

Senate panel proposes greater 'police visibility' in schools

MANILA -- A joint Senate panel on Wednesday recommended increased police visibility inside schools, strict monitoring of student activities within and outside school premises, and the investigation of the alleged recruiters of missing minors as part of the measure to be taken to finally put an end to the "deliberate recruitment of teenagers by the communist-terrorist groups (CTG)."

The recommendations were among the administrative and legislative actions contained in Committee Report 10 by the Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs, chaired by Senator Ronald dela Rosa, and the Committee on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation, chaired by Senator Panfilo Lacson, following an inquiry into the missing minors who were allegedly recruited by leftist groups into joining the Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army (CPP-NPA).

The joint panel said the issue on the deliberate recruitment of teenagers by the CTGs to be part of their manpower in pursuit of its armed struggle against a duly established government, has been going on for decades.

"It is, therefore, crucial to finally put an end to this social plague," the joint Senate panel said.

Police visibility around and within campus premises

The panel said the only way to save the youth from being recruited into and being part of the communist group is to prevent them from falling into its deceptive trap.

One way to achieve this is for the school authorities to occasionally allow the presence of police forces inside campus premises,

with the police force exercising utmost observance and respect of the rights and interests of the students and the rest of the members of the academe, the staff, and authorized visitors therein.

"Amidst threats of terrorism, prevalence of recruitment of students as armed combatants, increased criminality rates, reported incidence of drug-related problems within the campus, there is a justified need for the school authorities to occasionally allow the presence of a reasonable number of police forces in the school premises at an acceptable designated time," the report said.

In relation to the issue of recruitment of students by insurgents, the committees pointed out that what is being monitored is not the expression of ideologies in whatever form — such as rallies, demonstrations, and other related activities — but the possibility and imminent danger on the part of the students to actually join the insurgency and take arms against the duly constituted authorities in the government.

"While the Committees value and recognize the right of expression and academic freedom, the exercise of these rights should observe lawful limitations, and should not, at any time, sacrifice the rights and interests of the youth who may end up as armed combatants for the communist groups," the report said.

The committees said school authorities should also allow the PNP and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to conduct seminars and lectures to students and parents on the devious methods employed by the CPP-NPA and its cohorts to recruit the

youth into its ranks.

"Parents, students, teachers, school administrators must be made aware of the warning signs of recruitment by these militant groups. And this could be achieved through constant dialogues with the police and the military on how to maintain the campuses free from communist recruitment," the committees said.

They said that school management, in coordination with the AFP and the PNP, should come up with a continuing program where lecture series on how to detect insurgency elements in school would be included in the authorized activities of schools and universities.

"This awareness campaign on 'Arouse, Organize and Mobilize' should be participated in by parents, students, teachers, school administrators, and staff, and even by local barangay (village) officials having jurisdiction over the schools," the report said.

Monitoring on-campus, off-campus activities

The joint panel also recommended for the meticulous and stringent security enforcement inside schools to strictly monitor the events within the campus premises, and the legitimate participants thereof.

The committees said universities, colleges and schools should be vigilant in their role to be the nuclei of academic excellence and progress for their students.

"And as such, campus premises should not be the center for recruitment and cradle of militant discourses and misplaced ideologies for the masses," the Senate panel said.

Accordingly, the report said that Department of Education

(DepEd) Order 66, series of 2017 and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order 63, series of 2017 that regulate the conduct of off-campus activities, should be strictly implemented.

"Due diligence should be observed by school authorities in the conduct of off-campus activities. Failure to do so would cause imposition of corresponding administrative sanctions," the report said.

The Committees said that CHED and DepEd must likewise conduct verification, monitoring and investigations on the activities within academic institutions where there are sensational issues or problems raised against them by students, teachers, or other interested parties.

"In this regard, schools mentioned in this Report should be investigated as to the reported recruitment activities of minor students within the premises of their campuses. Should evidence warrant, corresponding administrative sanctions should be meted out against erring and negligent school administrators," the Senate panel said.

Likewise, the panel also recommended stringent regulations on the issuance of student Identification Cards.

The report noted that one identified source of the problem regarding the unrestricted entry of unauthorized visitors and intruders in campuses who pose a threat to the security of the campus populace is the lax security procedure in identifying certified and registered students (and their parents), teaching staff, administrative personnel, and even school administrators.

"It is imperative, therefore, for every school to adopt an efficient, reliable and secured identification system," the committees said.

Investigation of alleged recruiters of missing minors

Meanwhile, the committees recommended the further investigation of the alleged recruiters of missing minor students.

The report said Kabataan Party-list Rep. Sarah Elago, Charie del Rosario, Bianca Gacos, Jayroven Vilafuente Balais, Veneer Crisostomo, Einsten Recedes, Alex Danday and Erika Cruzbe should be further investigated, "and when there is sufficient evidence," charged with violation of pertinent laws.

Among the possible violations they may have committed are inducing a minor to abandon his home; recruitment, conscription or enlistment of children into government forces and other armed groups; child abuse, cruelty or exploitation or to be responsible for other conditions prejudicial to the child's development; conscripting, enlisting or recruiting children under the age of 18 years into an armed force or group other than the national armed forces; and using children under the age of 18 years to participate actively in hostilities.

Besides the alleged recruiters, the Committees also urged the DepEd and CHED to initiate thorough administrative investigations on the allegations against teachers who instigate their students to participate in rallies and street demonstrations that advocate radical and subversive ideologies.

"Should the facts and evidence warrant, appropriate administrative sanctions should be meted out," they said.

"Same investigations should likewise be conducted by the CHED as to the reported continuing recruitment of students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and determine the probable liabilities of the school administrators and teachers," the report said.

Amend party-list law

Meanwhile, among the legislative actions recommended by the joint Senate panel is to amend Republic Act 7941, otherwise known as the "Party-list System Law", to remove party-list groups that advocate subversive dogma.

The report noted that there are party-list groups that advocate communist ideologies, and espouse principles that give semblance to democratic values and doctrines, but with the real ultimate goal of overthrowing the government.

"They take advantage of the seeming 'helplessness' of the masses amidst the social ills, and stir discontent and disgruntlement against the government. These party-list organizations, although legal in character, employ devious means to lure the people to support them," the report said.

"Sadly, even young minds are exploited and the students are used as buffer zones by these organizations, which coddle them and train them to embrace the life of armed combatants of insurgent groups. It is unfortunate, therefore, that some party-list groups use democracy to destroy democracy," the committees said.

They, thus, said that RA 7941 should be amended to focus, after observing due process of law, on "the outright refusal or cancellation of registration of any national, regional or sectoral party, organization or coalition that advocates subversive dogma, and pursuant

thereof undertakes criminal acts towards this goal."

The committees also urged for the immediate passage of the amendments to RA 9372, or The Human Security Act, to address the terror, violence, and lawlessness perpetrated by members of the CTGs among the people.

"The government should not be left completely defenseless in the face of extremism, which has adversely affected the peace and order situation in the country through the years. It is therefore imperative to amend RA 9372 by including within the ambit of the definition of terrorism, any criminal act committed pursuant to subversive dogma, in order to coerce the government to give in to an unlawful demand," the joint Senate panel said.

Lastly, the committees urged Congress to support the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), which was created under Executive Order 70, by providing the necessary funds for the implementation of the programs, plans, and activities pursuant to the National Peace Framework.

The report was signed by 17 lawmakers: Senators dela Rosa, Lacson, Francis Tolentino, Christopher "Bong" Go, Manny Pacquiao, Richard Gordon, Lito Lapid, Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr., Joel Villanueva, Imee Marcos, Sonny Angara, Cynthia Villar, Nancy Binay, and Sherwin Gatchalian; Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri; Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto; and Minority Leader Franklin Drilon.

On the other hand, the six lawmakers who did not sign the report were Senators Grace Poe, Risa Hontiveros, Francis Pangilinan, Leila de Lima, Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel, and Senate President Vice-nite "Tito" Sotto III. (PNA)