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University community to heighten security after bomb scare

by N.J. Viehland

NCR Today

Quezon City, Philippines — The bomb threat that caused officials of the Jesuit Ateneo de Manila University to order the evacuation of people from the campus around noon today was a "hoax," according to the school's newspaper.

"QCPD (Quezon City Policed Department) Chief Supt. Richard Albano says that the bomb threat was a hoax," The *Guidon*, ADMU's official school publication, announced on Twitter Wednesday afternoon.

Nonetheless, Ateneo President Fr. Jose Villarín announced in a press conference this afternoon that there would be tighter security after today's evacuation. Villarín said the university's security force will be increased and their training to handle these kinds of situations beefed up. All vehicles entering the campus will also be checked.

He declared the campus "safe" and asked the university community to "be more careful."

Villarín had called off classes and office work in the order's university in Loyola Heights, Quezon City, at noon today after receiving a report of a bomb threat.

"We advise all units on the Loyola Heights campus to execute evacuation procedures similar to fire drills," Villarín wrote in his initial memo posted on the university website asking everyone on campus to go home.

He said, "We are currently verifying a bomb threat that we received this morning." Philippine National Police (PNP) units "are now sweeping the campus," the school head said.

Former Dean of Ateneo Graduate School Fr. James O'Donnell told *NCR* three university employees received messages individually saying there was a bomb planted on the Ateneo campus.

O'Donnell said the three employees reported the text messages to their supervisor, who decided to close down their office and send the staff home. When someone from that office notified the Ateneo administration about the messages, the administration decided they did not want to take any chances and ordered all divisions of Ateneo to close.

The *Guidon* school paper tweeted later in the afternoon that the text message in Tagalog said: "There are bombs that will explode at Ateneo to make sure many students and employees will die. Thirty minutes from now."

"I was standing in the sacristy of our chapel on campus and we had just finished saying the Angelus when a very loud siren began to sound," O'Donnell narrated. "We had no idea why it was turned on until one of our campus ministers ran in and told us that there was a bomb threat and that everyone was being ordered out of the campus," the priest added.

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Traffic then clogged up the campus roads.

In an update posted around 5 p.m., Villarin explained that the administration had reported the bomb threat to the authorities, and the Quezon City and National Capital Region Police and the National Bureau of Investigation responded.

He announced that PNP bomb squads had cleared the campus to reopen at 5 p.m. today for people who wanted to retrieve their belongings. Offices are scheduled to reopen and classes to resume tomorrow.

Ateneo de Manila started in 1859 as Escuela Municipal, a small private school for children of Spanish residents. It has since moved its main campus to the Quezon City site and grown its enrollment to more than 11,000. It became a university in 1959.

Aside from a host of Jesuit ministries, offices and various NGO offices, the campus also includes the East Asian Pastoral Institute, Loyola School of Theology and seminary for Jesuits, and the San Jose Jesuit seminary for diocesan priests. An art gallery and the Manila Observatory operate on campus.

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