

THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY STATEMENT ON THE ANTI-TERRORISM BILL

June 8, 2020

*“At dawn the murderer gets up and goes out to kill the poor,
and at night he steals.” (Job 24:14)*

WE, the Vincentian Family in the Philippines, call upon our government to address the poverty and sufferings of our people, aggravated by a health crisis brought about by a dreaded COVID-19 virus. We need to take care of the poor because they are the most affected. They are already afraid and threatened, not only by the virus but also by hunger and pain. We should not threaten them more with the oppressive laws which place their lives and liberties in peril.

We strongly oppose the Anti-Terrorism Bill because it does not guarantee a solution to the problem but rather foresee the violations of rights especially of the poor and the defenseless.

For us and for our mission partners, the Anti-Terrorism Bill is reprehensible for several reasons:

Terrorism. What is “terrorism”? The Bill is not very clear on this. With such imprecise definition, it can be anything depending on the interpretation of the law enforcers – from plotting to assassinate the President to expression of discontent with his rule to organizing people against legitimate causes. Any political or ideological dissent is suspect.

Violation of Right to Privacy. With the advanced development in technology, any suspected individual can be placed under surveillance, can be wiretapped, and his or her personal communications intercepted against one’s personal right to privacy.

Punishment. The powers of the Anti-Terror Council seemingly usurp those of the legitimate courts. Upon its order, a suspect can be arrested without warrant; can be detained for 24 days; and his or her assets frozen. These are definitely against one’s right to due process and private property.

Impunity. We have not forgotten the dark years of Martial Law and the subsequent abuses of military and police against the people, especially against the poor, the indigenous peoples, and the human rights defenders who have been victims of such human rights violations. Draconian laws that know no rights, justice and accountability have been weaponized against them. With this regime’s impunity, it is the poor who will be at the losing end.

- We call on our lawmakers and political leaders to remember that they are first and foremost Filipino people who must protect, promote and uphold human rights in the land. We pray that they craft laws and policies that would ensure that the poor are better served. We do not need the Anti-Terrorism Bill if justice is experienced in our country;

- We call on our partners in mission and members of the Vincentian families to stand and adhere, to defend and protect the rights and welfare of the people, especially the poorest and the most vulnerable;
- We call on all our partner-organizations to open our communities to be asylums to those who are unjustly threatened by the law enforcers;
- We also ask our institutions and communities to take care of those whose rights are violated, the displaced and the hungry, the poor and the oppressed.

In his time, St. Vincent was also taking care of the thousands of poor and hungry refugees brought about by the protracted war in Lorraine (1635-1643) caused by the Prime Minister Richelieu's policies. Together with extensive fund-raising and the heroic work of the Confraternities, Missionaries and Daughters on the ground, Monsieur Vincent never wasted time. In order to defend the poor, he confronted the ruling powers which in his mind were the main cause of their suffering. He thought it helpful to visit the Prime Minister and pleaded in protest: "My Lord, give us peace. Have pity on us. Give peace to France."

The situation is not very different from today.

#JunkTheTerrorBill
#BawiinAngKalayaan

Signed:

Sr. Maria Ana Rosario G. Evidente, DC
 Visitatrix
 Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul
 Province of St. Louise de Marillac – Asia

Rev. Fr. Gregorio G. Banaga, Jr., CM
 Visitor
 Congregation of the Mission, Philippines

AND ALL MEMBERS OF THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY