



## **Brief Background for the National and International Day of Prayer for JustPeace in the Philippines**

**September 1, 2024**

Since the time of President Ferdinand Marcos Sr., every administration intensified its respective counter-insurgency program aimed at defeating the armed rebellion waged by the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army/National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDFP) since 1969.

Despite the massive military campaigns implemented by these administrations the armed conflict has continued to rage, particularly in the countryside. As a consequence, the most vulnerable communities have suffered internal displacement including grievous violations of human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL). According to studies, the armed conflict has resulted in the loss of more than 40,000 lives. Billions of pesos were spent on war materiel instead of going to basic social services and economic development.

This long-running armed conflict only mirrors how deeply embedded its roots in social injustice which cannot be suppressed with military might. Peace is not simply the cessation of armed conflict or the absence of war, unpeace is a complex phenomenon that encompasses the socio-economic, political, and cultural spheres of society.

Addressing the roots of the armed conflict is essential in order to have a just and enduring peace in the country.

This was the spirit of the peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front (NDFP) which formally started with the signing of The Hague Joint Declaration, in the Hague, The Netherlands by representatives of both parties on September 1, 1992. The Hague Joint Declaration sets the objective of the peace negotiations which is the attainment of a just and lasting peace by addressing the roots of the armed conflict and thereby resolving it.

Since then, the GRP-NDFP peace process has gone through many twists and turns across six (6) administrations. The two sides have produced 37 major agreements and joint statements including the landmark Comprehensive Agreement for Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL). From 2016 to 2017, during the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte, the Technical Working Groups of the peace panels of both parties were able to craft a common draft on social and economic reforms. Both panels also agreed on the principle of free land distribution.

However, in November 2017, the government of former President Rodrigo Duterte unilaterally terminated the peace negotiations and launched an all-out war against the CPP-NPA-NDFP. The all-out war has continued under the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

On November 23, 2023, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) released a Joint Statement indicating a possible resumption of peace negotiations. The Joint Statement was an offshoot of informal discussions that started in 2022 between the GRP and the NDFP emissaries and were facilitated by the Royal Norwegian Government (RNG).

While the Joint Statement was not a declaration that the formal peace negotiations would resume in earnest, churches and peace advocates recognize that both parties returning to the negotiating table has the potential to mitigate the loss of lives and human rights violations due to the armed conflict.

However, since the Joint Statement was released, both sides have made no further announcements regarding any developments in the peace process.

Meanwhile, the state of unpeace continues.

Several skirmishes between the military and the New People's Army (NPA) have been reported during the first half of 2024<sup>1</sup>. Civic space also continues to constrict with the anti-terrorism law being weaponized against activists who are charged with violations of international humanitarian law and others. So-called anti-terrorist financing measures have already been used to arbitrarily harass activists and freeze accounts or assets of civil society organizations (CSOs).

The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) continues its practice of red-tagging. Despite calls to abolish including recommendations made by two (2) UN Special Rapporteurs, Ms. Irene Khan on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and Mr. Ian Fry on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, during their visits<sup>2</sup>, Pres. Marcos Jr refuses to dissolve it. Ms. Khan, in particular, stated that the abolition of the NTF-ELCAC "will both address some critical drivers of 'red-tagging' but will also allow this administration to modernize peacebuilding approaches based on a changing political landscape."<sup>3</sup>

While the internal armed conflict continues to rage in the country, tensions are growing with China. This was further heightened due to the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, to counter and contain China's rapidly growing influence in the region. Pres. Marcos Jr., in a speech, also called on the military to prepare for external threat<sup>4</sup>. During President Marcos Jr.'s State of the Nation Address (SONA) last July 22, 2024, he did not mention the November 23, 2023 GRP-NDFP Joint Statement. He only stated that remaining guerilla fronts or groups will be "the subject of focused operations."<sup>5</sup>

The two Parties, the GRP and the NDFP should be supported and encouraged to resume the formal peace negotiations.

On April 25, 2024, the Executive Committee of the **National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP)** approved a resolution for a **National and International Day of Prayer for Just Peace in the Philippines on Sunday, September 1, 2024**, to show support for the resumption of the GRP-NDFP peace negotiations. The date is significant because of the Signing of *The Hague Joint Declaration* on September 1, 1992. On **July 5, 2024, the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) decided to adopt the Day of Prayer** and encourage churches from other denominations to observe it.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1943378/1550-aurora-town-residents-evacuated-as-soldiers-clash-with-npa-rebels>

<sup>2</sup> Ms. Irene Khan visited in February 2024 and Mr. Ian Fry, on November 2023.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/expression/statements/20240202-eom-philippines-sr-freedex.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://pco.gov.ph/news\\_releases/ph-must-be-prepared-amid-more-pronounced-external-threats-pbbm/](https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/ph-must-be-prepared-amid-more-pronounced-external-threats-pbbm/)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/sona-2024-full-text-transcript-speech-president-marcos-jr/>

**On that Sunday, please light a candle in your churches and use this prayer for Just Peace in the Philippines composed by Deaconess Norma P. Dollaga of the United Methodist Church, recipient of the 2024 World Methodist Peace Award from the World Methodist Council.** This award is given to individuals who've struggled for peace with courage, creativity, and consistency. A liturgy originally prepared in 2004 for the NCCP Peace Module by Rev. Dr. Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, former NCCP General Secretary from 2000 to 2007 and former PEPP co-chairperson can also be used for this day.

We hope you will join us on this Day of Prayer for a just and lasting peace in the Philippines.