



Church People Severely Harassed in the Philippines

June 2021

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:10-12

Church members in the Philippines involved in the social justice mission of the Christian faith continue to face severe harassment and threat under the Duterte Administration. They are often falsely accused of being part of the armed communist opposition forces.

The homes of Pastor Daniel Balucio (aged 62), a pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), and Maria Jesusa Sasah Sta. Rosa (aged 20), a spokesperson of Jovenes Anakbayan, were raided by police on 2 May 2021. The police planted guns and grenades at their homes to justify arresting them.

At 3:30 am on 2 May, around 30 police officers and soldiers entered the Shannan Christian Academy, where Pastor Balucio, his wife and two children were staying. Pastor Balucio is the administrator for the Academy. Pastor Balucio and his family were forced out of their bungalow. Police and soldiers then searched the bungalow for at least half an hour. It was only then that Pastor Balucio was shown a search warrant. The police then continued the search for another half an hour before producing guns, ammunition, a grenade and a communist flag they claim were found in the search.

Jovenes Anakbayan is a non-government organisation that seeks to unite the youth from different sectors of society to advance the cause of national democracy.

Prosecutors have also made false accusations against Bishop Hamuel Tequis of the UCCP Southeast Mindanao Jurisdiction, Rev Daniel Palicte, Ephraim Malazarte, Lindy Trenilla, Grace Avila and Christony Jun Monzon for violations of the *Special Protection of Children Under Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act*. It appears they have been targeted as a result of the UCCP providing sanctuary to members of the Indigenous Lumad community who have fled their homes due to activities by the security forces.

Ephraim Malazarte, Lindy Trenilla and Grace Avila are social workers.

The UCCP South East Mindanao Home and Altar and Renewal, Action and Nurture Mission Centre has provided sanctuary to hundreds of displaced and dispossessed Lumad Indigenous people since 1994.

The UCCP South Luzon Jurisdiction Area issued a statement stating:

We also declare and strongly condemn the harassment of church people who fulfil Christ's teaching to "feed and care for his sheep". We support Bishop Hamuel Tequis and his five associates and call on the Judge to immediately disclose the works and malicious cases accused to them. We also call for the release of Pastor Dan Balucio, Sasah Sta. Rosa and other political prisoners and to dismiss all cases against them.

On 15 April, Bishop Reuel Norman O Marigza, the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, made the following plea "We call on churches worldwide to be in solidarity with the Filipino people in the quest for justice and accountability in our community." In response, the President of the Uniting Church in Australia, Dr Deidre Palmer,



stated, "I offer my support to our sisters and brothers in Christ in the Philippines and Filipino people here in Australia as they continue to struggle for justice, dignity and human rights for all Filipino people."

The Uniting Church in Australia has a long-standing formal partnership with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters or e-mails to:

Her Excellency Mrs Ma. Hellen BARBER DE LA VEGA
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Philippines
Embassy of the Philippines
1 Moonah Place
Yarralumla, ACT 2600

Salutation: Your Excellency

E-mail: cbrpe@philembassy.org.au

Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern at the arrest of Pastor Daniel Balucio and Maria Jesusa Sta. Rosa on 2 May 2021 after police planted guns and grenades in their homes.
- Ask that the Philippines Administration immediately and unconditionally release them from detention and drop the charges against them.
- Express concern that prosecutors have made false accusations against Bishop Hamuel Tequis of the UCCP Southeast Mindanao Jurisdiction, Rev Daniel Palicte, Ephraim Malazarte, Lindy Trenilla, Grace Avila and Christony Jun Monzon for violations of the *Special Protection of Children Under Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act*. It appears they have been targeted as a result of the UCCP providing sanctuary to members of the Indigenous Lumad community who have fled their homes due to activities by the security forces.
- Ask that the Philippines Administration intervene to require that the accusations are dropped.

Also send letters to:

Senator the Hon Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

Points to make in your letter:

- Express concern at the arrest of Pastor Daniel Balucio and Maria Jesusa Sta. Rosa on 2 May 2021 after police planted guns and grenades in their homes.
- Request that the Australian Government make representation to the Philippines Administration seeking that they be immediately released and all charges against them are dropped.
- Express continued support for the Australian Government doing all it can to improve the human rights situation in the Philippines. Note that human rights defenders in the Philippines face extrajudicial execution, death threats, and harassment by filing false charges against them.