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Philippines: Aquino should rescind plan to deploy militias in mining areas

The Philippine government should rescind its plan of deploying civilian militias to augment security at private mining operations, Amnesty International said.

President Benigno Aquino III approved the military's proposal on 12 October after forces from insurgent group New People's Army (NPA) attacked mining operations at Surigao del Norte province in northern Mindanao, killing three private security guards.

Amnesty International said that such militias, including the Citizens' Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGUs), have a long record of human rights violations in the Philippines. According to the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, CAFGUs have been responsible for arbitrary detention, torture, and killings of local community leaders.

Moreover, the use of such militias at remote mining areas has put Indigenous People at particular risk, according to the UN special rapporteur on indigenous issues.

Amnesty International said the military cannot ensure proper discipline and accountability for the militias and paramilitary groups, creating an environment conducive to human rights violations. Aquino's decision to deploy militias compounds this problem, in which some CAFGU called the Special CAFGU Active Auxiliary Units (SCAA), will be seconded to private entities to secure their interests.

While the SCAA will be equipped and managed by the military, they will be on the payroll of the mining firms.

According to media reports, an initial batch of 200 SCAA will begin work with two mining corporations, while additional SCAA units will be deployed upon the request of other mining firms.

Some CAFGU will be deployed under the military and some under the police. According to an army spokesperson, the military has also trained 41 SCAA units of 100 personnel each.

Amnesty International emphasized that the Philippine government itself would remain responsible for human rights violations committed by militias which the military has trained, equipped and deployed, even if they are securing private interests of mining corporations.

The mining corporations should consider the risk of complicity incurred by companies that have financed militias who commit serious human rights violations, Amnesty International said.