

Letter to the Editor:

Stricter measures on gun-control urgently needed

We are deeply saddened with the spate of killings that captured the headlines in recent days. Innocent lives have senselessly ended because of uncontrolled proliferation of firearms in our society, with our enforcers oblivious to such a reality.

The black market provides easy access to weapons for lawless elements. But corruption in both the military and police also account for the ‘crossing over’ of legal guns to the illegal trade. Likewise, while we have laws on gun ownership and registration, permit-to-carry and usage, these measures are antiquated and inadequate and focused more on penalizing rather than preventing would-be criminals from committing acts of violence.

Yet, gun-possession is not the monopoly of criminal groups alone. Gun-trade thrives – both legal and illegal –because of the continued and increasing demand for arms by civilians. The inadequacy of security provided by the State fuels the drive of civilians to acquire guns. The inability of enforcers to prevent similar occurrence like the recent bank robbery and massacre in Laguna further creates the impression of lawlessness. If there is a generalized perception that government forces are not providing them security, people will look after their own safety. Wrongly therefore, a number of civilians look at guns as an object of value, in this case, provider of security.

But guns kill. It is not a neutral object. It does not provide security - paradoxically, the proliferation of guns makes people feel more insecure. The proliferation of guns further exacerbates the already volatile social, political, and economic divides that exist in Philippine society. The famous adage that “guns don't kill, people do” is a misplaced notion – guns give power to the one holding it. Mere possession of it emboldens one to take drastic action. Gun possession and passion becomes a lethal combination.

We commend and join the call of the Inquirer editorial when it stated: “The Philippines could pass stricter gun control laws and enforce them without exception” (“Monsters with guns,” Inquirer, 5/20/08).

Further, we earnestly call on our authorities to seriously look into the proliferation of arms in society:

(a) To address the *demand* side, we need to build safer communities by striking down the criminal elements operating in communities and prosecuting crimes with impartiality. People won't feel the need to arm themselves if they feel safe and secure in their homes and communities.

(b) To address the *supply* side, proper implementation and strict monitoring of laws, as well as participation from civil society and local communities in carrying out the rule of law can drastically lessen senseless killings and criminality from happening. A crack down on corrupt elements in the military and police is needed. And we reiterate the need for Congress to review existing laws, rules and regulations relating to arms and accordingly pass stricter gun-control measures. We at PhilANSA offer our hand to help in this endeavor.

PhilANSA, a network of organizations calling for stricter measures on gun possession and use, believes that these are but some immediate measures to take to arrest the spiral of violence we are in. And these measures must be done NOW, for what kind of existence is it when one cannot feel protected in one's community, and even more distressing, in one's home.

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