



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES National Office

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A STATEMENT OF THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES (ECP) ON THE ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE OF JAMES BALAO

As we approach the feast of St. Andrew the apostle, we recall his martyrdom on an X-shaped cross, a type of cross used at his own request because he did not see himself worthy of being crucified on the same type of cross on which Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. Like St. Andrew, many of the apostles and other disciples of Jesus were martyred, albeit in different ways. But in whichever way it happened, martyrdom has always been a cruel and inhuman way to die.

Unfortunately, in this day and age, there continues to be those men and women who have been martyred in different ways and for different causes. In whichever these may have happened, martyrdom for the exercise of one's freedom to espouse a cause is anathema to Christian teaching as well as to civil society as a whole.

And martyrdom has been the result of many enforced disappearances in our beloved country. May our Creator God who desires for us only that which speaks of Love, Justice, Truth and Peace, be our help at this time of search for JAMES M. BALAO who has been missing since 17 September. James, 46, is from a family who are members of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines. He finished his elementary studies at the Easter School (*now Easter Colleges*) in Baguio City.

James Balao is a founding member of the Cordillera Peoples' Alliance (CPA). Before his disappearance, he had informed others that he was under surveillance by military agents. His active participation in the struggle for the rights of indigenous peoples, through the Cordillera Peoples' Alliance which he helped found, makes him a target of the phenomenon called "enforced disappearances". The United Nations General Assembly December 1992 Resolution on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance defines this phenomenon as happening when persons are illegally "arrested, detained or abducted" (without a court warrant and/or against their will) by Government elements or private groups acting on behalf of Government. Such persons are further held in an undisclosed manner and without benefit of their rights to defend themselves against whatever charges there may be against them.

In September of 2006, the Episcopal Church in the Philippines made clear its stand on the issue of "unabated political killings". We remain steadfast in our "twin ministries of prophetic witness and loving service" as "affirmations of the biblical injunction to live out the difficult task of loving our neighbor as ourselves in a context where there is so much suffering, civil strife and sad divisions even within the Body of Christ... Concretely, the Church has seen fit to include the search for peace as a basic requirement for those who are baptized in Christ's name. Those who desire to be grafted in the Body of Christ must strive for justice and peace among all peoples, and respect the dignity of every human being". (from *A Statement of the Council of Bishops of the ECP on the Unabated Political Killings in the Philippines*, 26 September 2006)

The Episcopal Church in the Philippines believes in the dignity of the human person. (Man was created in the image of God. Gen.1:26) However, the quest for human dignity continues to be stultified by unjust structures that other human beings create in their desire to impose or to reign over the rest of society. The Church's proclamation of the Gospel actively involves the restoration of that "image of God" that was Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9) in each person. It is for this reason that we seek the return of James Balao to his community, to his parents and to his cause.

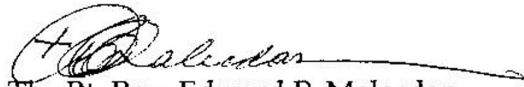
The Council of Bishops of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines opens its doors to James M. Balao and to those who have taken him forcibly from his people, his family and friends. Bring him to us and we will keep him in our custody so that the proper

charges, if any, may be filed against him in the proper courts and we shall ensure that he shall have his day in court. "Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people both now and forevermore." (Psalm 125:1-2)

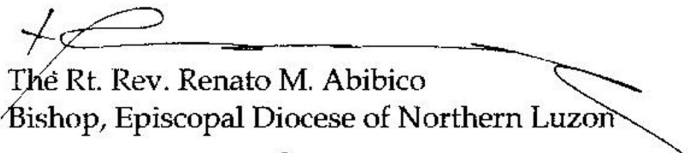
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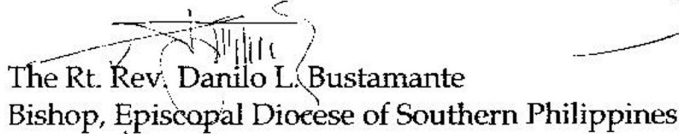
The Most Rev. Ignacio C. Soliba
Prime Bishop



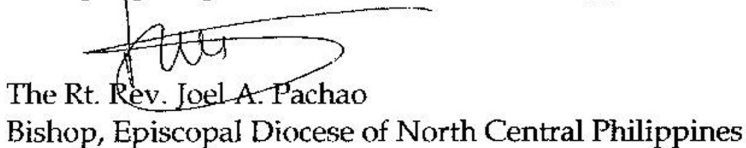
The Rt. Rev. Edward P. Malecchan
Prime Bishop elect and Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Northern Philippines



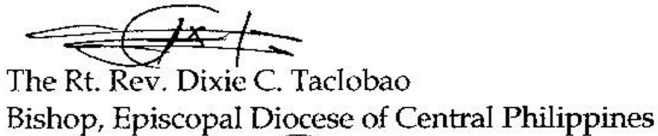
The Rt. Rev. Renato M. Abibico
Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Northern Luzon



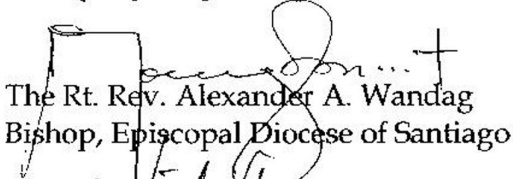
The Rt. Rev. Danilo L. Bustamante
Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Southern Philippines



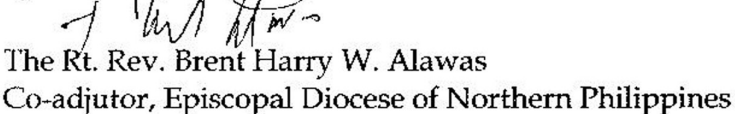
The Rt. Rev. Joel A. Pachao
Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of North Central Philippines



The Rt. Rev. Dixie C. Taclobao
Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Central Philippines



The Rt. Rev. Alexander A. Wandag
Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Santiago



The Rt. Rev. Brent Harry W. Alawas
Co-adjutor, Episcopal Diocese of Northern Philippines