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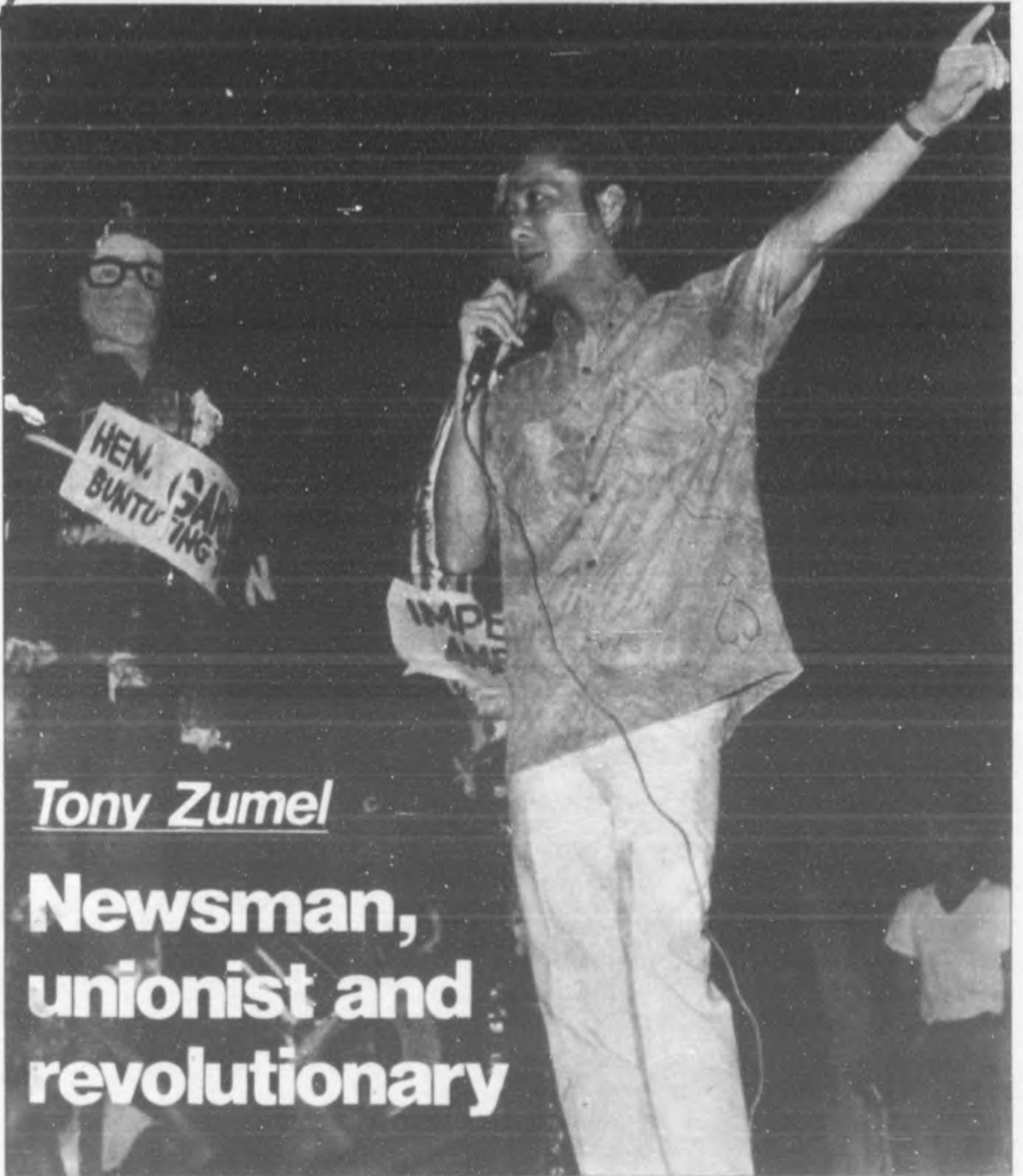
LIBERATION

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Tony Zumel

**Newsman,
unionist and
revolutionary**

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Cover: Zumel in Plaza Miranda rally, May 23, 1971

Cover stories: The NDF and the revolutionary movement moves forward in their endeavor to achieve a just peace, even as they continue to defend themselves and the masses from the intensifying attacks of the AFP. Also featured is the life story of NDF spokesman and negotiator Tony Zumel.

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The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDF) serves as the organizational framework and channel for the unity, cooperation and coordination of all anti-imperialist and democratic forces in the Philippines and for progressive Filipinos and solidarity groups abroad. It traces its beginnings to the establishment of the Preparatory Commission for the National Democratic Front on April 24, 1973. LIBERATION is the official publication of the NDF.

