

1. This report focuses on the recent persecution and harassment being experienced by the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and some of its constituents as a **result** of its commitment and engagement in manifesting its prophetic ministry as a faith imperative, through its justice, peace and human rights program and advoca.
2. The human rights violations perpetrated by agents of the state against some UCCP Pastors and laypeople shifted from Extra-Judicial Killings (the latest being the murder of Datu Jimmy Liguyon in March 5, 2012)<sup>1</sup> into intense surveillance, intimidation, vilification and trumped-up charges filed in courts in different parts of the country during the period of January 2013 to the present. In regard to **the trumped-up charges** and harassment cases, we have been able to prove legally that cases were fabricated and all have been dismissed due to lack of evidence.
3. On August 20, 2013, surveillance operations on Pastor June Ver Mangao were conducted by intelligence agents of the 1st Infantry Battalion, Philippine Army, under the command of Col. Jose Augusto Villareal based in Sta. Maria, Laguna. Two unidentified persons visited three UCCP Mabitac Church Council officers in separate incidents within that day. Using different fictitious stories: namely, being CAFGU looking for a born-again Church in Paagahan where the UCCP Mabitac Chairperson resides; asking the name and whereabouts of the Pastor just three houses away from the UCCP Chapel while pretending to ask about **other church affairs**. All of these UCCP members were asked the same questions about Pastor June Ver and his whereabouts. They even attempted to secure Pastor June Ver's picture. The Chief of Police of Mabitac and his police intelligence officer confirmed that the surveillance was done by elements of Philippine Army in order to verify Pastor June Ver's alleged links to the revolutionary movement.<sup>2</sup>
4. **After he graduated from Union Theological Seminary in March 2013, Pastor June Ver started his ministry with the UCCP Mabitac in Laguna where he has shown exemplary passion for Church mission.** Within a short time, **he successfully** organized a mission outreach in Brgy. Kabulusan, Pakil, Laguna which is about 15 kilometers away **and** was able to put up a community center for children and parents' development, serving the poorest among the poor in the community. **Proven with his** capability and potential, **he** was entrusted **by the North-East Tag-alog Conference as Chairman of its Community Ministries Committee where his passion for the ministry to the poor was seen as a way of life. He leads** the Prison Ministry in Laguna Provincial Jail **giving** regular visit to the so called "Lumban 3" political prisoners and effectively organized the church people's presence **during** court hearings. Both Pastor June Ver and the Conference have no other inkling as to the reason why he was threatened, harassed and intimidated.
5. We view Pastor June Ver's surveillance as an affront to the UCCP as a whole. The UCCP Northeast Southern Tagalog Conference has reported persistent surveillance. It is an example of the ongoing harassment and assaults on the UCCP. In August 2013, Pastor June Ver, upon

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<sup>1</sup> Datu Jimmy Liguyon, Chairman of the Church Council of UCCP Dao, San Fernando, Bukidnon was the latest UCCP victim of extra-judicial killing in March 4, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Under the government's counter-insurgency program, Oplan Bayanihan, human rights defenders and advocates were vilified as part of the underground left and in the process harassed, threatened and intimidated.

the advice of the church, filed a case on harassment before the Commission on Human Rights. After the case was dismissed, Pastor June Ver never experienced harassment anymore.<sup>34</sup>

