

Statement on the Declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao in the Southern Philippines

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) expresses its serious concerns on the declaration of martial law in Mindanao in the southern Philippines. The Filipino people have a long history of undergoing traumatic experiences from 14 years of martial law rule under former President Ferdinand Marcos, who was ousted in 1986 by the people's power. During martial law era, the people of the Philippines witnessed a gross and systematic pattern of flagrant abuses of human rights, including illegal arrests and detention, torture, involuntary disappearances and summary executions.

The CCA, as a regional ecumenical organisation that has accompanied the struggles of the Filipino people, is following the current political developments in the country and decries President Rodrigo Duterte's declaration of martial law in Mindanao, which subjects the people of the southern Philippines to direct military rule. It was unfortunate to read the statement of President Duterte: "It would not be any different from what President Marcos did. I'd be harsh."

We understand that President Duterte imposed martial law in Mindanao, following clashes between the Maute terrorist Islamist group and government forces, during which civilians were taken hostage and properties were damaged. However, it is pertinent to raise concerns over why martial law was imposed in the entire Mindanao region, when armed clashes took place only in Marawi City, and while the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) simultaneously declared that the situation in Marawi was under control. Civilians are now subjected to curfews, checkpoints and other restraints on their human rights.

The CCA believes that martial law as a quick fix to troubles only makes Mindanao more troubled, where people are experiencing the trauma and fear of living under authoritarian rule. The CCA shares the concerns expressed by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines that, "placing the entire island under martial law only sends a chilling effect on the general populace" and that "the sudden declaration of martial law is bound to make matters worse."

At this crucial time, it is imperative that the Christians, Muslims and Lumads (the indigenous peoples of Mindanao) strengthen their solidarity and unite in a concerted stand, especially to meet the challenges of martial law and the possibilities of human rights violations, including warrantless arrests and detention, torture and political killings.

The CCA is also concerned about the spread of the IS-supported Maute group and their activities. We condemn the Maute terrorist group for taking church people and teachers as hostages, destroying properties, as well as occupying schools, a hospital and a parish.

The CCA urges President Duterte to lift martial law in Mindanao and address the root causes of the conflicts and violence not only in Mindanao but in the Philippines in general. Complex historical injustices or the historical causes of the problems must be addressed in order to solve the problems in Mindanao in particular, and in the Philippines in general.

We believe that the declaration of martial law does not solve fundamental problems. Peace can only be attained in Mindanao when the root causes of the armed conflicts are addressed through diligent efforts.

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