



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

# GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER

Impunity for those Targeting Church  
Workers in the Philippines

Justice and International Mission Unit  
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania  
Uniting Church in Australia

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## **Cover photograph**

The fiancée of murder victim Isaias Drummond Manano, at the site of his murder.  
Photograph by Caz Coleman.  
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# Introduction

In September 2005 Bishop Eliezer Pascua, Bishop of the Southern Luzon District of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, addressed the annual meeting of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia.

The following report is a response to Bishop Pascua's call for solidarity with the people of the Philippines in their struggle for justice. The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia (UCA, V&T) have committed in partnership with the Southern Luzon Jurisdictional Area, United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP SLJA) in calling for change in the Philippines.

As partners, the UCCP SLJA and the UCA V&T have committed to working faithfully together in the areas of justice, human rights, peace and sustainable development for the poor, deprived and oppressed.

This report documents recent murders of members of the UCCP in the Philippines and the lack of progress in bringing any of those responsible for the murders to justice.

## Partnership between UCCP and the UCA

In 1984 the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and the Uniting Church in Australia established a relationship of solidarity and support between the two partners.

Twenty one years later the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Southern Luzon Jurisdictional Area and the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Justice and International Mission Unit sought to enrich this relationship through formal partnership committing to a mutual relationship of listening, learning and of solidarity as faithful servants of Jesus Christ.

*Through this partnership we affirm the presence of God in the lives, struggles and faith of marginalized and oppressed peoples. We affirm the belief that in his life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ, invited the poor and marginalized to be central figures and bearers of wisdom and truth in the new community of God.*



## Philippines in context

The country is divided into three main island groups: Luzon in the north, the Visayas in the centre, and Mindanao in the south. Luzon and Mindanao together make up 65 percent of the Philippines' total land mass. The capital city, Manila, is located on Luzon.

The most commonly spoken language in the Philippines is Filipino, a language derived from the Tagalog language of central and southern Luzon, although English is also widely spoken. There are approximately 87 ethnic languages and dialects spoken throughout the Philippines for a population of 84.5 million (estimated in 2002).

## ***Conflict in the region***

A Communist insurgency throughout the country has been a long-standing armed rebellion. Total combat-related deaths since 1969 number between 21,000 and 25,000. The conflict is between the Philippines Government and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its military arm: New People's Army (NPA – active in eastern Mindanao, central Philippines and in parts of northern Luzon).

In February 2004 peace talks between the government and the National Democratic Front (NDF) representing the CPP and the NPA, resumed in Oslo, Norway. The two sides renewed commitments to address the root causes of the conflict by addressing social, economic and political reforms.

However, in August 2004 the NDF suspended talks, calling on the government to lobby for a removal of the NPA's designation as a "Foreign Terrorist Organization" by the USA and its allies and to fulfil its promises since 2001 to release political prisoners and cease human rights violations.

In 2005 The Philippine Human Development Report (PHDR) commissioned by the UN Development Program and the New Zealand Aid refuted claims from the US and the European Union that the CPP is a terrorist group. However, the US government has refused to de-list the CPP-NPA as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. Both Filipino Government forces and the CPP-NPA continue to commit human rights abuses associated with the ongoing conflict, but the majority appear to involve the Filipino military and police.

Conflict in the south of the Philippines between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has abated in the presence of peace talks hosted by Malaysia. During several rounds of talks, a number of agreements had been reached including ceasefire conditions, contentious issues around ancestral land and a collaborative fight against terrorism. There is hope for a final peace agreement for 2006. The 24-year struggle has left more than 120,000 people dead.<sup>1</sup>



## ***Economic context***

The Philippines is classified as a developing country. Despite generally favourable human development indicators, the country has not matched its economic potential. The Philippines has not experienced a sustained period of rapid economic growth over the past 30 years, which has seen it lag behind the achievements of many of its East and South-East Asian neighbours in reducing poverty<sup>2</sup>.

Agriculture employs about 40% of the workforce and accounts for 20% of GDP, producing crops for both domestic consumption and export. Migrant income is a significant contribution to the Philippines economy. According to the World Bank estimates, remittances of Filipino migrants were projected to reach US\$12 billion in 2005<sup>3</sup>.

According to the Government's Labour Force Survey (LFS), unemployment and underemployment

1 Reuters Foundation, 'Philippines,' AlertNet [www.alertnet.org/thefacts/countryprofiles/219474.htm?v=details](http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/countryprofiles/219474.htm?v=details)

2 Australian Government AusSAID, 'Philippines' <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/country/country.cfm?CountryID=31&Region=EastAsia>

3 World Bank 'Global Economic Prospect 2006 Report' [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

4 Ecumenical Institute for Labor, Education and Research 'Globalization and the Present Situation for Workers in the Philippines' <http://www.eilerinc.org/labupdates/20050724%20labupdate.html> 4/01/06

is the highest the country has ever seen with more than one third of the country's rapidly growing population living below the poverty line.<sup>4</sup>

## **Political context**

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo received a six-year mandate after winning national elections in May 2004. She announced that her policy priorities were to alleviate poverty, address unemployment and education, and to end armed insurgencies by Muslims in the south and communist armed opposition groups.

President Arroyo faced a political crisis in the summer of 2005, in the face of allegations of vote rigging and corruption. The opposition filed an impeachment motion in July but in September 2005 the Philippines' House of Representatives voted by three to one to dismiss the impeachment, despite surveys showing an overwhelming majority of Filipinos thought that the President should be removed.



President Arroyo declared a State of Emergency through Proclamation No. 1017 on 24 February 2006. Emergency rule allows arrests without warrants and extended detention without charge and created the fear that the abuse of human rights against persons critical of government would escalate. Many church leaders in the Philippines, including those of the UCCP, as well as others both Protestant and Roman Catholic, have been sharply critical of the government. According to President Arroyo's spokesman, Ignacio Bunye, Proclamation No. 1017 was issued to thwart a conspiracy to overthrow the government among the communist rebel movement, certain military officers, and some members of the opposition. One week later the State of Emergency was lifted. The Supreme Court in the Philippines ruled that the implementation of Proclamation 1017 was unconstitutional in allowing arrests without warrants.

