



## National Ecumenical Forum for Filipino Concerns - Inland Empire

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
JUNE 24, 2018  
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### A STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY FROM NEFFCON-IE

*“What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us” (Rm 8:35,37). Yes, indeed, “For the Spirit that is in you is more powerful than the spirit in those who belong in the world” (1 John 4:4)*

We, the members and friends of the National Ecumenical Forum for Filipino Concerns - Inland Empire (NEFFCON-IE), strongly condemn the brutal killings of the three priests in the Philippines: **Frs. Tito Paez, Mark Ventura, and Richmond Nilo.**

Fr. Tito Paez has been consistent since the time of martial law in standing with those who most need to feel the presence of the church, giving witness to the true meaning of his ordination as a priest. Living in a society where poverty, exploitation, demolitions and killings have become the norm, he was compelled by his Christian faith to stand by the victims and those struggling for justice. He was murdered while facilitating the temporary release of a political prisoner.

Fr. Mark Anthony Ventura, was a zealous pastor, young, vibrant and committed Catholic priest. He was known to be passionate in his ministry and dedicated advocate of the care for creation as he spoke against mining, the empowerment of indigenous peoples and love for the poor in the “peripheries”. Right after celebrating the Sunday Eucharist, he was shot to death by murderers riding in tandem.

Fr. Richmond Nilo, parish priest of St. Vincent Ferrer Parish in the Diocese of Cabanatuan was gunned down and died on the spot inside the barangay chapel of Mayamot, Zaragoza, Nueva Ecija, just as he was about to celebrate the Sunday Holy Mass. Fr. Richmond, in his nearly 17 years in the priesthood, undoubtedly loved, courageously preached and staunchly defended the Catholic faith.

No priest, and no human being for that matter, deserves to be killed with utter brutality, disrespect and impunity. Every priest, however imperfect, is God’s gift to His Church and we are duty-bound to respect them as “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20). To kill a priest then, for whatever motive or cause, is not only unchristian and inhuman, it is also anti-Filipino.

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We condemn these senseless killings which are increasing. We also denounce the growing number of church workers being harassed by the Duterte Regime. We demand that the GPH (Government of the Philippines) stop the killings and continued harassment of church workers (like Sr. Pat Fox, NDS) whose only “crime” is to advocate for the rights of peasants, indigenous peoples and the urban poor. We also call on the GPH to renew the Peace Talks with the NDFP (National Democratic Front of the Philippines). The Duterte Regime claims the climate is not conducive. It is exactly at that time when things seem the worst that the revival of peace talks is most needed. Only when the roots of the armed conflict are resolved will the people experience fullness of life.

We call for justice for Frs. Tito, Mark, and Richmond who were victims of an increasingly tyrannical society where human life is expendable. We will continue to be inspired by their living out of their Christian faith and join the people in their continuing struggle for a society where all can live in peace and security, enjoying a life where they no longer experience hunger, poverty, landlessness, and homelessness.

We call on all peoples of goodwill not to let their death be in vain. Let us not allow fear to reign and keep us silent. Let us put into practice not only our native inner strength but the strength that comes from our Christian faith. Our Lord Jesus promised us: “You will have affliction in this world, but take courage, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

### **WE WILL NEVER FORGET FRs. TITO, MARK, AND RICHMOND!**

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The National Ecumenical Forum for Filipino Concerns (NEFFCON) is an organization comprising of people of faith who believe in a dynamic presence and integration of Filipinos and Filipino-Americans in the US Church and society. This is demonstrated by a deep, and liberating solidarity relationship between the Filipinos, the Filipino-Americans and people of different cultures and the progressive organizations and people in the Philippines in their struggle for justice, peace, human rights, and integrity of creation. This vision is inspired by the Love of God and Service to the People, where faith is seen as a river of life that nurtures legitimate struggles and inter-human relationships.

*Ezek 28,15-18:*

*“You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. In the abundance of your trade, you were filled with violence, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and guardian cherub drove you out from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast on their eyes on you. By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries; so I brought forth fire from the midst of you; it consumed you”.*