



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES

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COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

Enough of Deception, Conspiracy, and Aggression

(A Pastoral Statement on Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), Balikatan Military Exercises and National Sovereignty Issues and Concerns)

The Council of Bishops is alarmed of the threat of high-tech military war of aggression by China, the United States, Japan and other countries. The war rehearsals are staged on the territories of the less powerful countries such as the Philippines and Taiwan. There is a surmounting level of fear of losing our sovereignty and identity as a people. The imagery of the peaceable reign of God in the region and the entire world that has emboldened our faith affirmation and our faith expression seems a farfetched experience of nations that are objects of imperial control.

The roots of people's insecurity and submission to the power of former and emergent colonial masters have not been undone and eradicated from the Filipino culture. We have been made to believe that the country will benefit from lopsided joint military and security agreements with the United States. The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which was signed on April 28, 2014, brings us back to previous shameful and regrettable agreements involving US military forces, including the Treaty of Paris in 1898, the Military Bases Agreement in 1947, the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1951, and the Visiting Forces Agreement in 1999.

All of these accords, including EDCA, have been promoted by the government and the AFP as a way to modernize outdated Philippine military weaponry and capability. But in actuality, this deal is one-sided and will solely serve the interests of the United States as it has been granted free access to Philippine territories such as airspace, land and waters, existing AFP camps, and other facilities to station and deploy soldiers on a rotational basis, giving the US a base for flexing its military power regionally and for launching military operations against suspected enemies.

In the past decades and in recent historical developments show that the Philippines has been a hot spot or a theatre for high tech-war of aggression between the United States of America and China and the inevitable collusion of countries belonging to NATO. The joint military exercises on the Philippines, sponsored by the USA and by other cooperating countries dubbed as "Balikatan" or "Shoulder to shoulder," with emphasis

on live fire drills in the West Philippine Seas is a cause for deep concern for the Filipino people. This is being done using the framework of EDCA and other existing military agreements, which also allows the U.S. to open four (4) new military bases or installation in the country.

An agreement like EDCA is abhorrent to God. In biblical wisdom, this is a project of individuals whose minds are filled with wicked designs that are prejudiced, unjust, and unfavorable to the Filipino people (Proverbs 6: 16-17). The Church strongly decries this agreement because it speaks poorly of the real meaning of righteousness and peace.

The intensifying threats to the sovereignty and people's security in the Philippines have been a deep concern of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and the Churches in Northeast Asia region. In the midst of the China's recent show of military might in the surrounding seas of Taiwan, close to the territorial boundary of the Philippines poses imminent threat to the country and the neighbouring countries in the region.

As a Church, the UCCP upholds its ethical principles of working for social justice and tenable peace, that emulates the articulation of abhorrence to high tech war of aggression and calls for international diplomacy with countries in the region, asserting UNCLOS ruling on sovereignty of the Philippines, and at the national level, work for the resumption of peace negotiation and operationalizing of previous peace agreements.

Let us not be hoodwinked anymore! We should not allow our people to be duped by foreign masters who will surely treat us like lowly brown slaves as they always do. Enough of foreign domination, oppression, and deceit. As the Old Testament reminds us: "*Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy.*" (Proverbs 212: 20)

EDCA must be spelled out as...

**Enough of
Deception,
Conspiracy, and
Aggression!**

RESIST BALIKATAN! SCRAP EDCA! OUT U.S. TROOPS NOW!

Let us pray fervently that God's shalom will guide the decisions of our global political and religious leaders to choose the path to sustainable peace grounded on justice and compassion. May Jesus Christ, our Peace inspire us to beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. (Isa. 2: 4). +

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15 April 2023



Bishop Melzar D. Labuntog
General Secretary



Bishop Joseph G. Agpaoa
North Luzon Jurisdictional Area



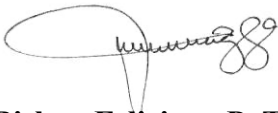
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