

5 October 2016

Dear Global Mennonite family

“Please pray for the Philippines, as the country is experiencing several changes after a new leader was elected last May. The new president’s war on drugs has now killed around 3,000 individuals who are suspected to be drug pushers and users. Inquiries into his human rights violations produce offensive remarks from the president himself. Churches nationwide have opposing views, with some avid supporters of the president, while others call him out on the human rights violations and the culture of fear it creates among the citizens. We have come to a point where publicly expressing opposition to the government’s human rights violations can be a dangerous move. Please pray that the Body of Christ in the Philippines will be united in its voice to pursue justice, peace and human rights. Pray that we will overcome these difficult times.”

In May of 2016, the Philippines elected a new set of leaders. For the first time in history, the country elected a president from the southern island of Mindanao. President Rodrigo Duterte has been a mayor of Davao City for around two decades. He is a lawyer and served as a prosecutor in Davao City before becoming mayor. Even during his campaign, he was vocal about his war against drugs and his willingness to eliminate all drug dealers and pushers in the country. Since he assumed office in June, there are currently around 3,000 documented cases of unexplained killings nationwide.

About 16 million people voted for him, which is around 38 percent of the voting population. All these supporters have been supporting him and defending him against any opposition. He has emerged as a very different leader from the country’s normally elite leadership. He challenged oligarchy and claimed support for the indigenous people, farmers and the poor. He has also resumed the 40-year peace negotiations with the communist rebel groups, which has been stalled for five years. He was the first president to recognize the historical injustices with the Muslims in Mindanao. He is standing up for the nation’s sovereignty and inspires millions of his supporters with his humorous (and often offensive) remarks against the international community.

In recent weeks, he has also gained international attention through the unwise words he used in addressing other international leaders. He is, as many call him, a man of contradiction. He shows so much love and passion for the country, yet he also has a very short temper and foul mouth (which some people love about him). Some churches around the country have called him out in his cursing and outright expression of killing criminals. Evangelical churches, however, are not united in their views. Some have shown strong support for him even during the campaign period. Some have called him out in his ungodly character and the example he is showing to the young people.

The Mennonite church in the Philippines does not have a solid stance. Some of the members are strongly supporting the president, seeing how he has positively changed so much in the country in a short period of time. They see how passionate he is in serving the country and all the good things he can still do in the next few years. Some of the members are critical of the extrajudicial killings happening under his watch, as well as his character which is not worthy of emulation. Some who publicly speak out against the human rights violations receive a lot of bashing and threats from his supporters. Sometimes even close friends and relatives have destroyed relationships due to differing political opinions.

Please continue to pray that the Integrated Mennonite Churches, Inc., as a body, will be united in our stand against human rights violations, to call out our leaders and the rest of the Filipino people to value human life, respect the dignity of individuals – even those of criminals – and to be creative in our approach to the challenges in this administration. Please pray that relationships will be preserved over the differences in political opinions. And please pray that we may all experience the redemption in Jesus Christ, experience him as our Lord and Saviour and the only One who can make things perfect.

With love,

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