World Bank Institute Governance Indicators for 2004 compare the average government effectiveness rank for developing countries placing the Philippines at 46.2 percentile rank (down from 67.8 in 1998) for government effectiveness, 15% (down from 48.5%) for political stability and 36.5% (down from 54.6%) for control of corruption.<sup>5</sup>

## **Increase in Human Rights violations**

The Philippines is a signatory to a number of international covenants protecting human rights and has its own Bill of Rights enshrining this protection in domestic legislation. Despite this legal protection, human rights violations have been a constant presence in the Philippines with an increase in incidents during the leadership of President Arroyo.

Since President Arroyo's term of office a national human rights organisation has documented 4,207 cases of human rights violations, which included killings, enforced disappearances, illegal arrests and unlawful detention, indiscriminate firings and forcible evacuation, among others. These cases affected 232,796 individuals, 24,299 families and 237 communities.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Percentile rank indicates the percentage of countries worldwide that rate below the selected country (subject to margin of error)  
GRICS: Governance Research Indicator Country Snapshot Comparison within Philippines for all six governance indicators  
[http://info.worldbank.org/governance/kkz2004/sc\\_chart.asp](http://info.worldbank.org/governance/kkz2004/sc_chart.asp)

6 KARAPATAN Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights, 'The Human Rights Record of the Arroyo Administration: Four and a Half Years of State Terror' July 18, 2005

The 2005 Annual Report of Amnesty International stated that “Serious defects in the administration of justice, particularly the lack of effective investigations and fair trial safeguards, undermine the right of victims of human rights violations to redress.” Amnesty International also concluded that “Despite an extensive array of institutional and procedural safeguards, suspected perpetrators of serious human rights violations were rarely brought to justice.” They further found that “Victims from poor or marginalised communities, when faced with physical threats combined with “amicable” financial settlements, frequently abandoned attempts to seek redress.”

In their report on human rights practices on countries around the world released on 8 March 2006, the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor stated “some elements of the security forces committed human rights abuses.”

## ***Increase in military presence***

Heavy government troop deployments have led to increased human rights violations, as clearly documented in the Southern Tagalog region where 39 battalions are deployed, including Mindoro Island which hosted nine battalions at one time<sup>7</sup>. It is clear from the increase in human rights abuses where there is heavy militarisation, that some elements of the security services have been responsible for arbitrary and unlawful arrest and detention, disappearances, torture, and in some cases, extrajudicial killings. Suspected Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) involvement has largely been ignored by the state. State failure to condemn the murders and to ensure thorough and independent investigations are carried out has led to a culture of impunity for perpetrators.

## ***Development***

Long-term environmental, indigenous and community concerns are often sacrificed for development and economic growth in the Philippines. Such is the case in the mining industry, where residents in mining areas have experienced an increase in military presence bringing with it food and movement sanctions, forced displacement and poverty. Numerous attempts to resist inappropriate development have been met with violent response from government security forces.

*“She is afraid to testify. She is afraid for her children if she is murdered like her husband.”*

*Bishop Eliezer Pascua speaking about the case of a murdered Pastor of the UCCP.*

## ***Disappearances and killings***

Common among those who have been murdered or have disappeared in the Philippines in the past four years, is that they were persons critical of the government, upholding principles of justice and human rights. Notable is the number of journalists who have been killed, 37 of whom had been murdered between the time President Arroyo took power in January 2001 and December 2005.<sup>8</sup> Whilst President Arroyo has ordered an investigation in relation to the killings of journalists, progress on the cases has been minimal.

*“We protested when the mine was to open. As a result the military came to our lands and began to control the area including our food... We were harassed and I was afraid for my family. We are now displaced with no home or land to care for.”*

*Member of Hanunu O' indigenous tribe in Mindoro affected by a Mindex Mining project.*

<sup>7</sup> 5 battalions and 1 brigade in Cagayan Valley, 10 battalions in Western Mindanao, 11 battalions in SocSKSargen, 9 battalions in Eastern Visayas, 11 battalions in Southern Mindanao, 1 division and 1 brigade in CARAGA, 5 battalions in Central Luzon, 5 battalions in Bohol and 2 battalions in Cebu.

<sup>8</sup> 2005 Media Death Toll Tops 100 After Tenth Journalist Killed in the Philippines December 3 2005 International Federation of Journalists <http://www.ifj-asia.org/page/philippines051203.html> 24/4/06

Failure by the state to thoroughly investigate cases and a lack of protection for witnesses hinders the ability to progress cases of human rights abuses. Furthermore, an increase in judicial fees and a lengthy judicial process has made it more prohibitive to file cases against perpetrators of human rights violations.

The U.S Department of State reported on 8 March 2006 that police and anti-government insurgents committed a number of arbitrary and unlawful killings and that summary killings by vigilante groups in two major cities increased where local officials seemed to condone and even encourage the killings. The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP) investigated 381 complaints of killings between January and September 2005, compared with a total of 307 complaints of killings during 2004. The CHRP included killings by anti-government insurgents in its investigations, although the majority of the cases involved the security forces and local officials. The Commission on Human Rights suspected Philippine National Police members in a majority of the human rights violations including deaths that it investigated during the year.<sup>9</sup>

*In Hacienda Luisita, November 2004, workers on a picket line associated with United Luisita Workers Union (ULWU) were fired upon by Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) troops. Seven people were killed, and over one hundred injured.*

The US Department of State report further found that “The courts and police failed to address adequately complaints of victim’s families concerning past disappearances in which security forces were suspected.” The report further found that human rights organisations “continued to encounter occasional harassment, mainly from security forces or local officials from the area in which [human rights] incidents under investigation took place.”

