

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

News and Information Bureau

MALACAÑANG PRESS BRIEFING

HOSTED BY MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ

WITH NTF-ELCAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UNDERSECRETARY ERNESTO TORRES JR.,

**ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES CHIEF-OF-STAFF GENERAL ROMEO BRAWNER JR., OFFICE OF THE
SOLICITOR GENERAL ATTY. JAMES CLIFFORD SANTOS**

AND NATIONAL AMNESTY COMMISSION CHAIRPERSON LEAH TANODRA-ARMAMENTO

NOVEMBER 8, 2024

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Good afternoon, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome to the 6th National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict or NTF-ELCAC Executive Committee Meeting Press Conference. President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. earlier presided over the ExeCom meeting and was presented with the National Action Plan for Unity, Peace and Development.

And to discuss this plan and other items on the agenda during the meeting, we have with us today Executive Director of the NTF-ELCAC Undersecretary Ernesto Torres Jr., Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief-of-Staff General Romeo Brawner Jr., Office of the Solicitor General Atty. James Clifford Santos and Chairperson of the National Amnesty Commission, Leah Tanodra-Armamento.

Good afternoon. I think we have an announcement from Undersecretary Torres.

NTF-ELCAC EXEC. DIR. USEC. TORRES: Yes. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for having us here at the press conference to share with you what was discussed earlier during the 6th Executive Committee Meeting of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict which was presided by the Chairman himself, His Excellency President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr.

Also in attendance, of course, is the Vice Chair of the NTF-ELCAC, the National Security Adviser, Secretary Eduardo Año. The Executive Secretary Bersamin was also there together with SAP Lagdameo and the secretaries of the different member-agencies of the NTF-ELCAC or their representatives and other partners.

So, among the things that were discussed this morning which we would discuss/share with you today are the following: The draft of the National Action Plan for Unity, Peace and Development; and then, we will be announcing also the new Cabinet Officer for Regional Development and Security or CORDS for Regions II, NCR and Region VIII; and the designation, of course, of Secretary Tereso Magno as CORDS of Region XI. He, being designated now as the chairperson of the Mindanao Development Authority, coming from his position as Presidential Adviser for Eastern Mindanao Command.

Also discussed were concerns and issues about the Barangay Development Programs implementation to include its funding and we also gave an update to the Executive Committee on the implementation of the program.

Also, it was approved by the President, the inclusion of the Coordinating Council for Private Educational Association or COCOPEA as one of the two private representatives to be an official member of the NTF-ELCAC. So, COCOPEA a while ago was represented by Father Albert Delvo. Well, just for the information of everybody, under COCOPEA are at least 1,500 private schools all over the country.

Then, we also discussed some of the concerns and challenges that the National Amnesty Commission is facing and some recommendations based from the discussions were agreed upon. And, of course, the chairperson is here with us in this press conference and she would also be sharing with you the important points during that discussion.

So, those are the agenda and items that were discussed. But in addition to that, a briefing on the situation of our counter-insurgency campaign was presented by no less than the Director General of the NICA, DG Ricardo de Leon.

And then, an oath taking ensued also after the approval of the designation of the CORDS and the members of the Executive Committee.

So, we are also fortunate that we have in that meeting this morning, the AFP Chief-of-Staff, of course with the Chief of the Philippine National Police represented by Brigadier General Salvador.

So, for this afternoon's press conference, we are likewise happy to have the head office of the Legal Cooperation Cluster headed by Justice Angie Miranda, ably represented here by Atty. Clifford Santos.

So, with that as a broad backgrounder, we are now ready for any questions coming from our friends in the media. Thank you very much.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Harley Valbuena, DZME.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Thank you, Ms. Daphne. Good afternoon. Sir, with the inclusion of COCOPEA in the NTF-ELCAC, are we expecting an enhancement of our campaigns against insurgency or anti-communist ideologies in our schools or in the member-schools of COCOPEA?

