



Statement of Solidarity with Human Rights Defenders, Religious People and Other Leaders Accused of Sedition in the Philippines.

Pax Christi Australia expresses deep concern and outrage at the condemnation of leaders in the Philippines such as lawyers, human rights defenders and bishops, priests and other religious leaders who have been charged with sedition and accused of terrorist links for speaking truth to power. We object strongly to framing any kind of activism or holding a contrary opinion as an attempt to overthrow the government. There are grave implications of red tagging or labelling individuals and groups as subversive, left leaning or as terrorists because they express dissent. Association with any organisation and belief in the principles it espouses is an exercise of the right to freedom of thought, assembly, and association. Curtailing this and may affect all other rights such as the right to free speech, expression, and movement among others.

With other organisation in Australia and the Philippines, Pax Christi Australia condemns the false charges against people who stand with people who are oppressed, disenfranchised, and have their human rights and right to life disregarded by the military and paramilitaries. We understand that some of the charges against bishops, priests and religious as well as the vice-president and other opposition members are linked to the release of a video that has linked the President and his family to the illegal drug trade.

Pax Christi Australia joins with Pax Christi Asia Pacific (Philippines, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Sri Lanka and South Korea), to stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in the Philippines who have been accused of sedition and face imprisonment. The ongoing persecution of lawyers, human rights defenders, people protecting their lands, and religious and political leaders who stand with them must cease. The Philippines cannot be seen as a democratic nation if human rights are disregarded especially when people call out criminal actions. The best response to dissent in a community is to address legitimate grievances. >This would show a commitment by the government to work in the best interests of all its citizens.

Pax Christi believes that healthy dissent is a mark of a truly democratic and self-confident society. It points to better ways of serving the people, as no government can claim to have all the wisdom. Dissent should be enshrined in law, not criminalised and punished.

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