



MESSAGE OF SYMPATHY

We have been informed that six policemen were killed in an encounter with members of the New People's Army. More were wounded, some needing surgery. We, your bishops, are deeply saddened and we extend to the bereaved families of our departed brothers -- all of who were Police Officers 1, hence new recruits into the police force -- as well as to the anxious members of the families of the wounded our assurances of prayer and solidarity in this dark hour.

The Sufferings of the Innocent

It is part of the information furnished us that the attacks were preceded by acts of destruction by which the New People's Army burned heavy equipment owned by a contractor engaged by the National Irrigation Administration. Obviously, apart from the moral evil of willfully destroying property is the injury visited on farmers who would otherwise benefit from the irrigation projects.

Our fallen policemen gave their lives in defense of our democratic way of life. We reprove strongly the posturing of a group that holds itself out as the defender of people's rights but has no compunctions about what are essentially acts of pillage, brigandage, extortion and murder.

Peace Based on Justice

If negotiations and attempts at settlement are to prosper they must rest on the commitment on the side of the Government of the Philippines as well as the NDF-CPP-NPA to respect fundamental human rights and the clearly expressed option of our people to enjoy constitutional freedoms, including the freedom of religion.

Prayer

May eternal light shine on our departed brothers, and may their families find consolation in the promise of the Resurrection, and also in the thought that their kin died for a noble cause.

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, February 17, 2016

+ SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
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