

After Philippine massacre, some bishops say short-term martial law OK

COTABATO CITY, Philippines - Bishops in the southern Philippines said they would tolerate martial law for a short time, providing it is not abused, following the massacre of 57 people in Maguindanao province.

Archbishop Orlando Quevedo of Cotabato told the Asian church news agency UCA News that the complex situation in the province called for extraordinary measures. He expressed hope that military rule would be short and would facilitate justice for victims.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declared martial law Dec. 4 and allowed government troops to arrest people without court warrants in some areas of Maguindanao. She said it was necessary because "lawless elements" had "taken up arms and committed public uprising" against the government and the president.

In a Dec. 6 statement, "Martial Law in Maguindanao: A Pastoral Perspective," Archbishop Quevedo said human rights must be respected under martial law.

"We know that even the suspects in the massacre have human rights," he said. "Therefore, even as justice for the victims is to be pursued, it should not be by doing injustice to the accused."

He told UCA News that the longer martial law remains, "the more chance human rights violations will occur."

The archdiocese lies geographically within Maguindanao, and Archbishop Quevedo said the local tradition of clans taking revenge when attacked has created "complex situations." Police and armed forces officials have indicated the massacre was clan-related.

Archbishop Fernando Capalla of Davao, east of Maguindanao, told UCA News that it

was “the right time” to declare martial law. However, “it need not last long,” he added, saying people in Manila do not understand the situation in the province.

The archbishop said he believes the “government had to show it was serious, and martial law is more than serious.”