News

Cardinal Jose F. Advincula of Capiz, Philippines, pictured in a June 17, 2019, photo. The Social Action Center of the Capiz Archdiocese condemned the killing of nine indigenous group leaders during an attempted mass arrest shortly before the new year. (CNS photo/courtesy Archdiocese of Capiz)

by Catholic News Service

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Philippine Catholic leaders condemned the killing of nine Indigenous group leaders during an attempted mass arrest and denied claims that they opened fire on security forces.

The nine were shot dead Dec. 30 when government forces attempted to arrest 28 people from the Tumandok Indigenous group accused of being communist rebels in Capiz province in the Visayas region, reported ucanews.com. According to authorities, many of the suspects tried to resist arrest, and those killed were shot after opening fire on security forces. Another 17 people were arrested, the authorities said.

The Social Action Center of the Capiz Archdiocese condemned what it called an unnecessary use of force and demanded a full investigation.

"Show us genuine results founded on truth and justice," it said in a statement released Jan. 3.

Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos also issued a statement condemning the violence, ucanews.com reported.

"Do we have to kill our perceived enemies, especially the unarmed? Is this the way we celebrate Christmas as a Christian country and welcome the new year? Can we consider this a great accomplishment that nine tribal leaders were killed?" he asked.

The bishop said he was no stranger to "red tagging" and extrajudicial killings as many churchgoers in his diocese have been accused of being members of the New People's Army, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

"How long will this spiral of violence continue? Have we run out of peaceful means? Do we really, seriously believe this is an effective and lasting way to resolve our social ills?" he asked.

Alminaza also said the incident was an attack against Indigenous people, the very group that the law sought to protect.

"Indigenous people are supposed to be protected by the government. They are defenseless and many of them still need education. Instead of killing them ... arm them with an education so that they can grasp issues better," he said.

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