These conclusions are in contrast to the claim by the Government of the Philippines that it “is dead serious to put a stop to these senseless killings and it seeks the cooperation of all stakeholders, whatever their ideological stripe.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Work Force**

Real wages today are barely above their 1980 levels, often rendering workers to work overtime in the attempt to compensate for low wages. In export processing zones, workers are forced to work up to 14 hour workdays, 6 or 7 days a week.<sup>11</sup> Alongside increases in the cost of basic services, rising interest rates, tax system changes, and the cutting back of social services, a number of industrial disputes have led to picket lines and protests.<sup>12</sup>

According to the Centre for Trade Union and Human Rights (CTUHR), there were 121 documented cases of harassment, assault and other violations of workers’ democratic rights at the picket lines in 2004, up from 97 cases in 2003.<sup>13</sup>

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9 U.S Department of State “Philippines” Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2005 <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrpt/2005/61624.htm> 8 March 2006

10 Secretary Ignacio R Bunye, Government of the Philippines, ‘Extrajudicial killings’, <http://www.gov.ph/news/?i=15333>, 2 June 2006.

11 Ecumenical Institute for Labor, Education and Research ‘Globalization and the Present Situation for Workers in the Philippines’ <http://www.eilerinc.org/labupdates/20050724%20labupdate.html> 4/01/06

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

# Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines

The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP) is mandated by the Constitution of the Philippines to protect and promote the economic, social, civil and political rights of all Filipinos, particularly of vulnerable and disadvantage groups. The dual mandate of the Commission to protect and promote human rights is set out in the Goal Statement 2003-2008. Firstly, the Commission aims to strengthen the investigation of human rights violations, monitor government compliance with treaty obligations and advocate for legislative, judicial and administrative reforms. Secondly, it works to institutionalise human rights standards in governance through the promotion and advocacy of such standards.

The functions and powers of the CHRP more specifically include the investigation of all forms of human rights violations involving civil and political rights, either through its own means or with compliant bodies, and the monitoring the Philippine Government compliance with international human rights standards. The Commission has the authority to request information of any department, bureau, office or agency with regards to its investigation. It has the power to grant immunity from persecution to any person whose testimony or delivery of evidence can aid an investigation being undertaken by the Commission. It can also make recommendations to the Congress on 'effective measures to promote human rights and to provide for compensation to victims of violations of human rights, or their families.' In addition, the Commission runs a promotion and advocacy program to enhance and sustain respect of human rights through Philippine society.

The Commission on Human Rights has described the Philippine National Police (PNP) as the worst violator of human rights in the Philippines.<sup>14</sup>

The US Department of State has concluded that the Commission on Human Rights continues to be hamstrung by insufficient resources. In their view, the CHRP's regional and subregional offices remain understaffed and under funded. The CHRP budget for 2005 was US\$3.59 million (197.38 million pesos), down 6% in peso value from 2004.

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<sup>14</sup> U.S Department of State "Philippines" Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2005 <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61624.htm> 8 March 2006

# Cases of Murders and Death Threats

The following are cases of UCCP ministers and members that have been murdered, had assassination attempts made on their lives or had death threats made against them in the period 2004 – 2006.

In formulating this report, the Justice and International Mission Unit of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania wrote to the Ambassador of the Government of the Philippines to Australia, the President of the Philippines, and the Chief of the Philippine National Police regarding progress in the cases of the murders of UCCP members and ministers:

- Isaias Drummond Manano
- Joel Barrameda Baclao
- Vicente Olea
- Abe Songit
- Rev. Edison Lapuz
- Rev. Raul Y. Domingo

The letters requested to know what progress had been made in bringing those responsible for the murders of the above men to justice. The letters were sent on 31 March 2006 and at the time of writing, no reply has been received from those the Unit wrote to except from the Ambassador to acknowledge our letter. However, no details were provided by the Ambassador into the progress or current state of investigation into the above murder cases.

## ***Isaias Drummond Manano***

**Isaias Manano** was 23 years old when he was gunned down in the street on the evening of 28 April 2004 in Pachoca, Calapan City. As a young person involved in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines he was also active in many human rights organisations working toward justice for victims of violence and representation of human rights to parliamentarians in the Filipino Congress. Mr Manano had spent a short time co-ordinating a local human rights organization, Karapatan, after Leima Fortu, the former Acting Secretary General who was murdered. Within this role Mr Manano figured prominently during an incident where a Karapatan Fact-Finding Mission Team investigating human rights abuses were held inside a church by armed soldiers of the 204<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Roxas town. Mr Manano was successful in negotiating the teams release, developing his profile as a human rights advocate.



At around 9pm on 28 April, Mr Manano and his friend Guillermo Coz left the house of a mayoral candidate in Calapan City, Mr Ignacio. There was little public transport available so the two decided to walk. A few minutes later, Mr Coz noticed a man was following them closely. Mr Coz nudged Mr Manano to signal him to quicken their steps. When Mr Coz looked behind them, the man also increased his pace.

At a distance of 200 metres away from Mr Ignacio's house, Mr Coz indicated to Mr Manano to go separate ways. Mr Manano immediately crossed the street; as soon as he did Mr Coz heard a gunshot and Mr Manano crying out in pain. Mr Coz rolled on the ground and stood up, running in a zig-zag pattern to duck the bullets being fired in his direction. He shouted for help that attracted the attention of some nearby village officials who called for the police, while two women agreed to drive Mr Coz away from the scene.

Mr Manano's family and colleagues later found his body in a funeral parlour. A post mortem was conducted on 29 April. Mr Manano had two gunshot wounds, one on his stomach and another one on his right temple.

To the knowledge of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, to date there no charges have been laid relating to the murder of Isaias Manano.

## **Joel Barrameda Baclao**

**Joel Barrameda Baclao** was 40 years old and married with two children when he was murdered. Mr Baclao was a Lay Preacher in the UCCP; coordinator of Andurog-Bikol, a Disaster Relief Program of the UCCP in Bicol; and Regional Coordinator of the Promotion for Church People's Response (PCPR) in Daraga, Albay, Philippines.

Mr Baclao was a Filipino Christian committed to the ministry of justice and peace. He was a staunch and outspoken opponent of the militarisation campaign in the Albay province. He was also in opposition to destructive mining practices in the region.

