



# RAMENTO PROJECT FOR RIGHTS DEFENDERS

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## IFI rejoices long-sought release of Bishop Carlo Morales

Diocese of Ozamiz Bishop Carlo Morales was greeted with excitement by his family, fellow bishops, priests and supporters after being released from jail and before going to his first Thanksgiving Mass after ten months of incarceration.

The decision granting the bishop's motion to fix bail came out last March 14, 2018 after 309 days of unjust detention and dreading legal battle. Judge Edmundo Pintac of the RTC in Ozamiz City found "the prosecution's evidence presented...is not strong enough" and ordered for his temporary liberty after fixing the 200,000-peso bail.

But Obispo Maximo Rhee Timbang said in a statement released in March 16, 2018, that while the Church hails the bishop's release, "the ordeal of Bishop Morales must be continually condemned." The Church holds firm that the arrest of the bishop of Ozamiz, his wife, driver and companion, who is a JASIG-protected consultant for the peace talks, is "unjust and a violation of [one's] human rights."

The Obispo Maximo also cited the massive and various forms of human rights violation being committed systematically by the current government and holds that it is "liable [for] the violation of human rights and must be judged according to [the] law of God. Furthermore, he said that, "as president, Rodrigo Duterte could not lead the people in this country in righteousness, impartiality and integrity. He has lost his moral authority to administer this nation."

The Church leadership instead calls on the government "to pursue governance that leads to

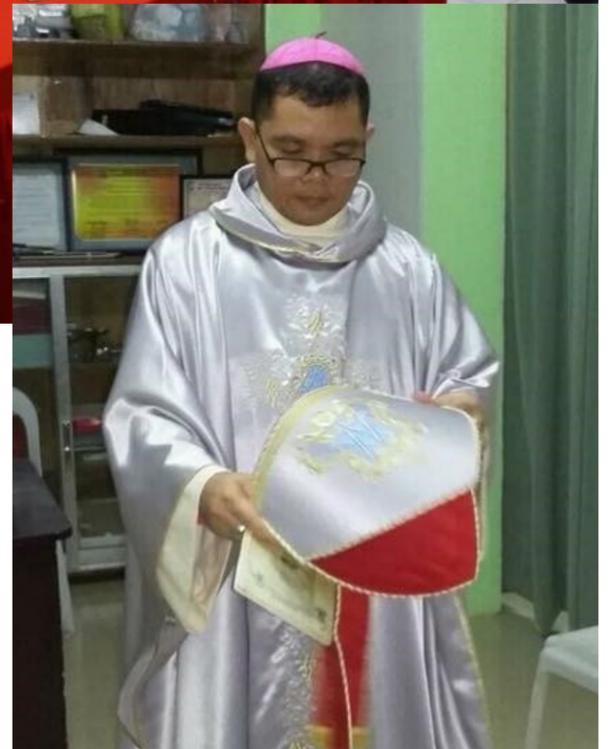


Photo grabbed from Bp. Romeo Tagud

➤ **Bishop Morales preparing for his Thanksgiving Mass.** Photo grabbed from facebook post.

peace and justice and to resume the peace negotiations with the NDFP so they could forge comprehensive agreements on socio-economic reforms and on political and constitutional reforms so as to put an end to the decades-old armed conflict."

On his final note, the Church leader thanked those who have committed their continuing, resolute and unwavering support to the campaign to free Bishop Carlo Morales and all political prisoners.



## Priests not exempted from government's crackdown on HRDs, activists



"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." —2 Timothy 3:12

At least twelve (12) priests from the North-Central Luzon Dioceses of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente reported incidents of threats, harassment and intimidation from uniformed and un-uniformed state forces in the past months.

During the Training on Human Rights Documentation and Paralegal Work at the beginning of the year in Baguio City, priests of the National Priests Organization-North Central Luzon (NPO-NCL), which initiated the training, reported their experiences of threats, harassment and intimidation through surveillance during eucharistic mass and social concerns-related activities. Rev. Jed Manzano of the Diocese of LUISA reported that he has been labeled in public by an elected official as "anti-development" and member of rebel groups. On the other hand, Revs. Randy Manicap, Arvin Mangrubang, Clifford Bayod and Sherwin Sapnad of the Diocese of Laoag reported receiving threats and intimidating statements sent via SMS after their activity celebrating the International Human Rights last December 2017 and on the following weeks.

To further document and assess these incidents, RPRD led the first batch of risk assessment among some of the affected priests last March 6 using Frontline Defender's Workbook on Security.

Clergy from the Dioceses of Luisa, Eastern Pangasinan and Nueva Ecija were among those who have been subjected to threats, harassment and intimidation (THI). Similar incidents of tailing, suspicious men lurking around church vicinities, sometimes caught taking photos, especially during church-led activities that take up social and human rights issues were reported by officers and members of NPO-NCL. Also, similar incidents of unannounced and uncoordinated visitations of police officers in church vicinities during mass (most of the time, not for the entire duration of the mass) and unexplained taking of photos of them were reported too and seems to be common among many parishes in the Church's northern region. Some of the reported "visitations" of policemen were found to be part of police operations (purpose and conduct not coordinated, established and publicized) as some church members found update posts and photos posted on Facebook by different provincial police offices indicating them as part of Oplan Bathala.

It was also reported that Deacon Allan Khen Apus also experienced a series of harassment while serving both as a deacon of the church in Northern Mindanao and as an active member of the local chapter of the Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR).

He later learned that the harassments were targeted for his active participation in the International Solidarity Mission in Marawi and for providing aid to the Moro evacuees. (Read more at facebookpost by PCPR-Northern Mindanao)

This recent spate of THI incidents comes along the illegal arrest and detention of Bishop Carlo Morales based on fabricated criminal charges and the increasing number of faith-based activists falling victims to extrajudicial killings (at least 5 from July 2016 to December 2017). More generally, this pattern falls in line with the 'crackdown' on activists which was announced and instructed by no less than the President himself last year.

Although the pronouncements and moves were primarily directed to the members of armed revolutionary movement in the country, practically and historically, it has targeted human rights defenders and activists, peasants and indigenous peoples and their supporters from the clergy and other people of faith were never exempted from persecution and repression. These have resulted to brutal and massive arrests, murders, disappearance and tortures and forced evacuation of communities upon communities.

From July 2016 to December 2017, human rights alliance Karapatan has documented Karapatan, 126 political EJKs, 4 cases of enforced disappearance, 87 cases of torture, 56,456 cases of threat, harassment and intimidation (THI), 362,355 affected of indiscriminate firing and aerial bombing and 426,590 forcedly evacuated from their communities.

Participants resolved to take more proactive steps to address these ongoing and potential human rights violations. They have become more determined in countering these attacks not only among the clergy but moreso on the people in their parish communities struggling for land and basic rights. On the other hand, RPRD will continue to document and aid its other partner organizations in confronting this emerging trend of repression among faith-based human rights defenders and activists.

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