

**EXODUS FOR JUSTICE and PEACE**  
An Interfaith Fact Finding Journey for Truth, Peace and Justice

Arakan Valley, North Cotabato  
October 17-18, 2011

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**MISSION REPORT**

**Contents:**

- I. **Introduction**
  - Background of the Mission Area**
- II. **Methodology**
  - A. **The Participants**
  - B. **Objectives of the Mission**
  - C. **Conduct of the Mission**
- III. **Profile of the Victim**
- IV. **Accounts of the Incident**
- V. **Summary of Findings of the Mission Team**
- VI. **Synthesis/ Conclusion**
- VII. **Recommendations**
- VIII. **Annexes**
  - 1. **Photos**
  - 2. **Affidavits**
  - 3. **Newspaper Clippings**
  - 4. **Medical Certificate**
  - 5. **Autopsy Report**
  - 6. **Police/ Brgy. Blotter**
  - 7. **Sketch**

I. **Introduction**

On October 17, 2011, the Rural Missionary of the Philippines- Southern Mindanao office received a call from one of Fr. Fausto “Pops” Tentorio’s staff, informing them of the firing and killing of the said priest. The RMP staff immediately informed Exodus for Justice and Peace (EJP) office thru a phone call.

This prompted the EJP, of which RMP is a convenor, to a Quick Reaction Team to verify the said incident. By afternoon on the same day, the EJP was able to organize a team of members and volunteers for the fact-finding team coming from the different sectors. The mission team then went to Mother of Perpetual Help Parish in Arakan Valley on October 18, 2011.

### **Background of the Mission Area:**

Arakan is a 2nd class municipality in the province of Cotabato, Philippines. According to LGPMS (as of 2009), it has a population of 46,410 people in 9,282 households.

The word Arakan is derived from the Manobo term “ARA” which means abundance of natural resources in the valley and “KAN” which means heroism, bravery and valor of the early Manobo leaders and settlers of the area. The word “ARAKAN” then was named referring to one of the rivers of the valley. Arakan is basically a territory of a number of ethno-linguistic groups, predominantly of the Manobo-Kulamanon and Manobo-Tinananon tribes. The names of the two (2) big rivers in Arakan were also from these ethnic groups of the Kulaman and Tinanan Rivers. The original settlers of the place are the Manobos, which were believed to have originally come from the string of islands in the Malayan Peninsula and Borneo. This assumption is based on their language structure which has Malayan roots.

For several years now, Arakan had been caught in terror due to massive militarization resulting to various human rights abuses against poor peasants and lumads. In the recent years, all barangays and lumad villages had been en-camped by military soldiers under the AFP’s Re-engineered Special Operations Team (RSOT) of the former Pres. Macapagal-Arroyo’s Oplan Bantay Laya Program and stayed among the residents in their communities for not less than three months.

Aside from militarization, Arakan was also a target of mining and big plantations which threatens the existence and livelihood of the lumads.

On July 29, 2009, soldiers belonging to the 57th IB arrived in the villages of Tumanding, Sto Niño, Ma. Caridad and Salasang, and set up camps in the barangay halls, in the middle of the civilian community, near the school, the church, health center, women and daycare center.

The soldiers stayed in the area for 16 days and the lumads again felt harassed when the military conducted a census and tagged members of the lumad group Tikulpa as members of the NPA.

The soldiers also required civilians to guide them during their operations, placing their lives in extreme danger.

This year the AFP’s Peace and Development Teams (PDTs) under President Benigno “Noy” Aquino’s Oplan Bayanihan Program, a continuity of former Pres. Arroyo’s OBL2, continued to wreak havoc in the lumad communities in Arakan launching various activities and making the military’s threatening presence in the communities more visible.

## II. **Methodology**

### a. **The Participants**

The FFM led by the Exodus for Justice and Peace (EJP) was participated by 110 individuals coming from:

1. Arakan Mother of Perpetual Help parish workers
2. Community residents of Poblacion, Arakan Valley
3. Indigenous people from Arakan Valley
4. Tribe Farmers Program for Community Development, Inc. (TFPCDI)
5. Tinananon-Kulamanon Lumadnong Panaghiusa sa Arakan (TIKULPA)
6. Sisters Association of Mindanao (SAMIN)
7. Mindanao Interfaith Services Foundation, Inc. (MISFI)
8. Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR) - SMR
9. Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP) - SMR
10. Oblates of Saint Benedict (OSB) Missionaries
11. Congregation of Holy Cross (CSC)
12. Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM)
13. Salugpungan Ta Tanu Igkanugon Children's Learning Center (STTICLC)
14. Exodus for Justice and Peace
15. Sowing the Seeds for Peace
16. HUSTISYA SMR
17. PANALIPDAN SMR
18. KARAPATAN SMR Secretariat
19. Nonoy Librado Development Foundation (NLDF)
20. Science on Alternative Technology for Rural Development (SALT-RD)
21. Kusog sa Katwhang Lumad sa Mindanao (KALUMARAN)
22. Anak Pawis Partylist
23. Children's Rehabilitation Center – Southern Mindanao
24. Gabriela Women's Party
25. Kabiba Alliance for Children's Concerns in Mindanao
26. Bayan Muna
27. Gabriela Network of Professionals
28. College Editors Guild of the Philippines (CEGP)
29. National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP)

