



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES

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DEFEND UCCP-HARAN, DEFEND THE POOR AND THE OPPRESSED

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) is deeply offended and gravely concerned by the recent forced entry of the para-military group, Alamara, in the compound of UCCP-Haran which we believe arose from the resolution of the Regional Peace and Order Council of Region 11 seeking the immediate closure of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) Haran Center on F. Selga St., Madapo, Davao City. We find such resolution undoubtedly offensive against the Church and against those that advocate peace, justice and human rights – a clear violation of the principle of separation of church and state.

UCCP-Haran is not a mere evacuation center. The Regional Peace and Order Council is probably not well-informed that HARAN stands for “Home and Altar for Renewal, Action and Nurture”, a mission house inspired by the UCCP action in 1990 to “declare our churches and church facilities as sanctuaries and zones of peace”. The Regional Council has no right whatsoever to demand the closure of a church’s mission, much more to blame a church for faithfully doing its Christian mission of defending the poor and the oppressed. The Scriptures so clearly instruct us in: Psalm 82:3-4, “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

The forced intrusion of Alamara group in the compound of UCCP-Haran could not have happened without the prodding of those who initiated the resolution. It was unlawful and yet no one among the illegal intruders has been apprehended by the police up until this moment. We deplore such inaction and fumbling on the part of the police.

Equally deplorable is the apparent black propaganda being hurled against UCCP-Haran as in the report aired by PTV News Mindanao. We are dismayed that the media is now being used to sow false and fake news. We unfalteringly disprove all such allegations of DILG officials in the region, Region 11 Police Director and others that lumad evacuees in UCCP-Haran

Quadrennial Theme: “**Doing Christ’s Mission in these Changing Times**”

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are being used “to get donations from foreign groups” and that “they are being detained in UCCP-Haran”. Such are entirely unfounded statements which should have been verified first for purposes of fair and balance reporting. The fact that not even one lumad accepted the offer of Governor Edwin Jubahib already refutes the false claims of the PNP regional director that the lumads are being detained in Haran. As a legitimate private Filipino institution, it is well within our fundamental rights to protect our compound from any possible harm from dubious intruders like the Alamara.

Consistent with the declaration of Prophet Isaiah, our church has committed to be a *stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the scorching heat...* (Isaiah 25: 4).

We resolutely believe that the Church cannot go wrong in serving and defending the poor and the destitute. Hence, we remain steadfast in our resolve to advocate justice for the weak until they are delivered from the hands of their oppressors and tormentors. Our continuing efforts to defend and be in solidarity with the lumads and other marginalized sectors is grounded on our firm commitment to bring the good news of God to the masses. No amount of intimidations or pressures from whoever can force our church to abandon our sacred calling and duty to do Christ’s mission in season or out of season.

We call on the PTV News Mindanao to refrain from airing unverified news especially those that defame our integrity and reputation as a church.

The following are our calls for immediate action:

- That the Regional Peace and Order Council of Region 11 urgently withdraw its arbitrary resolution and we also demand for a public apology for besmirching the integrity of our beloved UCCP;
- That the Davao City Council, through the Committee on Human Rights and Committee on Indigenous Peoples, conduct an investigation on the intrusion and damage to property;
- That the PNP be held accountable for condoning the intrusion and for their inaction;
- That all Alamara leaders who were involved in the attacks be apprehended for their unlawful forced entry in UCCP-Haran and for damaging church properties;
- That Alamara be disbanded.

We implore our constituents throughout the nation to carry on with our mission of serving and defending the poor and the oppressed even as we also beseech your prayers and solidarity with our fellow servants and co-workers in UCCP-Haran and the whole Southeast Mindanao Jurisdictional Area. Let us all be assured of God’s constant presence and guidance as we carry on with our shared mission. “*Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.*” (Proverbs 31:8-9 ESV)


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THE UCCP COUNCIL OF BISHOPS


January 28, 2020



Bishop Melzar D. Labuntog
General Secretary

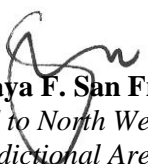

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