NTF-ELCAC EXEC. DIR. USEC. TORRES: Thank you, Harley, for that question. Yeah, as I have mentioned a while ago, COCOPEA or CEAP has a membership of at least 1,500 Catholic private schools all over the country. So, it would broaden the base of our information awareness campaign and information and education campaign pertaining to matters related to the terror grooming of organizations like the CPP-NPA-NDF – which is by the way, a designated terrorist organization as per our Anti-Terror Act.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Eden Santos, NET25.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Good afternoon, sir. Gusto lang po namin munang malaman ano, gaano pa ba iyong strength nitong mga CPP-NPA na ito? Tapos, nalalapit na rin po iyong halalan, mayroon pa rin ba sila iyong mga activities gaya noong ginagawa nila before na kabilang po doon sa ating mga concern na tinututukan pa rin until now?

AFP COS GEN BRAWNER: Thank you, Eden. Kinalabit ako ni Usec. Torres eh dito sa ilalim. So anyway, in terms of the strength of the New People's Army ay talagang mahinang-mahina na sila 'no. So, they only have about 1,111 fighters left from the 2,200 last year so that is a big reduction in their manpower. And in terms of firearms, ganoon rin po iyong reduction nila, about a thousand firearms have been reduced.

So, in terms of the guerilla fronts, earlier about three months ago, we reported that there were seven remaining weakened guerilla fronts. Now, there are only four – apat na lang po. And we are expecting that by the end of the year, we will have finished all the guerilla fronts, we will have reduced them to zero.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Anu-ano po iyong apat na iyon na tatapusin ninyo within this year?

AFP COS GEN BRAWNER: Iyong mga guerilla fronts natin, dalawa ang naiwan na lang dito sa Northern Luzon, isa po dito sa Southern Luzon area at isa dito sa Visayas area.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Anu-ano iyong mga pangalan po noong mga guerilla fronts na iyon?

AFP COS GEN BRAWNER: Naku, hindi ko dala iyong...

NTF-ELCAC EXEC. DIR. USEC. TORRES: Yes. Apat iyon, kasamang Eden. We have weakened guerilla front North Abra; then we have weakened guerilla front Baggas both in Cordillera Administrative Region; then we have KLG 1 in the Bicol Region; and weakened guerilla Central front in Negros Occidental. But as the AFP have submitted to us three of those are already for validation to be dismantled. So, we are very optimistic that upon official validation we would only be confronting one weakened guerilla front.

So, what is very important to note is that from the start of the NTF-ELCAC in December of 2018 we had 59 active guerilla fronts all over the country and if we are to consider active guerilla fronts, we now have zero guerilla fronts. And we thank the public for that 'no because prior to that it is only the security sector primarily – AFP and PNP, who are taking the cudgels of resolving our insurgency problem but when we finally got our acts together and committed to the whole-of-nation approach, whole-of-government participation founded on good governance we were able really to do the almost impossible at that time.

So, on the average if you will do the math, 17 guerilla fronts have been dismantled per year and when we were still in the active service – just to further contextualize why I said that it is almost impossible, there were years that only one, two, guerilla fronts are being dismantled in a particular year. But with this mechanism that we have we were able and with the help of everybody including our friends from the media in disseminating important information and programs of the government and to make the insurgents feel that there is a government that cares for them we were able to turn the tide in favor of the government. And yes, we have zero active guerilla fronts and upon the official validation of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and our security sector we are hopeful that towards the end of this year and we are praying that there will be no more weakened guerilla fronts that would be confronted at the start of next year. Thank you.

AFP COS GEN. BRAWNER: Let me answer the second part of Eden's question about their activities in relation to elections. Alam ninyo po iyong natitirang 1,111 fighters, most of them want to surrender already however, what is preventing them from doing so is the elections – the midterm elections of next year. May mga nakausap kami na mga rebel returnees, sabi namin, "Kausapin ninyo iyong mga kasamahan ninyo na mag-surrender na." Sabi nila, "Sir, gusto sana nilang mag-surrender pero elections next year." So, idi-delay na lang muna nila iyong pag-surrender nila 'no.

Anong kinalaman? Well, they always have this scheme 'no – money-making scheme – nangongolekta sila ng permit to campaign at permit to win 'no. Kaya po ang pakiusap namin sa ating mga kandidato ay huwag pong magbayad ng permit to campaign or permit to win sa kahit na sinumang miyembro ng New People's Army or iyong mga nagpapanggap na miyembro ng New People's Army. Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Thank you. Next one is Tuesday Niu, DZBB.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Hi, sirs and ma'am. To follow up lang, sir, kay Chief of Staff General Brawner, sir. Sabi ninyo, bago matapos ang taon hopefully matapos na rin itong mga weakened guerilla fronts natin. If that is the case, sir, I understand iyong NTF-ELCAC was created under Executive Order 70 para ma-stop iyong local armed conflict. So, kapag wala na tayong local armed conflict, ano pa ang magiging silbi po ng NTF-ELCAC? Ito po ba ay ia-abolish o kayo ba ay isi-shift into another commission or group?

