

A STATEMENT OF GRIEF, A CALL FOR JUSTICE

Fact-Finding Mission Statement On The
Killing Of Italian Priest Father Fausto 'Pops' Tentorio
October 20, 2011

"Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."
PSALM 82:3-4

We, representatives and leaders from Catholic and Protestant churches, faith-based institutions, advocacy groups, academe, health institutions, the youth sector, indigenous peoples, and peasants have come together in response to the KILLING OF FATHER FAUSTO 'POPS' TENTORIO, PIME and went to a FACT-FINDING MISSION IN ARAKAN, NORTH COTABATO on October 17, 2011.

The MISSION was the quickest possible response of the Exodus for Justice and Peace, along with peace advocates and human rights defenders, friends and colleagues of Father Pops in an effort to pursue justice while we are in deep grief.



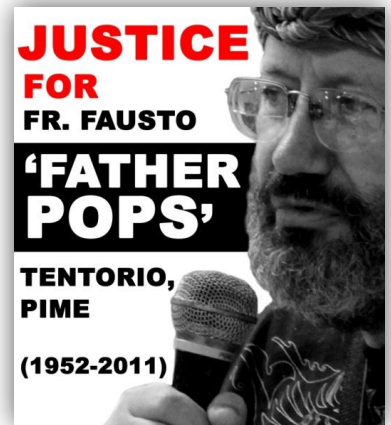
Ours is a time when people still languish in suffering and oppression. A time when peasants do not own the land they till and indigenous people driven away from their ancestral homes. It is during these times when people, like Father Pops, who lived with the poor and the landless, and who would eventually stand up with them for more than 30 decades, are targeted and killed.

Father Pops has chosen the missionary's life he knew would not be easy or would later endanger his life. He knew he would be persecuted. But he knew better, he continued to offer and dedicate his life to the lumads and peasants.

The brutal killing of Father Pops proved that Oplan Bayanihan was far from being a peace and development program, that it was rather just a sugar-coated continuation of the blood-stained counter-insurgency Oplan Bantay Laya 2, that claimed thousands of innocent lives including church people.

Thus, an interfaith, church-initiated and independent FACT-FINDING MISSION to Arakan Valley was carried out. Now, in behalf of those who joined, we now present, the MISSION findings and conclusions:

- 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. Witnesses saw the presence of men in military uniform near the crime scene. 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 8:00 am when she was about to throw some garbage;
- 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;
- That on October 15, while Fr. Fausto along with 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 contacted the police and ordered not to hold the firearms, thereby claiming its ownership;
- That before Fr. Fausto was killed, church workers observed the presence of unfamiliar fish vendors everyday coming in and out within the parish compound for 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 six times consecutively every 2:00-3:00pm within the period of January to August this year;
- That it should be recalled that on June 12, 2009 about 3:45pm the parish was illegally searched by 9 elements of 57th Infantry Battalion wearing full battle gear as they wrongfully accused Fr. Fausto assisting sick and wounded New People's Army (NPA) member; That Fr. Fausto used to sit in the Municipal Peace and Order Council (MPOC) of Arakan, but since 2007, the commander of 57th 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; and



"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God,"
Micah 6:8 (A Bible verse from the Book of Micah in the Old Testament Father Pops lifted himself. He requested for this verse to be placed on his grave when he dies.)



- That the near-death experience of Fr. Pops on October 6-7, 2003 that he narrated himself, established that he was targeted by the paramilitary group called “Bagani” (a group organized by 73rd IB to run after the NPA and suspected supporters) but he was able to survive with the help of almost 300 lumads in Kitaotao, Bukidnon.

Hence, the MISSION believes that the killing of Fr. Pops is premeditated and a well-planned state-sponsored vigilante-style killing. It happened at the onset of the approval of President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III of the proposal of the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) to deploy more military and paramilitary troops in the communities where there are strong local opposition to mining operations.

The MISSION believes that Fr. Pops is a VICTIM OF THE REIGNING STATE OF IMPUNITY. This recent brutal killing exposed the continuing policy of the state on eliminating human rights defenders, peace and justice advocates.

Fr. Pops’ death has further exposed Oplan Bayanihan’s deceptive slogan of ‘peace and development.’ The killing of Fr. Pops is an example of the truth that the military’s peace and development teams are a machinery to protect the interest of large-scale mining and agri-industrial corporations that cause environmental plunder, economic dislocation and displacement of indigenous peoples and peasants.

The MISSION has also heard the people’s cry in the hinterlands of North Cotabato. Testimonies reveal that ‘Peace and Development’ Outreach Program (PDOP) under Oplan Bayanihan of the Eastern Mindanao Command-AFP has nothing to do with genuine peace and real development. These Peace and Development Teams (PDT) are in communities as part of a grand scheme to pacify the people’s economic struggles and their opposition to government’s anti-poor policies.

Almost six months ago, the Exodus for Justice and Peace also conducted a National Peace and Mercy Mission to investigate on the killings of peasant leader Rudy Dejos and his son in Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur and anti-large-scale mining leader Santos “Ricky” Manrique in Pantukan. The Dejos and Manrique were staunch critiques of the military and government policies. The mission results reveal the killings were also state-sponsored.

At this point, the MISSION puts forward the following recommendations:

1. **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;
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 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 Roman Catholic Church institutions such as the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and the Vatican.



We are here in grief and we are also here in faith – that justice must be pursued. Fr. Pops’ missionary life did not end with his death – he died to live with us and share to all of us the life he offered to the poor and the landless.



Father Pops knew we will not fall deaf or would close our eyes to the people’s cry and suffering. He knew we will speak out to condemn all that has caused the misery of people. Let us then take the challenge, seek JUSTICE FOR FATHER POPS! Let us join the journey, and call on others to take on Fr. Pops’ mission to help the poor and the oppressed and encourage them to rise as one in our quest for a just and lasting peace.

JUSTICE FOR FATHER FAUSTO ‘POPS’ TENTORIO! “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” Amos 5:24

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