

Pastoral Statement on the Plight of our Indigenous People of Surigao del Sur

Genesis 4:10 The Lord then said: “What have you done! Listen: your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil.”

Last October 24, 2014, in the small villages of Kabolohan, Yadawan, Emerald, Simuwao, Kabalawanan, Manluy-a, Dikoy, Km16 and Han-ayan, Diatagon, Lianga, Surigao del Sur, our Indigenous brothers and sisters were allegedly harassed and threatened by an armed group known as Magahat/Bagani Force. As reported, they purportedly burned the Tribal Filipino Community School (TRIFCS), including their Corn Sheller, ransacked likewise their ‘Cooperative Store’ and even allegedly killed one of their village leaders, Henry S. Alameda. This is the reason that, on October 27, 2014, more than four hundred Lumads (Natives) fled and went down to Diatagon Brgy. Gym.

October 29, 2014, a “Peace Dialogue” was conducted in Lianga, Surigao del Sur and through the reached agreement, it was decided that the Lumads would have to go back, one by one, to their respective homes with no certainty that what happened will not anymore recur.

December 8, 2014, our Lumads of the small villages of Huwangan and San Isidro, St. Christine, Lianga, Surigao del Sur once again experienced the harassments and threats of the suspected paramilitary group, Magahat/Bagani, that resulted to their evacuation.

January 30, 2015, another “Peace Dialogue” was conducted among the PNP, AFP, Provincial Government, LGU-Lianga, and the Religious groups as well as the Lumad leaders. One of the most significant part of the agreement formulated in that dialogue was the immediate dismantling, disarming of firearms and filing of a case against the Magahat/Bagani group headed allegedly by Datu Calpito Egua, Marcos Bocales, Marcial Belandres, Bobby Tejero and companions, in accordance with the due process of the law. The responsibility to implement what had been agreed was given to the PNP and AFP to resolve the situation. Sadly, until now, the problem has not been solved.

August 9, 2015, almost two hundred and fifty (250) Lumad families fled from the small villages of Tambonon, Malindog, Bisyp and Bugbog, Bolho-on, San Miguel, Surigao del Sur, allegedly because of the constant harassments done from the same group of the Magahat/Bagani.

August 29, 2015, two innocent civilians, Crisanto S. Tabugol and Elly S. Tabugol, residents of Brgy. Siagao, San Miguel, Surigao del Sur, were allegedly rapidly fired at and gunned down by the same notorious group.

On September 1, 2015, up on the area of Km. 16, Han-ayan, Diatagon, Lianga, SDS, the Executive Director of the Alternative Learning Center for Agriculture and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV), Mr. Emerito Samarca, was mercilessly killed by allegedly the same infamous group using a knife thrust towards victim's throat, while his hands and feet were tied up. Meanwhile, at that same time, the Lumads of that place, close to the ALCADDEV compound, were reportedly asked by the group to gather in one area and right in front of them, killed Dionel Campos, the chairman of MAPASU (Lumad) organization including his cousin, Datu Jubello Sinzo.

In a deeper analysis of the situation, it is possible that this series of incidents of threats and harassments could have ceased long ago if there was no one behind all this. One can see and understand that only those community of Lumads who firmly stand to protect the forest and reject mining activities and anything that destroys nature were obviously the ones being hounded and intimidated supposedly by the aforementioned notorious group. Gathering all these, we can say that all this could be a work that has been extensively planned. Our indigenous people who, ever since, have been one with Nature, have lived in and survived out of their land of heritage, are now victims of those who are hungry and greedy for power and wealth. If God heard the cries of the blood of Abel as a consequence of the greed of Cain, how much more would God hear the cries of the blood of those Lumads who have died while also listening to the anguish of the people who continues to live in fear and uncertainty..

As Priests of the Diocese of Tandag, together with our Bishop, we all strongly condemn the terrorization, harassments and the killings of our Lumad brothers and sisters, as well as denounce the root cause of it all. Therefore, this is our call, that:

1. That the agreed decision of destroying, disarming and the arrest of the suspected paramilitary group of Magahat/Bagani be upheld and pushed through. All the ruthless killings and threats that were done to our indigenous people have caused great harm to their existence while losing the unified efforts to fully develop their lives, particularly in the aspect of education.

2. Because the lumads are likewise living beings created by the same God whomade and gave us equal rights, we call upon those defenders of the rights of our indigenous brothers and sisters to file the case on the suspected perpetrators so that justice shall be given to the victims and their families. Like all of us, the Lumads have human rights as well. Let us therefore give them the justice that they deserve.

3. Both the provincial and local governments must see to it that the case filed against the alleged group will not result to a cover up achieving no certainty of attaining justice to the victims, all because of some powerful people who exert their influence on the justice system, who could also be the reason why the suspects continue to exist. The continued violence done to our Lumads indicates the breakdown of the peace and order. As a result, it is most

likely that all the terrorization, harassment and killings of our Lumads will still go on thereby showing how weak the government is in pursuing justice and achieving peace. If these threats and killings continue, where can the Lumads turn to? To whom then, can we ask for help?

4. The government agencies, such as the DOJ and CHR, should make a careful and fair investigation on the AFP to inquire and look for answers to various allegations that came out, for instance, that the military is the origin and creator of this so-called paramilitary group of Magahat/Bagani and that it is possible that the military could no longer, at the moment, control the said group. The AFP should also respond to more allegations that the military, for instance, planned and allowed this group to terrorize Lumad communities as part of their counterinsurgency campaign while also in collusion with big mining companies that would like to take advantage of the rich resources of Nature to the detriment of the lives and existence of our indigenous brothers and sisters.

5. All the people will be united in praying while equally determined to protect the rights of our indigenous people. The Lumads have always been one with and have lived in Nature; they are the more affected communities when it comes to the threats to destroy Nature; they are the heroes in protecting our natural resources from those who are selfish and greedy; they are now the ones in need of our combined and continuing support.

In this Year of the Poor, where our indigenous brothers and sisters are indeed an integral part of the celebration, we the priests of the Diocese of Tandag, together with our Bishop, are united in actively supporting our Lumad brothers/sisters and are praying for the fast tracking of the due process of law to achieve justice and peace for the victims and their families. It is our desire that the people of God will understand better the plight and dreams of our indigenous brothers/sisters. In the same way that Christ connects himself with and understood the state of the gentiles and other non-jews, we, His people, are encouraged to do the same. Through the intercession of our Blessed Mother, Queen of Peace and Mirror of Justice, we pray and hope that our indigenous brothers/sisters can see the fulfilment of their dreams and the fullness of life that they deserve.

Given this 8th of September, 2015
Presbyterium Meeting
Diocesan Pastoral Center
Mabua, Tandag City, Surigao del Sur

Date	Event
2014	
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2015	
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