### b. **Objectives of the Mission**

**GENERAL OBJECTIVE:** To describe in detail the incident surrounding the killing of Fr. Fausto "Fr Pops" Tentorio through investigation and documentation.

#### **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:**

1. To describe the victim's personal history, advocacies, and his church work.
2. To determine the nature, date, time, place of incident.
3. To describe and possibly identify the assailant/s of the said killing
4. To elaborate the incident of the killing.

5. To review the past related events that could have led to the killing.
6. To identify other people that may have participated, contributed or masterminded the killing.
7. To discuss the most plausible motive for the killing of Fr. Pops.
8. To formulate recommendations for further investigation when needed.
9. To utilize the report of the mission to file cases against the perpetrators of this brutal killing.
10. To mobilize members of the church and the academe, law practitioners, media entities and local government units to help uphold and protect human rights, and push the call to stop Extra-Judicial Killings now.

c. **Conduct of the Mission**

The EJP Mission team left Davao City at around 7:00 AM and reached Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Arakan, North Cotabato at around 11am. Upon arrival, members of the team proceeded to the wake of Fr. Fausto Tentorio. After lunch, there was a quick briefing and assignment of tasks of the mission team. The team was separated into three groups. One group was tasked to gather pertinent records and papers from the local police station. Another group took charge of the interview with the local residents, parish staff, and persons with direct and close correspondence with the victim. The last group, composed of church workers, priests, pastors and nuns, was supposed to have a consultation with the bishop and the clergy of the Diocese of Kidapawan. However, the third group was not able to pursue the initial plan since the bishop and the clergy had already left moments after the team's arrival. The third group then spearheaded a liturgical service for Fr. Pops.

The whole team did an ocular inspection of the crime site. A re-enactment, with the accounts of the police who secured the crime site, was also done. The small groups dispersed to proceed to their respective assignments using the fact sheet prepared by EJP as a guide for interview, alongside photo and video documentation. The first group headed to the police station. The second group did the interview, while the third group conducted an ecumenical service as a substitute activity for the cancelled consultation with the diocesan clergy. The questions included basic information of the interviewee, his/her relationship to the victim, his/her location and activities during the incident, and his /her personal accounts on the recent activities, affiliations and encounters of the victim that could have led to his killing.

The gathered data were then processed and consolidated to establish findings for this report.

### III. Profile of the Victim

Fr. Fausto Tentorio, or Fr. Pops, as he is fondly called, is a priest and an Italian missionary in the Philippines for the past twenty five years. Arriving in the Philippines in 1978, he first stayed in Ayala, [Archdiocese of Zamboanga], where he worked for two years and during which he acclimatized himself to the Filipino culture. He came to the Diocese of Kidapawan in 1980 and was stationed as mission administrator in the parish of Columbio. province of Sultan Kudarat. Here, he had his first taste of what it takes to be a missionary in a tri-people setting of Christians, Muslims, and indigenous tribes.

Five years later, in 1985, Fr. Tentorio was transferred to the mission station of Arakan. The new place was nothing new to him, as he had been coming in and out of this place to visit since the missionaries here are his confreres in the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME).

By then, he had known what it takes to live with and work among a tri-people milieu of Christians, Muslims and indigenous tribes. Till his death, his twenty-five year in Arakan, Fr. Tentorio finds this mission truly meaningful and fulfilling.

In his pastoral ministry, Fr. Tentorio gave special focus on the organization of and support for the indigenous tribes collectively known as the lumad. They are among the poor and exploited in his parish. It is necessary to organize them and provide them with opportunities for a better future through education, livelihood capabilities and agricultural enhancement right in their own home environment.

Fr. Pops has been receiving death threats because of his active pastoral role with the tri-people communities of Lumad, Muslims and Christians. His advocacy on lumads and peasant struggle for land, environment and human rights has been reflective with his commitment to serve the disadvantaged and oppressed. On October 6-7, 2003, Fr. Pops had survived a manhunt from a paramilitary group called "Bagani", which was organized by 73<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion to fight the New People's Army when he went to a remote village in Kitaotao, Bukidnon to conduct missionary work. The leaders of 'Baganis' are also known in facilitating for the encroachment of 'development projects' such as agribusiness monocrop plantations and mining in ancestral domains. This was the first attempt against his life as a foreign missionary.

