



PRESS RELEASE

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Resurrected Anti-Terrorism Bill threatens human rights in exchange for aid

There is no excuse for the employment of violence to deliver a political message. The Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL), together with AKBAYAN, stands in resolute opposition to any such acts that harm innocent civilians and non-combatants. APL and AKBAYAN believe that the power of ideas far outlives the damage and horror that bullets and bombs can inflict on people.

But the ideas embodied in House Bill 5923 are as pungent and detestable as any weapon of destruction. The proposed bill, up for plenary debates at the House of Representatives aims to stem what it calls the threat of terrorism as evidenced by the spate of admittedly horrendous attacks on the public in recent years. But this legislation is riddled with loopholes prone to abuse and misinterpretation.

First, it vaguely describes terrorism to include any act that is "threatening to cause serious interference with or actually causing disruption of a public transport or utility or an essential service, facility, or system, whether public or private, except in the furtherance of a legitimate protest, grievance or advocacy."

But who defines what "a legitimate protest" is? If the National Labor Relations Council deems a strike as illegal, would this mean that a union which chooses to express its grievances fall prey to that onerous provision of the ATB? Would workers calling for decent wages and humane working conditions then be labeled as terrorists for merely expressing their basic human right?

The boundaries set by HB 5923 for what constitutes the commission of terrorism is dangerously intruding into the legitimate rights of the broad masses to express themselves. All it would take is an outsider to instigate panic and chaos in an assembly and it would be easy for the police to brand protestors as terrorists for "creating a common danger, terror, panic, or chaos to the public or a segment thereof." Naturally in the absence of real targets, it would not be impossible for police and military to employ the ATB in its current form against progressive forces like APL and AKBAYAN which operates within the boundaries of the law. This is unacceptable.

The ATB is a long-dead measure now being resurrected at the expense of more important bills such as HB 4535 which indemnifies human rights violations victims of the Marcos Regime. The proposed measure is bound to take so much out of the legislature's precious time which is better spent on other pressing matters.

The fact that the ATB is a requirement for the flow of more US aid into the country further makes its resurrection suspect. A requirement which is in line with the US-led war on terror which so far has not resulted in convincing results but our government seems intent to continue supporting.

The ATB would qualify the Philippines for more aid from the United States, which the people the ATB would affect will eventually have to pay for in the long run as debt. A myopic prescription for a problem with roots deeper and more wide-ranging than the government is willing to admit.

The assurance of security from a reformed and reliable police force is what the government should be going after. It should go after poverty, the real enemy of democracy and the real source of resentment and rebellion and ultimately the breeding ground of terrorists.

The ATB must be opposed and junked, not only as it infringes on human rights and workers' rights in particular but also because it declares a state policy against an enemy which it does not even know, much less understand.