



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES

COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

877 EDSA, West Triangle, Quezon City

PASTORAL STATEMENT

Commemorating the 73rd Anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948-2021)

RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS, PROTECT HUMAN LIFE

The Church's assertion of the basic human rights of the people in the present Philippine context is pressing and the participation of the Church members in the protection of these rights necessitates sustained and committed ethical response for the strategic work for just and humane society. As a Church, we ascribe to the provisions of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which has its 73rd anniversary on December 10. We uphold the inalienable rights to which all human beings are inherently entitled, regardless of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.

In biblical terms, the moral status of human beings is exalted, in large part due to the declaration first made in Genesis 1, that human beings are made in the divine image or *imago dei*. This divine image of every person speaks of fundamental human equality—no one has more of God's image than anyone else. Freedom, equality, and dignity are bestowed on all by virtue of being human, made in the image of God

Respect for human rights and defense of human life is profoundly embedded in the fundamental principles of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and clearly articulated in the UCCP Constitution and By-Laws, Declaration of Principles, Article 11, section 11, to wit:

"In accordance with the biblical understanding that all persons are created in the image of God, the Church affirms and upholds the inviolability of the rights of persons as reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other agreements on human rights, the international covenants on economic, social and cultural rights and on civil and political rights, the 1984 Convention against Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and those that relate specifically to refugees, women, youth, children, minority groups and other persons who cannot safeguard their own rights."

The UCCP's unwavering concern and steadfast commitment to respect human rights and protect human life is not just in keeping with the mandate of UDHR. Ours, in fact is deeply biblically rooted. In Exodus 23 for instance, the Israelites are given instructions on how to maintain justice for all. The passage lists acts that must be

and not be done, so as to prepare a safe and equitable space for all who inhabit the land. It ensures that everyone is equally entitled to the rights set forth by the law.

This biblical ethical injunction touches the very core of our national life, wherein since June 30, 2016, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has carried out a “war on drugs” that has led to the deaths of over 12,000 Filipinos to date, mostly urban poor. At least 2,555 of the killings have been attributed to the Philippine National Police. Duterte and other senior officials have instigated and incited the killings in a campaign that could amount to crimes against humanity. ¹

Even yet, with the international pressure to stop human rights violations, aerial bombings of communities by the State forces have not been abated. Recently, on December 1st, eight farmers in Alimodias, Miag-ao, Iloilo were casualties of the intensified military operations. We deplore these brutal acts that are violative of the International Humanitarian Law. Also, we call on the State forces to stop the red-tagging of Church Workers that lead to illegal arrest and detention and drop trumped-up charges for all unjustly accused and are still languishing in jail. The lives of the Filipino people have been threatened by the slackness of the hands of those who are entrusted with justice, the protection of life and the pursuance of peace.

We believe that the Church should serve as the bastion of hope for the reign of justice, peace and love in the country and the world. No amount of brandishing of good deeds or trustworthiness of those running for political positions in the 2022 national elections can ensure the respect of human rights. This year’s celebration of the 73rd Anniversary of the UDHR should encourage our Local Churches to:

- a) Conduct study sessions on the biblico-theological basis of human rights;
- b) Organize or revitalize their human rights committee; support the campaign for the resumption of peace talks between the NDFP and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines;
- c) Assert the implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic reforms that will address causes of poverty and other socio-economic woes of the people;
- d) Support the cry of the families of victims of extrajudicial killings to the International Criminal Court to investigate killings in the Philippines;
- e) Hold prayer vigils to remember and push for the release of political prisoners
- f) Invite victims of human rights violations to tell their stories during prayer meetings, and during worship services;
- g) Provide monetary, legal, material and spiritual support for those red-tagged, and arrested;
- h) Express support and solidarity for indigenous communities whose lands have been confiscated for use in large scale mining, plantations, and various forms of development aggression;

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/tag/philippines-war-drugs>

- i) Urge present and future State leaders to protect the lives of people by making the health care system adequate, affordable and sustainable;
- j) Offer prayers for communities around the world that are still suffering of human rights violations--their right to life, liberty and prosperity have been curtailed and deprived of them.

As we celebrate this year, the International Human Rights Day, the UCCP Council of Bishops harks our minds back to our long-time commitment to RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS AND PROTECT HUMAN LIFE consistent with the charge of the Scriptures, *“But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”* (James 2:1-4; 8-10)

THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS
December 05, 2021



Bishop Melzar D. Labuntog
General Secretary



Bishop Joseph G. Agpaoa
North Luzon Jurisdictional Area



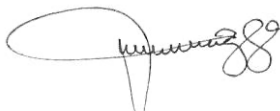
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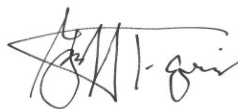
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