AFP COS GEN. BRAWNER: Thank you. Well, when we say that there will be zero guerilla fronts by the end of the year, hindi po ibig sabihin nito ay wala nang matitirang mga fighters. We are expecting that there will still be vertical units. So, may mga matitirang mga armado na ang nangyari ngayon ay nagtitipun-tipon sila, naggugrupo-grupo sila dahil halos kakaunti na lang po iyong mga natitira. So, they group themselves into bigger formations so that they could, well, attack probably mga detachments natin and so on pero talagang mahina na sila. So, by next year, we are expecting na mayroon pa rin, magkakaroon pa rin ng mga encounters next year pero hindi na po sila talagang makakapag-extort ng pera, hindi na po sila makakapag-influence ng mga communities natin and that is the more important thing.

But as to your other question, I will leave that to Usec. Torres as to what will happen to the NTF-ELCAC.

NTF-ELCAC USEC. TORRES JR.: Thank you, Chief of Staff for allowing me to answer that difficult question. Well, to answer, Tuesday, we have to remember that the more difficult part in our counter insurgency campaign is the sustainment of our peace gains. We cannot afford to allow them that opportunity to recover, that's why we all have to continue working together as a nation in order to sustain our peace gains.

So, in part of our effort in the NTF-ELCAC is to review our campaign plan and program and we've been doing that for the past year that's why we arrived at the draft that we presented to the chairman, our President, His Excellency President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. a while ago the final draft of the National Action Plan for Unity, Peace and Development which is more focused on socioeconomic development rather than on security operations or campaign.

But it is not to say na sini-set aside na natin kasi kailangan talaga natin pa rin na to have a secured environment for us to be able to proceed with our various developmental efforts 'no para ma-implement natin nang maigi.

Let us always be reminded, and this always what I share to the public 'no, lasting peace is the price of eternal vigilance. So, we have to continue working together to be more vigilant even if we have already severely degraded their capability to conduct violent actions or terrorism. We have to be continuously vigilant and supportive of the different socioeconomic development programs of the government. And that is practically what the NAP-UPD or National Action Plan for Unity, Peace and Development is geared towards.

And I also would like to make mention that we are already reaching the final stage of counter insurgency campaign on matters related to their armed component and we are very lucky that last year the President signed the amnesty proclamation. So, iyon pong ating National Amnesty Commission is very much at the forefront of the implementation of the amnesty program. In fact, as we speak now, there are 971 former members of the CPP-NPA who have already submitted their application for amnesty.

So, all over the country mayroon na po tayong mga local amnesty boards and one of the topics that was discussed earlier of course is related to that. And sorry, ma'am, but I think it would be better for the chairperson to elaborate further on the actions of the National Amnesty Commission, if that would be required by Miss Tuesday. Thank you.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Sir, puwede bang bago tayo lumipat kay, Ma'am, 'no. gusto ko lang malaman, magkakaroon ba ng panibagong issuance ng Executive Order para i-amend iyong EO70 creating the NTF-ELCAC tapos transition into NAP-UPD?

NTF-ELCAC USEC. TORRES: Well, that is one of the considerations also. But what happened this morning is just the presentation of how we would recalibrate the program. From a campaign that is more focused on security to a campaign that is more focused now on socio-economic development. So, it was approved by the President, but as to re branding or issuance of another Executive Order, it would be a subject of another discussion at the moment. Thank you, Tuesday.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: You would want to hear from Chairperson Armamento.

NAC CHAIRPERSON ARMAMENTO: Thank you very much, miss Daphne. We are highly satisfied with the outcome of today's meeting with the President because the President approved our request that the national amnesty commission be given the authority to issue safe conduct pass. Because our applicants most of them have warrants of arrests. And they cannot go to our offices to file their applications. So, our game plan is to go to them, but sometimes we cannot access them because they are in the mountains, they are in hiding.

