

November 11, 2004

Press Statement

**JUSTICE FOR JOEL BACLAO
AND ALL VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION!**

We, in the Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR), are aghast and shocked when we were informed that our colleague and co-church-worker, Mr. Joel Baclao, a member of our National Council, was gunned down last night by two unidentified gunmen believed to be members of the military. Wilma, Joel's wife, relayed to us that at around 8:00 pm last night, (November 10, 2004) Joel went out of his house in Lacag, Daraga Albay, to check on what their dogs are barking at. After a few seconds, his wife saw a burst of fire and a loud shot and saw Joel lying down. She shouted, "tama na, tama na" to no avail because the gunmen armed with M-16 rifles continued to gun him down at close range. His face was shattered and was dead on the spot.

Mr. Joel Baclao, was a Filipino Christian committed to the ministry of justice and peace. Aside from being an active and committed member of PCPR, he was a member and lay-preacher of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), and a volunteer of Andurog Mayon, the relief and rehabilitation program in Bicol of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). He was a staunch advocate against large-scale mining and rampant militarization in Albay. His determination to contribute to the ministry of upholding human rights, justice and meaningful change may have earned him the ire of the powers that be.

His wife relayed to us that Joel received death threats during the few days before his untimely death. There were also reports stating that military men have been asking neighbors about Joel's whereabouts a couple of nights before he was gunned down.

We in PCPR, convey our deepest sympathies to the family, friends, and co-workers of Joel Baclao. While we grieve over this tragedy, we are angered with the fact that Joel was killed with impunity. Joel now belongs to the growing list of people who were murdered under the Arroyo regime for their principled stance against government policies that are detrimental to the people. This alarming news is an indication of a grim fact that church-workers are not exempted from human rights violations in this "strong republic".

We demand a swift and impartial investigation of Joel's death. Justice for Joel Baclao and all victims of human rights violations!

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