

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau**

**PRESS CONFERENCE OF THE
NATIONAL TASK FORCE TO END LOCAL COMMUNIST ARMED CONFLICT (NTF-ELCAC)
WITH NTF-ELCAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UNDERSECRETARY ERNESTO TORRES JR.,
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL (NSC)
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR GENERAL JONATHAN MALAYA,
NATIONAL AMNESTY COUNCIL (NAC) CHAIRPERSON ATTY. LEAH TANODRA-
ARMAMENTO
AND ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES (AFP) VICE CHIEF OF STAFF
LIEUTENANT GENERAL JIMMY LARIDA
MARCH 26, 2025 [1:15 P.M. – 1:50 P.M.]**

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Magandang hapon, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome sa press conference ng National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.

Pinangunahan kanina ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. ang 7th Executive Committee Meeting ng NTF-ELCAC kung saan pinag-usapan ang update sa Executive Order 70 at panunumpa ng mga bagong CORDS at execom members pati na rin ang mga aktibidad ng NTF-ELCAC.

Para bigyan tayo ng detalye sa 7th Execom Meeting, kasama natin ngayon sina NTF-ELCAC Executive Director Undersecretary Ernesto Torres Jr., National Security Council Assistant Director General Jonathan Malaya, National Amnesty Council Chairperson Atty. Leah Tanodra-Armamento at Armed Forces of the Philippines Vice Chief of Staff Lt. General Jimmy Larida.

Good afternoon, ma'am/sir. Undersecretary Torres for an opening statement?

NTF-ELCAC EXEC. DIR. USEC. TORRES: Magandang umaga sa ating lahat. Once again, thank you very much for having us here in this press conference. Thank you, Asec. Dale, for the introduction.

Tama iyan ano, this morning we had the 7th Executive Committee Meeting of the NTF-ELCAC. It was conducted in two parts: The first part is the preparatory meeting which was presided by the Executive Secretary, Secretary Lucas Bersamin, in order to discuss the agenda items so that there will be, you know, there's already a consensus when the President arrives for the meeting proper. And then, the President arrived at about 1000 hours and then the meeting presided.

Very important things were tackled during those two events such as business arising from the previous meeting that was conducted last year, November of 2024; and then, we also showed an AVP of the NTF-ELCAC showing to the public what the task force has done for the past year; and then, a briefing was conducted by the Director General of NICA on the CPP-NPA-NDF's situation; then, I briefed the executive committee in those two occasions on updates, challenges and recommendations. So, I would be sharing with you in the course of this press conference what transpired during those meetings.

But before that, I just would like to inform the body that the Executive Committee Meeting was well-attended. Out of the 36 regular members of the execom cabinet secretaries, 32 were present. So, just a rundown of who were present in that meeting earlier, of course the President as the Chairperson was there, the Vice Chair, Secretary Año was also there and the Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin.

Also present are, if I may just mention to you the department secretaries who were also around. We also have around your—the head of the PCO, Secretary Jaybee Ruiz, then NEDA, Department of Health, Department of Trade and Industry, even the DOF was represented there, the DND, DTI, DOST, CHED Chairman was also there, DA, Department of Transportation. I'm mentioning this just for everybody to have a picture on how broad the participation was this morning and how complex the organization of the NTF-ELCAC is.

So, we also have a representative from TESDA; the NCIP Chair was also there; NICA head; then, of course, from the Armed Forces of the Philippines – it was represented by the Vice Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Jimmy Larida; then the DENR was also represented by Usec. Augusto dela Peña; DPWH was represented; and, of course, some other officials from the NICA; from OPAPRU, Secretary Galvez was in attendance; and then, the OSG himself was there together with the Assistant Solicitor General Angelita Miranda.

Also present, of course, is the head of the StratCom cluster of the NTF-ELCAC; Assistant Director General Jonathan Malaya of the National Security Council; and from the DA, represented by Secretary James Layug.

Also present are commissioners from the National Amnesty Commission in the person of Atty. Jamar Kulayan; and the newly designated Commissioner for Luzon of the National Amnesty Commission, Atty. Ser-me Ayuyao; and then, the Department Human Settlements and Urban Development was also represented by its secretary.

