

[GENERAL ORDER NO. 7, August 13, 2007]

SECURITY DIRECTIVES RELATED TO BASILAN/SULU BATTLES

WHEREAS , twenty-six troopers were massacred in Sulu;

WHEREAS , The Army Commander has been ordered to move to Mindanao and directly prosecute Basilan and Sulu campaigns;

WHEREAS , the Sulu ambush has shown that conflict escalation can easily happen;

WHEREAS , it is absolutely imperative to keep solid focus on the overriding strategic goal: Maintain the ceasefire and peace efforts with the MILF;

WHEREAS , the government needs to perform a delicate balancing act between firm security response and continued peace initiatives;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GLORIA M. ARROYO , President of the Philippines and Commander-in-Chief of all the armed forces of the Philippines, by the powers vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the land, do hereby order:

1. Keep Basilan and Sulu operations firmly controlled to minimize civilian casualties, with NDCC help in evacuating them, and respect ceasefire guidelines in close consultation with the International Monitoring Team, whose mandate should be extended before it expires next month, and GRP-MILF ceasefire committee.
2. Hold urgent talks with the MILF under Malaysian auspices to contain and resolve the Basilan/Sulu situation, making it clear that the government has to secure its forces and areas as part of peace efforts and law enforcement, but will not overrun MILF areas.
3. Brief the OIC Committee of Eight on Mindanao developments, underlining both the limited military operations and the continuing peace and development efforts, including huge outlays in the 2007 and 2008 budgets for Mindanao, including Basilan and Sulu.
4. Harness the Bishops-Ulama Conference and other religious and civil society groups for peace efforts, with the President and other national leaders joining them in prayers and peace rally in Mindanao, and meeting with them on the need to work together for peace and against forces and ideologies promoting violence.
5. Accelerate and project development initiatives in ARMM, especially high-profile public works and social programs, including health, housing, livelihood and Muslim education. If it would not adversely affect the GRP negotiating position and provoke alarm among Christians, a pilot implementation of the envisioned Muslim ancestral domain regime shall be undertaken, to demonstrate our sincerity to achieve peace.
6. Hold the first peace and security assembly in Bohol and more elsewhere to wind down insurgency in other areas, further demonstrating the government's peace resolve while freeing up troops in case they would be needed in Mindanao.