On 10 November 2004 at around 8pm, Joel Baclao was shot by an unidentified gunman after he left the family home in Albay to investigate why the family dogs were barking. Mr Baclao's wife Rowena had followed him to the door and recalls hearing gunshots and witnessing her husband fall to the ground. Rowena was six metres away when the first shots were fired but when she tried to move closer she saw an armed man carrying a rifle lean over her husband. The armed man stood up and fired further shots at Mr Baclao, however, Rowena failed to identify the man in the dark.

Mr Baclao suffered four gunshots, two on his head, another on his right side and one more located two-inches on top of his navel. The top right part of his head was blown off and his right side was shattered.

Rowena recalled that the night before the incident their dogs were also barking loudly but on this occasion it was her father who went out to make them stop.

Mr Baclao had been warned a week earlier to take extra care because his life may be in danger. Not long before his murder, on 26 September some government soldiers went to Mr Baclao's house and tried to conduct an illegal search. However, Mr Baclao's father-in-law requested to see a warrant before the soldier departed the property.

To date no one has been charged with Mr Baclao's murder.

## **Juancho Sanchez**

**Juancho Sanchez**, aged 20, was shot and killed by police officers who violently dispersed striking workers at the Hacienda Luisita plantation on 16 November 2004. He was the son of the UCCP Pastor at the UCCP church located inside Hacienda Luisita and was an active member of the Christian Youth Fellowship of the UCCP. He was shot while serving water to striking workers.

The Hacienda Luisita is a large sugar estate owned by the family of former President Corazon Aquino in the province of Tarlac. The strike started in November 2004 in response to the dismissal of a number of union members. The union accused the management of union busting. Seven of the striking workers were killed and 36 wounded when police attacked them on 16 November 2004. The National Bureau of Investigation recommended that nine policemen be charged with multiple homicide, attempted homicide and physical injuries inflicted during the attack.

Other church people were subsequently murdered, apparently in connection with their support for the striking workers at Hacienda Luisita.

*“Something is seriously wrong in any system where large numbers of workers are caught in a vicious cycle of heavy debts and who are denied the possibility of owning land.”*

**Fr William Tadena**, aged 37, was murdered by two gunmen on 13 March 2005 in Barangay Guevarra, La Paz, Tarlac Province, on his way home from officiating a mass. He was the chairperson of the Social Concern and Human Rights Committee of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, a defender of human rights and a supporter of striking workers and farmworkers of Hacienda Luisita.

**Chrispin Amazona** was kidnapped on 14 February 2005 in La Paz, Tarlac. His body was found on 16 February wrapped in a plastic bag with the words 'Hacienda Luisita' on it. He had been shot on the chest and head. **Abelardo Ladera**, a Tarlac City Councilor and another supporter of the striking workers of Hacienda Luisita, was murdered on 3 March 2005 in Barangay Paraiso, Tarlac City. Another supporter of the workers, **Victor Concepcion**, was murdered on 17 March 2005. **Romeo Capulong**, a human rights lawyer and a supporter of the striking workers, survived an attempt on his life in the early hours of 8 March 2005 in the province of Nueva Ecija.

On 29 March 2005 Archbishop Paciano Aniceto of the Ecclesiastical Province of San Fernando, Pampanga, demanded that the authorities identify those behind the murders of Fr William Tadena, Abelardo Ladera and Victor Concepcion. The bishop questioned the hacienda economic policies stating: "Something is seriously wrong in any system where large numbers of workers are caught in a vicious cycle of heavy debts and who are denied the possibility of owning land."

## ***Vicente Olea***

Fondly called Lolo Ente (Grandpa Ente), he was 71 years old when he was murdered leaving his wife **Bathsheba Montilla** and two children. **Vicente Olea** was a resident of Brgy Landing, San Vicente, Palawan and an active lay leader of his church, UCCP San Vicente, Palawan. He was shot and killed by two unidentified motorcycle-riding men in front of his house on 27 November 2004.

Mr Olea was involved in condemning illegal logging and the presence and intimidating activities of military intelligence in San Vicente. In March 2004 dialogue between the military and Palawan Associate Conference-UCCP he was one of those who gave testimony on military harassments and intimidation in San Vicente.

It was dusk of 27 November, between 6:30 and 7:00 pm, when the two unidentified men riding on a motorcycle arrived in front of the house of Vicente Olea in Brgy Landing, San Vicente, Palawan. His family and some neighbours could hear the motorcycles and dogs barking. However, Vicente Olea also heard a man's voice calling his name from the road. So he went down from the house to see the men. After a few minutes, according to his wife and neighbours, Vicente Olea was trying to scamper to safety yelling "marine.... marine...!" Two bullets from a .45 calibre firearm instantly felled Mr Olea. When his wife and some neighbours came to see Vicente Olea he was lying flat and the two men were seen speeding away on their motorcycle. Vicente Olea was rushed to the town hospital but the doctor declared him dead on arrival.

No one has been charged with the murder of Vicente Olea.

## ***Abe Songit***

**Abe Songit** was 42 years old when he was murdered. He was married to Letya Songit and had seven small children.

Mr Songit was an Indigenous leader in Palawan and a volunteer community organizer of the Integrated Development Program with Indigenous People-Southern Tagalog (IDPIP-ST), and a member of KARAPATAN-Palawan. He was also an active lay leader of UCCP in Ladayon, Quezon,

Palawan.

Mr Songit played a strong role in advocacy against inappropriate development projects established by government in his local area and was a strong supporter of Indigenous communities in their fight against illegal mining and militarisation in Indigenous areas. He had also been known to oppose and expose human rights violations committed by military and police contingents.



In one dialogue between the church workers of UCCP-Palawan Associate Conference and the military in March 2004 Abe Songit testified on the harassment by the military of communities based on his first hand experiences of such abuse.

