



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST INT THE PHILIPPINES

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COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

A Pastoral Statement on the Commemoration of the 51st year of the Declaration of Martial Law in the Philippines

This 21st of September 2023, we join the nation in commemorating the 51st year of the Declaration of Martial Law. The nightmarish experiences of one-man rule taught us to defend and value democracy and declare that never again should our civil liberties be imperiled, our human dignity violated and human life desecrated.

In the light of the present realities obtaining in the country, we would like to admonish the youth to re-read history, learn, reflect and should plant in their minds and hearts the lessons of the Filipino people's history. The youth should overcome their fears lest they lose the constitutional guarantees of people's civil liberties and human rights. The present government of Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. has shown regression in instituting and administering justice and is not willful to realize livable economy and sustainable peace in the country.

We would like to remind our UCCP faith communities that our Church is one of the few Churches that denounced Martial Law as elucidated in the statement issued by the 1978 General Assembly, "Whereas, in keeping with the democratic tradition of evangelical churches in the Philippines that these civil and political liberties and the machinery of Martial Law be scuttled."

In the same statement was emphasized that UCCP is against the perpetuation of a one-man rule in the country; that it is for the immediate restoration of all the civil and political liberties of the citizens; and that it is for the immediate dismantling of the machinery of Martial Law in the country. Our faith in the God of justice and peace is the strong foundation of our ethical response we have been expressing in the many challenging historical junctures of our society and the world.

Gleaning from our Statement of Faith, we declare that "the Kingdom of God is present, where faith in Jesus Christ is shared, where healing is given to the sick, where food is given to the hungry, where light is given to the blind, and where liberty is given to the captive and oppressed." Because the State's failure to protect human rights of the people, we assert of our ethical responsibility to protect human rights of every member

of the Church and every citizen in our community and help people in distress, defend their human dignity and extend moral, material and legal assistance to them.

More so, we admonish our faith communities to keep abreast of the laws and the State's instrumentalities violative of the constitutional rights, civil liberties, equity and social justice. We have been subjected to the Anti-Terrorism Law (ATL) implemented by the various departments of the government particularly by the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, the AFP and the NTF-ELCAC. This embodies the "One Nation Approach" an anti-insurgency strategy that is now being strengthened by additional funding by the various government offices such as the Department of Education, and other branches of government.

The ATL has been used to quell dissent from the various sectors of society impacted by the iron-clad policies that justifies illegal arrests, red-tagging, the filing of trumped-up charges against individuals and institutions that are at the service of the poor, deprived and oppressed. Recently, illegal arrest and fake surrender of environmental activists Jonila Castro and Jhed Tamano that happened in Orion, Bataan on the night of September 2, 2023 has been blamed on the malicious acts of the NTF-ELCAC. This government agency should be prosecuted and disbanded.

Also, the Law Against Terrorism funding being operationalized through Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2012, has been implemented that impacts the finances and real property holding of suspected institutions and organizations and the UCCP has been the guinea pig of the law wherein the UCCP Haran account was frozen by AMLAC and similarly the bank account of UCCP Fatima, Bohol.

All these are vestiges of Martial Law that still remain in our country and these will continue to be used to persecute and oppress persons, institutions and organizations that are critical of government policies. However, victims and survivors do their share of advocacy for protection of human rights, and giving humanitarian services to marginalized communities and struggling sectors of society.

Yet, we are not wearied or discouraged, *for we know that God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7).*

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21 Sept 2023



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General Secretary



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