

[From *Ang Bayan*, #16, Aug. 21, 2007]

AFP suffers successive losses

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) suffered another serious blow from forces of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Moro National Liberation Front and other armed Moros. In the latest firefight in Ungkaya Pukan, Basilan on August 18, sixteen soldiers were killed, including five lieutenants from the Philippine Marines and one from the Philippine Air Force.

At around 6:30 a.m., elements from the 64th Force Reconnaissance Company and the Philippine Marines 31st Company attacked what they claimed to be an Abu Sayyaf camp in Sitio Kurellem, Barangay Silangkum. Thirteen Marines died on the spot and two more died in the hospital. Seventeen others were wounded on the side of the military. The firefight lasted until afternoon, with one of two MG-520 helicopters providing aerial support crashing, killing its pilot and injuring his two crewmen.

Despite the news blackout imposed since the AFP suffered major losses in Basilan, news managed to leak out that more than a hundred MILF fighters from the neighboring barrio of Bagindan came to reinforce their comrades. The military claimed that Nuridim Mudalam alias Commander Nor of the MILF was seriously wounded and killed in this battle.

It will be recalled that on July 10, MILF forces ambushed Philippine Marine troops in Al Barka town (formerly Tipo-Tipo). The AFP lost 14 soldiers and suffered an undetermined number of wounded. Almost a month after this incident, 27 Philippine Army soldiers were killed and nine wounded in a series of gunbattles with MNLF forces in Sulu from August 2-9.

Aware of the worsening demoralization in the rank and file, Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV has called for an investigation by the Senate Committee on National Defense and Security on the successive losses suffered by the AFP in Basilan and Sulu. Through Senate Resolution No. 72 filed last August 14, Trillanes said he had received insider information that high-ranking Malacañang officials used the Marines in Basilan as cannon fodder to come up with a pretext to launch all-out war against the MILF.

The former Philippine Navy officer and Magdalo spokesperson said at least five high-ranking officials were involved in the incident. Trillanes charged the Arroyo regime with trifling with the lives of soldiers and innocent civilians. Detained Philippine Marines commandant Maj. Gen. Renato Miranda seconded Trillanes' view. He disclosed before the media that he and other officers knew who were responsible for the massacre in Basilan. Trillanes and Sen. Rodolfo Biazon, head of the Senate Committee on National Defense and Security have thus called for an investigation of the incident. The regime's immediate response was to block the probe and announce that it would bar AFP officers from attending the investigation. The regime has even had the gall to accuse Trillanes and Biazon of destabilizing the government.

In an attempt to ease demoralization and avoid severe criticism, Gen. Hermogenes Esperon has accepted full responsibility in his capacity as AFP chief. He nonetheless blamed the junior officers and their men for their losses. Esperon's statement has merely fanned the growing flames of demoralization spreading among the rank and file. [AB](#)

[From: <http://www.philippinerevolution.net/cgi-bin/ab/text.pl?issue=20070821;lang=eng;article=03>
(archived on Oct. 6, 2007)]