So, from that meeting and with the attendance of these distinguished officials, honorable secretaries which composes the NTF-ELCAC and the heads of the national clusters – 12 different clusters of the NTF-ELCAC – we were able to discuss a lot of things this morning and these items, we would be ready to share with you in the course of our press conference.

Muli, Asec. Dale, maraming salamat po.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, Usec. We're now opening the floor to questions to our panelists. Ah, another statement from ADG Malaya.

NSC ADG MALAYA: Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat—Good afternoon. Good afternoon to the members of the media, the Malacañang Press Corps.

In response to the calls of Gabriela Partylist Congresswoman Arlene Brosas asking the President to abolish the NTF-ELCAC, I am sorry to relay the bad news to them – that the President made it clear today that he will never abolish the NTF-ELCAC. The President, as chairman of the NTF-ELCAC himself recognizes the success of the task force in decimating the terroristic activities of the CPP-NPA-NDF and if I may quote the President this morning, *"I'm encouraged by the reports, our efforts are bearing fruit, we have to continue. It has been successful and we need to continue to invest in its success."*

So, I don't think we will have a much clearer answer than that of the President. Let me put on the record that it was the NTF-ELCAC that dealt a heavy blow to the CPP-NPA-NDF that is why the NPA now is at its lowest point in its more than 50 years of reign of terror in the countryside. The facts speak for themselves, and later on the Vice Chief of Staff may perhaps give a more comprehensive report, there is now only one remaining weakened guerilla front in the Province of Camarines Sur. Wala na pong ibang active guerilla front, weakened na lang at nasa Camarines Sur. Ang nakakalungkot, tagadoon pa ako *[laughs]* and this remaining weakened guerilla front will be dismantled within the year.

At present, there are only 1,050 remaining NPA armed members scattered and isolated in some parts of the country. When NTF-ELCAC was organized, 89 po lahat iyan – 89 guerilla fronts and now we are at one weakened guerilla front – that is equivalent to 98.88% accomplishment rate from the original target.

And, why has the CPP-NPA significantly declined? It is due to various reasons: One, its leadership losses – the death of Joma Sison, the neutralization of key central committee members like the Tiamzon couple; and just last—a few months ago, the death of Myrna Sularte of the Northeastern Mindanao Regional Committee; focused military and police operations that has led to the dismantling of almost all guerilla fronts; socioeconomic investments through the Barangay Development Program; and, of course, sustained localized peace engagements.

The CPP-NPA-NDF is also impeded in its recruitment efforts in schools and in universities because of the anti-terror grooming and anti-radicalization program of the NTF-ELCAC. With the loss of their mass base, the CPP-NPA is no longer able to impose their revolutionary taxation nor are they able to impose their permit to win or permit to campaign rules as in the past election. 'Di po ba habang lumalaki tayo, laging isyu iyan – permit to campaign, permit to win, revolutionary tax. For this coming May elections, the CPP-NPA-NDF will no longer be a significant threat to the peaceful conduct of elections.

Nonetheless, with the launch of the New People's Army of its third rectification movement, the CPP-NPA seeks to rebuild and reclaim its lost mass base. But their efforts are hindered by the NTF-ELCAC, focused military and police operations, legal and financial restrictions, socio-economic projects like the Barangay Development Program, and our amnesty program which I understand will be explained to us in detail by the National Amnesty Commission.

This is the reason why Congressman Brosas and other leftist members of Congress are calling for the abolition of the NTF-ELCAC. The NTF-ELCAC is the instrument that will finally deal a death blow to communist insurgency in the country.

Under President Bongbong Marcos, the NTF-ELCAC has been an instrument of peace and order, allowing the surrender in 2024 alone of 5,558 surrenderees. Ano po ang breakdown ng 5,558 na iyan? Ang regular NPA diyan – 2,033; Militia ng Bayan – 732; underground mass organizations – 856; SPL or Samahan sa Partido sa Lokal – 165; mass supporters – 1,772. Lahat po, itong limanlibong ito or 5,558 were provided E-CLIP assistance by the NTF-ELCAC.