So, the issuance of the President, the approval of the President for the National Amnesty Commission to issue a safe conduct pass is very timely and it is much needed by the National Amnesty Commission to perform its work effectively. And then, also the President approved the creation of an additional ten local amnesty boards, six in Luzon, additional two in Visayas and additional two in Mindanao and then he also committed to appoint one new Commissioner, because we are lacking one Commissioner, because he recently died. So, he committed to that.

And I am very thankful to the NTF-ELCAC for raising these issues before the President. Thank you, very much.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: We have another question from Buena Bernal of CNA.

BUENA/CNA: In your analysis, sir, what is the impact of the arrest of Mr. Wigberto Villarico on the operations of the New People's Army? And then, I'll follow-up later, sir.

AFP CHIEF-OF-STAFF GEN. BRAWNER: Yes, definitely, this has a very big impact in terms of reducing the unity of command of the New People's Army, because he is considered the acting chairperson of the committee, so this has a big impact. In fact, nawawalan na po sila ng mga senior leaders, that is why we noticed that even the units, iyong mga New People's Army units on the ground are not unified in their actions.

BUENA/CNA: And sir, every year, this is a familiar refrain we also hear that the Philippine military will end the communist insurgency this year. It feels like a repeated new year's resolution in the past, half a century for the military. What makes this year different that you project in the next year, you can declare victory over the New People's Army?

AFP CHIEF-OF-STAFF GEN. BRAWNER: Well then again, we consider the NTF-ELCAC and the Executive Order 70, very successful. So, when government agencies and the whole of the nation come together for a specific objective, and in this case, the ending of the local terrorist group or the local armed conflict, then we get better results.

Yes, I understand that every year, we have this. For us, in the Armed Forces, it's important that we set targets for ourselves. So, even if people say, paulit-ulit iyan, pag-extend nang pa-extend lang naman iyan. But for us in the Armed Forces is very important because when we set targets, our units, our soldiers on the ground have that desire to meet their targets and if we don't meet the target, at least, we have achieved a lot in terms of the mission that we are, we set out to do.

JEAN MANGALUZ/PHIL. STAR: Sir, correct me, if I'm wrong, pero can private schools under COCOPEA expect anti-terrorism lectures soon?

NTF-ELCAC USEC. TORRES: Well, with the COCOPEA's inclusion as the part of the Executive Committee of the NTF-ELCAC, there will be, as I have mentioned earlier, a broader base for the information awareness campaign of the government for them to know the truth about the designated groups, the designated terrorist organization and personalities, so that they would have an informed choice as to whether or not they would, you know, join certain organizations.

So, it is more of a possibility of putting forth the information about the terror-grooming scheme of the CPP-NPA-NDF and other terrorist organizations in our country. Again, for students specifically, to be able to exercise their right to an informed choice, a choice that would not harm themselves, their school, their family, their community and our country so that it would be fair with them. It is actually our constitutional mandate to serve and protect the Filipino people to include the students, and part of really protecting them is providing them the right information about questionable organizations and personalities for them to protect themselves.

JEAN MANGALUZ/PHIL. STAR: But how do you address concerns of red-tagging especially with the Supreme Court ruling defining what it is? It is quite—it is a threat.

NTF-ELCAC USEC. TORRES: I would like to answer that question, but we have a representative here from our legal cooperation cluster of the NTF-ELCAC and I guess, with the permission of our moderator, he would be in the best position, Atty. Cliff Santos, to answer your question. Thank you.

OSG ATTY. SANTOS: Thank you, Usec. So with regard to the issue of red-tagging, first, it is the official position of the government that red-tagging is legally insistent, it is an invention of the CPP-NPA-NDF to demonize and to put a bad picture on the unmasking of the government of the real identities of the affiliates of the CPP-NPA-NDF. And you also raised the decision of the Supreme Court in the Deduro versus Vinoya, we are very well aware of that decision, but it's also our position as far as the LCC is concerned, that the statement of the Supreme Court on red-tagging is an obiter dictum, because if you

are going to look at the case of Deduro, it is a resolution of the court in response to a petition for writ of amparo.

The decision does not dispose the case on the merits, rather it remands the case back to the Regional Trial Court of Iloilo to litigate the case once again, because part of the issue there was the denial of due process on the part of the state which failed to present its evidence to exculpate themselves from the allegations of the petitioner.

