

Photos of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighters in alleged guerrilla tactic training with Abu Sayyaf militants that were presented before the fifth Senate public hearing on the Mamasapano bloody encounter began on Tuesday prompted senators to demand explanations from the Philippine government and the MILF which signed a peace treaty on March 27 last year.

The photos were received by Senator Grace Poe from Sulu Governor Abdusakur Tan, a stronghold of the Abu Sayyaf, where it have kept hostages they abducted from other nearby provinces and neighboring Sabah, Malaysia.

In a letter, Tan told Senator Poe the massive training was “reportedly facilitated by former Panglima Estino Mayor Hadji Munib Estino and his son, incumbent Mayor Benshar Estino, as they announced the opening of the MILF Camp intended for the Basic Training of the Bangsamoro National Guard as a pre-requisite to becoming bona-fide members of the MILF.”

“These recent developments have raised fears among ordinary citizens in the province, instead of hope, after the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. More so when the pictures show high-powered firearms being handled by the above-named former and incumbent local officials and their supporters,” Tan said in the letter.

He said the activities are “provocative actions” that violate guidelines on the cessation of hostilities between the MILF and the government.

Asked directly by Senate President Franklin Drilon, MILF spokesman Mohagher Iqbal said he believes it has something to do with the political situation in Sulu, the ABS-CBN TV network reported.

“[The area] is embroiled with political problems. There are ongoing misunderstandings between politicians in the area. I think it has something to do with that,” Iqbal said.

He said he already saw the pictures during a congressional hearing in January, but it's the first time that he saw the picture labels.

The pictures were labeled: "MILF member and mostly ASG."

He said he can't confirm if the persons in the photos are indeed MILF men. He said he asked for copies back in January, but was not provided even a single one.

Government peace panel head Miriam Coronel-Ferrer told ABS-CBN she will give the Senate copies of an initial report they were able to obtain on the matter. She said the report is intelligence data that should be treated confidential.

She said, however, there are "identified personalities there, and some private armed groups in terms of the firearms used..."

Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Deles said: "It's not purely political, but political with possibility of violence breaking out between political parties."

Deles said they immediately informed the ceasefire mechanism committee to look into the matter.

She said they also asked the MILF for their response.

Drilon asked both if they were able to inform the police and the military about it.

Ferrer said the ceasefire committee is also composed of members of the military. The report was also validated by the Western Mindanao Command (Wesmincom), she said.

Photos of MILF fighters with Abu militants presented in Senate

Wednesday, 25 February 2015 11:52 -
