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On the NDF's withdrawal from the peace talks

“Our hopes for a just peace died at Mendiola”

The Mendiola Massacre on January 22 is the darkest hour of the Aquino government. In one day, the government surpassed the Marcos regime's bloody record of suppression in Metro Manila, with the slaying of 18 unarmed demonstrators.

Yet, it was more than life which was stilled that Black Thursday. On the road to Mendiola, the bullets and the brutality also fatally wounded the current efforts for peace in our country.

Today, on the funeral of our martyred comrades, we, the organizations under the National Democratic Front, declare our stand to formally withdraw from the peace negotiations with the Aquino government. However, we will continue to respect the preliminary ceasefire agreement until its expiry date. But we will assert the right to defend ourselves, and the revolutionary forces and the people we represent, against any further armed operations of the military.

We have taken this stand because the Mendiola Massacre made us realize the futility of pursuing the peace talks at present. It highlighted the extent of the government's intransigence to our agenda for a just peace, which specially includes the people's demand for genuine land reform. Moreover, the massacre underscored the bellicosity of the AFP which even prior to this incident, had secretly issued ceasefire guidelines to its field commanders in gross violation of the ceasefire agreement.

The Mendiola Massacre reveals the dark and ugly side of the Aquino government, hiding behind the flutter of yellow ribbons and the mask of democratic liberalism. It manifests the inherent inability of an elite government to heed the people's fundamental demands, particularly the free redistribution of feudal landholdings. This is because the primary standpoint of the present government is that of the landed rich and the powerful, not of the landless poor and the powerless.

In many ways, the Mendiola Massacre, like the no less tragic killings at Mendiola bridge during the Marcos era, mirrors the continuing basic contradictions and conflicts riving Philippine society. The sources of this social conflict emanate from widespread feudal oppression and poverty, foreign domination and exploitation of our country, and the massive corruption of the entire bureaucracy. So long as these basic problems remain unresolved, the people's struggles will continue as a way of alleviating and breaking out from their hardships, even as the ruling classes intensify their efforts to protect their vested interests.

The recent aborted coup attempt by an ultra-reactionary faction against the dominant Aquino faction is but a logical phenomenon in a society rife with intensifying people's struggles for social emancipation. Such factional infighting among members of the ruling classes is bound to occur more often as the people resist further exploitation and oppression and as the spoils of power diminish. This infighting seeks to preserve the present unjust system even as each faction tries to reap more advantages over its elite rivals.

Yet, for all their exhortations about defending democracy and progress, these competing factions of the elite classes

share the same standpoint of being anti-people, anti-revolution, pro-imperialist and pro-feudal. They differ only in their choice of approach or method of repressing the people. While the militarists opt for an outright campaign of force, the Aquino faction chooses to combine an iron-hand approach with a deceptive soft-line method in its counter-insurgency program.

Under these conditions, our country can never hope for real peace.

Even prior to the Mendiola Massacre, the GRP and NDF panels were already at loggerheads over the issue of peace. We had presented an agenda of peace to the GRP panel, an agenda founded on justice, democracy and freedom, especially for the impoverished majority of our people. We premised and directed this agenda towards identifying the real roots of the insurgency and proposing lasting measures for their solution.

But rather than meet the basic proposals raised by the NDF, the GRP panel came up with an agenda that seeks to coopt the revolutionary forces under the gilded rhetoric of "amnesty with honor," "social amelioration," and "employment and economic benefits" for "NDF/PPP/NPA returnees." And even more basic than this, the GRP agenda immediately squelched any hope of meeting the NDF proposals by restricting the resolution of issues "within the framework of the Constitution."

These moves, and this agenda of government, we had consistently opposed and rejected.

We did not enter the peace negotiations in order to be trapped into accepting a Constitution fatally flawed with anti-nationalist and anti-people provisions. We did not enter the peace negotiations only to be coerced under the political authority of a government which has failed to heed the peasants and workers' cry for land and jobs, and the entire people's cry for national freedom and independence. We did not enter the peace negotiations to gain amnesty or concessions for ourselves, because we are neither criminals who have violated the law nor rebels without a cause and principles.

