



JOINT STATEMENT
of the Archdiocese of Cebu, SVD Philippines Southern Province,
and University of San Carlos

We issue this Joint Statement to clarify the surrounding facts relative to the presence of policemen at the Talamban Campus of University of San Carlos this morning, February 15th, that to us is of serious concern.

To recall, the Societas Verbi Divini (SVD) Philippines Southern Province supported the Archdiocese of Cebu–Commission on Social Advocacies (COSA) project of a bakwit school program with Save Our Schools (SOS) Network.

For this, the SVD hosted last March 11, 2020 the delegation of forty-two (42) students accompanied by five teachers and three community elders (Datu), after four other educational institutions in Cebu hosted the same. The delegation was housed at the SVD-owned retreat house, accessible through USC–Talamban Campus. The delegation was supposed to complete their modular schooling on April 3, 2020 after which, they would have returned to their respective indigenous communities.

As we all know, though, the Cebu City government imposed quarantine restrictions beginning March 13, 2020 to stem the spread of coronavirus disease of 2019 (CoViD-19). After being locked down, the SVD Community has since sheltered the delegation at its retreat house, providing them with comfortable accommodation, and allowing them the use of its facilities for the lumad's recreation.

When the quarantine restrictions loosened, plans were made for their safe return to their homes. Because the return necessitated logistical preparations to be made and entailed costs such as those relating to the swab tests, fare and food allowance, the travel of the delegation was planned to be carried out in batches. At least four of the delegates have so far returned to their place, and another batch was scheduled to return this week.

It, thus, came as a surprise that reports about minors being “rescued” surfaced today. While COSA mentioned that some parents were coming over to fetch their children, it did not dawn on us that the parents' visit will necessitate the presence of policemen.

Here, no rescue need ever be conducted because the presence of the lumads in the retreat house was for their welfare and well-being, and all throughout, they were nurtured, cared for, and treated with their best interest in mind.

(original signed)

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