6. Trumped-up charges were also brought against Pastor Francisco Bunoan Jr., involving 3 counts of murder and 2 counts of frustrated murder **and** was subsequently dismissed on August 26, 2015 for having no legal merit. The attempt was to implicate Pastor Bunoan in an incident on November 10, 2014 when members of the New People's Army (NPA) attacked members of the 81st Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army (IBPA) illegally holding the detachment at the basketball court of Bugbuga, Sta Cruz, Ilocos Sur. Pastor Bunoan is 62 years old, a resident of Aringay, La Union, a retired UCCP pastor who has been serving as volunteer research staff for the Community Ministry Program of the UCCP-North Luzon Jurisdictional Area (UCCP-NLJA).<sup>5</sup>
7. Trumped-up charges were also **been** filed against Bro. Benjie Gomez, Local Lay Preacher of UCCP La Libertad, Zamboanga del Norte, involving 1 Count of Murder and 2 Counts of Frustrated Murder before the RTC Branch 11 of Sindangan, Zamboanga Del Norte, by plaintiff 1Lt. Arlene Quijano Palafox of PA 10th IB "Alpha Coy based in Leon B. Postigo. He was illegally arrested on July 27, 2014 while riding his motorcycle on his way to fetch his wife and son to go to Church for Sunday worship at Poblacion La Libertad, Zamboanga del Norte. He was implicated in the killing of CPL Marwin D. Ybanez during an encounter between the Philippine Army and the NPA on December 3, 2012 at Sitio Napolan, Bgy. Tinuyop, Leon B. Postigo, Zamboanga del Norte. The case was quashed for lack of evidence in May 2015.<sup>6</sup>
8. In Southern Mindanao, two UCCP ordained ministers, Rev. Roger Rafalez and Rev. Allen Bill Veloso, were among 20 activists and human rights defenders who had trumped-up charges filed against them on June 17, 2015 involving attempted murder, violations of RA 7610 and RA 9851 otherwise known as the "Philippine Act on Crimes Against International Humanitarian Law, Genocide, and other Crimes Against Humanity." Charges were filed by PO2 Jegz Bryan L. Salutan of Philippine National Police Alabel and PFC Charlito B. Tunggak of 73rd Infantry Battalion, Philippine Army. The attempted murder case related to an encounter between New People's Army (NPA) and 73rd Infantry Battalion, Philippine Army in Brgy. Upper Suyan, while the Violation of RA 7610 and RA 9851 was related to the evacuation of B'laan Lumads whom they supported in seeking refuge and access to foods and medicines at the

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<sup>3</sup> These assaults include the extra-judicially killed on May 27, 2006 of Brother Noli Capulong. The abduction and torture on May 27, 2007 and the following detention under trumped-up charges of Pastor Berlin Guerrero. The abduction on May 6, 2008 of Pastor Rodel Canja in an attempt to coerce him to testify against Pastor Berlin.

<sup>4</sup> This account is based on information gathered from the UCCP South Luzon Jurisdiction (SLJ) and made public in a Press Statement released on September 4, 2013

<sup>5</sup> This account is based on information gathered from the UCCP North Luzon Jurisdiction (NLJ) and also information made public in a Press Statement entitled: "Stop Persecution of All Church Workers and Lay Leaders" released by the Karapatan – Ilocos Human Rights Alliance August 21, 2015 over the recent harassment among UCCP Pastors and Lay Persons actively involved in the justice, peace and human right advocacy.

<sup>6</sup> Information was gathered from UCCP La Libertad, Zamboanga del Norte and subsequently made public in a Fact-Sheet of the case written by Rev. Isaias B. Morales on October 18, 2014.

United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) Compound, Brgy. San Isidro, General Santos City from May 23 to June 13, 2015.<sup>7</sup>

9. Trumped-up charges of Kidnapping, Serious Illegal Detention, and Human Trafficking were filed against Rev. Irma M. Balaba of UCCP Faith Bible Church, Quezon City, and serving as Program Assistant of the Christian Unity and Ecumenical Relations of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). This stemmed from her participation in an Interfaith Mercy Mission which was held on August 29-31, 2014 in Barangay Gupitan, Kapalong, Davao del Norte over the harassment, killings and displacements of Lumad.<sup>8</sup> Rev. Jorie Jayme, Christian Witness & Service Worker of Southern Mindanao District Conference, Pastor of UCCP Dolo and Member of the Board of Trustees of the UCCP Brokenshire College, Davao City was also charged in the same case arising from his active participation in the humanitarian response of the UCCP in cooperation with ecumenical and multi-sectoral mission partners providing sanctuary for hundreds of Lumad **people** at UCCP Haran Peace Center in Davao City. After a few months of court litigation, their case was dismissed for no legal merit.<sup>9</sup>

