PNoy ultimately responsible for Mamasapano massacre - Senate panel

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(UPDATED 3:58 p.m.) President Benigno Aquino III is responsible for the operation that led to the deaths of more than 60 people, including 44 police officers of the PNP Special Action Force, in Mamasapano, Maguindanao in late January, the Senate inquiry on the incident has said in its draft report.

Sen. Grace Poe, the chair of the Senate Committee on Public Order, said Aquino was accountable after he allowed the then suspended Philippine National Police chief Director-General Alan Purisima to be involved in overseeing Oplan Exodus in the morning of Jan. 25.

"As to the President, he is ultimately responsible for the Mamasapano mission," said Sen. Grace Poe, the chair of the Senate Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs.

Poe added that the Mamasapano incident was clearly a massacre and not just a mere misencounter as the authorities earlier called it. She pointed out that the MILF and its breakaway Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters “murdered and robbed” the SAF troops.

The MILF has an existing peace agreement with the government and Congress is deliberating a law creating a Bangsamoro autonomous region in Mindanao, the centerpiece of the GPH-MILF pact.

"Siya na po mismo ang nagsabi noon, bilang Pangulo at Commander-in-Chief, 'Pasan ko naman po ang responsibilidad para sa anumang resulta, sa anumang tagumpay, pasakit o trahedya na maari nating matamasa sa paghahangad ng pangmatagalang seguridad at kapayapaan'," Poe said.
“The buck stops with him (Aquino). If he can own up to it I’m sure the people would be less confused,” Poe said.

Having found that the Aquino committed an error, Poe was asked how he could be made accountable.

"The President can only held responsible through impeachment," Poe said.

In Malacañang, Communications Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. deferred comment on the Senate probe’s findings until he has read the entirety of the draft report. He nevertheless acknowledged the Senate’s independence to act on the findings.

"Nasa kamay na po ng Senado kung ano ang nais nilang gawin hinggil sa kanilang sariling findings. Ang pagkaunawa po namin, ang isinasagawang pagdidinig o pagsisiyasat ng Kongreso ay para sa layuning makapagbuo ng remedial legislation, ‘di po ba, sinasabi natin na ito ay in aid of legislation,” Coloma told reporters.

PNoy needs to explain

The report also raised the issue on whether Aquino and other high-ranking officials could have minimized the deaths in the Mamasapano incident.

"Perhaps, if the President and the key security officials who were with him in Zamboanga City discussed the incident and shared information with each other at the early stages of the day, coordination between the Army and the PNP might have been hastened and fewer lives would have been lost," read the executive summary of the Senate committee's findings.

"As the Commander-in-Chief... [the President] wields the awesome powers of government, and has its vast resources at his disposal. The President’s decision not to use these resources at that instance, must be explained by him. The President is ultimately responsible for the outcome of the mission," it added.
The executive summary of the committee report said that it was evident that Aquino knew that Purisima was suspended on graft charges on Dec. 4, 2015 and that Deputy Director-General Leonardo Espina was appointed officer-in-charge of the PNP on Dec. 12, 2015.

Still, Aquino continued to course his instructions as regards the mission through Purisima.

"The President himself admitted that all the communication regarding Oplan Exodus emanating from him to PDIR Napeñas, and vice-versa, was being coursed through a then suspended PDG Purisima," the summary said.

**Usurpation**

Poe said that Purisima committed usurpation of authority and official function and an administrative complaint of indirect contempt may be filed against him with the Ombudsman for “disobedience of or resistance to a lawful writ, process or order” of the anti-graft body.

Napeñas, on the other hand, committed grave misconduct and may also be held administratively liable for inefficiency and incompetence in the performance of official duties and for conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service on account of the poor planning and execution of Oplan Exodus and his failure to coordinate the operation with the AFP.

Forty-four police commandos were killed in the "misencounter" with the MILF and its breakaway Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters after the PNP-Special Action Force killed Malaysian bomb maker Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan in Mamasapano in the morning of Jan. 25.

Poe chaired the Senate inquiry into the Mamasapano massacre. The other committees involved were the Senate committees on peace, unity and reconciliation and on finance.
The senator presented the findings of the committee report to the media on Tuesday afternoon.

**Oplan Exodus**

“The President must bear responsibility for giving assent to and failing to prevent the unlawful exercise of official functions by Purisima in connection with Oplan Exodus,"

"It is beyond doubt that the President was fully aware that Purisima was preventively suspended by the Ombudsman on 4 December 2014, and that Deputy Director General Leonardo Espina was designated Officer-in-Charge of the PNP,” Senator Grace Poe said Tuesday.

She added that the President himself admitted that all the communication regarding Oplan Exodus emanating from him to then Special Action Force Getulio Napeñas Jr, and vice-versa, was being coursed through then suspended Purisima.

““The President assented to Purisima’s unlawful exercise of official functions, and continued to communicate with Purisima in regard the Oplan Exodus,” Poe said.

The Senate probe which began on Feb. 9 looked into the Jan. 25 incident in Mamasapano, Maguindanao which led to the death of 44 Philippine National Police-Special Action Force troopers. The troopers were on a mission to arrest high-profile terrorists and figured in an hours-long gunfight with forces of the MILF and BIFF.

**See the full executive summary here:**
[https://aboutphilippines.org/doc-pdf-ppt-etc\EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY_FINAL.pdf](https://aboutphilippines.org/doc-pdf-ppt-etc\EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY_FINAL.pdf)

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