

January 08, 2009

**2008 INTERNAL SECURITY OPERATIONS SUCCESSFUL;
AFP IS ON-TRACK**

CAMP AGUINALDO – The year 2008 has become a very fruitful year for TEAM AFP's Internal Security operations, in our continuing effort to extinguish all threats to our country's security, as embodied in our national government's vision for genuine peace and development for the country.

Our unwavering efforts against the Communist Terrorists continue to gain grounds towards meeting the 2010 deadline to obliterate communist insurgency. Last year, we were able to significantly decrease the number of NPA-affected barangays from 1,919 in 2007 to 1,381 by the end of 2008. Rebel guerrilla fronts have also been notably reduced from 82 in 2007 to 62 in 2008.

The military offensive that we are taking against the lawless MILF groups is a necessary action to a more responsive and effective way of attaining peace in Mindanao. It is because of these military operations that we are able to limit the capabilities of the LMGs to spread violence, thus allowing innocent civilians to return to their communities. And we must, at all cost, be able to neutralize the LMGs under Kato, Bravo, and Pangalian, at the soonest possible time. We shall continue these actions until we have accomplished our goal of bringing the lawless MILF groups to justice and hold them responsible for the atrocities they have committed. Nevertheless, the Armed Forces of the Philippines supports the resumption of peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, to be able to finally put an end to the long-standing problem of our Moro brothers in Mindanao.

After the major damage wrought on the Abu Sayyaf by the AFP, the members of the terror group have splintered into cell groups operating in small scale operations of extortion and terror activities. The failure of the ASG to resume its large-scale terror operations is mainly due to the neutralization of its top leaders by the AFP. We expect that its remaining members will continue the conduct of small-scale terror operations like extortion and kidnapping activities to sustain their organization. However, in anticipation to this, our efforts to destroy Abu Sayyaf will continue and we will frustrate attempts to carry out terror operations.

To support these military operations, we continue to place a lot of effort in encouraging the rebels to return to folds of the law and to the mainstream society by giving them opportunities under different social integration programs. Last 2008, there were more than 200 NPA rebels who chose to surrender from their arduous life in the mountains, and benefited under the Balik Baril Program.

Complementing our military operations is the AFP's continuing support to national development. The AFP National Development Support Command continues to undertake development projects in designated priority areas nationwide. Of the 501 projects under the Kalayaan Barangay Program, which includes construction of school buildings, water supply systems, farm-to-market roads, and others, 423 have been completed. Hand in hand with other government agencies, the AFP is working to attain an environment conducive to socio-economic growth in support to the AFP mission.

The year 2008 has been a very successful year for the Armed Forces of the Philippines, in pursuit of our mission of a peaceful and secure nation. We are aware, though, that there is still much left to be done, as we prepare for a transition towards external defense by year 2010.

We move forward to 2009 still with many tasks before us, and we have to stay on course, remaining upbeat and vigilant at all times while we address these challenges. We will intensify our operations, maximize intelligence gathering, and continue the launch of civil-military operations. We need to pursue our gains, and continue the fight against insurgency, terrorism, and other forms of lawlessness that impedes our road to development. And while we are doing all these, we shall continue to upgrade the military and improve the welfare of the individual soldier. We must continue efforts to strengthen the force, which is central to the success of our operations.

As we welcome 2009, your armed forces will remain upbeat and we are gaining headway in our mission as defenders and protectors of the Filipino people. Colossal as these tasks may be, we enter the year 2009 with a promise to our people that your Armed Forces, capable and ready to address all threats to our nation's security, shall strive to fulfill its mission to preserve the integrity of our nation and protect the Filipino people.