In 1998 Mr Songit came to the attention of authorities when he was travelling with a companion, **Roberto Bornales**, a fisherman of Espanola, Palawan Province. The pair encountered troops from the 1st Marine Battalion of the Philippines Armed Forces in Palawan province in October and an unprovoked shooting incident occurred. Roberto Bornales was killed by the military forces and Mr Songit arbitrarily arrested. On the way to detention, he reported that the soldiers kicked his stomach and hit his back several times. When he was brought to the Marines' headquarters in Barangay Abo-abo, his captors tied his hands with rope and subjected him to serious beatings while interrogating him. Mr Songit reported that he was forced to sign a document claiming ownership of a shotgun, which was then used as evidence against him.

On 5 February 2005 at around 4 am Mr Songit was travelling at the rear of a motorcycle driven by his colleague Melvin. They were on their way from Puerto Princesa City to San Vicente, Palawan to attend an Indigenous people's activity called by the UCCP.

While they were travelling along the road in Brgy Malcampo, Roxas, two unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle tailed them before suddenly coming close and firing at them. Mr Songit was hit on his shoulder, which caused him to fall from the motorcycle. Melvin, frightened by the shooting and in fear for his own life, accelerated leaving Mr Songit on the road.

Melvin recalls hearing four gunshots behind him in the vicinity where Mr Songit fell.

After the incident a team made up of Indigenous people, UCCP pastors and lay leaders, and members of KARAPATAN-Palawan conducted their own search for Mr Songit over a period of two weeks. However, they were unsuccessful in finding Mr Songit's body.

Shortly after the search ended, on 20 February 2005, it was learned that Mr Songit's body had been recovered not far away from where he was shot and fell down on 5 February 2005. It was reported by witnesses that the condition of Mr Songit's body was not consistent with two weeks of decomposition in the place in which he was found.

## ***Alden Ambida***

**Alden Ambida**, aged 48 at the time of assassination attempt on his life, is a member of the UCCP, Vice-President of the Borongan Tricycle Drivers and Operators Association and Provisional Coordinator for the BAYAN MUNA political party in the Eastern Samar region.

On 9 April 2005, he was shot by two gunmen in civilian clothes on board a red-coloured STX new motorcycle without a number plate. Ambida sustained four gunshot wounds, but survived the assassination attempt.

## ***Alfredo Davis***

**Alfredo Davis**, a UCCP member, was murdered by two gunmen on a motorcycle armed with a .45 caliber handgun with a silencer on 15 April 2005.

At 8 am that morning, Mr Davis and his wife, Imelda, were boarding their multicab, bound for the municipal trial court where Mr Davis worked as a clerk. The gunmen opened fire. Mr Davis was shot five times, while Imelda was wounded in the arm.

It is believed that Mr Davis's name was on a target list of the military and had been confronted by a member of the security forces a week before he was murdered.

## ***Rev Edison Lapuz***

**Rev Edison Lapuz** was married to Emma, and together they had two children: Edem Harmonay, (12 years) and Demy Freedom (6 years). He was 38 years old when he was murdered.

Rev Lapuz held various positions in the church community. He was on his second term as conference minister of the Northeastern Leyte Conference (NELCON) UCCP; Coordinator of Eastern Visayas Convenors of Visayas Jurisdiction, UCCP; Chair of Katungod-Karapatan Eastern Visayas and he was a founding member of Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR).



From a young age Rev Lapuz was interested in the marginalized sectors in Philippine society. He had musical talent, which led him to compose several songs about the plight of the poor, and upon graduation from the seminary he joined the UCCP Tacloban City Church as its outreach worker.

As a pastor assigned to the rural communities, Rev Lapuz had been exposed to the struggle of peasants and fisher-folks to obtain land in Northern Leyte. His pastoral vocation brought him close to the issues and efforts of the marginalized. He consistently sought for the Church to be a living witness to the Gospel as it confronts the harsh reality of people's suffering and actively worked with the ecumenical community. As Conference Minister, Edison Lapuz was pastorally responsible for expressing the Church's alarm and concern over the shooting of one UCCP member and the killing of another in his conference. Rev Lapuz unflinchingly maintained his firm commitment to stand for justice and righteousness.

Rev Lapuz was also active in the wider community. At the time of his death, he was the main convenor of a civil liberties group composed of lawyers and some concerned individuals in Tacloban City. The goal of the group was to consider cases of murders or human rights abuses and to pursue legal avenues to have these cases resolved.

The activities of Rev Lapuz brought him to the attention of the police and military authorities. In 2004, a local media account based on a police press release mentioned his work in organizing peasant groups in northern Leyte and he became aware of surveillance in relation to his activities. However, Rev Lapuz did not allow himself to feel threatened by this attention, for he had a strong conviction that his personal beliefs and involvements were just and concrete expressions of his ministries.

Two weeks before Rev Lapuz's murder, Lieutenant Mangohon, the commanding officer of the local military detachment, visited the home of Rev Lapuz's father on several occasions. On each

occasion the Lieutenant Mangohon asked for the whereabouts of Rev Lapuz.

On 5 May 2005 Lieutenant Mangohon again visited the house. The father of Rev Lapuz was asked when his son would be returning and Mr Lapuz told Lieutenant Mangohon that his son would be back on 10 May 2005 to attend the wake of his father-in-law in Sitio Motor, Barangay Crossing. But on 11 May 2005 at about 2:00pm Lieutenant Mangohon returned with another person asking why Rev Lapuz was not at the wake on 10 May 2005. Mr Lapuz was afraid for his son's life and warned his son of his fears. However, Rev Lapuz did not seem seriously concerned by the surveillance.

The murder occurred on 12 May 2005 at around 6:30pm. According to **Emma Lapuz**, they had just come from the burial of her father. The couple had travelled to the house of Rev Lapuz's father and were relaxing with friends and relatives. They were seated on a small table and joking with each other. There were more than 10 people in the yard. Rev Lapuz was with three friends, with the rest playing cards. Mrs Lapuz was taking a nap a few meters from them. Suddenly two persons entered the yard both wearing bonnets and crash helmets. One of the gunmen had his handgun drawn covered with a *tubao* (a locally woven handkerchief) and approached the table where Rev Lapuz was seated with the three other persons mentioned. The murderer drew aside the person beside Rev Lapuz, and then shot Rev Lapuz through the temple and stomach. The



second assassin shot **Alfredo Malinao** in the chest. Rev Lapuz died on the spot due to the shot on his temple whilst Alfredo Malinao was rushed to hospital but later died.

