



SANGGUNIANG PAMBANSA NG MGA SIMBAHAN SA PILIPINAS

National Council of Churches in the Philippines

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- ✚ Apostolic Catholic Church
- ✚ Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches
- ✚ Episcopal Church in the Philippines
- ✚ Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en Las Islas Filipinas
- ✚ Iglesia Filipina Independiente
- ✚ Iglesia Unida Ekyumenikal
- ✚ Lutheran Church in the Philippines
- ✚ The Salvation Army
- ✚ The United Methodist Church
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- Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities
- Consortium of Christian Organizations in Rurban Development
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- Manila Community Services, Inc.
- Philippine Bible Society
- Student Christian Movement of the Philippines
- Union Church of Manila

Press Statement
June 24, 2010

“WOULD THAT... YOU KNEW THE THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE” A Statement on the killing of Benjamin Bayles and Jovelito Agustin

The National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) joins the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) in denouncing the extrajudicial killing of Mr. Benjamin Bayles in Negros Occidental and Mr. Jovelito Agustin in Laoag City, Ilocos Norte. Both victims are known in their church as outspoken advocates of human dignity and active lay ministers. Bayles was a known human rights advocate while Agustin was a broadcaster known for his advocacy of workers' rights. Even as we reach out to the families of Bayles and Agustin in their grief, we join the IFI in demanding justice and a stop to these killings.

The circumstances of their deaths point to the pattern of continuing impunity against progressive organizations and their members, and journalists who raise critical voices. The culture of impunity is so pervasive that, according to Karapatan, from June 1, a month to go before President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo steps down, six people were summarily killed, including these two IFI lay leaders. They were killed for espousing the right to live abundant lives – free from the systemic violence of the state. They were killed for standing for the rights of ordinary people. From the perspective of those who ordered their killing, Bayles and Agustin are “enemies of the state”. This is the spirit of Operation Bantay Laya (OBL) the anti-insurgency policy of the state carried out by state security forces. It makes no distinction between armed combatants and civilians engaged in principled dissent. OBL and the resulting extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances are an abomination to democracy and to a country claiming to be a Christian nation. We renounce it and will continue to speak out against it.

How shall we pay homage to this increasing number of victims of extrajudicial killings in the twilight of the current administration and the dawning of a new presidency? How shall justice be rendered to victims and perpetrators? They are not mere statistics. They represent state repression never experienced since the time of martial law.

President-elect Benigno Aquino III campaigned on a platform of prosecuting perpetrators of human rights violations among others. Vindicate the suffering and the oppressed, Mr. President-elect! Stand by your promise and "let justice roll down like a river" and let peace come "like an ever flowing stream". We urge the incoming president to scrap the OBL and neither adapt nor engage in any similar repressive measures in the future. We also urge the incoming government to make this nation stand unashamedly before the international community. Abide by the Philippine commitments and pledges to international instruments on human rights.

The church in the Philippines stands committed to the primacy of just and lasting peace. The festering issues of poverty, neglect and corruption in high places have long remained barriers to a just and lasting peace. Beyond the political colors is the pressing demand to address the roots of dissent through a government that is compassionate and caring to its citizens. This is the call of the church.

As Jesus drew near to Jerusalem, he saw the city and wept over it saying "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace". (Luke 19.41) We grieve not only for the loss of sons and daughters, husbands and wives but also for the never-ending violence. We bear witness that we are now being hemmed in on every side, and dashed to the stone by the dark principalities and powers of this country and the world that seek to perpetuate violence and oppression upon this land. We urge our partners and people of peace around the world to listen to our testimony and join us in prayer, hope and work for the better condition we deserve and which we know can happen.



Rev. Rex RB Reyes, Jr.
General Secretary
June 22, 2010