Freedom for All Political Prisoners and Justice for All Victims of Human Rights NOW!

The United Church of Canada offers our solidarity and support to the political prisoners in the Philippines who are on hunger strike in order to call attention to the injustice of their continued detention.

We take the opportunity of President Benigno Aquino’s State of the Nation Address to urge him to order a general, unconditional and omnibus amnesty for all political prisoners.

We believe that the Government of the Philippines is failing to live up to its human rights commitments by continuing to deny that there are political prisoners in the Philippines. The Samahan ng Ex-Detainees Laban sa Detensyon at Aresto reports that there are 385 political prisoners in the Philippines. Of this total number, 107 of them have been detained since the beginning of President Aquino’s administration.

Members of the United Church of Canada, who have participated in human rights missions, met political prisoners in Bilibid and Bicutan jails and in Camp Crame. They testified that the Philippine Government is concealing the political reasons for their detention by laying trumped-up criminal charges against them.

Several political prisoners have serious ailments and some are elderly. We urge President Aquino to grant a general, unconditional and omnibus amnesty so these prisoners could seek the medical and elderly care they need.

The United Church of Canada has consistently supported the Peace Talks between the Government of the Philippines, the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The resolution of the armed conflict is key to ending the human rights crisis. We call on President Aquino to release the 14 National Democratic Front Consultants covered by JASIG, in line with the agreement during the resumption of talks in February 2011. This confidence-building measure will be a significant step in advancing the Peace Talks.

The United Church of Canada challenges President Aquino to live up to the commitment he made in his June 2010 inaugural address to “provide true and complete justice for all” and “end the culture of silence, injustice and impunity.”

In addition to granting a general, unconditional and omnibus amnesty to all political prisoners, we call on President Aquino to take the steps to end impunity for extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and other human rights abuses. We urge the President to initiate steps to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Council and several countries namely, to end the counter-insurgency program, order the investigation and prosecution of police and military personnel including those at the command level, who are implicated in the killings, enforced disappearances and torture, order the police and military to stop the vilification of activists, human rights defenders, environmentalists and critics of government, and put in place an independent, accessible and properly funded witness protection program.

President Aquino, the time is NOW to take action on these recommendations in order to fulfill the promise Your Excellency made during the 2011 State of the Nation Address “to attain justice for all.”

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