The territory of the parish of Arakan extends its boundary to some parts of Kitao- tao Bukidnon. Here, Fr. Tentorio has organized the tribal organization called the Tinananon-Kulamanon Lumadnong Panaghiusa or TIKULPA, for short.

Fr. Pops is the third Italian PIME priest gunned down in Mindanao but second in the Diocese of Kidapawan.

#### IV. **Accounts of the Incident:**

On October 17, 2011 at about 7:30 in the morning Fr. Fausto "Pops" Tentorio, PIME, 59 years old, Italian, parish priest of Mother of Perpetual Help Parish in Arakan Valley, North Cotabato Province was shot dead within the compound of the church as he was about to board his Suzuki gray vehicle.

Fr. Pops was supposed to be on his way for a clergy meeting in Kidapawan City. A female staff of the church narrated that, while she was taking out the garbage, she passed by the garage where the vehicle was parked, and saw Fr. Pops' body slumped on the ground. She immediately called for help from other church staff, when she saw Fr. Pops bloodied. The staff has not seen any suspicious looking people near the crime site, and did not hear any gunshots at that time. Other church colleagues responded and brought Fr. Pops to Antipas Medical Specialist Hospital but he was declared dead on arrival.

Arakan Councilor Leonardo Reovoca, also a former church worker narrated that he saw a person wearing a helmet ran from the Parish compound garage towards the main road then rode off with another suspect waiting on a blue XRM motorcycle. When the incident occurred, Councilor Reovoca was outside the premises of the Arakan Central Elementary School which was located just right across the parish. However, he could not identify the assassin. He also said that there were two (2) army soldiers wearing complete uniform and in full battle gear, believed to be members of 5th Special Forces (SF) of Philippine Army (PA), who were near the vicinity of the incident, yet none of them responded.

During that day, there was an Oplan Bayanihan activity conducted by the military inside the school as the military vehicle was parked in its premises. The parish has one (1) main gate but the compound doesn't have a fence, and is easily accessible to other people.

Fr. Pops sustained multiple gunshot wounds in his head and chest. The Philippine National Police (PNP) in Arakan Station responded at around 8:20 in the morning and conducted initial investigation. Based on their initial reports, Fr. Pops was shot at about 3 feet away.

The PNP also said they found seven (7) empty shells of a 9mm caliber, and that the Italian priest had 8 gunshot wounds in the body. The fatal shot was on his head, which entered the rear of his left ear and exited at the back of the skull on the left side. Fr. Pops also had gunshot wounds on the left side of his body; presumably the assailant shot Fr. Pops on his left side as he was about to board his vehicle.

The night before the incident, some of the staff observed the incessant barking of dogs within the compound of the Parish, but they didn't mind it. A few days prior to the incident, a female parish staff noticed fish vendors unusually frequenting the parish. She also recalled that sometime in January to August this year, an unidentified

man had shown up at the parish and would always look for Fr. Pops about six times (6x) consecutively at around 12 noon to 2:00 in the afternoon and asking about the priest's whereabouts.

One of the staff recounted that on 2007 while Fr. Pops was facilitating a dental mission being held in the Parish, a number of military men from the 57th Infantry Battalion Philippine Army raided the compound and alleged that there were firearms hidden in the office of the parish. But Fr. Pops denied the allegations saying it was impossible. Fr. Pops and his staff reported the incident immediately to the police.

Fr. Pops had also received death threats because of his active pastoral role with the tri-people communities of lumad, Muslims and Christians. His advocacy on lumads and peasant struggle for land, environment and human rights was reflective of his commitment to serve the disadvantaged and oppressed. #

**ACCOUNT OF FROM STAFF, LOCAL RESIDENTS and FRIENDS**  
**(interviewed by the Mission team)**

**1. ACCOUNT OF ROSITA NABREDA:**

Rosita "Sita" Nabreda, age 72, is from Oton, Iloilo. Fr. Fausto hired her as the caretaker of the convent since 2002. She has been working at the convent for almost 9 years.

After the celebration of the feast of the parish (18th September), she started to notice that people were going in and out of the parish compound. Fish vendors in motorcycles peddled their fish inside the compound, sometimes up to 5 vendors were seen at the same time. Some of them were just resting around the grounds of the compound.

These men did not seem suspicious to the parish workers. Sometimes, they even bought fish from these men.

On the 16th of October, Fr. Fausto held a mass in another parish. Sita stayed the night in the convent. She usually sleeps over at the convent when the priests are away.

