

## Church 'faces religious persecution' in the Philippines and in the world

Philippine Church 'faces religious persecution' Bishops' conference chief accuses social media trolls of mounting church attacks over stance on morals, rights Philippine Church 'faces religious persecution'



---

Religious persecution is being experienced in the Philippines despite it being a predominantly Christian country, according to the head of the bishops' conference.

"Persecution is not limited to violence," conference president Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan said Nov. 14.

"Bashing in social media where truth is made to appear as a lie and a lie appears to be true is another form of persecution," he said.

Archbishop Villegas said the Philippine Catholic Church is being attacked in social media for being a moral compass of society.

"Whenever we talk to call for respect of human life and dignity, we are tagged as an enemy and become targets of trolls," said the prelate.

A "troll" is internet slang for somebody who sows discord by posting inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community.

Archbishop Villegas, however, said church leaders and Catholics "should not stop speaking the truth and what is moral."

He said the provision in the Philippine constitution about the separation of church and state does not mean that the church should be silent.

Several Philippine Church leaders have recently voiced concern against killings in the country resulting from the government's "all-out war" against illegal drugs.

The anti-narcotics campaign has already resulted in the death of almost 5,000 suspected drug users and peddlers, according to rights groups.

Archbishop Villegas said even people within the church "try to silence the institution" in its promotion of social justice and human rights.

"The persecution is not limited to the government but people who are there trying to keep the church quiet," he said.

The prelate said the absence of "care and sympathy" for others contribute to the persecution. He said a lot of people do not care as long as they are not affected.

"We don't stand in solidarity. It is also because we are ignorant," said Archbishop Villegas.

He was speaking during the launch in the Philippines on Nov. 14 of Aid to the Church in Need, a pontifical foundation of the Catholic Church that supports victims of persecution.

Founded in 1947 as a Catholic aid organization for war refugees, the institution was recognized by the Holy See in 2011 as a papal foundation.

The foundation announced that the Philippines has become one its "partner-countries" to help Christians around the world "who are persecuted by violence and oppressed by terror."

Baron Johannes Frieher Heereman, international executive president of the foundation, said many people don't know that the church itself, especially those in poor countries, "often requires urgent help."

Heereman said the foundation is committed to religious freedom and reconciliation across all faiths, adding that, "religious freedom is under threat or entirely in retreat."

According to a report released by the organization, religious freedom has "deteriorated or was drastically hampered in 82 countries" between 2012 and 2014.

The report also showed that Christians are currently the "most persecuted minority" in the world.

Mark Saludes,- UCA News Manila