



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES Council of Bishops

REAFFIRMING OUR COMMITMENT TO SERVE THE DOWNTRODDEN AND THE LEAST PRIVILEGED

(A Pastoral Statement of the UCCP Council of Bishops on Haran's Case)

'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me' (Matthew 25: 40 NKJV) is a constant reminder that keeps the United Church of Christ in the Philippines dynamic and actively engaged in the ministry for the least privileged and disadvantaged sectors of our society.

The recent filing of a criminal case by certain Ata-Manobo individuals against a number of our members, local church leaders and church workers including fellow bishops is a sad reflection of high-handedness and hostile attitude of the powers that be towards the Church. Said filing of case is apparently stirred by the military and Atty. Marlon Bosantog, head of the legal affairs office of National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP).

We take this case as part of a grand design to shame and smear the integrity not only of those accused individuals but of the whole United Church of Christ in the Philippines for its staunch advocacies for the protection of Lumads' rights and indigenous people and for our active engagement in peace and justice ministries.

Over the past year or so, the UCCP and some of our members and leaders had been among those red tagged by the military. In fact, one of our former Conference Ministers in the Bicol Region had been arrested and detained on the basis of a trumped-up charge filed by the military. In plain sight, therefore, the case filed by Ata-Manobo in Davao City Prosecutor's Office is just another act of harassment and intimidation.

We recall that in a dialogue with no less than the newly proclaimed president then, held in Malacanang in 2016, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, assured us that he will do his best to bring the Lumads back to their own homes. UCCP did not invite nor encourage the Lumads to come to UCCP-Haran. The Lumads actually came to Haran seeking for refuge as a result of militarization in their places. As a church, the UCCP cannot but accommodate them in gesture of support and solidarity.

In 2016, then Davao City Vice-Mayor Paolo Duterte personally came to Haran and offered the Lumads free vehicles that would bring them back to their homes, but the Lumads refused the offer. The same was done in 2020 by Gov. Edwin Jubahib of Davao Del Norte but also to no avail. Clearly, the UCCP did not prevent the Lumads from going back to their homes neither did we oblige any of them to remain in Haran. It was solely their decision to remain under the refuge of Haran.

As a Church of Jesus Christ, we remain true to our commitment as declared in February 1990: "the United Church of Christ in the Philippines through its Council of Bishops and the Executive Committee in session on February 21-23, 1990 declares as sanctuaries and

zones of peace all its church buildings, parsonages and lands, hospitals and schools, and other church-owned institutions and their premises. As sanctuaries, these places and premises are open to all people, regardless of color and creed, sex and status, and of political and religious affiliation, at all times, in all circumstances of need. We welcome those needing sanctuary to use these places for protection, study, reflection, retreat, prayers and meditation, or simply for rest and quiet.”

Let it be made very clear that the UCCP is ready to face the accusers in court to prove the innocence and guiltlessness of our members and church workers who are among the respondents. All the allegations in the case are unfounded and tall tales that are too incredible to be true.

As leaders of the Church, we abhor such act of falsehood even as we also call on the accusers and those behind their action to stop besmirching our church, our members and church workers. As the Prophet Isaiah puts it, in Isaiah 5:18: “Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, and wickedness as with cart rope...”

We also call on al UCCP faithful to join us in sober prayers and support for our fellow UCCP members who are drawn into this quagmire of trickery and sham. Let us continue to be ONE in living out our shared calling as God’s ambassadors of peace, justice and love! “With Christ on our side, even the gates of hell will not prevail over us!” (Matthew 16: 18).+

UCCP COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

28 September 2020



Bishop Melzar D. Labuntog
General Secretary



Bishop Joseph G. Agpaoa
North Luzon Jurisdictional Area



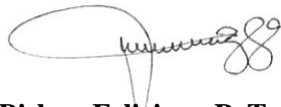
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Middle Luzon Jurisdictional Area



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South Luzon Jurisdictional Area



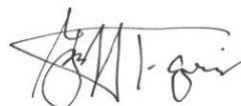
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