



Church People Continue to be Targeted in the Philippines

June 2022

Our church workers have been faithful to their pastoral duty to accompany the downtrodden, the poor and the marginalised. They have been instruments to proclaim the good news of salvation to God's Anawim [afflicted or oppressed] and to expose and denounce evil. But unfortunately, their unwavering stand against any attempt to suppress and oppress the people's basic and fundamental rights makes them a target of a government that is coward yet intolerant to criticism.

Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, General Secretary, National Council of Churches in the Philippines

Church people in the Philippines who stand up for social justice, human rights and protection of the environment continue to be targeted by the security forces for harassment and intimidation. As a result, a number continue to be prisoners of conscience.

Members of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines imprisoned on trumped-up charges are:

- Rev Nathaniel Valiente;
- Pastor Jimmy Treves;
- Pastor Carmilo Tabada;
- Jodito Montesino;
- Jaypee Romano;
- Jasper Aguyong;
- Rogen Sabanal;
- Junnifer Hermino; and
- Rogelio Suetas.

Pastor Treves, Jodito Montesino, Jaypee Romano, Jasper Aguyong, Rogen Sabanal and Junnifer Hermino have all been imprisoned on trumped-up charges of murder.

On 26 June 2019, soldiers of the 62nd infantry battalion arrested Pastor Jimmy Teves (pictured, handcuffed, holding a Bible). Jimmy is a UCCP pastor who has been serving 17 local UCCP churches in Himamaylan, Negros. On the same date, soldiers also arrested farmers Jodito Montesino, Eliseo Andres, Jaypee Romana, Rodrigo Medes, and Rogen Sabanal on the same trumped-up charges.



Rogelio Suetas remains imprisoned on the false claim that he is a member of the armed communist group, the New People's Army (NPA).

Rev Nathaniel Valiente was arrested at his home by soldiers and police on 25 June 2021. His imprisonment occurred after security forces planted guns and a grenade in his home. Planting guns and grenades in the homes of those advocating for social justice is a common tactic used by security forces in the Philippines.

Pastor Carmilo Tabada was arrested on 25 June 2021 for allegedly being a member of a communist terrorist group.

The Uniting Church in Australia has a formal partnership with the UCCP.

On Palm Sunday, 10 April 2022, soldiers and police arrested Aldeem Yañez (pictured). He is a volunteer with the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) church in the Philippines on a development program and in a network of peace advocates. The arrest took place at 3 am at his home in Barangay Iponan. He is facing trumped-up charges of illegal possession of firearms. The military claimed to have recovered a pistol, two hand grenades, fake voter cards and anti-government documents in the raid on Aldeem's home. The IFI leadership have condemned the arrest as another attempt to imprison Aldeem on false charges.



"We in the IFI leadership decry this grave abuse of police and military power and the co-optation of the civil courts", said IFI Supreme Bishop Rhee Timbang. Bishop Timbang described Aldeem as an



IFI member of good standing. He also stated that Aldeem was active and committed in his participation in the life and work of the church. He further described Aldeem as a musician and songwriter. In addition, Aldeem was a former national youth president of IFI.

Aldeem had previously been targeted for trumped-up charges of arson, kidnapping and robbery with violence. However, a court threw out those charges for lack of evidence.

He was arrested again in 2020, along with 17 other human rights defenders. They were among 555 people accused of attacking a paramilitary patrol aligned with the army in December 2018. However, the court again threw out the charges against Aldeem and 533 of those accused as again being baseless.

Aldeem's brother, Redeemer, said of Aldeem, "My brother is an activist if the word is to be defined as a person who sees the misery of his people, who hears the cry of the poor, who is concerned about their sufferings, and journeys with them in the path towards emancipation."

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 ongoing harassment of ministers and members of churches in the Philippines involved in defending human rights and protecting the environment.
- Ask for the immediate and unconditional release of Rev Nathaniel Valiente, Pastor Jimmy Treves, Pastor Carmilo Tabada, Jodito Montesino, Jaypee Romano, Jasper Aguyong, Rogen Sabanal, Junnifer Hermino, Rogelio Suetas and Aldeem Yañez.
- Point that you regard these church ministers and members as prisoners of conscience in the Philippines.

Also, send letters to (postage cost for a letter to Switzerland is \$3.50):

The Hon Michelle Bachelet
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

E-mail: registry@ohchr.org; infodesk@ohchr.org

Salutation: Your Excellency

Points to make in your letter or e-mail:

- Express concern at the ongoing harassment of ministers and members of churches in the Philippines involved in defence of human rights and the protection of the environment.
- Ask for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to seek the immediate and unconditional release of Rev Nathaniel Valiente, Pastor Jimmy Treves, Pastor Carmilo Tabada, Jodito Montesino, Jaypee Romano, Jasper Aguyong, Rogen Sabanal, Junnifer Hermino, Rogelio Suetas and Aldeem Yañez.