

## **Philippine Lasallian Family Statement on the Maguindanao Massacre**

Brutal, barbaric, and heinous. These were words used to describe the Maguindanao massacre that has claimed the lives of more than 50 people—the majority of them being political supporters, lawyers and media practitioners in the company of scions of a political clan.

Eyewitness reports from survivors have pointed to the perpetrators responsible for this gruesome mass execution, and while verification of these accounts has yet to be done, there is little doubt that at the core of this barbarism is a politics bereft of principle, a politics that has lost touch with the very foundations of human decency. What happened in Maguindanao was an animal act. The savage atrocities wreaked upon the victims and horrifyingly evident on their mutilated corpses beggars the imagination. This incident is a warning about the depths to which human beings can descend when they allow the lust for power, possessions and prestige to take over their lives.

“God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows, so shall he reap”(Gal 6:7). Let us not fool ourselves. The Maguindanao Massacre is not a mere election-related feud. It is a symptom of the moral bankruptcy, lack of accountability, and wanton disregard for human rights that has characterized the culture of the Arroyo administration since consolidating its power in the contested elections of 2004. Such trends, well-documented by various local and international human rights agencies and by no less than the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Commission in 2007, have been tolerated for too long.

The Arroyo administration took a double tack, on the one hand, expressing indignation at “a most heinous crime” that constitutes a “supreme act of inhumanity that is a blight on our nation,” while on the other hand, dragging its heels in pursuing the capture and detention of a political ally whose fortunes flourished under this administration’s patronage. We note that the administration’s invocation of the rule of law and call for the respect of due process, while appropriate in normal circumstances, sounds mightily suspect coming from an administration that is beholden to the political clan said to be behind this atrocity, an administration that has failed to successfully prosecute any of its allies and supporters for corruption, human rights violations, and other high crimes. Actions speak louder than words.. Why treat with kid gloves those who use their influence to silence their political opponents and disenfranchise citizens in elections? Why weren't the alleged murderers at least immediately called in for questioning, if only to answer the charges of survivors or clarify the presence of the local government’s backhoe in the area of the mass grave?

An additional source of discomfort is the clear dereliction of duty of the police and military in the province and region who were informed earlier about the prospect of a violent incident and decided to steer clear of deploying forces to prevent the lawless armed thugs of the political warlord from carrying out their

sinister plan. While the military was quickly mobilized to avoid any possible retaliation of the aggrieved clan, the leadership of the Armed Forces at present (with a Defense Secretary that headed an Inter-agency Legal Action Group that prioritized cases of extra-judicial killings perpetrated by “enemies of the state,”) leaves much doubt as to its capacity to effectively defang armed political warlords.

We condemn the Maguindanao Massacre not only because of the brutal and barbaric murder of those who sought only to exercise their political rights, but more importantly because it unravels in a most telling way, the age-old problem of a feeble state that has allowed private armed groups to lord it over territories in exchange for propping up the national leadership and its cohorts at the local and national levels. Whatever blight we now face does not fall simply on the hands of the alleged perpetrators of the Maguindanao Massacre. **The blood that flowed in Maguindanao stains the hands of the President who ultimately commands the forces of political control and coercion in this country. We demand that justice be done with all transparency and in the quickest possible time.**

**We call on Lasallians and all Filipinos to express our indignation at the moral bankruptcy that has led to this paroxysm of violence. If we are not to be complicit in this abomination against humanity, we must act now and demand that this administration be held accountable for the quality of its stewardship and for its continuing debasement of the political system.**

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Brother Visitor**

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