



Murders Most Foul – More Church workers murdered in the Philippines

July 2010

On 14 June at around 4:30 pm Benjamin E. Bayles was waiting for a ride at the crossing Sitio Antolo, Brgy. Suay when two men wearing helmets on board a black Honda TMX 155 with no license plate stopped nearby. The back rider disembarked and walked towards Benjamin. About 3 meters away from him, the gunman shot him several times. When Benjamin fell down, the driver of the motorcycle also got off the motorcycle and shot him. His body had 25 bullet wounds and 21 bullets in it when an autopsy was conducted.

Then the perpetrators left the area on the motorcycle. Bystanders took Benjamin to the Valeriano Gatuslao District Hospital but he was pronounced dead-on-arrival.

Among the bystanders who witnessed the incident was a government employee who immediately called someone he knew from the Himamaylan City Philippine National Police (PNP) to report the incident. The Himamaylan City PNP alerted the nearby Kabankalan City PNP who set up a check point and apprehended Roger Bahon and Ronnie Caurino. Two .45 caliber pistols were confiscated from the suspects.

Mr Bayles was a 43 year old, single, parish worker of the Independent Church of the Philippines and a member of the September 21 Movement and the Negros Federation of Sugar Workers.

The Kabankalan police initially said the suspects confessed to be “organic” members of the 61st Infantry Battalion of the Philippines Army. The two were turned over to the Himamaylan PNP and are now detained at the Himamaylan City Jail.

The Himamaylan PNP later retracted the statement from the Kabankalan police, claiming the suspects are not connected with the military.

Benjamin had taken part in many human rights fact-finding missions. He had received a number of death threats before his murder.

The bishop of the Diocese of the Independent Church of the Philippines in which Benjamin Bayles was a member, The Right Rev Felomino Ang, wrote in response to the murder “In this moment of grief and rage, as your bishop, I am calling all the ordained and the faithful to be prayerful and vigilant that the death of Benjie Bayles will be given justice and the killers and their handlers will be convicted. We have already offered many lives in the altar of liberation, let this be our inspiration to immerse ourselves deeper to struggle for genuine freedom and peace based on justice. As One Body of Christ, let us intimately renew our commitment with the struggling masses. Break the culture of silence and let our cries be heard *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute”* (Proverbs 31:8)”.

On 15 June, Jovelito Agustin, a lay minister in the Philippine Independent Church, was murdered in Bacarra, Ilocos Norte. He was also a broadcaster who spoke out for the rights of workers. He was also the Diocesan President of the Laymen of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente in the Diocese of Laoag.

Jovelito was on his way home on-board his motorcycle after an evening broadcast when two motorcycle riding gunmen overtook him along the highway and shot him several times. He was rushed to hospital where he died.

He had received death threats before his murder.



What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters to (a letter to the Philippines will require a \$1.50 stamp):

His Excellency Benigno Aquino III
President of the Republic of the Philippines
Malacañang Palace
JP Laurel St., San Miguel
Manila NCR 1005
PHILIPPINES
Fax: (+632) 742-1641 / 929-3968
Text: (+ 63) 919 898 4622 / (+63) 917 839 8462
E-mail: corres@op.gov.ph / opnet@ops.gov.ph
Salutation : Your Excellency

Atty. Leila De Lima
Secretary, Department of Justice
DOJ Building
Padre Faura St., 1004 Manila
PHILIPPINES
Fax: (+632) 521-1614
Email: soj@doj.gov.ph
Salutation : Dear Secretary

His Excellency Ernesto H. De Leon
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
of the Philippines to the Commonwealth of Australia
Embassy of the Philippines
PO Box 3297
Manuka ACT 2603
E-mail: cbrpe@philembassy.org.au
Salutation: Your Excellency

Points to make in your letters:

- Express deep concern at the murder of Benjamin Bayles on 14 June by two gun men.
- Request an immediate, impartial and credible joint investigation by the Himamaylan and Kabankalan PNP into the murder of Benjamin E. Bayles.
- Ask for the immediate filing of criminal charges against Ronnie L. Caurino and Roger M. Bajon and anyone else found to have been involved in planning or carrying out the murder.
- Also express concern at the murder of Jovelito Agustin, a lay minister in the Philippine Independent Church, on 15 June.
- Ask what progress has been made in identifying his murderers and bringing them to justice.

Also write to:

The Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600
Salutation: Dear Minister

Ask that the Australian Government urge the Philippines authorities to thoroughly investigate the murders of Benjamin Bayles and Jovelito Agustin and bring those responsible to justice.