

## **Uphold Life! Reclaim Peace! A Statement on the Recent Ambush in Basilan, Philippines**



As if the series of ambushes that had claimed and damaged lives in Basilan for the past several months were not enough, another dreadful ambush incident occurred on 7 September 2012. The recent incident, which killed one and wounded 35 rubber plantation workers, brings to four the ambush incidents in Basilan in just 10 months – October 23, 2011, April 15, 2012, and July 11, 2012.

The images of these innocent civilians being fired at on broad daylight give us a chilling sense that life in this island can be snuffed out easily, anytime, and anywhere by those who want to continue sowing terror and fear among the people.

We condemn in no uncertain terms the senseless killing of the victims of these ambushes. We believe that no political ideologies or religious beliefs anywhere in the world can ever justify the mindless killing of people, especially the ordinary ones, the civilians who are non-combatants. We appeal to the authorities of the Province to act swiftly based on well-discerned decisions on these cases that have reduced the people to a state of constant fear and paralysis. We demand nothing but justice for the victims, accountability for their crimes on the side of the perpetrators, and restorative justice and healing in the community. We challenge the different government units to exhaust all their resources so that an incident like this, and other acts of brutality and lawlessness, will never happen again in Basilan and elsewhere. We enjoin civil society to support the people of Basilan in the struggle to bring about genuine and long lasting peace.

We appeal to all citizens of the island for calmness and sobriety. No matter how difficult it is, let us continue to trust in the justice system of the land. As people of God, we continue to pray for peace, justice, and reconciliation in Basilan and in the whole of Mindanao especially as we celebrate the International Month of Peace this September. Let us heed the wise words of Pope Benedict XVI that

“[people who pray are not wasting their time even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone.]”

We grieve with those who lost their loved ones. We grieve with those whose lives had been scarred both by the physical wounds and invisible wounds resulting from these acts of violence. We cannot fully grasp the depth of their pain and suffering and perhaps even anger and despair. We continue commending to the Lord the souls of all those who died, as well as the healing of those who have been wounded. To the bereaved families, we pray that God console them in their deepest sorrow.

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