On the 17th of October, around 6:00 AM, Sita went home to feed the pigs and take a bath. She returned to the convent at around 8:00 AM. Seeing that the main door of the convent was already locked, she entered through the kitchen door. She then did her routine of cleaning inside the convent. After that, she went outside to dispose of the garbage near the trees.

When she was about to go to the drum of water in order to wash her hands, she saw Fr. Fausto lying on the ground. She rushed to him, thinking that the priest might have had a heart attack. When she lifted the priest's head, blood gushed. Sita then asked

help from the niece of the Mayor's wife so that they could rush Fr. Fausto to the hospital in Antipas.

2. **ACCOUNT OF LEONARDO REOVOCA:**

Leonardo Reovoca is a municipal kagawad in the area. He became part of the priest's staff in 1990-1995.

Fr. Fausto contributed a lot to the community. He was very approachable when people had problems with financing their project. The priest would lend them money and return the same amount in due time.

Fr. Fausto was an advocate of the anti-mining movement in Mt. Sinaka, which plans to explore the Magpet, Arakan and Kitawtaw areas.

On the morning of October 17, Fr. Fausto and Leonardo went to the meeting of the Peace and Order council.

When asked if Fr. Fausto received death threats, he said that there have been none recent except in the raid in 2007.

3. **ACCOUNT OF JUN LUBIANO:**

On October 12th, Fr. Fausto and Jun attended a forum sponsored by the PNP on their anti-criminality and terrorism campaign. Fr. Fausto was invited to give the opening prayer. The military facilitated the program.

On the 14th of October, Fr. Fausto and Jun were invited to meetings for the NAPEAR biogas application.

On the 15th of October, the priest held a mass for a deceased person. After that, while going home, Fr. Fausto and Jun passed by a person who was held because he carried long firearms in a sack. The police confiscated the said firearms but a certain Captain Espiritu sent the police a text message, telling him [police] to let the person through because it was theirs.

On the night of October 16, it seemed unsafe to go outside the parish compound because a 6x6 truck and motorcycles kept passing by.

Fr. Fausto was already not allowed to attend MPOC meeting since 2008 because the military was not happy with his presence. Fr. Fausto, together with Jun and others, formed the quick reaction force (QRF) vs the military.

4. **ACCOUNT OF Estrella Felimon**, a grade 2 teacher in the nearby Arakan Central Elementary School, said that at around 7:10-7:15 am, a flag ceremony was on going. Around 7:15, she heard dull gunshots, making her turn to the direction of the source of shots. She saw a short, chubby man from the garage of Fr. Pops, wearing a blue helmet and short pants. The man ran away to the direction of a waiting motorcycle. During that time, elements of the 57th IB and Special Forces were helping in the school activities (brigada). There was also a recently-launched campaign against criminality and terrorism.

5. **ACCOUNT OF ARLENE BATOON**, 33 years of age, married with no child, a resident of Santo Nino, Arakan North Cotabato, and a staff of Tri-Farmers Program for Community Development, Inc. (TFPCDI)- Health Department, attest to the truthfulness of the following accounts:

that on October 16, 8:00pm to 11:00pm, he was not able to sleep well because of the unusual noise of the barking dogs;

that on October 17, 7:20 am, we went to the market with his fellow parish worker, Yolanda Andagkit; they noticed a red Honda XRM motorcycle parked in the basketball court near the convent, and near the garage of Fr. Fausto;

that they also noticed an unfamiliar man who stood in the basketball court, near the XRM motorcycle; the man was about 5'6" tall, was wearing brown, sleeveless shirt and a pair of short pants, was wearing slippers, was bearded and had a skinhead cut, slim and dark in complexion;

that at 7:45 am, while in the market, there was a commotion among the people and they heard them talk about a priest gunned down;

that at 8:00am, when they returned to the convent, they learned that Fr. Fausto Tentorio was delivered to Antipas Medical Specialist Hospital; they just saw the two gunshot holes on the glass window of his car and the blood that splattered on the ground, underneath his car.

6. **ACCOUNT FROM ONE OF THE PARISH WORKER:**

As early as January until August, a man kept on visiting the parish and asking the whereabouts of the priest. The parish worker remembered that there have been five to six times that the same man visited the parish and look for Fr. Pops but was not able to meet him in person.

The suspicious man was described to have a fair complexion, wearing neat clothes and speaks in Ilonggo. During his last visit, the man asked in vernacular "Ara si Pops?" (Is Pops around?) and at that time Fr. Pops was out on a scheduled meeting.

7. **ACCOUNT FROM AN INTERVIEWEE:**

Name: Arnel (not real name)

Age: 42 y/o

Residence: Poblacion, Arakan, North Cotabato since 1986

Occupation: Part of the staff of Tri-Farmers Program for Community Development, Inc.