Therefore, we thank the President for his 100 [percent] support to the NTF-ELCAC and we commit to his directive to continue our efforts to finally end communist armed conflict in this country within his term.

Maraming salamat po.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, ADG Malaya. Chairperson Armamento, would you want to add more?

NAC CHAIRPERSON ARMAMENTO: The National Amnesty Commission in so far as the CPP-NPA-NDF is concerned, we have a total of 1,577 applicants out of the 2,233 combatants. And we have a total of 2,481 applicants from the four groups that are given by the President the opportunity or covered by the proclamation to apply for amnesty.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, Chairperson Armamento. Lt. General Larida, would you want to give a short statement?

AFP LT. GEN. LARIDA: Iyong success po ng ating NTF-ELCAC is a manifestation of the whole-of-government approach. And the Armed Forces of the Philippines is very proud to announce na iyon nga, mayroon na [lang] po tayong isang weakened guerilla front sa Southern Luzon area, and it's a matter of administrative procedure na lang po. Dumaan na ito sa national level Joint Peace and Security Coordinating Council, at na-deliberate na po ito at considered dismantled, so administrative procedure na lang po ang hinihintay natin. And with that, kung matapos iyong procedure na iyon ay wala na po tayong guerilla front na kinu-confront. That's the success of NTF-ELCAC. Thank you.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, Lt. General Larida. We are now opening the floor to MPC for questions. Racquel Bayan, Radyo Pilipinas.

RACQUEL BAYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS: To Sir Torres. Sir, bukod po dito sa mga binanggit ninyo na kanina, ano pa po kaya iyong ibang inilatag ninyo kay Pangulong Marcos sa meeting kanina? At saka mayroon po bang particular na isyu or topic si Pangulong Marcos na hiningian ng update sa meeting kanina?

NTF-ELCAC USEC. TORRES JR.: Thank you very much for that question. So among the things that were discussed earlier is the strengthening of the NTF-ELCAC. Kagaya nga ng binanggit ni ADG Jon kanina, it is very enlightening that the President made that commitment, that the NTF-ELCAC campaign would be sustained in its peace and development efforts.

So, part of that strengthening of the organization is the approval of the designation of the CORDS (Cabinet Officer for Regional Development and Security). So, for the information of everybody, the merging of the RDC or Regional Development Council and the Regional Peace and Order Council on matters pertaining to the resolution of the root causes of insurgency is being led by the courts in every region in our country. Since some of the regions were vacant, with the resignation, for instance, of Secretary Bautista of the CAR – siya iyong dating CORDS ng CAR – so this morning, he was replaced by Secretary Arsenio Balisacan of NEDA as CORDS of CAR. Similarly, Secretary Vivencio Dizon is now designated as the CORDS of Region IV-B. While for the newly established Negros Island Region, the TESDA head, Secretary Jose Francisco Benitez was also designated as its CORDS. Other than that, there were some designations also and adjustment in the organization of the NTF-ELCAC. One is the inclusion of TESDA as the co-lead of the PRLEC cluster 'no – cluster of the NTF-ELCAC.

By the way, there are 12 different clusters under the organization of the NTF-ELCAC, with the 17 joint regional task forces ELCAC all over the country. So, iyong PRLEC [Poverty Reduction and Livelihood Employment Cluster] which was led by the Department of Agriculture alone, so with the approval of the execom and the President this morning of the TESDA to be the co-lead ay dalawa na po silang magli-lead ng PRLEC cluster.

Also, OPAPRU was included as co-lead of the DILG and the DND in the E-CLIP, in Amnesty Program Cluster. Likewise, of course, ang National Amnesty Commission was also made a part of the EAP Cluster. Again, it's the E-CLIP and Amnesty Program Cluster, one of the twelve clusters of the NTF-ELCAC.

