

ARREST OF A MISSIONARY NUN IS AN ATTACK ON THE CHURCH OF THE POOR

The *Damdaming Katoliko Sa Teolohiya* (DaKaTeo), also known as the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines, condemns the arrest, detention of and deportation order against Sr. Patricia Fox.

The religious nun was nabbed by six immigration officers on April 16, 2018 at her residence in Quezon City over accusations of being an “undesirable alien” because of her alleged involvement in what the government claimed as “illegal political activities.” She was detained for almost 24 hours at the Bureau of Immigration building in Intramuros, Manila before she was released at around 3:15 in the afternoon of April 17.

The arrest was made pursuant to a mission order issued by immigration commissioner Jaime Morente. President Rodrigo Duterte admitted that he ordered the arrest following an intelligence report submitted by the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency in Region XI. For this Australian nun’s engagement “in partisan political activities,” the Bureau of Immigration has ordered her to leave the country in thirty days since those “activities that are not allowed under the terms and conditions of her visa.”

Sr. Pat, a 71-year old regional superior of the international Catholic congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, follows in the footsteps of many foreign missionaries who have chosen to serve our people and who have shown what it means to be truly in solidarity with and to opt for God’s suffering people. She has been living in the Philippines for the past 27 years. She headed the formation program of her religious congregation in the country in 1990. Sr. Pat, who is also a lawyer, has been involved in helping peasant and tribal communities in their fight for their right to life and right to land.

Her duty as a religious missionary brought her to places where there is great oppression and lack of recognition of basic human rights. She has tirelessly and selflessly dedicated her missionary life to accompanying the poor and spreading the Gospel of liberation.

To accuse her of engaging in “illegal political activities” is to misunderstand the demands that the Gospel of Jesus Christ compels her and other missionaries to enflesh. To promote and defend the rights of the poor is an act of evangelization that is at the heart of the call for God’s Kingdom. To work for justice is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel (1971 Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World*, 6). To ignore the cries of the victims of human rights is to forget that their blood cries out to God from the ground (cf. Gen 4:10). To respond to the needs of the least of our sisters and brothers is to be blessed by God and to inherit God’s Kingdom (Mt 25:31-46). Sr. Pat’s partisanship is that of the Gospel and its message of liberation and hope for those in bondage.

We believe the arrest and detention of Sr. Pat is part of a large-scale crackdown of the government against Church people and organizations that oppose anti-poor government policies and that criticize its dubious human rights record. The attack on Sr. Pat is clearly an attack on the Church of the Poor and an attempt to silence dissenting forces against the creeping authoritarianism and increasingly oppressive policies of the present administration.

We urge the government to step back, respect the democratic space, and, in the name of religious freedom, let Church people do their prophetic-missionary work for the upliftment and defense of the dignity of the poor. We urge the church's leaders, especially our bishops, to unite the faithful against brazen acts of persecution. We call on the faithful to defend our freedom to exercise our religious obligations and Christian duty to the Filipino masses. We turn to religious communities and call on them to go to the poorest communities in the country, preach the Good News, and follow Christ who for our sakes became poor so that his poverty might enrich us (cf. 2 Cor 8:9).