Former scholar of Fr. Fausto Tentorio

**Before the incident**

Around 6:20 in the morning on October 17, the respondent went to Sitio Midlambid to get a sack of rice. While away, as told by the respondent's niece, an unidentified motorcycle-riding man looked for him at their residence. The niece, without doubts and suspicion, told the man of the respondent's whereabouts.

After procuring the sack of rice, the respondent immediately returned to the poblacion. Around 7:00 to 7:20 AM, he was still able to make a phone call to Fr. Fausto Tentorio.

**During the incident**

On that day, the respondent and his wife had a scheduled activity in Barangay Bagtuk. Moments after the couple left home for their scheduled activity, the respondent received a phone call from a parish staff informing him that Fr. Fausto was shot. The respondent immediately rushed back to the parish but the ambulance that carried the victim had just left.

**After the incident**

Around 8:00AM, the respondent was called up by someone from Sitio Midlambid that an unidentified motorcycle-riding man was looking for him.

**Other information**

The respondent said that he did not observe any new threats to Fr. Fausto apart from the former's consistent and firm stand on issues of ancestral domain of the Lumads, development aggression in the area, militarization and environmental destructions.

The respondent admitted that their locality is highly militarized. He said elements of 57<sup>th</sup> IB, 38<sup>th</sup> IB and Special Forces of the Philippine Army are operating in the area. He also mentioned the presence of paramilitary units. The soldiers, under the Peace and Development Outreach Program of Oplan Bayanihan, proposed to sponsor a mass in Fr. Tentorio's parish. This was confirmed by the municipal mayor and said that there was already an agreement between Fr. Tentorio and the soldiers. However, the respondent denied this saying that Fr. Fausto refused the soldier's proposal.

Recently, the victim also received documents from NAPEAR Biofuels for a proposed Jathropa plantation in the area. Fr. Tentorio and his staff were puzzled why they were sent copies of the documents when it was already clear to everybody that Fr. Tentorio

never favoured operations of large agribusiness plantations in the ancestral domain area.

8. **ACCOUNT FROM FR. PETER GEREMIA, PIME:**

Fr. Peter Geremia, another Italian priest, said it would be premature to accuse the New People's Army of involvement in the killing.

"Il gallo che canta, ha fatto l'uovo (the hen making a lot of noise is laying an egg)," Geremia quoted an old Italian saying, when he heard some officials blaming the NPA for the death of Tentorio.

"Even during the time of Favali, they had the same pronouncement but it was proven the opposite," he said, recalling how on April 11, 1985, a paramilitary group led by Norberto Manero, known in the area as Kumander Bucay, killed Italian priest, Fr. Tulio Favali, in Tulunan, Cotabato.

He said the killing of another Italian missionary, the third in the Philippines and the 18th in the list of PIME martyrs, reminded him again of the dark days that took the life of Favali.

"The killing was not only brutal but also very precise, executed by a professional killer who appeared to have all the time in his hands. He was not in a hurry," he said, as people close to the priest still grappled with disbelief and shock.

"Even doctors can commit a mistake in their surgery but this killer did not, he was very thorough, he made sure he completed his task," Geremia said.

He also described the act as something no normal person would do. "He was a trained professional and well prepared in his execution, which meant, he was not alone in that task, he had a companion."

Now that authorities are blaming the NPA for the killing, it looks as the "Favali" days are back, according to the priest.

"They were saying the same things again," said the Italian priest who spent 39 years, the longest part of his life, in the Philippines.

Geremia recalled that it took months before the perpetrators were punished for the killing of Favali.

But the difference of the Favali slaying from the Tentorio murder was that, in the case of the former, the killer brazenly declared the crime in a letter.

**CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS (lifted from Germalina Lacorte's report in Philippine Daily Inquirer; Ms. Lacorte was with the Mission team during the actual FFM):**

ARAKAN, North Cotabato, Philippines — Residents and church workers say Italian missionary, Father Fausto Tentorio, had been under constant threat in the years he served indigenous communities in remote villages of Mindanao, and that there were even signs leading to his assassination on Monday.

Weeks before Tentorio was killed, a man came asking the church's staff about his whereabouts, said Leoncio Lubiano, head of the church's parish formation and catheticism.

It was the same man, not over 30 years old, who came to the church compound five or six times, and asked a day care worker about Tentorio.

Lubiano said that for several weeks in August and September until the week of Tentorio's death, several fish carts were seen parked in areas around the Church's compound.

Once or twice, Church's staff members caught them roaming too close to the convent and other office buildings but when they were asked what they were doing there, the fish cart vendors who claimed they were from Digos City in Davao del Sur, said they just wanted to know what was inside.

