulatory asset base, as well as the parameters, whether expenses that are not directly and entirely related to the operation of a distribution utility should be passed on, wholly or partially, to the consumers, so that electricity shall be provided to consumers "in the least cost manner."

"The Court (SC) said that Meralco and other electricity distribution utilities are monopolies that are regulated by the State, particularly

on the rates they charge consumers. The same rationale in regulating power acquisition costs by distribution utilities applies to the allowable depreciation of capital assets by distribution utilities in the present case," the SC Public Information Office said in a statement.

"(T)he Court further said that considering the case was remanded to the ERC, movant-intervenors Clark Electric Distribution Corporation, et al. can raise the issues raised before this present petition with the ERC instead," it added.

The SC ruling granted partially the petition filed by the National Association of Electricity Consumers for Reforms, Inc. (NASEC-ORE), which challenged the ERC's June 21, 2011 order that upheld and declared final its May 30, 2003 decision granting Meralco's application for the approval of its unbundled rates, appraisal of its properties, and proposed increase in rates. (PNA)

No rigging of VP poll protest case: Bersamin

MANILA -- Chief Justice Lucas Bersamin on Thursday assured parties to the electoral protest involving the 2016 vice presidential race, which is pending before the Presidential Electoral Tribunal (PET), that the case will be handled without irregularities.

"Don't worry, di ko niluluto. Di pwedeng lutuin 'yan (It won't be rigged, It cannot be rigged), I know everybody is so keen expecting some pronouncements but, you know the en banc is very deliberate about serious matters. This is a matter of national impact," Bersamin said in a media interview.

mamamayan na makibahagi sa mga programa ng pamahalaan. (When the people are able to live freely and safely, the economy is vibrant. Livelihood gets channeled faster. People have no qualms about partaking with government programs, he said.)" Fernando said. (PR)

The top magistrate said a court action is scheduled on the protest case between former senator Ferdinand "Bongbong" E. Marcos Jr. and Vice President Ma. Leonor Robredo.

"(There will be court action) By next week. It may not be what you are expecting. We are still discussing many other things taking up a lot of matters so that's all I can tell you." Bersamin added.

The SC earlier deferred its ruling on the case even as Robredo's counsels on Monday filed an urgent motion asking the PET to release the results of the initial vote recount in the poll protest.

Robredo, through her counsel, sought the release of a copy of the summary and committee reports on the revision, recount, and re-appreciation of ballots in Marcos' three pilot provinces of Iloilo, Naga City,

and Negros Occidental.

She said releasing the report would put to rest various speculations that recently came up when it was reported that justice-in-charge, Associate Justice Benjamin Caguioa has already concluded his report on the recount.

Robredo won the vice presidential race in the May 2016 polls with 14,418,817 votes or 263,473 more than Marcos' 14,155,344 votes.

In his protest, Marcos contested the results in a total of 132,446 precincts in 39,221 clustered precincts covering 27 provinces and cities.

He named three provinces where he can supposedly prove that irregularities marred the conduct of the 2016 national and local elections.

Marcos' pilot provinces are Camarines Sur, Negros Oriental, and Iloilo. (PNA)