

Pressidential Spokesperson Lorelei Fajardo said: “I don’t think the President’s friendship with the Ampatuans will be severed. Just because they’re in this situation doesn’t mean we will turn our backs on them.”

Such an understatement. The “situation” has necessitated draconian measures: A state of emergency rule was imposed in Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat and Cotabato City last week. We then worried that martial law was coming.

I am becoming cynical. Frankly, if 30 members of media had not been killed in the “situation” or event, I doubt if the outpouring of righteous anger and outrage would have been as overwhelming. After all, as many e-mails and text messages are saying, these are only Muslims anyway. Let them kill each other and be done with it.

Thus, while I grieve for my brave fallen comrades in media, I wonder: If they were not murdered during that massacre, would the “Ampatuan situation” be quickly forgotten? The international community has roundly criticized the way government has attended to the “situation.”

The scene of the crimes and the international forensics experts, it seems, were not well secured. The experts left Maguindanao, in fear for their lives.

I also worried about another scenario: Would the outrage over the murdered journalists be so overwhelming that it would create a demand for quick-and-draconian measures, an acceptable rationalization of martial law? The so-called creeping kind: First Maguindanao, then Mindanao and so on. However, we were reassured by the President’s people that martial law was both unnecessary and unwanted.

Last week, the President’s ally in the House of Representatives, Speaker Prospero Nograles, categorically stated that martial law was unnecessary. “I don’t think our senators and congressmen will favor this because it will certainly cause public uproar which can endanger their reelection bid,” said Speaker Nograles who hails from Mindanao.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), whom we assumed would support martial law, opposed it last week as a means to prevent the escalation of violence in the province and hasten the arrest of those responsible for the Ampatuan Massacre where 57 persons were brutally mowed down. In fact, AFP public information head Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner said there was no need to declare martial law because the military and the police were in control of the situation.

And yet here we are. On Friday night, martial law was imposed in Maguindanao. Why? Because

The “Ampatuan Situation,” Martial Law and the Muslim Women’s Liberation - MabuhayRadio

Written by Amina Rasul

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no one could enter the domain of the Ampatuans to serve warrants of arrest without a blood bath. Recall that the surrender of the principal suspect, Datu Andal, Jr., had to be negotiated by no less than Secretary Jesus Dureza, former Presidential Peace Adviser, and Justice Secretary Agnes Devanadera.

People worry. Will martial law be extended? If martial law will cover the whole country, what will happen to the cases against the suspects in the Ampatuan “situation”? Will Datu Andal, Jr. be found guilty? If found guilty, will the death penalty be imposed?

Veteran columnist Neal Cruz asked Nasser Marohomsalic and me, during the last *Kapihan sa Sulo*, if the death penalty will be supported by Muslims. In Islam, the death penalty is allowed. In fact the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

uses public beheading as its penalty for crimes such as murder. My late father Abraham Rasul, former ambassador to the Kingdom, related to me that the Saudi government took good care of the health of prisoners who were condemned to be executed. The logic: The guilty must be of sound mind and body, fully aware of the enormity of his crime before he is executed.

Muslims of the South must remember that “there are no masters where there are no slaves.” What kind of a future do we have, we who are victims of present-day “situations” but who keep harping back to our glorious past when we were sovereign and powerful? What is to happen to us in Muslim Mindanao, we who are labeled as terrorist or “collateral damage” by those empowered to keep the peace, especially under a martial law scenario?

Several of us from various groups (civil society, academe, military, religious, politics, business) will come together on Monday for a roundtable discussion on the culture of politics and violence in ARMM, what we can do to take back our communities. IF there is anything we can do, given the present circumstances.

The “Ampatuan Situation” and the Muslim “Women’s Lib”

On Thursday, some of us from the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy met with Presidential Peace Adviser Anabelle Abaya. She agreed with our recommendation that women should now be empowered, whether to negotiate for peace or to work for development or to protect themselves. The “Ampatuan situation” has proven that we cannot trust the men to protect us, as the Holy Qur’an mandated a very-long time ago when women had no rights and were treated like chattel.

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{xtypo_quote} Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more [strength] than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in [the husband’s] absence what Allah would have them guard. [The Noble Qur’an, 4:34] {/xtypo_quote}

The obedience of women clearly assumes that there was to be protection and support to be given them by men. Since the “Ampatuan Situation” has blown sky high the myth that Muslim men do not ever violate (even Muslim) women, we Muslim women must take charge of, and be responsible for, our lives.

“Nooros Salam” or “the light of peace,” a network of the *aleemat* (Muslim women religious scholars) and some women leaders of civil society, came out with a statement condemning what they called the “satanic” massacre. Perhaps now is the time for Muslim women to rise and take charge as equal partners for the lives of their families and communities.

“Dismayed with the slow rate and the manner of the investigation being conducted by the police,” the women of Nooros Salam said “our heart cries in grief especially with the atrocious murder and rape of women, including an eight-month-, and a fourth-month-old, pregnant women!”

“We call on the authorities and fact-finding missions to conduct a fair-and-impartial investigation on the incident to find out the truth and give justice to the victims. We demand that the government must ensure bringing of justice to the victims and hold the perpetrators accountable to the full limit of the law.” # # #

Editor’s Note: Ms. Amina Rasul is the Lead Convenor of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy. She is also a Trustee of the Magbassa Kita Foundation, Inc.

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