



## UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES

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### THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

#### IN SOLIDARITY WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND GOD'S GROANING CREATION

##### Statement on Nationwide Reclamation and Dredging Projects

*For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (Romans 8:22, NLT)*

Love of humans and the rest of God's creation should be reflections of God's love. With its firm prophetic conviction, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines has been defending, advancing, and promoting ecological harmony and the integrity of creation consistent with its statement of faith. These form the core of the Church's ministries.

The Church has a long history of supporting communities that have been severely impacted by environmental degradation and climate change, as well as advocating for the integrity of creation and climate justice. This has been outlined in statements and resolutions that introduce the Church's theological and ethical positions in support of the goal of a sustainable and livable world.

The Church's deliberate programmatic concern for the environment and ecology, condemning the effects of abuse on the natural environment, was succinctly stated in the 1990 General Assembly resolution: ". .the disappearance of lush forests and mountain ranges due to logging, destructive mining methods, and improper agricultural practices; the degradation of farmlands due to siltation, flooding, and a decline in water balance; the pollution of urban areas and coastal waters due to industrial wastes; and the disappearance of coral reefs and other fishery resources.

Additionally, a statement titled "Fear Not, Let us Unite" was published in 1998. It emphasized the extent of destruction caused primarily by foreign large-scale mining corporations throughout the nation, which was leading to serious issues for our people like social unrest, human rights violations, disasters, environmental destruction, and even violent death for those who opposed the mining operations.

Global temperatures are rising, weather patterns are changing, sea levels are rising due to polar ice melting, and other ecological crises or climate emergencies are still present. The wholesale destruction of ecosystems has a terrible impact on people's livelihood and security.

We are discouraged by the effects of ecological crises on the most vulnerable groups in our nation, including urban residents, farmers, and even environmental and human rights activists who fall victims to the whims and greed for power of the powerful. Indigenous communities in the Cordillera, Mindanao, and numerous other areas that are regarded as ancestral lands are negatively impacted. As a Church, we stand in solidarity with them and lend a helping hand in their fight for national and self-determination sovereignty.

Therefore, indigenous peoples, environmentalists, and the Church have opposed development aggression or the unchecked and pervasive construction such as the expansion of transportation and communication infrastructures like air and seaports; massive destructive open pit mining; mega hydro-electric dams, among others. Profit-driven businesses have harmed the natural tidal currents and the depletion of marine resources due to pollution and river siltation in the reclamation areas by the seafronts such as in Manila Bay and other cities across the nation.

In their advocacy materials, non-governmental organizations like People's Network for the Integrity of Coastal Habitats and Ecosystems (People's NICHE) and AGHAM - Advocates of Science and Technology for the People pose the query, "Reclamation: Kaunlaran para Kanino? It states that there are 34 reclamation projects in Luzon totaling 12,095.48 hectares, 19 reclamation projects in Visayas and Mindanao totaling 4,239.27 hectares, and 23 reclamation and dredging projects in Manila Bay totaling 22,875.54 hectares.

The projects in Manila Bay mentioned above have continued despite the "continuing mandamus" issued by the Supreme Court of the Philippines in 2008 to protect Manila Bay, clean up, rehabilitate, and preserve it so that it can be maintained to be able to maintain its waters to standard bacterial level in order to make them fit for swimming, skin-diving, and other forms of contact recreation.

Additionally, AGHAM and People's NICHE issue a warning that these projects endanger the environment, way of life, and communities. 1.56 million Filipinos nationwide, including 1 million in Manila Bay, are directly impacted by the aforementioned reclamation and dredging projects. In addition, a survey conducted in 2014–2015 discovered 146 marine species in Manila Bay that are negatively impacted by the projects and will go extinct if they are not stopped.

Two young female environmental activists, Jonila Castro and Jhed Tamano, are fighting against aggressive coastal development and reclamation projects as a result of the ecosystems' current state and the suffering it causes in the poor communities. They claim to have been red-tagged earlier, then later abducted in Orion, Bataan, and forced to swear they were surrenderers. However, at a press conference organized by the NTF-ELCAC, the two courageously admitted they were actually abducted by state forces elements. The groaning state of God's creation prompts the Church to renew its commitment to protecting, promoting and enhancing the ecological balance and

the integrity of creation (UCCP Constitution, Art. II, Declaration of Principles, Sec. 12). Accordingly, the entire constituency of the Church is encouraged to;

- be in sustained solidarity with the indigenous peoples, religious communities and people's organizations and work together for the promotion, defense, and preservation of the whole of God's creation;
- launch vigorous Christian education and nurture activities focusing on the current and future impacts of climate change and in the intervening climate emergency, grounding the lessons on the root causes of ecological destruction and the consequences of extractive industrial activities motivated by profit and enlargement of capital;
- help lobby for the formulation of development policies that consider the natural environment as the habitat not just for humanity but for all of God's creation. That the abuse and misuse of the natural resources of the nation and of the world leads to alteration of climate patterns, resulting in erratic weather conditions and the rising of ocean waters due to global warming.
- Intentional programs and policy formulation toward responsible stewardship of land, sea, and air, genuine land reform, forest land reform through a common platform participated in by the government, non-government organizations, and all levels of the Church.

We will actively work to oppose the powers and principalities that stand in the way of God's intention for climate justice and the integrity of all of creation. We pledge to support indigenous peoples, struggling farming and fishing communities, and everyone else whose lives and livelihoods have been threatened by the effects of unpredictable weather patterns and other natural disasters brought on by aggressive development. We pray that God's justice and peace rule over our nation and the entire world.




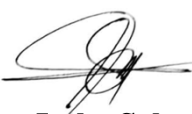
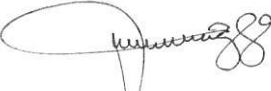

**THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS**

**26 October 2023**



**Bishop Melzar D. Labuntog**

General Secretary

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