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On the Postponement of the 5th Round of Formal Peace Talks: Continue the Principled Conversations

The Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) is saddened with the announcement of Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza on Thursday, June 14, that the government is not ready to resume formal peace talks with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) on June 28-30 in Oslo, Norway.

This is quite frustrating especially for peace advocates after the back channel talks, through the third party facilitation of the Royal Norwegian Government (RNG), seem to be gaining ground after the impasse last year. As church leaders, we were looking forward to the reported “stand down” ceasefire agreement which means that both sides will cease conducting offensive military operations to pave the way for the signing of an interim peace agreement. Both the stand down and the interim peace agreements, if followed to the letter, may result in lesser violence and can eventually end to further loss of life as a result of the armed conflict.

News reports indicate that the GRP-NDFP fifth round of formal talks was supposed to result to the signing of an interim peace agreement. The agreement shall consist of a coordinated unilateral ceasefire, general amnesty for NDFP-listed political prisoners, and agrarian reform and rural development as well as national industrialization and economic development agreements. For people longing for a just and enduring peace, this is something that is worth looking forward to. The interim peace agreement could have been a historical building block for genuine peace.

We hope that the announcement of the government to postpone the talks would not lead to a further deterioration of the peace process with the NDFP. We also hope that the “input” from the military and the police does not undermine principled negotiations over a desire for the surrender of one party to the other.

PEPP calls on the entire nation to implore both parties, especially the government of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, to resume the formal peace talks. Let us all pray that both parties continue the principled

conversations and realize the compelling need to come to terms with the issue of social and economic justice in the Philippines. We must all work for peace and guard against spoilers, as the popular hymn suggests: “let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me”. Let us all proclaim that “...God is not a God of disorder but of peace – as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people” (1 Corinthians 14:33)

Issued and signed on this day 15th June 2018.



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****The PEPP is a platform for 5 church institutions/groups, namely, the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) with organizations of Religious, Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) and the Ecumenical Bishops' Forum (EBF), in working for a just and enduring peace by supporting the peace process between the GRP-NDFP.***