We entered the peace negotiations in order to seriously discuss and identify the basic socio-economic problems that caused the revolutionary war to emerge and develop. We entered the peace negotiations to assert the people's most immediate demands, like the complete dismantling of the remaining fascist features of the Marcos regime, the promotion of the people's welfare and livelihood, and the affirmation of national dignity and sovereignty. We entered the peace negotiations so that both we and the government side could reach a political settlement based on these just and popular demands.

Even before the Mendiola incident, we had speculated that the government's real intention in entering into the ceasefire agreement was to undermine the revolutionary movement, and eventually annihilate it. The reason for this is because the government had only made superficial responses to the NDF proposals. This also became patently evident when Gen. Fidel Ramos issued implementing guidelines on the ceasefire even before December 10 to AFP commanders. These guidelines, which justify continued armed operations against the NPA during the ceasefire period, were a gross distortion and a fundamental breach of the ceasefire agreement. They starkly showed a clear intent to inflict political and military damage upon NDF forces through subterfuge and deceit.

Our flickering hopes to find a common ground for immediate peace with this government died when military men mercilessly killed the 18 peasants, workers, youth and students at Mendiola bridge. As a result of the Mendiola Massacre, we have come to the conclusion that this government is bent on denying justice, freedom and democracy to the people and destroying the revolutionary forces.

In this regard, the Aquino government should take a lesson from the Marcos regime. Despite the latter's use of overwhelming amounts of weaponry, equipment and men in suppression campaigns, the revolutionary movement grew in number, scope and influence throughout the Marcos era. The revolutionary movement let loose a powerful idea — the idea of united struggle — and this could not be defeated by bombs, massacres and censorship. The lesson that the Marcos regime failed to learn was that: one, revolutionary ideas are not defeated in such ways; and two, a successful guerrilla war thrives among oppressed and discontented people.

The National Democratic Front declares the Aquino government and its military forces responsible for the failure of the peace negotiations.

We hold them directly responsible for the Mendiola Massacre. While we recognize that the massacre could have been the handiwork of a loyalist faction within the AFP, this does not in any way lessen the culpability of a government which had refused to meet *four times* with peasants and had in fact erected a security cordon to keep them away from Malacanang Palace. Such contempt for the peasant marchers reflects no less than the government's own contempt for a cornerstone of the NDF peace agenda — which is immediate and sweeping land reform.

We hold the Aquino government accountable for sabotaging the peace efforts by imposing the narrow framework of the draft Constitution as the basis for the negotiated political settlement. We reject the draft Constitution as an anti-people and anti-nationalist charter which can never be the cornerstone of a just and lasting peace, nor a just and free society.

We hold the government and its military forces culpable for blatantly violating the ceasefire agreement by issuing unfair and hostile guidelines and for deliberately committing innumerable infractions in the field.

We call on the Filipino people to continue their struggles, both legal and underground, in order to assert their basic demands for justice, freedom and democracy. We affirm that the attainment of peace will only be fully possible through the persistence of a united people to advance their basic demands and thwart an agenda of surrender and oppression.

The peace that the Filipino people want is not the peace of the graveyard, not the peace of the dead victims of Mendiola. It is not the peace of compromise between wolf and sheep, not the peace of surrender of one side to another. The peace that we want is a principled peace, founded on the fundamental aspirations of the people. This is the kind of peace we want.

But should the government and the military pursue their policy of an unjust peace, then we have no option but to resort to a policy of waging a just war. We want peace, but we are not afraid of war.

Signed, this 30th Day of January, 1987.



NATIONAL COUNCIL, NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT

KATIPUNAN NG MGA SAMAHANG MANGGAGAWA
PAMBANSANG KAISAHAN NG MGA MAGBUBUKID
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KABATAANG MAKABAYAN
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