

5 Filipino troops killed in communist attack (Philippines)

MANILA, Philippines (AP) - Communist rebels ambushed an army vehicle with a land mine blast and gunfire, killing five soldiers and wounding two others, the military said Wednesday, after the guerrillas ruled out a resumption of stalled peace talks.

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The ambush happened Tuesday as a vehicle carrying administrative army personnel ran over the land mine in Lianga township in Surigao del Norte province in the southern Philippines, army spokesman Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner said in a statement.

The ensuing gunfight left five soldiers dead and two wounded. Troops also lost five firearms, ammunition, a laptop and other belongings, he said, while condemning the rebel use of land mines in violation of international treaties.

The latest attack came after rebel spokesman Fidel Agcaoili said the New People's Army guerrillas should intensify attacks and take advantage of "crisis conditions" battering President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's administration to advance their decades-old rebellion.

He said sporadic peace talks, which broke down in 2004, were "highly unlikely" to resume "while Arroyo is in power."

Arroyo's turbulent term ends in 2010. She has faced accusations of corruption and condoning massive human rights violations by the military, but has steadfastly denied any wrongdoing.

During an informal meeting with rebel negotiators in the Norwegian capital of Oslo that ended Sunday, Philippine government representatives insisted the guerrillas agree to an indefinite cease-fire as a condition for resuming talks. The rebels rejected the demand, Agcaoili said.

The guerrillas have been proposing a truce to take effect only during formal talks as a show of goodwill but the government has not responded, he said. Presidential peace adviser Hermogenes Esperon said the government wanted an indefinite cease-fire to provide the country a respite from frequent bloody clashes.

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