

A STATEMENT ON THE GUIMARAS OIL SPILL TRAGEDY AND THE ON-GOING THREATS TO INTEGRITY OF CREATION

“No peaceful society can afford to neglect either respect for life or the fact that there is integrity to creation.” [PEACE WITH GOD THE CREATOR, PEACE WITH ALL OF CREATION, John Paul II]

On August 11, 2006, the M/V Solar I, chartered by Petron, the Philippines' largest oil refiner, was carrying 2.4 million litres of oil to the southern island of Mindanao when it went down in unusually rough waters off Guimaras Island, several hundred kilometres south of the capital, Manila.

According to experts, 200,000 litres of oil have leaked from the tanker, contaminating a 24km² area and has affected already the coastal towns of Nueva Valencia and Jordan on Guimaras Island, as well as Villadolid, Pulpandan and Bago on Negros Island. Oil has contaminated more than 300 kilometers (200 miles) of coastline on Guimaras Island and is now threatening Negros, the country's fourth-largest island, as well as Panay. The oil has also destroyed 454 hectares (1,120 acres) of mangroves and 58 hectares of seaweed farms. The spill is heading up through the Guimaras Strait. (**Philippine Daily Inquirer (PDI), August 20-25, 2006**).

The Guimaras Strait is one of the most productive fishing grounds in the country, as well as a popular tourist destination. It is home to pristine white sand beaches, several marine sanctuaries and unspoiled coral reefs and mangrove forests.

The earth is cursed because of the sin of Adam. [Gen 3, 17]. The earth mourns and withers because the human person has violated the statutes. [Is 24, 1-7].

Mother Nature is grieving to the death of her “sons and daughters of creation”- marine life and bio-diversity. No amount of clean-up or prevention can console the death of marine life or even life (in general) just as we cannot accept the loss of any human kin. No amount of rehabilitation can awaken the original state of Guimaras' ocean biodiversity. It is not simply a loss to the people living in Guimaras but to the whole Filipino nation.

The Catholic Church clearly teaches:

“The most profound and serious indication of the moral implications underlying the ecological problem is the lack of respect for life evident in

many of the patterns of environmental pollution. **Often, the interests of production prevail over concern for the dignity of workers, while economic interests take priority over the good of individuals and even entire peoples.** In these cases, pollution or environmental destruction is the result of an unnatural and reductionist vision which at times leads to a genuine contempt for Humans.

On another level, delicate ecological balances are upset by the uncontrolled destruction of animal and plant life or by a reckless exploitation of natural resources. **It should be pointed out that all of this, even if carried out in the name of progress and well-being, is ultimately to Humankind's disadvantage.** [Excerpts taken from #7, **PEACE WITH GOD THE CREATOR, PEACE WITH ALL OF CREATION: MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE** on January 1990]

The actions of (a) few capitalist and profit-oriented Filipinos in society will be the burden- "*slow and painful death*" of many Filipinos who reside near the water resources for their living, aggravating their miseries with an already poverty-stricken condition.

Most of all, the oil spill has greatly compromised the very fragile state of Philippine ocean biodiversity all in the name of cost-cutting measures for greater profits. The present generation of youth and the next will be "starved" of nature's beauty and contribution to human existence.

There have been mistakes committed to Mother Nature, therefore, it is **just**, that Filipinos and Christians who believe in the sanctity of Life and the Integrity of Creation, to **demand** that:

1. Petron, among many other Oil companies in the country, **to pay for the destruction of Mother Earth immediately as fast as it can easily raise our fuel prices weekly** by:

- A *Formal and Public Apology* for the destruction of the Guimaras Bio-Diversity Zone.
- Creating an alternative livelihood project to all the economically displaced fisher folks of the affected areas in Guimaras.
- Creating a Marine Bio-Diversity Long-Term Rehabilitation Plan which will include paying of damages to affected residential and commercial establishments within the area.

2. Petron and Sunshine Maritime Development Corporation continue cleaning of the oil spill even beyond the time of the retrieval of the sunken tanker. **Rehabilitation cannot be a short term process when the oil spill has spelled a long-term destruction.**

3. The Department of Natural Resources **focuses on the rehabilitation of the Guimaras Ocean Bio-Diversity Zone** and not “sways easily” with its obligation by “suddenly” promoting the planting of trees on the National Highways. The idea of planting of trees at our National Highways is good but there are urgent matters that the government agency should be focused beyond the eyeing of any Guinness Book of Record “feat”. The planting of trees maybe “greening our highways” **but the continuous balding of our mountains brought about by legal logging and mining is another face of how our government approaches Philippine environment.**

4. The Department of Natural Resources seriously considers that any *Spill* (Oil, chemicals, etc) is a form of pollution to the Sea Bio-Diversity. **The Oil spill in Guimaras thus, is no different to a possible chemical spill brought about by the Mining Industry.** While there are conflicting opinions on the presence of mine tailings in the seas near the Lafayette mining operations, it is very clear that we are undermining the integrity of the marine bio-diversity in the seas of Southern Bicol. **There have been many incidents in the (recent) past of oil spills and mine tailing spills, when will we ever learn?**

**For the Sanctity of Life!
For the Respect of the Integrity of Creation!**

Rest the Earth: No to further degradation of the environment!

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