A commotion ensued and the gunmen fled, shooting the parked vehicle of Rev Lapuz on the right/rear wheel before leaving. The gunmen ran to two motorcycles with drivers about 210 metres from the yard. Once the gunmen had mounted the motorcycles headed to the main road.

No one has been brought to justice for the murders of Rev

Lapuz and Mr Malinao.

The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines wrote to the Justice and International Mission Unit on 16 May 2006 to say that the Commission rendered its resolution on the of Rev Lapuz, who was "allegedly murdered" on 19 July 2005 recommending the case be archived in view of the fact that the assailants were not identified and that no witnesses had emerged and were willing to testify.

## **Rev Raul Y. Domingo**

**Rev Raul Y. Domingo** was married with five children living in Palawan when he was murdered. Rev Domingo was a former Deputy Conference Minister of the Palawan Associate Conference UCCP and was serving at the time of his death as a minister in the Palawan region. He was actively involved in the Christian Witness and Service (CWS) of the conference and as such represented the church in fact finding, medical and relief missions of the church.



Rev Domingo had been a vocal advocate for people living in poverty and being exploited in the Philippines. He had spoken out about human rights abuses believed to be linked to the security forces in the Philippines and had also opposed destructive mining practices in Palawan.

On Saturday 20 August 2005, Rev Domingo was shot four times in broad daylight after disembarking from a Jeepney (a type of minibus

in the Philippines) in Puerto Princesa, Palawan. Rev Domingo was about to pass by his house when two armed motorcycle riders began shooting at him from behind. He was shot in the back with a large calibre pistol. A tricycle driver immediately took him to a hospital in Puerto Princesa City but Rev Domingo died of his wounds two weeks later on Sunday 4 September. No one has been brought to justice for the murder of Rev Domingo.

## ***Junico Halem***

**Junico Halem**, commonly known to friends as Junie, was 40 years of age, Coordinator of Bayan Muna in Calamba, Misamis Occidental for seven years, a motorcycle (habal-habal) driver, and married with two children at the time of his murder. He was a member of a UCCP Congregation in Calaran, Misamis Occidental.

Three days before his assassination, his family heard news that he was being targeted for assassination. That prompted his wife try to persuade Mr Halem not to go out on 6 December 2005 to avoid being harmed but Junie was not worried. He said he was not doing anything wrong so there was no reason for him not to work that day.

About 8am in the morning of the same day, Mr Halem's brother-in-law saw a military intelligence agent asking whether Mr Halem had already passed by. After a few hours, Mr Halem passed by with two passengers going to Quirino, Plaridel, Misamis Occidental. When the intelligence agent saw Mr Halem, he immediately sent a text message and went away. After a few minutes, two men riding on a STX single blue motorcycle started to tail Mr Halem.

When they reached Barangay Sulipat, Calamba, his passenger, Melinda Quezon, saw the man riding at the back of the other motorcycle poking his gun at Mr Halem, who then shot him. The men were wearing bonnets and helmets that hid their faces. The motorcycle driven by Mr Halem was thrown to the canal. The assassins then went to Mr Halem and shot him the second time to finish him off.

## ***Nestor Arinque***

**Nestor Arinque**, an active member of the UCCP and former local church council chairman in Mabini, Bohol, was gunned down by three men on a motorcycle at 12:30pm on 7 March 2006.

Mr Arinque was the chairman of Hugpong sa Mag-uuma sa Mabini (Organisation of Peasants in Mabini).

## ***Rev Jemias Tinambacan***

On 9 May 2006, **Rev Jemias Tinambacan** was driving a KIA Besta Van along with his wife, **Rev Marilou Tinambacan**, on their way to Oroquieta City from Lopez Jeana, Misamis Occidental. Four gunmen riding two DT Yamaha – type motorcycles opened fire on the van along the national highway in Brgy Mobod, Oroquieta City at around 5:30pm.

After Rev Jemias Tinambacan was shot in the head, he lost control of the van and it crashed into a Gemelina tree. The gunmen approached the van while saying “BUHI PA ANG BAYE” (“The woman is still alive”) and fired three shots at Rev Marilou Tinambacan.

Rev Marilou Tinambacan was rushed to Misamis Occidental Provincial Hospital in Oroquieta City after the attack. Rev Jemias Tinambacan died from a gunshot to the head.

Rev Marilou Tinambacan was able to identify one of the gunmen as Mamay Guimalan, a member of the Filipino military intelligence.

Rev Jemias Tinambacan (aged 49 at the time of his murder) was a resident pastor of UCCP Calaran, Calamba, Misamis Occidental, an active member of Promotion of Church People's Response – Western Mindanao and Executive Director of Mission for Indigenous and Self-Reliant People's Assistance Incorporated.

Rev Marilou Tinambacan (aged 50) is a former conference minister (equivalent to a Presbytery Minister in the Uniting Church) of the District Conference of Northern Mindanao (1999 – 2002) and an active member of Promotion of Church People's Response – Negros Oriental.

## ***Jose and Cancio Doton***

On 16 May 2006, UCCP member **Jose Doton**, aged 62, was murdered on Anong Road, Barangay Camanggan, San Nicolas, Pangasinan. Some time between 10:30am and 10:45am, Jose Doton and his brother, **Cancio Doton**, were riding a motorcycle when another motorcycle sped up behind them with two men on board. The men on the second motorcycle fired three shots from a .45 calibre pistol before overtaking the Doton brothers and then firing two more. Jose Doton and Cancio Doton fell on the road. The assassins then stopped their motorcycle and one of them got off. He shot Jose Doton in the head.

*No one has been charged with the murder...*

Jose Doton's daughter rushed to him and his heart was still beating. Both Jose Doton and Cancio Doton were taken to hospital, but Jose died on the way.

