News



Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte delivers his State of the Nation Address at the Philippine Congress in Manila July 22, 2019. The Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines appealed to Catholics to "resist the shadow of fear cast over the nation" following government allegations that several church leaders conspired to oust Duterte.(CNS photo/Eloisa Lopez, Reuters)

by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Manila, Philippines — August 7, 2019

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte delivers his State of the Nation Address at the Philippine Congress in Manila July 22, 2019. The Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines appealed to Catholics to "resist the shadow of fear cast over the nation" following government allegations that several church leaders conspired to oust Duterte.(CNS photo/Eloisa Lopez, Reuters)

The Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines appealed to Catholics to "resist the shadow of fear cast over the nation" following government allegations that several church leaders conspired to oust President Rodrigo Duterte.

It called on people to resist the government’s "lies, violence and betrayal," at a gathering attended by hundreds of priests, women religious and lay people in Manila Aug. 6, ucanews.com reported.

"This is a time for all Christians to display vigilance and resist injustice," said Fr. Angel Cortez, the association's executive secretary.

"We are calling on everyone to stand together and hold the government accountable for acts of wickedness, the violence and for selling out our sovereignty," he added.

The association is a joint forum of heads of religious congregations, which run most of the country's top universities and institutions.

Cortez said the "use of false information and the filing of trumped-up charges" against Catholic bishops, priests, and a religious brother "is a desperate move to hinder the Church from conducting its mission for the poor."

Philippine authorities have filed sedition, cyber libel, libel and obstruction of justice charges against 36 people including the country's vice president and members of the opposition.

Church leaders charged are Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan, Bishop Honesto Ongtioco of Cubao, Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan, retired Bishop Teodoro Bacani Jr. of Novaliches, Divine Word Fr. Flaviano Villanueva, Jesuit Fr. Albert Alejo, Fr. Robert Reyes and Lasallian Br. Armin Luistro.

The clergymen charged have publicly criticized the government's anti-narcotics campaign that has led to thousands of deaths.

The charges stem from the release of a video that went viral on several social media platforms early this year that linked Duterte and his family to the illegal drug trade.

Advertisement

The association of religious leaders said charging the religious leaders is "an attempt to intimidate" them and "to stop us from doing what we do best, voice the truth."

In his homily during the gathering’s Mass, Vincentian Fr. Daniel Franklin Pilario appealed to Catholics not to be afraid. "Silence in the face of evil is evil in itself," he said.

Alejo said it is time for church people to "resist the temptation of disconnecting doing good from seeking the truth."

"It is not enough that we take care of those who are dead. We have to investigate who led the act of killings," he said.

"It is not enough that we rehabilitate the drug addicts. We need to probe who is the mastermind behind these drug syndicates," Alejo added.

Villanueva said church people "will continue to speak up" and "resist everything that stands in the way (of truth) ... because it is how we follow Christ."

Faith-based groups also expressed their support for the accused church leaders, ucanews.com reported.

"The president cannot just intimidate the church and hinder it from telling the stories of the victims (of killings)," said Nardy Sabino, secretary-general of the Promotion of Church People’s Response.

Sr. Elenia Belardo of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines called on the government to "stop persecuting church people who work for justice and peace."

Isaiah Ministry, an ecumenical church group, condemned the sedition charges filed against the church leaders, saying they are "based on questionable and unreliable statements."

"That the basis of these charges are lies, makes it only obvious that the current administration is paving its way towards total dictatorship," the group said in a statement.

A preliminary hearing in court for the religious leaders is set for Aug. 9.