One of them even tied his makeshift hammock at a shed inside the church compound and slept there.

"Sometimes, they slept here (church compound) at night. They were still around last week but on the day Father Fausto was killed, they were gone," said Lubiano.

"They came every day and the Friday (Oct. 14) before he was shot, somebody actually tied their swing at a shed inside the church compound and slept there," said another church worker.

Also on Oct. 14, soldiers belonging to the 57th Infantry Battalion were asking Basic Ecclesiastical Community leaders in the village of Badiangon if they had Tentorio's mobile phone number but they said they had none.

The following day (Oct. 15), when Tentorio was saying mass in Barangay Dalag, the police confiscated a sack full of long firearms aboard a motorcycle driven by a civilian in the nearby Sitio Kamanangan, which travellers would have to pass through in going to Barangay Dalag.

Tentorio was already out of the area when the firearms were held. When the police held the civilian and confiscated the firearms, a military officer, only named Captain Espiritu, texted the police claiming ownership of the firearms.

Some residents said they were asking why a civilian was allowed to carry that many firearms. The police blotter showed that only two M16 rifles confiscated, but Lubiano said people were saying that a sack of firearms were confiscated.

On Sunday night (Oct. 16), two military vehicles were seen patrolling about the village. When lumad leaders asked the police about this, they were told this was only a regular part of their civil military operations.

The morning after (Oct. 17), Tentorio was killed.

When the gunman shot Tentorio in the garage right in the church compound, a flag ceremony was in progress in a school across the street.

Lubiano said some soldiers taking part in the school activity did nothing when the shots rang out.

Still, Angelito Magno, National Bureau of Investigation director for Central Mindanao, on Tuesday night, said they learned from their initial interviews with Tentorio's colleagues that they did not notice any immediate threat to the priest in the last six months and that they were taken by surprise by his killing.

"There were previous threats ... But there was no recent threat," Magno said.

Church workers said they had received a lot of threats in the past because they and Tentorio were together in the struggle for ancestral land rights and had faced the same harassment from the military.

Libunio recounted a raid on June 12, 2009 when soldiers in full battle gear went inside the church compound, looking for Tentorio.

On that same day, Tentorio wrote a letter to Arakan mayor Romulo Tapgos, the chair of the Municipal Peace and Order Council, about the incident. He said an Army vehicle entered the church compound with nine fully armed men, passing through a secondary gate, at 3:45 p.m. He was asking if this was a normal act of the military to enter private properties without coordinating with owner.

He said, "I don't have anything to hide and I assure the military they are welcome in our convent but I would appreciate it if they coordinate with me before scouring the church compound because I am the parish priest."

“They went straight to the mango and mahogany trees without passing through the convent or asking permission,” Tentorio said in his letter. “When they were asked by one of the staff members what they were looking for, there was no clear response.”

Tentorio was a low-profile personality but he was, at times, invited to join activities, especially at the Sanguniang Bayan, which had passed a resolution against mining. Under the previous administration, he used to sit in the municipal peace and order council but the 57th IB asked the local government unit to remove him from the meetings, after he became vocal against the intensifying military operations which had been hitting, not the communist New People’s Army, but lumad communities.

## **Ø SOME NAMES WITHHELD BY THE MISSION TEAM FOR SECURITY PURPOSE.**

### **v. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Based on the accounts and testimonies of the witnesses, church colleagues and circumstantial evidence, the mission has come up with the following findings:

1. That Fr. Fausto Tentorio was shot to death between 7:15 – 7:30 in the morning of October 17, 2011 at the garage area within the compound of Mother of Perpetual Help Parish, Arakan Valley, North Cotabato Province. The time was based when gun shots were heard and noticed by the school children and teachers while having their Flag Ceremony in Arakan Central Elementary School right across the street fronting the Parish compound. Thereafter, some of them witnessed a man wearing a helmet while running away from the garage. Also at that moment, one of the drivers of the priest was tasked to open the main gate of the compound to prepare Fr. Fausto’s departure that time. The driver noticed two (2) men wearing a complete military uniform who were standing underneath the Acacia tree that is located within the compound near the main gate.

Fr. Fausto sustained multiple gunshot wounds on the chest area and one fatal shot on the head that caused his instantaneous death. His lifeless body was found beneath the Suzuki gray vehicle by Rosita Nabreda (caretaker) only at around 8:00am when she was about to throw some garbage.

2. An hour earlier that day at about 6:00am, the residence of one of the leaders of the church, Arnel (whose real name is withheld for security reasons) was also monitored by the assailant who was then wearing a helmet, short pants and riding a motorcycle. But the man was not able to catch up Arnel, so he asked the niece of Arnel about his whereabouts. The girl then answered that his uncle was at the nearby village in Midlambid in Arakan. Then the man asked another question if they do have some dogs in their house, the girl replied with “yes, we do have.” Immediately, the man flew away with his motorcycle.

