

Open Letter to President Clinton on US-Philippines Relations

Boone Shirmer of the Friends of the Filipino People circulates and asks you to send this letter to President Clinton to signify your protest to a new Status of Forces Agreement being negotiated between the US and the Philippines.

President William Clinton
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500
USA

On 30 September 1997, in Washington, DC, high civilian and military officials of the Philippine and United States governments held a meeting to negotiate a new Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). These negotiations were made necessary because of Washington's demand, as put forward by Admiral Joseph W. Prueher, commander-in-chief of the US Pacific Command, that the Philippine government grant "partial diplomatic immunity" to US military personnel on duty in the Philippines.

The US government demanded and got diplomatic immunity when it imposed US bases on the Philippines at the beginning of the Cold War. This diplomatic immunity was clearly a definitive aspect of the infringement of Philippine sovereignty that the US bases brought with them. US soldiers were not bound by Phil-

ippine legal procedures and, when they committed crimes, they were often spirited out of the country by US military officialdom.

With the democratic upheaval that overthrew the Marcos dictatorship, the US bases were removed and Philippine national sovereignty strengthened. The attempt of the Pentagon to restore diplomatic immunity is part of its larger effort to restore the strategic military use of the Philippines that the bases provided Washington. The proposal for a new SOFA is therefore closely connected to the Pentagon's effort to foist an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) on the people of the Philippines. This agreement would allow the US military to use most of the important ports of the Philippines for ship visits and military exercises. When first proposing ACSA in June 1993, Admiral Charles R. Larson, then chief of the Pacific Command, declared agreement would in effect return the Philippines to its previous functions as stepping-off point for the US military interventions in Asia and the Mideast. The US military high command gave the Philippines this alien role after the imperial conquest nearly a century ago, and so it continued for many years until the Philippine Senate voted to remove the US bases in September 1991.

Mr. President, you have proclaimed the promotion of democracy to be the keystone of your administration's foreign policy. We, therefore, call upon

you, as commander-in-chief, to order the US military to cease its attempt to take from the Philippine people—by means of SOFA and ACSA—democratic gains they have won through the peaceful exercise of their political rights. To do otherwise is complicity in an exercise of hypocrisy that tarnishes our nation in the eyes of the world.

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Sandra Torrijos