

Canadian Ecumenical Response to Attacks on Lumad Evacuees in Mindanao

January 30, 2020

Members of the Canadian ecumenical community condemn, in the strongest terms, the attack of paramilitary group Alamara on the United Church of Christ in the Philippines-Haran (UCCP-Haran) evacuation centre in Davao City, Mindanao, the Philippines on January 25, 2020. During the attack, more than fifty men tore down the walls of the compound, where more than 500 Lumad Indigenous peoples have sought shelter since 2015. Some of the attackers were also carrying placards vilifying the UCCP.

Indigenous communities in Mindanao have faced displacement as a result of ongoing military operations and the intensification of mining activities in the region.

Karapatan, an alliance of individuals, groups and organizations working for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines, which is a member of EcuVoice, supported by both the United Church of Canada and KAIROS, framed this attack within the context of:

“continued displacement of the Lumad...due to the intensified militarization in their communities, as well as the attacks and threats against their lives and livelihood. The Duterte government has long desired to undermine the resistance of Lumad communities, including delegitimizing their struggle for self-determination.”

We join all human rights defenders and churches in the Philippines who are calling for repeal of a resolution recommending UCCP Haran's closure and their appeal to the Commission on Human Rights in the Philippines to take action against these latest forms of violence against Indigenous people and church workers. We also join them in amplifying the Lumad evacuees' concern that the forced entry of Alamara members in the compound provides opportunity to plant evidence and justify the entry of State forces into the sanctuary and the closure of the centre. Recent human rights reports from the region have documented the planting of evidence by state authorities to justify coercive action against targeted groups.

We affirm the right of religious facilities to serve as evacuation centers where people who are displaced can seek protection and refuge.

Finally, we call on the Government of Canada to work with their counterparts in the Philippines to protect the rights to land and self-determination of the Indigenous communities guaranteed under the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and to ensure the protection of human rights defenders through the full implementation of *Voices at Risk: Canada's Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders*.