

FOLLOWING the Quezon City Regional Trial Court's decision convicting the prime suspects in the 2009 Maguindanao massacre, lawmakers on Thursday said authorities should look further into the case of 80 accused individuals who remain at large.

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Maguindanao Rep. Esmael Mangudadatu, who lost his wife and relatives in the massacre, said the court decision against the Ampatuans is proof that justice is alive in the country and “that it is never wrong to choose the right, and trust completely in God and in our Constitution.”



He said “the 10 years of waiting was worth it because justice is on our side. Words are not enough to express our heartfelt gratitude, and gratitude to God and your prayers for us.”

“Although not all of the accused were sentenced to life imprisonment, we are still pleased that those who were prosecuted were sentenced to life imprisonment. [We] are deeply grateful for your prayers and support so that we may achieve the justice we have waited [for] 10 years,” Mangudadatu added.

ACT-CIS Party-list Rep. Niña Taduran said 80 more suspects in the Maguindanao massacre case are still at large.

She said 14 of the 80 on the run are carrying the Ampatuan surname, while 50 of them are police officers and soldiers who have served as security of the convicted Datu Andal Ampatuan Jr.

Taduran, House assistant majority leader, called on the Philippine National Police to exhaust all means to bring these 80 suspects to justice.

“Today, impunity has ended. The victims’ cry for justice has been answered. As we celebrate the bravery and wisdom of Judge Jocelyn Solis Reyes, we must also continue to pray for her safety, and the witnesses’ and the families of the victims’ wellbeing,” says Taduran.

Taduran believes that these 80 suspects are still threats to the surviving victims and their families, as well as the witnesses.

After 3,678 days, the verdict on the murder of 58 people in the single-most gruesome political massacre in Maguindanao was finally resolved and rendered by Judge Solis-Reyes of Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 211 at the Quezon City Jail Annex-Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig City.

It was on November 23, 2009, that 32 media personnel, 20 family members of Mangudadatu, and six other individuals were slaughtered and dumped into pits by a backhoe. Fifty-two of the victims were part of the convoy of now-Rep. Mangudadatu who was then set to file his candidacy for the governorship of Maguindanao.

Recognition

For his part, Dasmariñas Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. sought for the recognition of the legal prowess, commitment, and bravery of Judge Solis-Reyes who took the responsibility of deciding the case despite threats to her life and her family.

Since the conviction is just at the RTC level, Barzaga said it will surely be appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, with the process taking years again.

He also called for the judiciary to adopt measures to expedite legal proceedings and improve the administration of justice.

“They [accused at large] too must be tried so corresponding penalties may be sentenced to them.” Moreover, he challenged the judiciary to “recalibrate its system and address VIP treatment among big-time inmates and ensure that hospital referral official pass is not abused by some who fake illnesses to be moved into medical facilities.”

Meanwhile, House Deputy Minority Leader and Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate hailed the court decision. “At long last, after 10 years, justice is finally catching up with the culprits behind the most barbaric attack against journalists in world history.”

During its year-ender press conference on Tuesday, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) announced it was able to facilitate the regularization of 580,539 contractual workers since August 2016.

Labor Secretary Silvestre H.

Bello III has consistently reiterated this was a historic achievement since no other administration was able to regularize as many contractual workers.

However, of the said cumulative figure, 2019 accounted for only 166,599, which was significantly lower compared to the number of regularized workers in 2018, at 320,999.

In 2016 the number of regularized workers was 39,399 and in 2017, it was at 53,542.

Revitalizing measures

LABOR Assistant Secretary Benjo M. Benavidez confirmed the declining trend of regularization this year, which he attributed to the increasing number of companies questioning their regularization orders before the courts.

“Only a few companies are now voluntarily regularizing their workers,” Benavidez told the BusinessMirror in a previous interview.

He said they are now pinning their hopes on the passage of the Security of Tenure (SOT) bill or the revival of their scrapped planned

Number of workers regularized in 2019, compared to the number of regularized workers in 2018, at 320,999

Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (Ecop) to revitalize their campaign against illegal contractualization.

The labor official noted the SOT bill will clear most of the legal questions on the issue of contractual employment, making their regularization order less likely to be legally contested.

As for the MOA, he said it will encourage employers, particularly

Ecop members, to voluntarily comply with their regularization order by providing them a certain period by which they should complete the absorption of their illegally contracted workers.

Labor groups have opposed the MOA, saying it provides unnecessary concessions to employers in regularizing their workers, such exemption from the routine labor inspections of DOLE.

Needed proof

DESPITE the fewer number of regularized workers this year, the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) lauded DOLE in its continuous campaign against illegal contractualization.

However, the country's largest labor federation called on the department to break down its data to show those who are already absorbed by their principals, and those who are not due to pending regularization orders.

“It should be disaggregated, otherwise it is an intellectually deceptive good news,” TUCP Vice President Louie Corral said.

DOLE has consistently stated it does not include workers with pending regularization orders in its regularization figures.

Labor leaders have been challenging DOLE to release the names of the regularized workers for verification purposes.

Benavidez explained that, while they have the said list, they cannot release it to the public, stressing such information could only be disclosed to the parties it involves: the regularized worker, as well as their employer.