That said, since the case does not dispose the issue of the issuance of the writ of amparo on the merits, our position is that the statement of the court on red-tagging is a mere obiter dictum that is not binding on succeeding cases. And in fact, if you are also going to analyze the statement of the court there in Deduro, it reaffirms the long-standing position of the government that mere membership in the red organizations or their affiliates does not constitute a threat against life, liberty and security.

CHONA YU/PEOPLE'S JOURNAL: Sir, just a quick follow-up on Jean's question. What are the dynamics of the partnership of NTF-ELCAC with COCOPEA? Who will inform the students, will it be the teachers alone or the papasok among the sundalo in the private schools to inform the students about anti-terrorism?

NTF-ELCAC USEC. TORRES: First, we have to recall that the NTF-ELCAC is not just the military. There are 32 member agencies in the NTF, almost all the departments are members of the NTF-ELCAC and now with two private representatives in the NTF-ELCAC.

And we have 12 clusters, one is the Legal Cooperation Cluster, Basic Services Cluster, Strategic Communication Cluster. We also have the Situational Awareness and Knowledge Cluster, what else? Infrastructure Resource Management Cluster—I'll see if I can remember the 12, the PRLEC Poverty Reduction Livelihood Enhancement Cluster and the many more other clusters 'no.

And the information awareness campaign, basically lies on two of the clusters. One, is the situational awareness and knowledge cluster, which is headed by the NICA, and the strategic communication cluster which is co-headed by the PCO and the National Security Council.

So, COCOPEA will be one of the members in this clusters, and the cluster would be the one to craft on how to effectively launch our rule-based, human rights-based approach in really unmasking the truth about the CPP-NPA-NDF.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you.

CHONA YU/PEOPLE'S JOURNAL: Another issue sir. Balikan ko lang iyong 2,200 fighter from last year to 1,000 this year, ano pong nangyari sa 1,000? Were they neutralized or did they surrender sa government?

AFP COS GEN. BRAWNER: Most of these are surrenderees, a few of them where neutralized through encounters. Sa ngayon kasi, although every now and then may naririnig tayong mga encounters but usually the encounters last for about five to ten minutes only before the New People's Army will disengage. Nakikita namin dito halos wala na po silang mga bala 'no, and then, their fighters, those who are left are also the one's not trained anymore, parang ito na iyong mga baguhan. So, most of the 1,000 of the reduction in the number were surrenderees.

CHONA YU/PEOPLE'S JOURNAL: Sir, sabi ninyo po kanina, iyong more than 1,000 fighters na natitira, they want to surrender pero dahil may eleksiyon kaya ayaw na muna nilang mag-surrender, what will the government do about it, will there an intensified operation para hindi na makapanggulo itong mga natitirang fighters sa susunod na election?

AFP COS GEN. BRAWNER: Yes, tuluy-tuloy po iyong ating operations, iyong combat operations natin. But more than the combat operations are the program of the government to entice them to come back to the folds of the law 'no, balik sila, magbalik na lang sila nang sa gayon, ang sinasabi namin sa kanila, malapit na iyong Pasko at maganda, mas maganda na magbalik-loob kayo and then para makasama ninyo iyong mga mahal ninyo sa buhay.

They will also be receiving benefits from the government, under the E-CLIP program, the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program. So iyon po, iyong programa ng ating gobyerno. While we are doing the combat operations on one side, we're also convincing them, we're offering them to come back and we are also, as I mentioned earlier – offering amnesty.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay, thank you.

NTF-ELCAC USEC. TORRES JR: Can I make a rejoinder, Daphne?

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Go ahead sir.

NTF-ELCAC USEC. TORRES JR: Yes, although it is always a possibility that they will make use of this election to extort money like from permit to win and permit to campaign scheme just looking at what transpired in the last elections, there were actually very insignificant reports of them being able to extort money from the public 'no, under the scheme of permit to win and permit to campaign. Because, again, everybody is helping each other to protect ourselves from getting abused by the different schemes, extortion scheme of the CPP-NPA-NDF.