Opening salvo for peace

NDF calls for cooperation and goodwill as it paves the way for top-level ceasefire talks

Official negotiations for a ceasefire between the government and the revolutionary movement are set to begin with the naming of the emissaries from both sides. The National Democratic Front, a broad coalition of national democratic forces and organizations which includes the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army, has designated Antonio Zumel and Satur Ocampo as two of its representatives in the negotiating panel. Zumel is a responsible officer of the NDF, while Ocampo is a leading member of the CPP-NPA. Below are the statement of the NDF announcing the naming of its emissary and Ocampo's first official and open letter to President Aquino, which was issued last June 10, thanking her for accepting him as a negotiator.

NDF names emissary

The National Democratic Front announces the designation of its emissary who has been tasked to pave the way for top-level talks that may lead to a nationwide ceasefire between the New People's Army and the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

We have high hopes that our emissary's efforts will be met with cooperation and goodwill, believing as we do that President Aquino is genuinely committed to the search for a just and lasting peace.

Thus, we welcome her orders to the Armed Forces of the Philippines to disarm local warlords and disband Civilian Home Defense Units in Mindanao. These are a positive response to demands persistently raised by the people in the countryside. In fact, the New People's Army has been doing battle against warlord armies, counting them among the fascist forces that owe loyalty to the ousted dictator Marcos. However, we are disturbed by numerous indications that the leadership of the Armed Forces of the Philippines is little inclined to follow the spirit and letter of President Aquino's instructions. Warlords like Dimaporo, Dulay and Gustilo are being treated by them as allies and accomplices, instead of tyrants unleashing criminal terror against the hapless people within their respective domains. General Ramos himself justifies the existence of



NPA guerrillas: Suing for a just and meaningful peace

CHDF units not only in Mindanao but throughout the country, despite the popular clamor for their total dismantling.

Warmongers in the AFP have been engaging in divisive tactics designed to sabotage President Aquino's call for peace. For instance, they have been trying to convince her that the revolutionary leadership has no effective control over its forces in the field, and therefore it is futile to conduct talks on the national level.

We affirm that any dialogue between the Aquino government and the National Democratic Front, as the plenipotentiary representative of the Communist Party of the Philippines, New People's Army and other revolutionary forces, must be held on the national level if a mutually satisfactory agreement is to be reached.

Any attempt to work out a regional ceasefire, as the warmongers have been suggesting to President Aquino, would be useless and counterproductive. The New People's Army has transmitted to its regional forces that a policy decision has been made to conduct talks only at the highest level. This in effect cancels the exploratory dialogue scheduled for June 27 between cadres of NPA Front II

in Samar with Brig. Gen. Benjamin Cruz of the AFP's Regional Unified Command.

President Aquino also has to stand firm against the meddling of the United States in the country's internal affairs. We condemn the recent statement of US Ambassador Stephen Bosworth that "hard-core insurgents" who may not be open to dialogue "will have to be dealt with eventually through other means," meaning armed repression. Obviously, US imperialism wants Filipinos to go on killing Filipinos if only to ensure continuing sales of American weapons and war equipment as well as the future existence of their military bases in the Philippines. The National Democratic Front warns the US imperialists that they have no business pushing our country and the Philippine government farther along the road of civil war.

As we confront the issue of a possible cessation of armed hostilities, we in the National Democratic Front are tremendously heartened by the warm support extended by our allies and friends. We give our assurance that we shall continue consulting and uniting with them on this and other important questions that concern our present and future as a people and a nation. — NDF

Satur Ocampo's open letter

In the name of the National Democratic Front, I thank President Corason C. Aquino for accepting me as one of the representatives of the revolutionary forces who will engage in a dialogue and negotiations with her representatives concerning the question of a ceasefire. Implicit in this acceptance, I believe, is President Aquino's acknowledgment of our mutual desire for genuine and lasting peace and national unity.

President Aquino has stated that "if we are to hope reasonably for a lasting peace, . . . the roots of insurgency (which are in the economic conditions of the people and the social structures that oppress them" must be addressed vigorously. That concisely puts in perspective the dialogue and negotiations that the two sides will undertake.

This is no easy task for me and my comrades and for the government panel. Not only because the process entails the resolution of many immediate and long-term problems, which may require lengthy and difficult negotiations, but also because there are elements in and out of the government who would rather not see the negotiations proceed and succeed.

Our people's interest and welfare are the uppermost concern of the NDF, the CPP, the NPA and other revolutionary forces supporting the armed struggle. A genuine and lasting peace based on justice and democracy will certainly serve our people's interest and welfare. Thus, the National Democratic Front and its affiliated organizations are determined to seek the road to this peace, over the conference table and elsewhere.

