

# Workers' Digest

News and Commentaries

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## **Justice for the Victims of the Maguindanao Massacre *Break the Warlord Clans, Dismantle the Elite System***

The Partido ng Manggagawa condemns in the strongest terms the massacre of more than 50 people in Maguindanao, including 18 media workers and two government employees, by the private army of a local warlord. We condole too with the families of the victims who apparently are the collateral damage in a deadly game of political rivalry between two prominent political clans.

The date of November 23 will now live in infamy as arguably the single bloodiest day in history for media workers. The brazenness of the atrocity absolutely highlights the rule of impunity by warlord political clans in the rural hinterlands.

These modern-day political lords govern over these poor provinces and towns like the fiefdoms of old times. Yet these warlords survive only with the tolerance, nay connivance of the national government in Manila. The corrupt regime in Malacanang and the warlord clans feed off each other in a symbiotic relationship to preserve a rotten social system that oppresses the people, especially the poor.

The political debt of the administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to the Ampatuan clan, the principal suspect in the massacre, is common knowledge. In the fraudulent elections of 2004, the Ampatuans delivered



an incredible plurality of ballots for Arroyo in Maguindanao to the point where in one town her electoral rivals received no votes. What is less acknowledged is the role played by the armed forces in propping up the warlord rule of the Ampatuans in the guise of battling the Muslim insurgents in Mindanao. The cache of high-powered arms uncovered in the property of the Ampatuans reveal the cozy association between the military and the warlords which can only happen with the blessing of Malacanang.

Justice for the victims of the Maguindanao massacre begins but does not end with bringing the full force of the law on the mastermind (who happens to be the heir

apparent to the Ampatuan patriarch), dismantling the private army of the warlord clan and breaking their political stranglehold on the province and towns. But smashing the Ampatuan clan only for it to be replaced by their political rivals would be Pyrrhic victory for the victims of the Maguindanao massacre.



Genuine justice for the victims of the Maguindanao massacre goes beyond destroying the warlord clans and political dynasties such as the Ampatuans and Arroyos. The social and economic basis for the existence of the warlord clans and political dynasties must also be broken up. If not, tearing down one dynasty only to pave the way for a new clan, would be a labor of Sisyphus. The sacrifice of the Maguindanao massacre victims would not have been for nothing if it leads to a fundamental rethinking and radical restructuring of Philippine politics and society.



A real not just formal democracy is the antidote to the virus of warlord domination and elite rule in Philippine politics. A real democracy rests on extending the concept and practice from politics and elections to economics and society.

Elections—however clean, honest and automated it may be—in present society are mere exercises for the people to choose their oppressors. No worker can ever be president in electoral campaigns costing billions to wage. Still real democracy means not just a level playing field between the rich and poor in elections—which is an illusion under a society split between an elite minority and an impoverished mass.

Democracy must mean the actual participation of people in governance. Direct not representative democracy is the real exercise of the rule of the people.

## Congress must revoke martial law in Maguindanao

Calling the martial law imposed on Maguindanao as “a cure worse than the disease,” the Partido ng Manggagawa (PM) called on Congress to revoke the Presidential Proclamation 1959 that imposed martial law in Maguindanao.

Renato Magtubo, PM chairperson said that “*Martial law means giving full power to the military to rule over Maguindanao yet the AFP itself is suspect in coddling and colluding with the warlord clan of the Ampatuans. The large cache of buried military-issue weapons found near the property of the Ampatuans reveals their unholy alliance with AFP. How then can the military rule deliver justice to the victims of the Maguindanao massacre when it has a cozy relationship with the suspect Ampatuans?*”

The group is asking voters to watch how the senators and representatives will act on the review of PP 1959. “*The elections are coming to town in just a few months and so the solons should bear in mind that people are looking who will be naughty and nice. We appeal to the people not to vote for legislators who will affirm PP 1959,*” Magtubo declared.

PM argues that sustaining PP 1959 will lead to more abuses. “*Already the AFP vice chief of staff for operations is recommending an extension of martial law up to the elections supposedly to ensure peaceful and credible elections. This is classic example of military intelligence. It is precisely the military-controlled areas in Mindanao which are notorious for poll cheating and stories abound of wholesale fraud in military camps where election watchers are easily intimidated,*” Magtubo asserted.

“*An ex-general has already confessed to the fact that indeed the military was arming the Ampatuans on the sorry excuse that they were allies in the fight against Muslim rebels,*” he added.

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