**On UCCP Haran Incidents: *Desecration of Church Mission and Ministry of Upholding Human and People's Rights***

10. In the early morning of June 23, 2015, elements of the Philippine National Police (PNP) in full riot gear, along with a paramilitary group named ALAMARA and with fire trucks and military vehicles began massing outside the UCCP Haran Mission House Compound. They were led by a certain Col. Marvin Pepino. Without presenting any warrant or court order, they forcibly entered the Church premises by destroying the gate. This happened as Church officials were facilitating a dialogue between the indigenous leaders and representatives from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the National Commission for Indigenous People (NCIP). The DSWD Assistant Director Perlita Demaquiling stated that they were ordered by the Office of the President through the DSWD Secretary to get the women and children in the Haran Mission Compound. The *datus* refused the offer. The UCCP National Program Coordinator of the JPHR, Rev. Jerome C. Baris, suggested that the concerned agencies extend their services in the evacuation area, instead of forcing them to go back to their tribal communities without definite assurance of their security. The dialogue had just ended when for unknown reasons, a command was given to the PNP present to force their way in. Apparently there was no coordination with the local government unit, as the PNP immediately withdrew when Davao Vice-Mayor Paolo Duterte arrived on the scene.

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<sup>7</sup> Information was gathered from UCCP South-East Mindanao Jurisdiction (SEMJ) and made public in a Fact Sheet prepared by Zadrach Sabella of the South-East Mindanao Jurisdiction (SEMJ) and released on June 26, 2015

<sup>8</sup> Information gathered from an interview with Rev Balaba, also a publically available written account by Rev. Irma M. Balaba in the UCCP publication *UCCP Human Rights Week Celebration Guide 2015*

<sup>9</sup> The account on the case of Rev. Jorie Jayme is included in the Fact Sheet submitted by the SEMJ, June 26, 2015

11. The PNP did not have any warrant to enter and search the Church facility, a private property. HARAN Mission Center, owned by UCCP, has long been a Peace Sanctuary for the least of our people. It is a place purposely created to accommodate individuals or communities that have been deprived of their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. Our fellow *Ata-Manobos* have sought help and refuge in our Church since 1994, the first of a series of internal displacements due to militarization that happened in the countryside.
12. Providing sanctuary in our peace haven is a ministry we embrace arising from our own UCCP Declaration of Principles., to wit: *“In accordance with the biblical understanding that all persons are created in the image of God, the Church affirms and upholds the inviolability of the rights of persons as reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights . . . and those that specifically to refugees, women, youth, children, minority groups and other persons who cannot safeguard their own rights.”* (Art II Sec 11, UCCP Constitution). *“The United Church of Christ in the Philippines affirms its historic faith and its pastoral and prophetic witness in the life and culture of the Filipino people. The Church supports the people’s aspiration for abundant life and holistic redemption from all forms of bondage, in accordance with the vision of the reign of God* (Art II Sec 8, UCCP Constitution).<sup>10</sup>
13. Intentional desecration of the UCCP properties and ministries continued when in the early morning of February 24, 2016 at around 2:30 am, the Lumads were frightened upon finding that two cottages were intentionally set on fire as well an attempt made to burn down the evacuation camp in the UCCP HARAN Compound. Two unidentified men who forced their way inside the premises of HARAN Mission House were seen departing from the area on a motorcycle.<sup>11</sup>
14. The most recent harassment by the state at the tail-end of the administration of President Benigno Aquino III was the issuance of an arrest warrant by the Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 10, Davao City against 14 identified leaders of activist groups including a nun, a UCCP pastor and a son of a UCCP pastor, allegedly for kidnapping and illegal detention related to the scuffle between Lumad evacuees and the police at the UCCP Haran in Davao City, July 23 last year, which was led by North Cotabato Representative Nancy Catamco. The UCCP wonders why this case was re-filed by the Department of Justice when it was already dismissed last September 2015 by the Davao City Prosecutor’s office for insufficiency of evidence. This appears as mere harassment and intimidation against the church and human rights defenders, contrary to the actions of the Davao City government as ordered by its former mayor now President Rodrigo Duterte to assist and help the Lumad evacuees. The UN Special Rapporteur Dr. Chaloka Beyani who personally visited the LUMAD at UCCP Haran