For me, this new role is an immense responsibility. Hardly had I recovered from almost a decade of imprisonment by the Marcos fascist dictatorship, hardly had I familiarized myself with the advanced forms and content of the people's revolutionary struggle, when I was asked to assume this task. Humbly but resolutely, I take it up as an expression of trust in me by the revolutionary forces and a challenge to serve our people more.

Three years ago, President Aquino went to the Bicutan PC-INP jail to visit political detainees, one of whom was myself. Candor and the spirit of a common quest for freedom and justice pervaded that meeting. I hope that these qualities will continue to mark her dealings with me and my comrades as we begin this enterprise.

As soon as the necessary arrangements are completed, I look forward to calling on President Aquino and renewing acquaintances and friendships, specially with my colleagues in the press. ■



The pressure continues

AFP counter-insurgency buildup threatens government-NDF moves for peace

Even as the National Democratic Front and the revolutionary movement gears for the ceasefire talks, the Armed Forces of the Philippines are continuing its repressive counter-insurgency campaigns in the countryside. Hardest hit by the escalating military assaults are the militarized barrios of Cagayan Valley where a food blockade was imposed in early June. The campaign, meant to starve both the NPA and its countless civilian sympathizers, was the ultimate clincher in a ruthless and desperate operation that also bombed, strafed and burned entire villages in the province.

jungle warfare, as well as at least six Tora-Tora bomber planes, four Sikorsky helicopters, three Huey helicopters, armored personnel carriers and other military hardware.

Both AFP Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos and Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile justified the AFP moves with pronouncements that a ceasefire is not yet in effect, so "we will continue the pressure." The counter-insurgency offensives, they added, were in retaliation for the rising ambushes and raids of the NPA, especially in Cagayan.

The military's own figures, however, belie this. According to the 100-day re-



AFP terrorism: Troopets awaiting orders before attacking

To the NPA, which remains on the defensive in the face of a massive and far better armed AFP, these moves betray the latter's continuing thrust to decimate the revolutionary forces. It is an indication that "the AFP all along has no desire to work out a ceasefire, merely exploiting the President's call as a propaganda tactic to conceal its preparations for a major attack on our forces and areas," noted a statement of the NPA General Staff.

Indeed, since the four-day February uprising, new battalions were quickly airlifted by the AFP to Cagayan Valley, Kalinga-Apayao, Bicol, Panay, Negros and Samar. In Cagayan, "Operation Pegasus," an AFP counter-insurgency program, continues to inflict greater hardships on the people. Spearheading this is the "Cagayan 100," a motley company of renegades from the NPA, informers, criminals and military deserters. It is headed by newly promoted Cagayan intelligence chief Col. Rodolfo Aguinaldo, a known torturer of political prisoners during the previous regime. It is further augmented by four companies of Scout Rangers trained in

port of Gen. Ramos last June 5, encounters between military troops and the NPA dropped by about 40% during the past six months. About 817 encounters occurred from Feb. 26-June 1, indicating an average of four to five clashes daily, compared to an average of 10 to 12 before this period.

"In Cagayan," said Ronnie, a member of the NPA General Staff, "our ambushes were mainly defensive, to counteract the military's search-and-destroy missions." He said only the local militia and district guerrilla units tasked with local defense were involved, not the main force of full-fledged front guerrilla units in the region.

Ronnie said the intensified AFP campaign in Cagayan Valley must be due to the desperation of Enrile. As early as 1980, he recalled, Enrile had boasted that he could wipe out the NPA from the whole of Cagayan Valley, his home region, in three months. But when his deadline expired in December that year, not one Red fighter had surrendered, been arrested or killed. Last year, Enrile again boasted that the NPA would be

"completely flushed out of Cagayan Valley by December."

Obviously, Enrile still has to make good his threats. Far from being decimated, the NPA forces in Cagayan Valley have consistently gained strength and expanded their mass base in the plains and not just in hinterland barrios. From January to April alone this year, the guerrillas were able to launch 60 tactical offensives in Cagayan, seizing 134 arms.

The NPA weighed more carefully the political justification of every tactical operation. The main thrust of these were military and paramilitary units, local warlords and their armed goons engaged in violent operations against the NPA and their mass base. In Cagayan, close to 150 regular soldiers have been killed in operations from January to April, while only 10 guerrillas were killed. "*Pero kasalanan ng mga sundalo,*" Ronnie said, "*dahil pasok nang pasok sila sa mga baryo upang guluhin ang masa.*" Added a statement of the NPA Operational Command in Cagayan: "We cannot just let these fascists persist in oppressing the people. Even while the Aquino administration and the NDF pursue efforts for a ceasefire, we will continue to exercise our right to defend ourselves and uphold the people's interests."

