

Written by Senator Pimentel's Press Office
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Senator Pimentel Dares President Arroyo to Prove that State of Emergency Is Not Just for Show

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr., today dared President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to prove that the state of emergency she imposed in Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat is not just for show by taking quick-and-decisive action against the suspected perpetrators of the carnage in Maguindanao.

“There is a state of emergency. But what I fear is it may only be for show. It remains to be seen who will be hit by the exercise of that power. Very likely it will be the poor, the powerless, the innocent, instead of the guilty,” he said.

Senator Pimentel said there are sufficient grounds for law enforcement authorities to hold Maguindanao Gov. Andal Ampatuan Sr. and his son, Datu Unsay Mayor Andal Ampatuan, Jr., so that they can be questioned on their alleged involvement in the massacre of more than 50 individuals, including members of their political rival, the Mangudadatu, their supporters, lawyers, media men and other innocent victims.

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On why the Maguindanao governor should be held and questioned by the authorities, Pimentel explained: "Gov. Andal Ampatuan should be held as a material witness. You may not be a formal suspect but you can be a material witness because you have many things to answer for what your people did."

The senator from Mindanao said Governor Ampatuan should be held responsible because according to witnesses, the armed men who abducted and gunned down the victims were mostly members of the civilian volunteers organization (CVOs) or militia organized and controlled by the governor.

He said a graphic evidence was the backhoe used in digging the gravesites of the victims bearing the name of the provincial government of Maguindanao.

On the other hand, Buluan Vice Mayor Ishmael "Toto" Mangudadatu said his wife, Genalyn Tiamzon, positively identified Mayor Ampatuan Jr. as the one who led the attackers – an information she was able to relay to him in her cellphone calls minutes before they were abducted and massacred.

"Obviously, even an ordinary person can make the connection that they (the Ampatuans) have a lot to explain," Pimentel said.

Comparing the Faylon and the Maguindanao-Massacre Cases

“I recall that when the wife of broadcaster Ted Faylon committed suicide, nobody pointed to him as having killed his wife. But he was taken into custody by the police. In other words, there is unequal and uneven application of the rule of law. That is what I fear now.”

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is perceived to be soft on the Ampatuans because of her debt of gratitude to them in delivering votes in her favor in the 2004 presidential election and to administration senatorial candidates in the 2007 election.

{xtypo_quote} The Armed Forces of the Philippines is not only fighting Muslim and communist insurgency problems alone but also wrestle with the private armies being maintained by political warlords in Mindanao with the acquiescence of the Arroyo Administration. – A Filipino general told Senator Pimentel {/xtypo_quote}

“In matters like this, political considerations should be set aside. The rule of law should be

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upheld," Mr. Pimentel said.

He also said that all police and military officials who were not able to prevent the buildup of the huge civilian militia or private army by the Ampatuans should be sanctioned.

Senator Pimentel pointed out that there are limits to the authority of the local government units to form CVOs in areas where the law and order situation is critical, particularly in terms of the number of volunteers who can be recruited.

He said a military general has admitted to him that the Armed Forces of the Philippines is not only fighting Muslim and communist insurgency problems alone but also has to wrestle with the private armies being maintained by political warlords in Mindanao with the acquiescence of the administration.

The minority leader bewailed that the AFP and the PNP appear to be helpless in going after these private armed groups because they are prevented from doing so by these abusive politicians by flaunting their influence with the President. # # #

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