



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES Council of Bishops

Statement on Massacre of Tumanduk in Panay Island

The plight of the indigenous peoples in the country especially in Panay Island had been characterized by injustice, aggression, confiscation and land grabbing of their ancestral land. The government has been surreptitiously and openly scheming to occupy their lands or have systematically encroached their lands for multinational companies to construct mega dams and other profit-oriented projects at the advantage of the investor companies and the government bureaucrats. The lives and future of the indigenous peoples like the Tumanduk are not factored in infrastructure projects yet bear the brunt of development aggression.

The UCCP Council of Bishops strongly condemns the recent killings of nine (9) Tumanduk barangay leaders in Calinog, Iloilo and the abduction of their seventeen (17) leaders in Tapaz, Capiz, on December 30, 2020. The massacre and arrests are heinous crimes against the individual and collective life of the Tumanduk. These acts have been well-planned by the military and police operatives under the intensified counterinsurgency program funded by the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC).

These acts are contrary to the logic of law and order and democratic processes. Regardless of the state security forces' incredible justifications of the killings in front of the victims; family members and community, these are condemnable brutish acts. It has been disclosed by credible sources that prior to the incident, the victims were being tagged as members of the New People's Army (NPA). The military keep on coercing them to surrender and clear their names. These victims refuse to do what the military instructed them to do because they were not NPAs.

The UCCP Council of Bishops undoubtedly attribute this massacre and arrests to the implementation of the disreputable Anti-Terrorism Law (ATL), that has just got its presidential imprimatur in the last quarter of 2020. The notoriety of the Anti-Terrorism Law is used in criminalizing acts of dissent against violations of human rights and state repression of civil liberties. The resistance of the Tumanduk to forcible entry into their ancestral land by investors of Jalaur Mega Dam and their collective efforts to protect their communities, livelihood and sustainable future were classified as acting in collusion with the New People's Army.

Witnesses of the Tumanduks narrated that prior to the incident, the victims were being tagged as member of the New People's Army (NPA) and the military keep on harassing them to surrender and clear their names. These victims refuse to do what the military

instructed them to do for the simple reason that they are barangay officials and barangay tanods have no connections with the armed revolutionary movement. This renders the principle that the civilian authority is above the military and police ineffectual.

The incident grossly violated the law of God and the law of the land. This should be investigated thoroughly to bring justice to the victims and their families. The blood of the victims cry out for justice and these criminals will be held accountable by the people. As a community of faith, we stand in vigilance against these injustices. The Church as defender of human rights is in solidarity with all the victims, supports the struggle of the indigenous people in seeking justice and in bringing to reality genuine and lasting peace in our land.

We resound to the government and the state security forces to ***“Learn to do good; seek justice; help the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow.”***- (Isaiah 1:17). We know that God’s justice will prevail and the evil deeds of the state will be dealt with accordingly. We call on President Duterte to stop the killings and the attacks on indigenous people, repeal the Anti-Terrorism Law, mete out justice for the victims and let peace reign in the land. +

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January 31, 2021



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