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Philippines: Multiple bombings in Mindanao are unlawful attacks on Civilians

Amnesty International condemns five bombing incidents in several areas in Mindanao that have killed at least 12 people and injured approximately 90, the overwhelming majority of them civilians. The attackers chose to target civilians going about their daily business in town centres and busy public places. This shows contempt for the most fundamental principles of humanity.

Such deliberate attacks against civilians can never be justified under any circumstances. Individuals' right to life must be protected at all times, and the civilian population must never be treated as expendable tools for achieving political or ideological ends. Amnesty International has repeatedly and consistently condemned attacks against civilians and indiscriminate attacks, regardless of whether they were carried out by armed groups or by government troops, in the region and elsewhere.

The attacks took place in Datu Piang, Maguindanao, Cotabato City, Iligan City and Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte, and Jolo, Sulu—towns and cities that have all experienced previous attacks and bombings in the context of the ongoing armed conflict between Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as well as other armed groups like the Abu Sayyaf.

No armed group has claimed responsibility for the bombings. Officers from the Philippine military have accused the MILF of carrying out the Cotabato and Maguindanao attacks. In turn, the MILF leadership has repeatedly denied responsibility and has attributed the attacks to the military, saying that there is a “bigger agenda” behind the bombings.

For the Sulu bombing, the Philippine military points at armed group Abu Sayyaf. While there is no apparent link between the bomb attacks in mainland Mindanao and the explosion in Sulu, the military is looking at regional armed group Jemaah Islamiyah as a common link, drawing from previous intelligence that its members have conducted bomb-making trainings for insurgent armed groups in Mindanao.

Amnesty International calls for an immediate end to all bombings and other attacks which target civilians as well as all indiscriminate attacks. The organisation reminds all sides to the armed conflict that they are obliged to comply with the rules of international humanitarian law, and in particular Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which prohibits any attacks on persons “taking no active part in the hostilities.”

The Philippine government must initiate prompt, independent investigations into the attacks and to bring those responsible to justice in proceedings that meet international standards of fairness. It must not react to the bombings with any measures which themselves violate human rights.

Additional information

On 4 July at approximately 6:45 pm, an improvised explosive device detonated about 100 meters away from the mayor's residence in Datu Piang, Maguindanao province in Central Mindanao, injuring three people.

On 5 July at around 8:40 am, a bomb exploded in a city street in front of the Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Cotabato City, Central Mindanao. Six people were killed, including an 11-year old boy and a 15-month old baby. At least 34 were injured, including two of the baby's siblings aged 11 years and 9 years.

On 6 July at 11pm, two of several explosives strapped to a tower of an electric power company in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte province in North-central Mindanao went off. There were no reported casualties.

On 7 July at 7:45 am, an explosive placed inside a motorcycle parked near the Mount Carmel Church in Jolo, Sulu detonated killing six people and injuring some 40 others. Two other similar explosives, hidden in boxes, were neutralised in the surrounding area.

On the same day, at 10:30 am in Iligan City, a bomb planted inside a car parked near the city pier exploded, wounding 16 people including three soldiers. An army jeep was parked beside the vehicle where the bomb exploded.

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