

Philippine bishops can keep money, cars

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MANILA, Philippines -- Senators have exonerated seven Catholic bishops who accepted donations of money and vehicles from the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office during the administration of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

The senators said there was nothing irregular in the bishops' actions, because the vehicles were used to help people, not promote religion, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News.

However, the bishops had already admitted that the issue had brought shame on the church, and they returned the vehicles, despite the Senate's decision.

In a statement read by Archbishop Orlando Quevedo of Cotabato during the hearing, the bishops said the vehicles were used for social programs in their respective dioceses but they would return them. Three prelates from Luzon brought their vehicles to the Senate and returned them to Charity Sweepstakes officials.

Archbishop Quevedo said vehicles in Mindanao, including the one for his archdiocese, are ready for immediate return to a duly authorized sweepstakes representative.

Six of the seven bishops involved in the controversy faced the Senate committee.

Besides Archbishop Quevedo, the bishops included Archbishop Romulo Valles of Zamboanga; Bishops Rodolfo Beltran of Bontoc-Lagawe, Leopoldo Jaucian of Bangued, Juan de Dios Pueblos of Butuan and Martin Jumoad of Isabela.

Archbishop Ernesto Salgado of Nueva Segovia, who was out of the country, was represented by Auxiliary Bishop David Antonio.

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