In the same statement, the NPA-Cagayan Command conveyed its sincere condolences to the families of two journalists who were killed in an ambush at Barrio Aguiguican, Gattaran on April 24. "It was not our intention to harm them, but unfortunately, we only realized later that they were with the military convoy," the NPA apologized. They reiterated the NPA's warning to civilians, especially to newsmen, to avoid going with military convoys.

On the whole, the military's persisting high rate of casualties reveals its lack of support from the people. This is a fact recognized by Gen. Ramos himself, who attributed it to the reluctance of many local officials to cooperate with the military. In his trip to Cagayan last month, Ramos even scolded the mayors there for asking the military to supply them with arms. "What the military needs is the cooperation of the civilian authorities and not the offer of arms to engage in gunbattles with the rebels," he said.

But what Ramos fails to see is that the military's own campaigns constitute the biggest obstacles to "neutralize the insurgency" and "win back the people." In Samar, peasants were angered when local soldiers abused the goodwill shown by revolutionary forces. An activist of the NDF had been invited to a meeting by military officers who said they wanted to talk peace. But the youth was immediately disarmed at the designated place, questioned and ruthlessly murdered.

Gogoy, a high-ranking official of the Samar Northern Guerrilla Front, also criticized the deployment of the Tabak Bat-



NPA company drilling

alion in Samar early June after operating in Sulu province more than a year. "The AFP is using every method to sabotage the ceasefire efforts. Members of the civilian home defense forces are unusually active. The AFP even conducted combat operations in Allen town in April even while President Aquino was calling for a ceasefire," he said.

Little wonder then that in Samar, as elsewhere in the country, the peasants are even more wary than the NPA about talks of a ceasefire. "The peasants feel that they have a lot to lose if the NPA is deceived into surrendering," said Gogoy. "They have been fighting for a long time and they do not wish to lose the gains they have achieved in the revolution."

As one peasant told a guerrilla, "If you are going down to talk with those in the new government, leave your guns behind. Come back to us if the ceasefire fails. The guns will always be ready." ■

NPA raps AFP offensives

We view with deep concern Gen. Fidel Ramos' orders to field unit commanders to take more aggressive military actions against the NPA supposedly to preempt an alleged "NPA 9-point military plan to destabilize the government." This irresponsible provocation by the AFP chief-of-staff clearly countermands the President and commander-in-chief's reconciliatory pronouncements. A virtual declaration of all-out war nationwide, it could only result, once implemented, in an unprecedented escalation of hostilities. This in turn could irreparably damage all efforts towards the negotiation of a ceasefire. If anything, Gen. Ramos' order is a poorly disguised attempt to preempt not a fictitious NPA plan, but rather, the President's peace initiative, no less.

The so-called "9-point plan" cited by Gen. Ramos is a crude fabrication by the AFP to discredit the NPA, justify their intensifying attacks on us, and cover up their failure to decimate our forces despite their unrestrained use and abuse of military force and superior firepower. We categorically and unequivocally deny having mapped out, much less issued to our field units, such a plan since the Aquino government assumed office. This concoction further bolsters our suspicion that the AFP all along has no desire to work at a ceasefire, merely exploiting the President's call as a propaganda tactic to conceal its preparations for a major attack on our forces and areas. For while it announces a "defensive posture," the AFP has actually intensified its offensive operations in several guerrilla fronts. More ominously, it has stepped up its recruitment and training, even reintegrating notorious elements previously discharged from the CHDF and other AFP units for abuses and assorted crimes.

We warn Gen. Ramos and the AFP command that we shall not sit idly while they scheme and move to destroy us. Even as we continue to restrain our forces and take the position of active defense to help create conditions favorable to the negotiations, we will not relinquish our right to self-defense. Should the AFP implement the order of Gen. Ramos to attack us nationwide, we will be forced to respond with nationwide tactical counteroffensives.

We earnestly call on the President, as AFP commander-in-chief, to discipline her warmongering generals and order them to stop all provocative actions such as bombings, strafings, hamlettings, harassment of civilians, redeployment in order to concentrate troops in selected "critical" areas, and offensive patrols in areas we control. Recruitment should likewise be stopped, especially that of notorious scalawags, hoodlums, criminals and troublemakers into the AFP.

We also call on the patriotic, sensible and sincerely reform-oriented AFP officers and men not to obey orders that countermand their commander-in-chief's initiatives toward peace. We call on them to follow the example of some of their fellow soldiers who have prudently withdrawn from areas we control, desisted from attacking our forces, and avoided potentially provocative actions.

For our part, we offer our assurances that we shall not needlessly be provoked into retaliating, even as we remind the AFP command that neither shall we be intimidated nor gulled into passive defense.

Only in this way can we move closer towards genuine peace: peace with justice and progress for our people. — General Staff, New People's Army