

PH still committed to peace, says Duterte

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Norway remains committed to helping in the peace process between the Philippine government and communist insurgents, but Malacañang said negotiations with the rebels were still out of the question at the moment.

President Duterte met with Idun Tvedt, the Norwegian special envoy to the peace process between the government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, in Davao City on Thursday.

Mr. Duterte told Norway that the Philippines remained committed to peace, said presidential spokesperson Harry Roque.

Norway's help

Tvedt reiterated her government's commitment to help the Philippines in its peace negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDFP), said Roque.

The President welcomed her statement and said the goal of peace must be achieved with

due regard for the country's interests.

"The President stressed that the Philippines is committed to peace," Roque said in a statement.

But in a separate interview with reporters, Roque said the peace talks with the communist insurgents were not about to resume anytime soon, and the war against the NPA would continue.

No sincerity

"The President explained that there seems to be no future for the peace talks because the NPA has no sincerity when it

comes to talking peace," he said.

"We cannot hold talks with people who are not being true to you," the spokesman added.

The ball now, he said, is in the NPA's court if it wants the peace discussions to resume. "The government has to see some sincerity on the part of the NPA," he said.

'Warm and open'

Roque described the President's meeting with Tvedt and other Norwegian officials as "warm and open," while the latter said it was "productive."

Joining Tvedt were Norway's

Ambassador to the Philippines Erik Forner, Deputy Chief of Mission Kristian Netland and Senior Advisor William Hovland.

Mr. Duterte earlier canceled peace talks with the communists after getting incensed over their continued attacks on soldiers and civilians.

Oslo's signal

He subsequently declared the CPP and NPA as terrorist organizations, and vowed to crack down on their legal fronts.

Ryan Amper, spokesperson for Barug Katungod Mindanao, of the groups calling for the re-

sumption of peace talks, said Tvedt's visit could be a signal that Oslo was pressing Manila to return to the negotiating table.

"We laud Norway's special envoy for exerting efforts to revive the peace talks that Duterte has persistently scuttled," Amper told the Inquirer.

He said it was important for the talks to resume so that a comprehensive agreement on social and economic reforms, which were seen to address "the root cause of the insurgency."

—WITH REPORTS FROM ALLAN NAWAL AND JIGGER JERUSALEM INQ

* PEACE TALK

* DUTERTE, RODRIGO