

# **Filipino churches seek global Christian help over assassinations: Church workers and human rights activists in danger**

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Filipino churches seeking justice over the summary killings of church and human rights workers are looking to the international Christian community to pressure the government in Manila to put a halt to the assassinations.

The latest church delegation to visit this predominantly Catholic country of 88 million people was from the United Methodist Church, whose representatives from the United States, Europe, Africa and Russia urged President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to probe all summary killings and make efforts to put a stop to them.

United Methodist bishop Solito Toquero of Manila said the denomination's local church invited the delegation "to express deep concern over the worsening human rights situation in the country, especially the killing of activists and church workers."

Methodist bishop John Hopkins of Cleveland, who headed the delegation, said at a January 6 news conference: "We implore the government and military officials to recognize the important work of those who seek to minister with the poor and marginalized and to distinguish their work as vital and important to the country."

Hopkins said he and eight delegates had met and talked to more than 20 people, including local Methodists, who lost relatives in the killings. He said the people interviewed believed these were perpetrated by members of security forces. The U.S. bishop said the delegation also talked with military and police officials, who denied they had any connection to the killings.

"Because of the high level of fear and intimidation among victims, it is difficult to identify perpetrators, making it appear that they enjoy impunity for their actions,"

the delegation said in a statement.

The Bayan Muna (Nation First) political party reports that more than 100 activists and church workers, including 72 of its members, have been killed since Arroyo took office in 2001.

The National Council of Churches in the Philippines in July 2005 invited leaders from the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia to help look into summary killings of activists and church workers.

In October, the WCC and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches joined other Christian groups in writing to Arroyo to urge the Philippine government to immediately and impartially investigate the summary killings. *-Ecumenical News International*