



PHILIPPINE ECUMENICAL PEACE PLATFORM

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Pastoral Statement

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Respect for Human Rights and God's Gift of Human Dignity A Cornerstone for Peace

The Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) is very concerned about the growing state of violence in the country that is fast spreading like the deadly COVID-19 virus. As church people, we are seriously alarmed that human rights, which protects God's gift of human dignity and an important cornerstone of peace, is sadly being ignored and desecrated.

On March 7, a day before International Women's Day, coordinated "tokhang" style raids by the police and the military in Calabarzon, resulted in the death of nine activists and arrests of six others. Most were killed in their homes but the police claimed that there was an "armed encounter" and the alleged members of "communist terrorist groups" fought back (nanlaban). Prior to this, on March 4, two union leaders were arrested in Santa Rosa and in San Pablo City, Laguna, respectively. We offer our sincere condolences to the bereaved families of those killed and our prayers for those arrested and their families and colleagues who are working for their releases.

Human rights groups have dubbed the chilling crackdown as "Bloody Sunday," redolent of the government's war on drugs. They also noted how the attacks came two days after President Rodrigo Duterte

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ordered police and military to “kill” and “finish off” members of the New People’s Army (NPA) — and “don’t mind human rights”.

Rights violations and attacks on members of civil society organizations have increased these past few days and weeks. On March 3, 2021, Atty. Angelo Karlo Guillen, Vice President for Visayas of the National Union of People’s Lawyers, was almost killed when two men in Iloilo City stabbed him. Atty. Guillen is the lawyer for the survivors of the Tumandok and Sagay massacres and his laptop containing files of said cases were taken by his attackers. Other disheartening rights violations include the killing of Julie Catamin, the barangay captain who came forward to counter the claims of state forces that the “Tumandok 9” massacre victims were rebels, and the arrests of Lumad students and their teachers in the University of San Carlos, among others.

It is very alarming that these human rights violations are in the context of the government’s all-out war against the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and its allies. However, the victims of these killings and other recent human rights violations were mostly unarmed activists working for the interests of the marginalized – peasants, fisherfolk, indigenous people and the urban poor. For PEPP, based on our faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ, we believe that such violence breeds injustice which in turn results to unpeace. Such a complex conflict cannot be solved by an all-out war, not even a counter-insurgency program with billions of pesos for a budget.

We call on the government, especially those in the security sector, to fully respect human rights and strive to protect God’s gift of human dignity. We also call on the Filipino people to pray and work for the resumption of the peace talks between the government and the NDFP. Like the vaccine, which is a crucial solution to the COVID-19 pandemic, principled negotiations that address the roots of the armed conflict in our country are likewise the best option for a people-centered peace settlement. It is written: *“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace —as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.” (1 Corinthians 14:33)*

Issued and signed on this 10th day of March 2021.



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****The PEPP is a platform for 5 church institutions/groups, namely, the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) with organizations of Religious, Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) and the Ecumenical Bishops' Forum (EBF), in working for a just and enduring peace by supporting the peace process between the GRP-NDFP.***

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