Kaya ngayon, we are again appealing to the public na ngayon pong magkakaaleksiyon tayo, we have already mechanisms on a reporting properly, if there a such cases of extortion demands from the CPP-NPA-NDF that are related to the election. And then, when it is properly reported to the concern agencies, they are acted upon and thus, it would deter any effort 'no, from the CPP-NPA from extorting money again as part of their resource generation or personal resource generation nila 'no, for us to be able to frustrate them and doing those. So, that just our call to the public this coming election.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you, we go to Mikhail Flores of Reuters.

MIKHAIL FLORES/REUTERS: Usec. Torres, it's been almost a year since the joint petition for peace was signed in Oslo, I wonder if peace talks remain an option under the National Action Plan considering that the government and the military have significantly weakened the armed wing of the CPP-NPA-NDF? And to General Brawner, with your indulgence, I hope we can also briefly get your outlook on the security alliance with U.S. under Trump presidency?

NTF-ELCAC USEC. TORRES JR.: Yes, and we are very much aware of that Oslo communique are you referring to that, which was inked last year, November of last year. So, we are optimistic still that such peace effort would finally lead to a final peace settlement with the CPP-NPA-NDF. But as to the nitty-gritty details on how it is proceeding, there are just some selected personalities who are into it.

But at the moment, what we getting at the NTF-ELCAC, particularly at the national secretariat, we are of the understanding that a new framework would be defined for us to be able to proceed with the nationally orchestrated peace engagement.

So, I think that is all that I can share at the moment, but the local peace engagement is very much continuing. Meaning, iyong effort again, it is headed by the OPAPRU and other member agencies, we are collaborating with the local chief executives, the communities to be able to reach out doon sa mga nandoon pa po sa bundok, explaining to them clearly on what the programs of the government are, for them to be convinced to return to folds of the law and be reintegrated back to mainstream society.

So, in summary, we are hopeful, that there be a final peace settlement/agreement as a result of the Oslo Joint Communiqué, but efforts at the local level have been continuing under the local peace efforts, under the LPE cluster of the NTF-ELCAC.

AFP COS GEN. BRAWNER: Yes, as to the second part of your question. We are at the Armed Forces of the Philippines are optimistic, that the relationship of the Armed Forces of the Philippines with the military of the United States will remain robust and strong.

The reason why I say this is because of the existence of several agreements, the MDT being one, Mutual Defense Treaty. And aside from that, we share a long history of defense cooperation with the United States, we fought together during the World War II, they have continued to support us in our campaign against terrorism. Even now against the other threats that we are facing in the region, they still continue to support us.

And aside from that, there were several statements that were given by U.S. officials even prior to the elections stating that the United States, would continue to support us in terms of the defense cooperation that we have. Regardless of who wins the elections. So, we're still very optimistic.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you.

MIKHAIL FLORES/REUTERS: Just a very quick follow up kay Usec. Torres. Sir, in terms of the—you mentioned the national framework. So, is that a framework agreement already in terms of where the peace talks discussions are going similar to the framework agreement on the Bangsamoro in 2014? And, what's the timetable that you're looking at in having that kind of national framework finally being agreed upon by both panels?

NTF-ELCAC EXEC. DIR. USEC. TORRES: What I was referring to are the—when I say framework are the basis of both the GRP and the NDFP for proceeding with possibility of having a peace talk because there were parameters before that were being followed or there are certain agreements before prior to this Oslo communiqué and prior to its termination in 2017, iyong peace talks natin ano.

And those things, although consistently being mentioned by some sectors belonging to the CPP-NPA-NDF group 'no, we are of the belief that those earlier parameters would not be the same as that with the new framework that's being crafted.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Harley Valbuena, again.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Hi again, sirs/ma'am. Since we are already talking about the election, may we get the stand of the NTF-ELCAC on the proposed postponement of the 2025 BARMM parliament reelections?

NTF-ELCAC EXEC. DIR. USEC. TORRES: Sorry ano, Harley 'no. NTF-ELCAC kasi only concerns about the CTGs or the CPP-NPA-NDF and we are not privy to decisions related to the concerns about BARMM.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Sir, but do you think that if the postponement pushes through, it might result to rise of some insurgent or resistance groups since some local executives are already opposing it?

NTF-ELCAC EXEC. DIR. USEC. TORRES: So again, Harley 'no, I have my own personal opinion on that. But, of course, as the head of the National Secretariat of the NTF-ELCAC, probably, I can just share it with you in confidence *[laughs]* for now because, again, my task only covers matters pertaining to the CPP-NPA-NDF. I'm really sorry, Harley.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you. Question from Anne Soberano over here, Bombo Radyo.