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<sup>10</sup> The Incumbent Bishop of the UCCP issued a Pastoral Statement on the forcible entry of state agents/authorities to the premises of UCCP Haran Peace Center on July 23, 2015

<sup>11</sup> The facts of this account can be found in the Letter Request by SEMJ Area Bishop, Bishop Hamuel O. Tequis addressed to SFO4 ORENCIO B. GRADO, OIC, IIS-DSFD, Bureau of Fire Protection, Alvarez Cor. Monteverde Sts., Davao City, February 24, 2016

Mission Center in September 2015 attested in his statement, “*Let me be absolutely clear, the indigenous persons in Davao are not victims of human trafficking.*”<sup>12</sup>

15. Even worse is the obvious effort to despoil and smear the integrity of our church people and human rights defenders and put their lives in danger by posting unsigned banners and “*wanted*” posters in public places around Davao City.

16. The UCCP deplors all these acts of harassment committed against our church people and against peace advocates and human rights defenders.<sup>13</sup>

**17. The UCCP makes the following recommendations to the United Nation Human Rights Council to call on the Philippine Government to:**

- I. Stop all forms of threats, surveillance, intimidation, vilification and other form of harassment against Church people exercising their religious and political beliefs
- II. Stop the desecration of places of Church mission and worship and other places offending religious rites/practices and ministries.
- III. Discontinue the practice of criminalizing political offenses and actions for acts in pursuit of one’s political beliefs at the arrest, investigation, prosecution and trial stages and uphold the political offense doctrine by charging the proper political charges instead of trumped-up common crimes.
- IV. To undertake every effort towards the punishment of human rights violation perpetrators in order to bring justice to victims. This may involve making changes in country’s criminal justice procedures. Punishment of the perpetrators is a huge first step in the ending of impunity.
- V. Discontinue the arbitrary, unfounded and malicious labelling of Church people manifesting their prophetic witness as “*terrorists*” both at national and international forums.
- VI. Act on the recommendations of Mr. Chaloka Beyani, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons with regards to the displaced indigenous people taking refuge at UCCP Haran in Davao City
- VII. Put an immediate stop to the military coercive actions of recruitment among Indigenous Peoples for Counter-Insurgency programs of the state causing rampant HRVs among IPs people and communities; immediately implement the recommendation in UPR 2012 from some member state for the “*disbandment of the para-military groups*” by repealing E.O. 546 creating and use para-military groups in *Oplan Bayanihan*.
- VIII. Put an end to the state’s terror against the IPs rights to Ancestral Domain and Self Determination.
- IX. Stop Counter-Insurgency Program *Oplan Bayanihan*, instead, pursue the resumption of formal peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines

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<sup>12</sup> This testifying statement by the UN Special Rapporteur Dr. Chaloka Beyani on Human Trafficking was his means of clarifying the public about the coercive misinterpretation by a high-ranking military officer on his observation on the plight of more than 700 Lumad taking refuge at the UCCP Haran Peace Center, Davao City he visited in 2015.

<sup>13</sup> An account of this incident can be found in the Pastoral Statement of the UCCP Incumbent Bishops relative to the recent harassment by the state agents/authorities against 14 human rights defenders (including Rev. Jorie Jayme and a son of a UCCP Pastor) issued July 11, 2016

(GRP) and National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and other armed group in Southern Philippines, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) as a means to achieve just and lasting peace.

- X. To implement and uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and all human rights treaties and instruments to which the Philippine government is a party or signatory.
- XI. **Encourage the conduct of international investigative missions to look into the gross violations of the basic human rights of the people of the Philippines.**
- XII. **Issue invitation to UN special procedures mandate holders to investigate various forms of human rights violations in the Philippines.**