And also, the Department of Migrant Workers was made a member in five different clusters namely, International Engagement Cluster; Basic Services Cluster; and then, the SUCBEM Cluster or Sectoral Unification Capacity Building and Employment Cluster; STRATCOM Cluster. So, DMW will now be a part of the cluster headed by ADG Malaya. And the 5th cluster wherein DMW was made a member of is the PRLEC Cluster [Poverty Reduction and Livelihood Employment Cluster].

So, other items that were discussed, of course, pertain to the sustainment of the Barangay Development Program and the NAPUPD. NAPUPD is the National Action Plan for Unity, Peace and Development, which would serve as the roadmap of the NTF-ELCAC in the implementation of its programs, projects and activities from 2025 to 2028. It was actually approved by the President in the 6th Executive Committee Meeting last year, November 8 of 2024, and officially launched on December 6th 2024 which coincided with the 6th founding anniversary of the NTF-ELCAC.

So, we are just awaiting for the issuance of a memorandum circular that would direct all the agencies of the government and its partners to provide support in the implementation of the NAPUPD 2025 to 2028.

So, details of the BDP program, siguro po ang pinaka ... aside from the funding support that we requested from the administration, one significant thing about the BDP program—well, just to contextualize ano, iyong BDP program po natin, ang beneficiaries niyan are barangays that were formerly influenced by the CPP-NPA-NDF. Hindi po kasama iyong mga barangays na dating naimpluwensiyahan ng local terrorist group, meaning iyong nga Abu Sayyaf Group, Dawlah Islamiyah, pati BIFF. But this morning, it was recommended with the Executive Committee to the President for the inclusion of such barangays that were cleared by our security forces from the local terrorist group, and there are 280 of those.

So, it was the decision of the Executive Committee this morning to include those 280 barangays that were previously influenced by those local terrorist groups that I've mentioned now cleared by them and then puwede na pong ipasok sa BDP Program.

So, provinces and a city which have these barangays are Zamboanga City, Sulu, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Sur, and the last one is Basilan. So, iyon pong limang lugar na iyon ay puwede nang mag-benefit starting in 2026 iyong mga RCSP natin or Retooled Community Support Program and then BDP starting 2027.

Ang schedule ng implementation doon sa mga provinces and city na nabanggit ko – for Sulu, Lanao del Sur, and Zamboanga City to be the beneficiaries of the RCSP for 2026 and BDP 2027. Whereas, for provinces of Basilan and Maguindanao del Sur to be beneficiaries of RCSP 2027 and BDP 2028.

So, for the regular BDP [Barangay Development Program] natin, we are happy to note from the President himself that he would sustain the implementation of the Barangay Development

Program because this is our commitment to those barangays that were formerly influenced by the CPP-NPA-NDF.

So, as we speak now, we are serving 4,830 barangays from 2021 to 2025 but then we still have to serve more than 3,000 barangays up to 2028.

So, schemes and funding efforts, funding on how to generate the necessary fund for the BDP in more 3,000 barangays was discussed a while ago and there is that commitment from the government to complete the implementation of the BDP barangays on or before the end of this term of this administration.

So, there are other things because there are a lot of items actually that were discussed this morning kasi iyong tanong naman ni ma'am kanina is about those iyong BDP and how we strengthen the NTF-ELCAC. Maybe later on some of the topics that were discussed, well, actually a lot of the topics discussed are related to the function of the National Amnesty Commission and then specially mga farm-to-market roads iyong funding ay na-approve din po kanina. I can discuss that in detail the next round na lang siguro.

Maraming salamat po.

RACQUEL BAYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS: Sir, how much budget po kaya iyong kakailanganin natin para sa inclusion ng 280 barangays by 2026?

NTF-ELCAC USEC. TORRES JR.: I-rectify ko lang, you're referring to the LTG barangays 'no? So for Sulu, Lanao del Sur and Zamboanga City – iyong RCSP lang muna. This is a multiagency team that goes to the community that were cleared from any terrorist group 'no, they determine the needs of that community then at saka po pagpasok ang BDP after RCSP.