After getting the 1 sack of rice in Midlambid, Arnel went back home and suddenly his niece informed him that someone suspicious-looking-motorcycle-riding man was looking

for him. Few minutes later, a friend from Midlambid also told him via his cellphone that a man was searching for him minutes after he left the village. Arnel and his wife could sense the chilling effect when in a few while they were already notified by their fellow church workers that Fr. Fausto was shot in the Parish by unknown assailant. The couple rushed directly to the parish but the priest was already brought to the hospital. Right there and then at the hospital, they witnessed the lifeless body of Fr. Fausto.

3. About 7:20 in the morning that day, a male stranger was seen by two (2) female staff of Tri-Farmers Program for Community and Development Inc. (TFPCDI) at the basketball court beside the church while they were proceeding outside to the main gate to go the market. The man was a complete stranger and with him was an XRM red motorcycle, but still the staff went to the market. When they reached the market at 7:45am, they noticed that the people were disturbed as someone reported that the priest was shot in the parish. When the staff got back at the parish to verify the incident at past 8 o'clock, they were told that Fr. Fausto was brought to Antipas Medical Specialist Hospital.

4. That on the night of October 16, some of the staff noticed the incessant barking of dogs within the compound between 8-11pm which was very unusual to them. And also that night they have seen two (2) military vehicles patrolling around the village.

5. On October 15, while Fr. Fausto alongwith Jun Lubiano (head of the parish formation and catechism) passed-by Sitio Kamanugan after serving a funeral mass at Brgy. Dalag, they saw the police confiscated 1 sack filled with long firearms brought by a civilian. But then they only knew that the military owned the firearms when a certain Capt. Espiritu contact the police and ordered not to hold the firearms, thereby claiming its ownership.

6. October 14, Fr. Fausto received a proposal-agreement on the application of Napear Biogas in Arakan and invited him for a meeting.

7. Fr. Fausto was invited to offer a Christian Prayer during the launching of Information, Education, Campaign Materials on Anti-Criminality and Terrorism between the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Municipal Government of Arakan. The activity was held on October 12, 2011 at the Arakan Municipal Gym and was believed to be facilitated by the military of 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Airborne.

8. Before Fr. Fausto was killed, church workers observed the presence of unknown fish vendors everyday coming in and out within the parish compound for a period of two months. Likewise, a daycare teacher also noticed a strange man who was always looking for Fr. Fausto and his whereabouts. The man was observed visiting the parish for about 6x consecutively every 2:00-3:00pm within the period of January to August this year.

9. It should be recalled that on June 12, 2009 about 3:45pm the parish was illegally searched by 9 elements of 57<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion wearing full battle gear as they wrongfully accused Fr. Fausto assisting sick and wounded New People's Army (NPA) members.

10. Fr. Fausto used to sit in the Municipal Peace and Order Council (MPOC) of Arakan, but since 2007, the commander of 57<sup>th</sup> IB requested to pull him out because of the priest's opposition to combat heavy military operations that has been targeting civilian communities. He was also

against the formation of Barangay Defense System (BDS) and military encampments of schools. He was also a staunch advocate for the environment who was helping the community folks in their opposition to the entry of large-scale mining companies and encroachment of agri-industrial plantations in the area.

11. The near-death experience of Fr. Fausto on October 6-7, 2003 which he was written. He was targeted by the paramilitary group called “Bagani” (a group organized by 73<sup>rd</sup> IB to run after the NPA and groups accused as having links with it) but was able to survive with the help of almost 300 lumads in Kitaotao, Bukidnon.

## VI. **Synthesis**

Based on the accounts of the interviewees, the killing of Fr. Fausto Tentorio was a well-planned act, which involved a long period of complex plotting and familiarization of the victim’s routine. The suspicious presence of transient fish vendors for about two months before the incident, the unidentified motorcycle-riding man who frequented the convent for months since January, are some of the circumstantial evidences suggesting that the perpetrators belong to an organized group with the confidence to operate in the area under strong protection.

It was also found out that there were suspicious looking men frequently visiting the Parish convent and there have been previous cases of harassments to him by those opposed to his advocacies for the Lumads and the peasants. The victim’s consistent and firm stand against militarization and development aggressions in the form of mining and agribusiness is also a very probable cause of his killing, especially with the recent pronouncement of President Benigno Aquino, III, for heightened security for upcoming and ongoing mining and agribusiness investments, allowing the deployment of military and paramilitary units.