Cancio Doton suffered two gunshot wounds. One bullet pierced his lung. His other wound was from a bullet that had passed through Jose.

Several days before Jose Doton was murdered, people noticed that motorcycle-riding men used to stay at a two-storey house in the middle of fields near the road. They seemed to be waiting for someone because they usually arrived very early and stayed up late into the evening. The two-storey house is adjacent to the parcel of rice fields that was attended by Jose Doton.

## ***Pastor Andy Pawican***

**Pastor Andy Pawican**, aged 30, was murdered by soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in Fatima village, located in the mountainous town of Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija (around 180 km from metropolitan Manila).

Andy Pawican dedicated his life to spreading the word of God. He was a licentiate pastor of the UCCP in Fatima village.

On 21 May 2006 at around 11 am, while walking home from church with his family and another church member, Pastor Pawican was confronted by four armed men. They claimed to be members of the armed opposition group the New People's Army (NPA). They said they were looking for **William Tuping**, a friend of Pastor Pawican's who lives near the UCCP chapel in Sitio (sub-village) Maluyon. They ordered Pastor Pawican's companions to go on ahead. Pastor Pawican's wife did not protest, thinking he would not be harmed as he was holding the baby.

At around 3pm, the villagers heard gunshots. The four men that had confronted Pastor Pawican were in fact soldiers of the 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

The soldiers brought the baby back to Pastor Pawican's wife.

At around 5 pm, a villager found the body of Pastor Pawican on the roadside. He had been shot

in the right cheek.

The soldiers initially claimed that Pastor Pawican was a member of the NPA who was killed in an exchange of fire. They paraded the body around the village. They admitted to killing Pastor Pawican. They warned the villagers that the same fate would befall them if they did not cooperate with the soldiers.

On 22 May, the soldiers ordered ten villagers to carry Pastor Pawican's body to the road. Only eight of the ten ordered to carry the body returned. **Rogel Marcial** and **Miguel Paltin**, both in their 30s, were ordered by the soldiers to board a motorcycle to go to the military camp. They have subsequently "disappeared".

The soldiers ransacked the home of William Tuping and stole the possessions in the home. A local Pastor told William that one of the soldiers told the Pastor to bring Mr Tuping to the soldier's camp or the Pastor would suffer the same fate as Pastor Pawican.

A number of families fled the village in fear of their safety.

## ***Noel 'Noli' Capulong***

At 6pm in the evening of 27 May 2006, UCCP member **Noel Capulong**, aged 51, was gunned down with four bullets to the head and body by unknown assailants. Noel was the chair of the Christian Witness and Service Committee of the UCCP in Calamba, Laguna. He was also the spokesperson of the Southern Tagalog Environmental Action Movement and convenor for the Christian Movement for Good Government and Movement of Concerned Citizens for Civil Liberties. He had spoken out against government corruption.

Mr Capulong was a former employee of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, working on the International Affairs Desk and later as Coordinator of the Ecology and Environment Protection Program for Southern Luzon.

He left behind a widow, Teodora (a teacher), and two children, JR and Marilag.

Mr Capulong was the youngest of six children, his parents being the late Lay Minister Emilio Capulong Sr and deaconess Cristeta Corteza-Capulong.

The day of Noel Capulong's murder, his brother, **Emilio Capulong**, a lawyer, had presented a resolution to the National Assembly of the UCCP condemning the murders of community activists and calling on the Government to properly investigate cases of extra-judicial execution and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Noel Capulong had left a home in Elipanio subdivision 1, Calamba City at around 5pm on 27 May. He had a companion, Charlie, and they were going to visit a leader of the community. They could not find him. Mr Capulong decided to go to a prayer meeting to pray for his ill brother and sister. He was murdered while in his car. The murder weapons were .45 calibre firearms.

## ***Pastor Beatriz Perido and Aprilyn Perido***

From 27 May to 3 June 2006 soldiers of the 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion of the Armed Forces of the Philippines under **Lieutenant Elmer Taglinawan** confronted UCCP **Pastor Virgilio Perido Sr** in Cambitala village, Pantabangan. Virgilio was told to "surrender" his two daughters, UCCP **Pastor Beatriz Perido**, 34, the secretary-general of the local chapter of the human rights group Karapatan, and **Aprilyn Perido**, 26, an organizer of the urban poor group Kadamay.

Lieutenant Taglinawan and his soldiers kept coming to Virgilio Perido's home threatening that if Virgilio Perido did not turn in his daughters, the soldiers would "take care of them". Virgilio Perido told Lieutenant Taglinawan to file charges against his daughters if they had done anything wrong.

# Conclusion

The fourteen cases of murder and summary execution outlined in this report suggests the use of serial killings and the systematic violence by the Philippine military and police to create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation over the ministers and members of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

It would appear that the acts of violence and human rights abuses against ordinary Christians undertaking the traditional and Apostolic ministry of pastoral care and advocacy for the poor and marginalised is part of a wider culture of corruption and violent oppression in the Philippines at large.

That faithful and non-violent Christians are the target of such sustained violence amounts to an organised regime of Christian persecution with, at the very least, the tacit approval of the Philippine Government.

All of the cases outlined in this report involve UCCP ministers or members who, as Christians, seek as part of their ministry of Christ to bring forth justice and peace in their communities. They are clearly identified as ministering on behalf of the poorest and most marginalised members of those communities. Sometimes they are involved in advocacy work on behalf of the poor; giving them a voice against powerful, well connected and apparently protected interests' whose concern is to exploit them or their land.

In this sense, this appears to be a pernicious form of Christian persecution, whereby Ministers and members of the UCCP are deliberately targeted, by the military and, possibly, by sections close to government.

The assassination of church members is occurring because this dedicated Christian community has the temerity to live out its calling of care and justice for all. Church members undertake this ministry in a non-violent fashion, obeying the laws of the land and upholding international standards of human rights. Yet they themselves become the victims of the opposite standards: their human rights are abused; they are victims of a malevolent violence and the perpetrators break the law with apparent impunity. Not one murder has been solved. Not one person has been brought to justice.

