



PHILIPPINE ECUMENICAL PEACE PLATFORM

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Stop the Killings in Negros, Resume Peace Talks Now!

The Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) denounces the rash of extrajudicial killings that has terrorized the island of Negros. We support the joint pastoral letter of Bishops Gerardo Alminaza (San Carlos) Julito Cortes (Dumaguete), Patricio Buzon (Bacolod) and Louie Galbines (Kabankalan) condemning the killings. We condole with the families of the 17 victims, including a 1-year old baby, that were killed during the month of July alone. May God's consoling hands be with them in their time of grief. We also offer our prayers to the families of the four police officers who were also killed in an attack by the New People's Army (NPA) last July 14.

The island of Negros has experienced a very disturbing pattern of human rights violations in recent times since the murder of known human rights lawyer, Atty. Ben Ramos, the massacre of nine farmers in Sagay in 2018 and the mass killings last March 30 of 14 farmers by police officers in Canlaon City and Manjuyod and Santa Catalina towns in Negros Oriental. There was also the illegal arrest of Jimmy Teves, a pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and his members in Buenavista, Himamaylan, Negros Occidental last June 26. The recent victims include two lawyers, a former mayor and his cousin, a city councilor, a village chief, a school principal and his sister also a teacher, a doctor, and other human rights defenders and community leaders.

Activists and human rights defenders have blamed President Duterte's Memorandum Order 32 of November 2018 ordering additional troops to Negros as well as Bicol and Samar for the increasing number of attacks against civilians. Government authorities meanwhile have put the blame on the New People's Army, which the latter denied. There are reports that the island will be placed under Martial Law.

As church leaders, we support the position of Bishop Alminaza that Martial Law in the island is not the solution. We fully support Bishop Alminaza's call for the resumption of the peace negotiations between the government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

As a platform of church leaders working for peace, we always put premium on principled talks rather than a military solution that may result to even more bloodshed. We are unwavering in our position that peace negotiations are still the most viable option to attain a just and enduring peace in the country.

We thus join the clamor for a stop to these killings. We also call on the faithful to continue praying and working for peace not only in Negros but in the whole country "...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

Issued and signed on this day 8th August 2019.



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- ***The PEPP is a platform for 5 church institutions/groups, namely, the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) with organizations of Religious, Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) and the Ecumenical Bishops' Forum (EBF), in working for a just and enduring peace by supporting the peace process between the GRP-NDFP.***

