News



Fr. Edwin Gariguez, secretary-general of the National Secretariat for Social Action Caritas Philippines, is pictured in Washington Oct. 7, 2010. (CNS/Bob Roller)

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Fr. Edwin Gariguez, secretary-general of the National Secretariat for Social Action Caritas Philippines, is pictured in Washington Oct. 7, 2010. (CNS/Bob Roller)

In a letter addressed to the Canadian bishops and the leaders of their Caritas affiliate, Development and Peace, prominent leaders of the Catholic Church in the Philippines and civil organizations criticized a moratorium on at least four Philippine

associations suspected of "violating the social teachings of the church."

The seven-page letter deplores that the investigation, conducted by an "opaque" committee that included staff of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and Development and Peace, was surrounded by secrecy. The four Philippine partners affected by the moratorium have never been told why Development and Peace is denying them financial support from its Lenten campaign.

Philippine groups also have "no way to know the charges against them," said the signatories, upset that "the truth of the charges is determined by an opaque ad hoc committee."

"We regard this as deeply unfair and inconsistent with the partnership principles and practices to which D&P proudly declares itself adherent," said the letter, obtained by the French Canadian Catholic news agency Presence. Development and Peace's temporary moratorium, the letter added, is already affecting "peacebuilding, agrarian reform, urban shelter and community development work in the Philippines."

"For a distant and anonymous committee with no knowledge of our circumstances, our lived experiences, or the challenges facing us, to make summary and unilateral judgments of us at a time of growing authoritarianism is deeply dangerous," said the letter, noting that the Catholic Church has recently been threatened by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

The April 3 letter was sent by email to Bishop Lionel Gendron, Canadian bishops' conference president, and Evelyne Beaudoin, president of the national council for Development and Peace. All members of the national council also received it, as well as all Canadian bishops. The letter was sent a few days ahead of April 7, when Canadian parishes were actively promoting the Share Lent Campaign.

Among the signatories to the Philippine letter were Fr. Edwin Gariguez, secretary-general of Caritas Philippines, and Redemptorist Fr. Leo Armada, chairman of the board of Francesco Inc., a consortium that recently inaugurated the Village of Pope Francis, where 1,300 survivors of 2013 Haiyan typhoon now live.

Caritas Philippines and Development and Peace are members of the international Caritas network of Catholic charitable agencies.

On April 8, Development and Peace said it would not comment until the partner review process is completed. The organization has not yet communicated a clear deadline for this process.

The Canadian bishops' conference did not respond to a request for comments.

In 2018, fragmentary information about Development and Peace partners prompted some Canadian bishops to retain donations raised during the Share Lent campaign. These allegations against 52 of approximately 180 partners were compiled in an unreleased document called "2018 CCCB Research Findings on D&P Partners."

Development and Peace staff responded to these allegations last fall in a 290-page document rejecting the vast majority of the allegations, except for five partners that needed a more in-depth review. The allegations seem to have come from internet queries focusing on expressions such as "feminism" or "abortion."

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Development and Peace also said that what was supposed to be a joint review was done by the bishops' conference staff, and that the charitable agency felt cornered.

Most of the 52 partners are in Latin America (25) and Asia (15). Only when Development and Peace committed not to send donations to the 52 partners targeted by the allegations of the joint bishops' conference/Development and Peace ad hoc committee was it able to recover withheld funds before the end of the year, thus recovering around $2 million (US$1.5 million). At the beginning of April 2019, the organization discreetly announced that the moratorium would be maintained for the funds raised during the 2019 Share Lent campaign.

In March, the Jesuits in Canada expressed their annoyance at Development and Peace's decision to suspend funding for two Jesuit-supported organizations in Honduras. In January, some 20 Canadian religious communities had already reported their surprise at a stalemate that penalizes "poor people" around the world.

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Gloutnay is a reporter for Presence info, based in Montreal.