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War Drive

Against the deployment of the US military troops in the Philippines

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1) THE "all-out-peace" declaration of Philippine President Arroyo, aimed at a resolution of the conflict in Mindanao, has now turned into an all-out US-backed military campaign. The Arroyo administration approved the deployment of 660 US military personnel to the province of Basilan, Mindanao, last January - the biggest deployment of US troops as part of the global "war against terror" outside Afghanistan. Arroyo said that this was only for a joint military exercise called 'Balikatan Exercise 2002,' designed to upgrade the counter-terrorism skills and capabilities of Filipino soldiers. However, these military exercises will last for six months, violating the US-Philippines Visiting Forces Agreement and Mutual Defense Treaty.

2) Clearly, another goal of the US forces in Mindanao is to combat the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which is alleged to be part of the international Al-Qaida terrorist network. It was only the US that linked ASG to Al-Qaida, with no hard evidence. But the ASG today is not much more than a group of local bandits engaged in the kidnap-for-ransom business, which uses terrorist methods to assist in that project (though it began life as an Islamic revivalist group).

3) The US has sent not only troops but also powerful armaments to Mindanao.

Even more sophisticated armaments are promised, part of an overall plan to install a US military command post in Basilan. Thus, the presence of the US troops in Mindanao will not be temporary. It will be ongoing (though without the expense of permanent bases in the Philippine archipelago) even if this grossly violates the Philippines constitution. The goal is both control over the Southeast Asian region, and to strategically advance US policies regarding China.

4) The US-led anti-terrorism campaign in Mindanao constitutes a counter-insurgency war that will surely involve and harm the civilian population in the province of Basilan and elsewhere. US forces and the Armed Forces of the Philippines will conduct joint military operations against so-called terrorist groups, and this will not be limited to Basilan. It will cover all the islands of Mindanao. Already the US-backed military operation is being conducted not only against Abu Sayyaf, but also against other revolutionary armed groups in Mindanao. This can only worsen the existing political and social crisis there.

5) Mindanao plays a vital role in the neo-liberal policies of the government -which complies 100 percent with terms imposed by the Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines East Asian Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA). The US-backed military offensive in Mindanao targets not only the ASG. It is also designed to crush all the revolutionary groups and terrorize militants involved in the struggle against neo-liberal globalisation. The US troop deployment in Mindanao is, in this way, part of the global capitalist scheme to fully consolidate the BIMP-EAGA as one of the regional free trade agreements in Asia.

The FI therefore thoroughly condemns the deployment of US troops in the Philippines. The irresponsible actions of the present Philippine government put the national interests of the country at risk. In particular, the US intervention threatens the lives and well-being of the civilian population of Mindanao (the tri-people: Moro, Christians, and Indigenous peoples). We must build a worldwide solidarity campaign in order to uphold the basic right of the broad masses of people in the Philippines to be free from such threats. We call on social movements, revolutionary groups and human rights organizations everywhere to express their opposition to the new US presence in the Philippines, and to the US-led global war that has now expanded in the Southeast Asian region.

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We condemn the terrorist activities of the ASG and other fundamentalist and rightist groups. Even more, however, must we condemn the direct intervention of US forces in the Philippines.

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