ANNE SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Sir, good afternoon. Sir, balik ko lang. Pinalawak ninyo pa iyong information campaign sa mga estudyante, hindi lang po sa mga public schools. Ngayon, pinasok ninyo na po iyong mga private schools. Ibig sabihin ba, sir, na lumalakas din ang recruitment ng CPP-NPA-NDF sa private schools na mga estudyante? Thank you.

NTF-ELCAC EXEC. DIR. USEC. TORRES: Well, again, gusto ko lang banggitin iyong binanggit ko kanina – lasting peace is the prize of eternal vigilance. So, for us, as part of our eternal vigilance that we are referring to is continuous flow of the right information to the general public not only to the students, but especially to the sectors that are most vulnerable – most vulnerable to getting exploited or radicalized 'no.

This is a democratic country, of course, but we would like to put across the right information – again, for the Filipino people to be able to exercise their right to an informed choice. Hindi naman pupuwede na iyong basis ng information nila is through deception or mga untruths about certain organization and personalities 'no. So, we have to give them the right information so that they can decide for themselves, they can make that choice that would not harm anybody.

So, again, the membership of COCOPEA would broaden that base of information awareness campaign to better protect the students and the Filipino people.

ANNE SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Pero wala kayong namo-monitor, sir, na may recruitment?

NTF-ELCAC EXEC. DIR. USEC. TORRES: Well, again ang CPP-NPA-NDF, they are very... you know, very persistent in their efforts. So, we are not discounting the fact that they continue to recover. They would attempt to recover their lost mass bases 'ika nga. They will still attempt to recruit but with what we have now as we have briefed 'no, as we were briefed earlier, they do not have the capacity, not only to generate funds but pati iyong recruitment po nila ay hindi na rin po ganoon kalakas ano. That is our latest assessment coming from the security sector.

AFP COS GEN. BRAWNER: May I just add one thing? One thing good that came out of COVID-19, bumaba iyong recruitment nila sa mga schools 'no.

NTF-ELCAC EXEC. DIR. USEC. TORRES: I think I may just ano, kasi we might miss this 'no. Iyong mga pangalan po noong mga bagong CORDS hindi ko yata nabanggit kanina sa opening statement. If I may...

CORDS is the Cabinet Officer for Regional Development and Security and there were three vacant CORDS position due to the resignation of the following: Doon sa Region II because nag-resign si Secretary Pascual, nabakante iyon so we do not have CORDS for Region II; tapos sa NCR dahil tumakbo for an elective post si Secretary Mangudadatu; and then Region VIII si Secretary Abalos, alam naman natin nag-resign na rin siya so bakante iyong tatlong CORDS for the three regions.

Iyong CORDS po, sila ang... they are the ones responsible for collaborating the efforts of the Regional Peace and Order Council and the Regional Development Council for it to contribute in the resolution of the root causes of insurgency – kasama na iyong poverty, delivery of basic services, livelihood opportunities, iyon po 'yung function noon. And, they being the cabinet secretaries, they get to meet the President regularly kaya iyong mga concern doon sa regions ay naipaaabot kaagad nila diretso sa Presidente and with their colleagues in the... their fellow cabinet secretaries.

So, very important na ma-fill up po iyong position ng CORDS doon sa tatlong region. And it was approved by the President a while ago and they even took their oath before the meeting ended this morning and they are the following: For CORDS Region II, we have DMW Secretary Hans Leo J. Cacdac; for CORDS

NCR, we now have DILG Secretary Jonvic Remulla Jr.; and for CORDS of Region VIII, we have DepEd Secretary Juan Edgardo Angara.

Also, Secretary Tereso Magno, the former Presidential Assistant for Eastern Mindanao now designated as the Chairperson of the Mindanao Development Authority was reappointed as the CORDS of Region XI.

So. Lyon lang po. Thank you, Madam Moderator.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Thank you so much for all the updates from NTF-ELCAC and, of course, the efforts towards lasting peace.

Thank you, Undersecretary Torres, General Brawner, Atty. Santos and Chairperson Armamento. And thank you, Malacañang Press Corps. Have a good afternoon.

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