

PEACE PLEASE! PEACE WITH JUSTICE!

“Even in the most difficult and complex times, besides recognizing what is happening, we must above all else turn to God’s love... [This requires] self-denial, acceptance of others, justice and peace.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate. #79).

Once again, we are tempted to fight fire with fire. The violence that was ignited by the killing of 19 AFP soldiers and 6 MILF combatants in Basilan on 18 October has led to more suffering among our people. To date, some 20,000 people have been displaced from their homes in Al Barka, Basilan and in Talusan, Payao and Alicia in Zamboanga Sibugay. The martyrdom of Fr. Fausto Tentorio, PIME in Cotabato and the ambushes and arsons in Surigao, Agusan, among other places make us realize that the challenges to peace are not isolated events. The conflicting voices in Manila, some clamoring for all-out-war and some crying for peace confirm that this is a national concern.

We laud Pres. Benigno Aquino III for standing his ground and rejecting an all-out war. His “all out justice” is correct and noble. We also acknowledge the statements made by MILF leaders that they are ready to resume formal peace talks and even willing to cooperate in pursuing the real culprits whose actions hurt us all. We salute the many men and women in uniform for protecting us to the point of offering their lives for us. We call on those who violate human rights to submit themselves to the rule of law.

Following the CBCP statement “to continue the peace negotiations despite these recent setbacks” and the thrust of the 2011 Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) National Convention to foster a culture of peace, we in CEAP join the mounting call---**Peace please! And let this peace be based on justice!**

In line with this call, we propose the following action points:

- **Investigate thoroughly.** Consider all angles. Leave no stone unturned in investigating what really happened, who are really accountable in each of the case of violence. And apply this not just in Western and Central Mindanao but also in other troubled spots like CARAGA. Put in context the interpretation of the report. Avoid escalating the violence by casting false accusations and enforcing indiscriminate sanctions.
- **Mobilize existing joint mechanisms.** Make way for the International Monitoring Team (IMT), the Joint Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (JCCCH), the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) to perform their crucial roles in peace keeping. Observe the terms of the ceasefire and use these existing mechanisms to sort out grievances and ceasefire violations.
- **Avoid miscommunication.** Rumors and disinformation breed more confusion. Let all of us avoid spreading misinformation and unverified reports. Check the facts before passing received text messages. Be wary of how truth can be twisted or misconstrued. We thank the media for your service of keeping us connected. As we say this, we also appeal that you take extra care in crafting your language, presenting the images, and discerning the angles of your stories.
- **Attend to the victims.** Immediately mobilize resources to assist the internally displaced persons (IDPs), especially the children who are not able to go to school. Make sure to consult them on how best to help them. Address the psychosocial needs of those traumatized by conflict. Support the counselors, therapists and other volunteers who wish to be of help.
- **Intensify formal peace talks.** Go back to the negotiation table, and render all the support needed for addressing the real roots of the problem and finding sincere and creative solutions to them. The different agencies of the government must have coordination in tackling the issues according to a well-thought out roadmap.
- **Strengthen local peace processes.** Immediately appoint Chairs for the Regional Peace and Order Commission (RPOC) in all regions and strengthen local initiatives such as those between bishops and governors, tribe-to-tribe boundary delineations, clan conflict resolutions, civil society peace actions, school-based peace programs, among many others.
- **Harness spiritual and cultural resources.** Peace and justice are not just political or economic issues. We need to acknowledge the important roles played by local religious leaders, indigenous chanters, artists, mediators, meditation teachers and ritual healers. In times like this, we call on spiritual leaders to scale up their mission of calling people to prayer, dialogue, harmony, justice and integrity. They in turn deserve substantive support from the Government and all other solidarity partners.

May we learn the bitter lessons and grow wiser from our exasperation with war.

May God bless our longing for justice and healing and peace!



CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

Tel: 925-5153; 926-0521 | Fax: 426-2670 | Email: info@ceap.org.ph | Web: <http://www.ceap.org.ph>