



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

PRESS RELEASE

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PUNO BARES GOV'T PLAN TO CRACK DOWN HARD VS ABU SAYYAF

Secretary Ronnie Puno of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) yesterday bared an intensified government campaign to crack down hard against the Abu Sayyaf and other organized crime groups in the Zamboanga peninsula, Sulu, Basilan, and other parts of Mindanao.

Puno made this announcement in a press briefing as he thumbed down calls to grant amnesty to the Abu Sayyaf, saying that unless the extremist group could prove its sincerity in renouncing its terrorist acts and abandoning kidnappings as a main source of survival, "there is no need to change government policies in midstream."

"After all these deaths, will we just forget all about what the Abu Sayyaf did? I think justice has to come into the picture and it has to prevail in all situations," Puno stressed.

He noted that the international community "will not look kindly" at this proposed amnesty for the Abu Sayyaf, after the group had kidnapped three Red Cross volunteers and released the last of them—Italian Eugenio Vagni—only after seven months in captivity.

"I am very happy for Mr. Vagni's release," said Puno. "His release came after a long trail of sacrifice and after many lost lives in the PNP (Philippine National Police) and the Philippine Marines."

He said, "I think we have to look at these things before we try to change direction on the policies that we have in place on how to deal with the Abu Sayyaf, a terrorist group that preys on helpless individuals and feeds on the fruits of kidnappings and criminality."

The DILG chief he will meet soon with Secretary Gilbert Teodoro and the PNP leadership to discuss an intensified campaign to eliminate the Abu Sayyaf as an internal security threat in Sulu, Basilan, the Zamboanga peninsula and other parts of Mindanao.

Puno said he will also meet separately with Sulu Gov. Abdusakur Tan to discuss the province's course of action in dealing with the Abu Sayyaf.

These include recommendations on whether to demobilize Civilian Emergency Forces (CEF) in the area and whether to retain or pull out the PNP's Special Action Force and Regional Mobile Group units deployed in the province and transfer them to other conflict areas in Mindanao.. .

In the same press conference, Puno said the government is now fine-tuning its guidelines for a firearm relicensing program that includes a gun amnesty with the goal of reducing unlicensed firearms by at least 50% even as he noted that those who will choose to ignore this call for the registration of loose guns will have to go to jail.

“Sa totoo lang, marami ng binigay na amnesty parang hindi sineseryoso. So now we want to make sure that everyone understands that when the amnesty is over, you will go to jail for holding an unlicensed gun,” Puno said.