

*[The article below is from the press in the Philippines on plans to start formal peace talks in early 2011 in Norway between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), which includes the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army.]*

## **Interview with Jose Maria Sison on GRP-NDFP Peace Negotiations**

*Philippine Daily Inquirer, October 25, 2010*

### **1. How do you see Alex Padilla and his team? Are they acceptable to the NDFP panel?**

**JMS:** PNoy [President Benigno Aquino] has made an excellent choice of Alex Padilla as the chair of the GRP Negotiating Panel. Alex has an understanding of the Filipino people's struggle for national independence and democracy. He was a human rights lawyer and was once with Bayan. I also know Pablito Sanidad personally. He is also an excellent choice by PNoy. He is known as a man of integrity, a human rights lawyer, a patriot and progressive. I do not know the three other GRP panelists personally.

PNoy as GRP principal has the prerogative of appointing his own panelists. His panel appears to be so composed as to encourage the belief that there will be serious peace negotiations towards mutually satisfactory agreements. Through NDFP negotiating panel chairperson Luis Jalandoni, the NDFP has already publicly welcomed and accepted the new GRP panel.

### **2. What should be a good starting point for the renewal of the talks?**

**JMS:** The chairmen of the GRP and NDFP Negotiating Panels should start immediately to communicate with each other. It is possible that by the time you go to press they shall have started to communicate and try to arrange preliminary talks between teams of the panels as soon as possible in Oslo. The preliminary talks are intended to pave the way for the resumption of formal talks in January or February.

Likely topics for the preliminary talks include compliance with the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (particularly to enable NDFP consultants to attend negotiations), the release of political prisoners in the same manner that Ramos released both the military prisoners and political prisoners in 1992, the enhancement of the work of the Joint Monitoring Committee under the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law [CARHRIHL] and the acceleration of negotiations on social and economic reforms.

### **3. What is it that the PNoy government should do to show it is sincere in talking peace with you? What can the NDF panel do on its part to show the same?**

**JMS:** PNoy has begun to show serious interest in peace negotiations by composing his panel. The NDFP has responded promptly by welcoming and accepting the new GRP panel. By way of showing goodwill and building confidence, PNoy can release the 388 political prisoners. After all, he has already ordered the release of close to 400 military prisoners.

The NDFP does not have a comparable number of prisoners of war to release in exchange or in reciprocation. That is because the NPA has always released its prisoners as soon as possible and does not accumulate them. But the NDFP can assure the GRP with concrete proposals for the acceleration of the peace negotiations and for the implementation of CARHRIHL in order to lessen human rights violations by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police.

**4. I heard the NDFP panel is willing to send somebody to Malacanang to meet with PNoy before the start of the talks, is this true? Who is going to meet the president?**

**JMS:** Indeed, the NDFP is willing to send somebody to Malacanang to meet with PNoy. To show goodwill, no less than the NDFP negotiating panel chairperson Luis Jalandoni is prepared to visit Manila and pay a courtesy call to Pnoy. The visit can be made under the protection of the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees.

**5. What time frame are you looking at?**

**JMS:** Luis Jalandoni and his wife Coni Ledesma are now on a speaking tour in New Zealand and Australia. They will be in Hongkong at the end of November. From there they can go to Manila on December 1 or 2 to have informal one-on-one talks with his counterpart Alex Padilla and possibly to make a courtesy call on Pnoy.

**6. Will you still go by the old framework of negotiating through the four agenda?**

**JMS:** The GRP and NDFP will continue to negotiate in accordance with The Hague Joint Declaration as framework agreement and will tackle the three remaining subjects in the substantive agenda; namely, social and economic reforms, political and constitutional reforms and end of hostilities & disposition of forces. After the comprehensive agreement on social and economic reforms, fifty per cent of the peace process shall have been accomplished and shall push the further acceleration of negotiations on the two remaining subjects.

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Taken from:

<http://revolutionaryfrontlines.wordpress.com/2010/10/27/peace-talks-in-the-philippines-slated-to-begin-soon/#more-11042>