Furthermore, the reported presence of two uniformed soldiers under the acacia tree in the vicinity of the crime scene, and the presence of the soldiers who joined the Brigada in the nearby Arakan Central Elementary School, all during the incident, were aside from insulting and bothersome, very questionable. How come that these uniformed men who came for a supposed Peace and Development activities were not able to notice the suspicious acts of the perpetrator(s) and did not even bother to respond to the gun shots heard by the teachers who just near them. The presence of joint elements of 38th IB, 57th IB and 3rd Special Forces, as confirmed by the municipal mayor, was never able to prevent the gruesome incident. Despite their close presence, the soldiers were also not able to respond immediately to intercept the perpetrators, an act which is another ground for distrust of possible collaborations.

Overall, the possible involvement of state forces on the killing of Fr. Fausto Tentorio, PIME could not be easily denied as it has been clearly manifested in the circumstantial evidences and accounts of the parishioners, parish staff and residents who have close connections with the victim. Whether the killing was motivated by

the victim's anti-development aggression stand or not, the most certain finding is that the killing was done amidst active operations of even the elite units of the country's armed forces.

### **Conclusion:**

The killing of Fr. Fausto 'Pop's Tentorio happened during the time when the military under the 57th Infantry Battalion was conducting their Oplan Bayanihan activities.

But weeks before Fr. Tentorio was killed, daily surveillance was conducted by suspicious-looking men. Such surveillance activities on known leaders and supporters of legitimate organizations that are critical to anti-people and anti-environment policies, projects and programs is one of the activities of Oplan Bayanihan other than psychological warfare, deception and vilification of progressive organizations as enemies of the State. These activities provide State agents a license to kill those leaders and supporters under surveillance.

Fr. Tentorio had received lots of threats because he was helping the lumads and farmers in their struggle for land rights and against 'development' aggression which made him targets of harassment and vilification campaign from the military and paramilitary groups.

The circumstantial evidences pointed out the State security agents as primary suspects of the brutal killing of Fr. Tentorio. He was already a target by 'Baganis', a paramilitary group created by 73rd Infantry Battalion under the 10th Infantry Division, since 2003 when he almost lost his life.

The killing also happened when the Aquino government approved the proposal of the Armed Forces of the Philippines to deploy more military and paramilitary troops in communities where there are mining operations and people's opposition on it is strong.

The reign of impunity continues under the Aquino regime. The brutal killing of Fr. Tentorio showed the continuing policy of the government on physical elimination of socially-active civilians by State security agents. It shows that Oplan Bayanihan which deceptively focuses on 'peace and development' is actually giving protection for the interests of mining and agribusiness corporations despite the environmental destruction, economic dislocation and displacement of the people in the affected areas.

The pattern of State violence under Oplan Bayanihan has been exposed. Based on the people's experiences on the ground, the 'Peace and Development' Outreach Program (PDOP) under Oplan Bayanihan of the Eastern Mindanao Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines has nothing to do with peace and development but a grand

scheme for pacifying the people's oppositions against anti-people and anti-environment projects.

## VII. **Recommendations**

**Pursue an independent investigation.** Push for and facilitate case build-up, and expedite the prosecution of the perpetrators;

2. **Create an atmosphere that would encourage witnesses to come out and stand for justice.** Prepare and provide sanctuary to witnesses to ensure their safety and welfare as;

3. **Immediately pull-out all military detachments and encampments in the affected areas.** Stop the militarization in the country-sides, especially in areas targeted for mining explorations and operations and agribusiness plantation expansions;

4. **Stop the vilification campaign against leaders, members and supporters of legitimate and progressive organizations** who are critical to anti-people and anti-environment policies, programs and projects and to militarization under the counter-insurgency plan Oplan Bayanihan;

5. **Dismantle the Task Force Gantangan** that continues under Oplan Bayanihan of the Aquino government program. The group recruits lumads for paramilitary groups to guard mining concessions, agribusiness plantations and other corporate activities. These paramilitary groups harass, threaten, and even kill fellow lumads and their supporters who stand in defense of the ancestral domain and oppose the exploitation of natural resources;

6. **Call on the Aquino government to stop the cycle of violence in ancestral domains and rural communities** by taking back his approval of the proposal of the AFP on mining firms funding and organizing their own paramilitary units to secure their operations;

7. **Submit the mission report and seek appropriate actions** from national and international human rights entities, legislative bodies like the Philippine Senate and the House of Representatives and the Roman Catholic Church entities such as Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and the Vatican for appropriate actions.

## VIII. **Annexes**

1. **Photos**
2. **Affidavits**

3. **Newspaper Clippings**
4. **Medical Certificate**
5. **Autopsy Report**
6. **Police/ Brgy. Blotter**
7. **Sketch**

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**EXODUS FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE FACT-FINDING MISSION SECRETARIAT**  
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