



A Statement Against the Anti-Terror Bill

We, the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres in the Philippines, impelled by the love of Christ to educate the young and serve the poor and underprivileged in our hospital and pastoral ministries, are moved by that love to proclaim and promote a just and humane society, where people can enjoy free exercise of their rights and practice critical solidarity in socio-political affairs.

We believe that authentic democracy promotes critical solidarity between the people and the government. As citizens, we are convinced that active participation in nation-building not merely means being cooperative to government programs and policies but also includes giving constructive criticism as a form of check and balance to government powers.

While we condemn terrorism, we cannot be silent on the dangers of the Anti-Terror Bill approved by Congress. We reject the bill as anti-poor and the marginalized, anti-democracy, anti-human rights.

“Be alert and of sober mind!” (1 Pt. 5:8)

We believe that terrorism is an evil that must be subdued. But every act against it must be based on clear and precise understanding of terrorism for it to be just, humane, and effective in promoting a peaceful and harmonious community. The broad definition of terrorism in the Anti-Terror Bill can be misused and abused, thereby endangering legitimate pastoral works and associations on behalf of the poor and marginalized in society. In an era where red tagging is rampant, our fight for social justice and equity, human rights and freedom, any action or words that call the government to accountability and responsibility can be recklessly labelled as terrorist acts. Teaching the young how to protect and fight for their rights and freedoms and practice responsible and critical citizenship may be construed as promoting or tolerating terrorism, thereby stifling the integral education of the young, which we earnestly promote.

We firmly believe and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms as enshrined in our Constitution as keys to authentic human and social development. As foundations of democracy, they are to be zealously valued and safeguarded. We reject the Anti-Terror Bill because it threatens our valued rights and freedoms of expression, of speech, of the press, of association, and the right of the people to assemble peaceably and petition the government for redress of grievances, since anyone can be a suspect and be tagged by the government as terrorist. Student and pastoral actions critical of government's inaction and abuses can now be considered acts of terrorism.

We believe that the Anti-Terror Bill violates the Constitutional provisions of due process and separation of powers. The bill subscribes to the principle of guilty until proven innocent, warrantless arrest, arbitrary detention up to 24 days, as well as the establishment of an all-powerful Anti-Terror Council under the Office of the President with the power to determine what constitutes terrorism—a role exclusively reserved by the Constitution for the courts. We cannot allow the government to exercise Martial Law-like powers under the pretext of protecting the people against terrorism.

At a time where our people are suffering because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the approval of the Anti-Terror Bill is badly timed. It shows how the government is railroading the signing of the bill into law while people cannot gather *en masse* to express their disapproval. The pandemic has become an excuse for them to do what they want, hoping that they can pass public scrutiny. Instead of focusing their attention on alleviating the sad condition of the people, the economy, the frontliners, and the victims of the pandemic, the government is busy fortifying its powers. An Anti-Terror Law in the hands of abusive leaders is a disaster for the people they swore to protect and serve.

“Be alert and of sober mind!” (1 Pt. 5:8)

We call on the government to critically and responsibly review the Anti-Terror Bill and the President not to sign it into law until all issues and concerns have been considered and resolved. We remind government leaders that laws must be

reasonable, just, humane, and respectful of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We call on our legislators to listen attentively to their constituents, to whom they owe their position and power, to withdraw their signatures, and to be responsible leaders. You must uphold and protect the Constitution and the rights of the people.

We call on our Paulinian educators, pastoral and healthcare workers, to continue educating our people on the nature and implications of the Anti-Terror Bill and advocate for its rejection. Let us exercise our duty to protect and uphold the Constitution and safeguard and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms in our areas of service. Impelled by the love of Christ, “Be alert and of sober mind!” (1 Pt. 5:8) and let us work together in transforming our people into responsible and critical citizens.

We continue to hope that our government will listen to the people’s voice, as we continue to advocate our people’s rights and fundamental freedoms. We pray that the minds and hearts of our leaders be enlightened by the Holy Spirit and be inspired to desire only what is good for their people.