Now, doon sa scheme na prinisent [present] natin kay Pangulo kanina it would entail an addition of 73 million pesos per year starting 2026 for the RCSP; and doon sa BDP barangay, ang ating program kasi is if that's 280 barangays so yearly we've been proposing 10 million pesos per barangay eh. So, if we will multiply the 280 barangays by 10 million that will be 2.8 billion for the 280 barangays on the assumption that—of course, the recommendation for the funding of 10 million per barangay would be approved.

And related to that because this year we were informed that the proposal for the BDP to be funded with 10 million per barangay – kasi for 20255 we have 780 barangays 'no. Well, we were not able to...well, as we speak now 'no ang na-approve na funding doon ay 2.5 million instead of 10 million per barangay. But there is an instruction coming from the President to the DBM, DOF was also there this morning to find ways to recover a portion or the whole of this last amount for the implementation of BDP 2025.

So, there is that expressed commitment from this administration, by our President, to continue supporting the BDP Program because as he mentioned a while ago, this is our commitment to the Filipino people especially in the Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas.

So, I hope I was able to sufficiently answer your question. Maraming salamat po.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: ADG Malaya, you were mentioning Gabriela a while ago. Just now the Gabriela Women's Party filed a complaint in the COMELEC against the NTF-ELCAC. They are accusing the task force and other personalities of red-tagging as well as gender-based sexual

harassment during the election period particularly iyong supposed continuous vicious and systematic vilification campaign by the NTF-ELCAC which they say are in violation of COMELEC Resolution 1116 or the Anti-Discrimination Guidelines.

So, sabi ni first nominee Sarah Elago, 'when they red-tag and harassed the Gabriela Women's Party they are attacking not only the party but also attempting to silence the collective voices of women in and out of Congress.' Your comment, sir?

NSC ADG MALAYA: Thank you for the question. First and foremost, wala pong basehan iyang mga paratang na iyan sa NTF-ELCAC. Red-tagging has never been the policy of the NTF-ELCAC. If [there's] any, it is the former rebels who are the ones red-tagging them 'mo. We have many individuals who were part of the communist movement who have now joined mainstream society and they are the ones exposing these individuals, those people that they were part, that they know for a fact who are part of the communist movement.

So, I think the Gabriela Women's Party list is barking at the wrong tree. They are again as expected kaya nga sabi ko assailing the integrity of the NTF-ELCAC because the NTF-ELCAC is the instrument to destroy the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army kaya pinag-iinitan kami. But we are very confident of what we have done. Kami sa NTF-ELCAC we do not engage in red-tagging, it is the former rebels who are the ones who are exposing and telling the truth about them.

If you remember there is was this hearing in the Senate called by Senator Bato dela Rosa and former rebels spoke there under oath and pointed to many members of the leftist groups. So, ito pong mga paratang na ito is an effort on the part of the Gabriela Women's Party list to harass and intimidate the NTF-ELCAC. And as I said in my opening statement kanina, these efforts will not bear fruit because as the President himself said very clearly this morning, the fruits of the NTF-ELCAC are very clear to see, it's bearing fruit and government must sustain these efforts so that we can finally put an end to communist insurgency in the country.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Another question po kay Attorney Armamento. Ma'am, in a previous interview you mentioned that you have requested the Office of the President to grant NAC iyong authority to issue safe conduct passes sa mga rebels who may want to apply for amnesty, ano na po ang update dito?

NAC CHAIRPERSON ATTY. ARMAMENTO: Kanina po, this was also taken up kanina sa meeting and it was directed by the President na i-fast track na ito kasi the complete staff work was already done. All members of the National Amnesty Commission who are ex officio – the Secretary of Justice, Secretary of Local Government, the Secretary of the National Defense and OPAPRU Secretary Galvez, they recommended for the grant of authority to the National Amnesty Commission to have authority to issue the safe conduct pass.

So after the meeting, we approached Executive Secretary Bersamin, and he called the ODESGA (Office of the Deputy Executive Secretary for General Administration) who has the papers to already submit it to his office.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Ma'am, nabanggit ninyo ho matumal iyong bilang ng mga nag-aaplay 'no, because of iyong problems, that's the reason why you have requested for a safe conduct passes. How do you think this will affect iyong number ng mga nag-aaplay once na ma-approve siya?

NAC CHAIRPERSON ATTY. ARMAMENTO: Actually, this will be very helpful because we can already access these members of the groups that are covered by the proclamations for amnesty kasi some of them have their warrants of arrest and they are in hiding. They want to apply for amnesty, but they cannot go out of their hiding place because of their fear that they'll be arrested.

So, what we were doing then was that we go to where they are and get their application. Sometimes, we go—we interview them through online – that is if they have Wi-Fi signal, if none, so it will be very difficult for us.

At iyong sinasabi namin na matumal, sa awa ng Diyos marami na, bumilis po ang aming application ngayon because what we do is we go to the communities with the help of the OPAPRU, AFP and PNP. So, they set up the what they call the one-stop shop wherein we bring there our people with all the services and we accept their application and then the Public Attorney's Office is also assisting us; and the Prosecutor's Office, to administer oath to these applicants.

So, like we have in Basilan, this was sponsored by the OPAPRU. For one day we had 127 applicants; in Negros, we have like a total of 67 applicants for the two days.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Last question na lang po. General Larida, may we know what's our timeline to dismantle iyong nahuhuling guerrilla front and what are the challenges that we are facing right now?

AFP VICE CHIEF OF STAFF LT. GEN. LARIDA: Sa nabanggit ko nga po kanina, ma'am, ang nasa administrative procedure na lang po, iyong sa consider—sa declaration iyong natirang weakened guerrilla front as dismantled. So, itong—siguro, ma'am, kung signatures lang naman ang kailagan, in a month's time considered dismantled na po itong remaining weakened guerrilla front.

Of course, ma'am, iyong second questioned ninyo tungkol sa challenges. With the weakened, tapos weakened structure nila ngayon, ang kanilang tactics ay napunta na sa small units and they are constantly evading our troops. So, iyong talagang hitting them directly with our operating troops, medyo very challenging sa ngayon. Thank you, ma'am.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Do you have questions from Malacañang press. Gilbert Perdez, DWIZ.

GILBERT PERDEZ/DWIZ: Magandang hapon po. Siguro kay General Larida, na lang siguro, wala po itong kinalaman sa NTF-ELCAC. Sa Friday po kasi nakatakdang magdiwang po ng kaarawan si dating Pangulong Duterte at inaasahan po na magkakaroon po ng mga pagkilos iyong mga pro-Duterte. Iyong ganitong usapin po ba natalakay ninyo po ba sa meeting ninyo with the President at anong paghahanda po ang ginagawa ng AFP dito?

AFP VICE CHIEF OF STAFF LT. GEN. LARIDA: Ang Armed Forces of the Philippines po is mandated to support the Philippine National Police sa law enforcement operations. So, ang reaksiyon po ng AFP is kung ano po ang i-request ng Philippine National Police. Sa other matters po I might reveal the operational and tactical matters already that I have—you know I have no authority to reveal. Iyong ibang statement about that, we will defer to the statement of the Department of National Defense, sir. Thank you, sir.

GILBERT PERDEZ/DWIZ: Sa gitna po ng political noise po sa bansa, anong assurance po ng taong-bayan sa AFP na manatiling loyal po sa Constitution ang militar?

AFP VICE CHIEF OF STAFF LT. GEN. LARIDA: Iyong ating Chief of Staff po si General Romeo S. Brawner Jr. palagi niya pong kinakausap iyong ating mga field commanders at isa lang ang marching orders: To remain loyal to the national flag and always perform our task in accordance to the Constitution.

Rest assured po that the Armed Forces of the Philippines is one and united in serving our nation and that is again, to perform mission in accordance with the Constitution, salamat po.

GILBERT PERDEZ/DWIZ: Thank you, sir.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Do you have more questions to the members of the NTF-ELCAC?

Yes, that's it. Thank you very much, Undersecretary Torres, ADG Malaya, Attorney Armamento and General Larida. At dito na po nagtatapos ang NTF-ELCAC 7th Execom meeting press conference. Maraming salamat, Malacañang Press Corps.

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