

***KAPATID (Families and Friends of Political Prisoners) releases the following statement from the political prisoners of Camp Bagong Diwa, Bicutan, Taguig City.***

## **Oppose the Scheme to Transfer Bicutan Political Prisoners to Local Jails!**

**T**his regime's appetite for curtailing people's rights and its viciousness in using its coercive powers to further persecute its victims know no bounds.

Not content with throwing its perceived political opponents in jail using trumped-up charges, perjured testimonies and planted evidence, the top honchos of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) are even more blatantly interfering in the judicial process, fabricating lies and conjuring false scenarios in their scheme to transfer political prisoners detained in Camp Bagong Diwa, Bicutan, Taguig City to regular local jails, mostly outside Metro Manila.

To date, various courts have received requests from the BJMP National Directorate for the transfer of Frank Fernandez and Cleofe Lagtapon, Oliver Rosales, Adelberto Silva, Edisel Legaspi, Ireneo Atadero, Julio Lusania and Maximo Reduta.

The BJMP explained it supports the request and recommendation of DND Secretary Lorenzana, invoking Executive Order No. 70 and the "whole-of-government" approach "that includes efforts to prevent opportunities for Communist Terrorist Groups (CTGs) to conduct organized activities while under detention and the timely resolution of criminal cases against CPP-NPA personalities pending before the regular courts...."

Additionally, the BJMP letter/request claims that the political prisoners' detention in Bicutan "causes undue expense to the limited resources of the government and increases the risk of possible rescue attempts during the transport."

Court records belie the claims of the NTF-ELCAC and BJMP of undue delays in court proceedings. More importantly, court records show that many, if not most of the political prisoners detained in Bicutan, were transferred there from local jails upon the motion of the local jail wardens, citing greater security risks which they deem themselves less capable or incapable of handling. Though not explicitly stated, these include the danger to life and safety of political prisoners they invariably described as "high risk."

The real and more obvious rationale and objective of the proposed transfers are to throw us, the political prisoners detained in Bicutan, back to the horribly congested local jails to further restrict our movement and access to much needed medical attention, legal services, visits and support from relatives and friends.

Under current conditions here in the Bicutan detention center where our movements are naturally limited and our activities are closely controlled, monitored and observed, whatever "organized activities" we may and could conduct cannot be anything but legitimate and justified. These include political discussions among ourselves and with visitors, social gatherings and celebrations, handicrafts and other livelihood projects, sports, and health and wellness activities.

Moreover, referring to us, political prisoners in Bicutan, as "CTGs" and "CPP-NPA personalities" smack of the NTF-ELCAC's red- and terrorist tagging, devoid of any factual or legal basis and sans an iota of evidentiary value. It is a cheap and worn-out propaganda device meant to vilify and stigmatize their targets as a prelude to more vicious attacks.

The sinister and inhumane intent of the NTF-ELCAC's scheme stands out from the fact that historically, including during the Marcos dictatorship, political prisoners have always been detained in common facilities for practical reasons, including easier monitoring and control by state authorities. It is only now that the NTF's top brass are pressing to disperse and isolate individuals and to expose them to harsher and less secure conditions. Indeed, even without a formal declaration of martial law nationwide, this regime has surpassed the cruelty and brutality of the Marcos dictatorship in many ways and within a shorter period of time.

The NTF-ELCAC's overreaching methods and paranoia over the threats posed by political prisoners betray the bankruptcy of the so-called "whole-of-nation approach to end the local communist armed conflict." Its effort to rally and harness civilian government agencies, LGUs, various institutions, especially schools, and the private sector behind its counter-insurgency program, have elicited at best lukewarm and token responses, with many just going through the motions of complying to avoid incurring the ire of the military and the risk of being red-tagged. Not a few have defied the thinly veiled threats of the NTF-ELCAC, refusing to comply with its unreasonable demands.

This is hardly surprising. Upon its creation in December 2018, the NTF-ELCAC was tasked under EO 70 to formulate a new National Peace Framework defining the principles, objectives and methods of the whole-of-nation approach to ELCAC. But nearly a year after, the NTF-ELCAC has yet to show the whole nation, in black and white, via the National Peace Framework, what the vaunted new approach is all about, and how. In practice, the only new element in the "new paradigm" has been the total abandonment of peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front on a national level and its replacement with attempts or calls for "local peace talks" with local NPA commands.

To rationalize its failure to conduct a single "local peace talks" with any local NPA command, and to produce credible "droves of NPA surrenderees" and to consequently reduce CPP-NPA strength and activity, the NTF-ELCAC has escalated its attacks against defenseless targets such as lumad schools and communities, organized peasants, workers and student activists, human rights and environment defenders.

We political prisoners, many of whom are languishing unjustly in jails for years, are only the latest scapegoat now being targeted for further persecution.

We, the political prisoners detained in Bicutan, vehemently condemn and oppose the NTF-ELCAC's scheme to transfer us to local jails.

**Oppose the unjust and inhumane scheme to transfer Bicutan political prisoners to local jails!**

**Stop the persecution of political prisoners!**

**Free all political prisoners!**

**Resist Executive Order 70 and the NTF-ELCAC!**

**Frank Fernandez**

**Cleofe Lagtapon**

**Oliver Rosales**

**Adelberto Silva**

**Edisel Legaspi**

**Ireneo Atadero**

**Julio Lusania**

**Alexander Birondo**

**Rey Claro Casambre**

**Reynante Gamara**

**Vicente Ladlad**

**AND OTHER POLITICAL PRISONERS**