



PRESS RELEASE

Department of National Defense – Republic of the Philippines

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Statement of Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on alleged unreported human rights violations in Mindanao

It has come to our attention that some groups and individuals are alleging that there are cases of human rights abuses under martial law but have largely remained unreported. To this, I strongly encourage these groups and alleged victims of excesses by government security forces to come forward, present your evidence, and file charges in the proper courts. *Huwag po kayong matakot.* If indeed some of our soldiers are found guilty of committing excesses under martial law, then we will not hesitate to administer the appropriate sanctions against these individuals, while ensuring that due process is followed.

We will never allow anyone within the defense and security establishments to tarnish the good image and reputation that we have painstakingly built over the years. That is why we have decided in the past that only our best men and women should be allowed to operate in critical areas such as Marawi City and elsewhere in Mindanao, and that our Muslim brothers and sisters should not be singled out in our operations since terrorism goes beyond any religion or creed.

We have made it clear from the very start that all our operations under martial law will be based on the rule of law and respect for human rights of all, regardless of religion, ethnicity or ideology. That is why we have also opposed calls for an ID system for Muslims only since this is discriminatory. We believe that if an ID system is adopted, it should be national in scope, and should apply to every citizen of the republic.

As an added measure to prevent any potential excesses or mishandling by our forces, we have actually deployed AFP human rights officers and lawyers on the ground to help guide our soldiers in performing their expanded duties and responsibilities under martial law.

My trust and confidence in the professionalism and integrity of the Armed Forces, however, remains strong. *Naniniwala akong gagawin ng ating kasundaluhan kung ano ang nararapat alinsunod sa batas at hindi nila kailanman tatalikuran ang kanilang sinumpaang tungkulin - ang ipagtanggol ang bansa at sambayanang Pilipino, kahit kapalit ang sarili nilang buhay.*

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