This situation clearly calls for a determined effort by international churches, governments and human rights organisations to advocate for justice for those who have been murdered. Moreover the situation demands a determined effort by those same organisations to both encourage and support the Government of the Philippines to bring about the necessary changes for peace and justice to come to the communities affected by this blight.

# Recommendations to Australian Government

Australia has been a provider of training for officers and personnel of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The Australian Government has also funded joint projects aimed at fighting terrorism and transnational crime.

The Philippines is the fifth largest bilateral recipient of Australian development assistance and Australia is one of the top six bilateral grant aid donors along with the United States, Japan, Germany, Canada and the European Community.

- In light of the strong diplomatic and counter-terrorism links with the Philippines, the Australian Government should raise the murders outlined in this report with the Government of the Philippines. The Australian Government should urge that every effort be made to bring the perpetrators and architects of the murders to justice.
- Increase Australia's aid budget to the Philippines expanding program support from the Southern Mindanao region to other parts of the Philippines, including in the program a focus on human rights education.
- Offer the Philippines Government direct financial and other forms of assistance to be given to the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines.
- Provide assistance to non-government organizations that are working on promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines.
- Encourage the Government of the Philippines to develop an effective witness protection program, so that witnesses to murders are able to testify without fear for their safety or that of family members.
- Consistently monitor military support to the Philippines to ensure Australia is not contributing to human rights abuses being carried out by members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.
- Support the delivery of ongoing human rights education and education on International Humanitarian Law (the Geneva Conventions) to the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

# Recommendations to the Government of the Philippines

- Make every effort to bring the perpetrators and authors of the murders outlined in this report to justice.
- Establish an independent commission to investigate this series of murders of UCCP members and ministers and other church people, trade unionists, journalists and human rights defenders.
- Provide stronger investigation and reporting powers to the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines to enable independent assessment of human rights abuses in the Philippines.
- Increase the resources and staff of the Commission on Human Rights to ensure that they are able to effectively perform their duties.
- Undertake a comprehensive review of the Filipino security forces in relation to respect for human rights and thorough and impartial investigation into cases of human rights abuses.
- Ensure the protection of witnesses to human rights abuses in order to protect testimony. Ensure witnesses are free to testify in any investigation and trial without fear for themselves or their families.
- Establish community consultation models to negotiate the interests of local community, government and business development in the Philippines.
- Uphold the rights of those affected by development projects and respect Filipino law as it applies to the rights of local communities.
- Provide adequate reparation to communities displaced as a result of development projects.
- That the Government of the Philippines fulfill all responsibilities under the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CAHRIHL).

# Statements by the UCCP

## ***UCCP Resolution and Statement of Great Concern Regarding the Current Explosive Breakout in Human Rights Violations***

Whereas, reports have lately piled up about the increasing number of militants who had been liquidated under circumstances that seemingly point to the military as responsible. A number of church members and leaders of the UCCP, perceived by the government to be activist or left-leaning, have been among the victims.

Whereas, in the face of these awful depredations, government authorities have not made any serious and painstaking investigation. Passivity and silence, evasions and denials, distortions and prevarications, characterize the stale responses of the establishment, including those coming from the Office no less than the Commander-in-Chief.

Whereas, in behoves the present government, which is supposed to uphold the ways of justice, the imperatives of due process, and the tenets of Christian decency and morality, including military leadership, under the command and direction of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, to resolutely and uncompromisingly ferret out from our midst these thugs and assassins who now reign havoc on the lives and basic rights of those of our people who are afflicted, and to immediately stop the violent and wanton onslaughts.

Whereas, as a church body charged with the prophetic roles and mission for its people, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines is thereby called upon to denounce this continuing viciousness and iniquity, and to proceed to render comfort and support to the victims.

Wherefore, it is hereby RESOLVED by the delegates of the General Assembly of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines in plenary session –

- to strongly decry and denounce the ongoing unmitigated killings of militants and activist in our society, and hereby call upon the military leadership, especially the Commander-in-Chief, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, to immediately cause the stopping of these extra-judicial executions, and to employ all means to bring to justice, without delay, all those responsible in the commission of these crimes;
- to urge all the local churches to organize and mobilize so as to address effectively this particular upsurge in human rights violations; and
- to encourage and support lawyer-members of the Church, in all the jurisdictions, with regard to their need and desire to formally organize and be presently linked together on a nationwide basis, with the assistance of friends and partners of the Church, for the purpose of defending, under our laws and democratic system, those of our church members, and others in the community, who are victims of gross and flagrant violations of human rights.

*Adopted by the 8<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial General Assembly in Session, May 27, 2006, Digos City, Davao Del Sur.*

## ***A lived theology***

*An extract from "IN DEFENSE OF LIFE'S INTEGRITY" A Pastoral Statement of the Council of Bishops, United Church of Christ in the Philippines 13 April 2005*

We live at a time of fear, anxiety and disquiet. Our present predicament as a people harks us back to the memories of the dark years of our country's history. We are perplexed and distraught by the ghastly realities of grinding poverty, terrible corruption, inequality, and conflict. The recent series of murder and violence disturb and alarm us even more. Senseless killings of those who defend the truth and those who work for justice, including church people, undoubtedly point to an exacerbating situation of suppression and conflict.

With all these appalling realities, God, through the Prophet Hosea, cries out in anguish: ***There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed.*** (Hosea 4: 1b-2 NRSV)

We implore the entire constituency of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and our fellow servants in the Lord to remain steadfast and unswerving in faith and with sense of perseverance pray and work for peace. Together, let us continue to seek to be faithful to the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ as we also beseech the inspiring guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let the assuring words of Prophet Isaiah keep us resolute and strong even amidst the present realities of agony and discomfort: ***Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.*** (Isaiah 32: 16-18 NRSV)<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> An extract from "IN DEFENSE OF LIFE'S INTEGRITY" A Pastoral Statement of the Council of Bishops, United Church of Christ in the Philippines 20<sup>th</sup> April 2005

