



**The United
Church of Canada**
**L'Église Unie
du Canada**

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Friday April 24, 2026

Dear Minister Anand,

On behalf of The United Church of Canada (UCC), I write to convey our serious concern regarding reports of Philippine military operations carried out by the 79th Infantry Battalion on Negros Island on April 19, 2026, which are reported to have resulted in the loss of 19 lives and the displacement of 653 residents from 168 households in peasant communities. These developments raise significant questions with respect to adherence to international human rights standards.

In this context, and in collaboration with the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP), we support calls for a prompt, independent, and impartial investigation to clarify the circumstances of the incident and to ensure accountability in accordance with international law.

We mourn the loss of 19 lives, including Roel Sobillo, a farmer; RJ Nichole Ledesma, a journalist and cultural worker; and Alyssa Alano, an education and research councillor at the University of the Philippines Diliman.

The Philippine Army's official claim that all casualties were members of a "Communist Terrorist Group" must be rigorously scrutinized. Many young people, like Alyssa, visit rural areas to learn from marginalized communities and engage in solidarity work—not as combatants. As stated by the University of the Philippines Diliman Student Council: *"Alyssa lived and studied among our farmer brothers and sisters in Negros to understand their true conditions in the face of land grabbing, exploitation, and militarization."* A credible investigation must be conducted, and justice must be served.

We are also compelled to question the Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA) between Canada and the Philippines. For many years, The United Church of Canada has spoken out to Canadians and the Canadian government about human rights violations in the Philippines, including enforced disappearances, red-tagging, extrajudicial killings, and targeted attacks on journalists, Indigenous peoples, church leaders, and human rights defenders. These latest killings regrettably highlight the risks of Canada's involvement with the Philippine military.

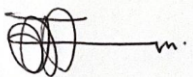
We therefore call on the Government of Canada to:

- **Support the call for an immediate, independent, and impartial investigation into the killings on April 19, 2026.**

- **Suspend the Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA) between Canada and the Philippines.** In light of this incident, actions that may violate international human rights standards are inconsistent with the values held by many Canadians.
- **Encourage the Government of the Philippines to prioritize human rights** and support the resumption of peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).
- **Conduct a comprehensive audit of Canada's financial, programmatic, and military support to the Philippines** to ensure that it does not contribute, directly or indirectly, to human rights abuses.

We believe that Canada's voice, exercised through thoughtful diplomatic engagement and public encouragement, can make a meaningful contribution to the pursuit of peace, human rights, and justice in the Philippines. At a time of profound global instability and conflict, we urge the Government of Canada to continue demonstrating principled and moral leadership by upholding international law and advancing the dignity of all people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'J' followed by 'Ndhlovu' and a small flourish.

The Rev. Dr. Japhet Ndhlovu Executive Minister, Church in Mission Unit,
The United Church of Canada
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