



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES Council of Bishops

Statement on the Raid of Lumad Bakwit School in Cebu

The UCCP Policy on Child Protection states that, human persons are created in the image of God, destined to live in community with God, with other persons and with all creation. Children are integral part of human society and must be given the best possible care, protection, empowerment and opportunities for them to become intellectually competent, honest, ethically and morally sensitive and critically aware of the needs and aspirations of their communities for the realization of a just and peaceful social order.

The February 15, 2021 police raid of the Lumad Bakwit School in the SVD University of San Carlos Talamban Campus-Cebu in the guise of rescue operation is a blatant violation of the right to education and the right to self-determination of indigenous children and youth. The Council of Bishops condemns this atrocious act by the Police Regional Office -7 and the involved state security forces. The allegations that the Lumad Bakwit Schools or the Indigenous Evacuee School is a training ground of the guerilla New People's Army are untenable.

Save Our Schools Network says this raid called "rescue" led to the detention of 26 persons, including 19 students, teachers and tribal elders. The raid of the school casts aspersion to human dignity and scandalizes the ministry of the Church carried out by the Society of the Divine Word and the University of San Carlos of providing alternative venue in Cebu for the schooling of Lumad children and youth displaced due to militarization of their homeland in Davao Del Norte and Bukidnon Provinces.

Also, this is a conscious attempt of government agencies such as the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) and the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) to discredit the work and commitment of the Save our Schools Network-Cebu in sustaining the education of the Lumad children despite the closure of many Lumad schools in Davao Provinces which displaced discriminated the children. The rescue is farcical and fabricated, as the parents and the students both gave consent to participate in the educational program.

Reliable resources and testimonies of adults present during the raid on February 15, 2021, disclosed that the retreat house where the students, teachers and tribal leaders were housed was 'gilusob' or raided by the marauding police and state security forces. They intimidated the students with intense verbal harassment, the children were forcibly taken resulting to Jomar's ripped shirt, Jomar and Modi were punched for resisting being taken by force. This is a chain of intimidation, harassment and persecution of organizations and institutions that support the struggle of the

indigenous people or the Lumad for their unhampered life, productivity and peace in their ancestral lands in Talaingod, Davao Del Norte, and other Provinces in Mindanao. The UCCP national leaders were not exempt of state persecution for hosting them in the Church's sanctuary in Haran in Davao City.

The UCCP through the Council of Bishops, sustains unwavering support and solidarity with the Lumad students in their struggle for their ancestral land and their right to education. We join the call to end militarization in Mindanao and to save Lumad schools. We call for the safe and immediate release of the 26 students including their elders and their teachers who were illegally detained from this violent raid. We remind the government of their accountability and responsibility to the people that they have pledged to serve:

Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain... buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat." The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. (Amos 8: 4-7a) +

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UCCP COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

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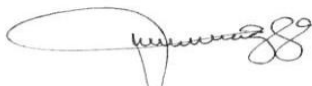
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