

## FR. STEVE BAUMBUSCH ,PIME

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N. Cotabato, PHILIPPINES

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*November 17, 2000*

*Dear Mom and Dad,*

*Checking in once again to let you know how things are going. Unfortunately, the news is not so good. Since I last wrote to you there have been some other incidents in the Columbio area. A family of six, very active in the GKK, was killed in the village of Lasak, and there have been clashes between the military and MILF forces. For more details, I will copy below a couple of statements of the Bishop in regard to these incidents and the general situation.*

*As always, this means a lot of refugees and evacuees from the affected areas, and they are streaming into the Poblacion. The diocese tries to send out relief missions with food, clothing and medicine, but it is a difficult to keep up, since there are many evacuation centers throughout the area, some of which have been active for months. Tomorrow (Saturday, Nov. 18), a relief mission will go to Columbio Poblacion, including the Bishop, and we hope to have more information about the situation there.*

*On the lighter side (for me at least), I have a lot of time to follow this election business in the States. At the bishop's house the cable TV receives CNN and the Fox New Channel. It really sounds crazy. If I had a nickel for every time I've been asked to explain the electoral college system in the last couple of weeks, I would be a wealthy man. Of course, to explain it in a way that makes sense is not so easy, precisely because (in my humble opinion) the system itself doesn't make sense.*

*I remember way back when I was a senior in high school, I did a research paper on the electoral college system for my American Government class. Even then I came to the conclusion that while it may have been valid in the early years of the country, it is certainly flawed in today's world. Oh well, I really can't complain, since although I was a perennial voter while I lived in the States, I didn't bother to vote absentee this time.*

*Ok, that's all the politics I'll talk about. MUCH more importantly, by the time I send this out, the OSU-Michigan game will be over. I'll check the score on the internet before moving over to my e-mail. Here's hoping I have a smile on my face as I press "send".*

*I'll close for now. Love and miss you both!*

*Love,*



*Here are the bishop's statements:*

*NOVEMBER 8, 2000*

## *ON THE HOT SPOT: OUR PRIESTS IN COLOMBIO*

*FOR THEIR SAFETY, THE PIME FATHERS OF COLOMBIO HAVE BEEN TEMPORARILY WITHDRAWN. A DIOCESAN PRIEST VISITS THE PARISH FOR THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION ON SUNDAYS.*

*The Parish of San Isidro Labrador in Colombio covers the Municipality of Colombio, Province of Sultan Kudarat and the adjoining Municipality of Datu Paglas, Province of Maguindanao. Datu Paglas has a predominantly-muslim population. Colombio has a population composed of about 30% tribals, 20% muslims, and 50% christians.*

*Father Steve Baumbusch, PIME is the lone priest in the parish of Colombio. The soft-spoken, few-words man received death threats. Father Peter Geremia, PIME, his confrere who lives in Kidapawan, would, every week-end drive to Colombio to give Father Steve company and to help in the work of the parish, specifically, in the tribal apostolate. Colombio is home to many B'laans and Tibilis. The tribes have formed an organization which they named La Bugal, their native term for unbreakable. Father Peter coordinates the Tribal Filipino Program of the Diocese. The tribesmen, with the support of the Tribal Filipino Program, have organized 12 Basic Indigenous Communities in Colombio with an on-going programs of education [adult literacy, day care, seminars, etc.], primary health care, and ancestral domain development through sustainable agriculture with many projects such as demonstration farms and nurseries of fruit and indigenous trees for the purpose of reforesting the ancestral domains in the area, protect the watershed, and support the preservation of the rainforest.*

*Father Peter is also supporting a muslim farmers' association and a tripeople organization called Chrislam which unites christian, islam and b'laan tribes to face their common challenges.*

*SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2000, 4:30 p.m. Father Peter, on board his Isuzu Elf, was on his way home to Kidapawan. At Barangay Salendal, someone who seemed to be holding a gun under his jacket, ran alongside the Elf and peeked a good look at Fr. Peter. Then he chased he Elf on a motorcycle as if taking aim but was unable to get a clear target.*

*THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5. While Fr. Peter was attending the Ustadz, Priests and Imams' Forum in Datu Paglas, a man arrived with a warning for Peter to stop going to Colombio. The mayor of Datu Paglas provided security to Fr. Peter. The vice mayor and a policeman had themselves photographed with him.*

*SATURDAY, OCTOBER 7. A group of men [apparently muslims] with high-powered weapons, were seen taking positions along the road leading to the National Irrigation Administration canal in Manindulo and stayed there the whole day. By afternoon, the Barangay Captain confronted the group, warning them to leave, explaining that if anything happens there, they will be blamed. If the armed men refused, they will be fired at. The armed group left the place. At 7:00 p.m., the Isuzu Elf of Fr Peter, fully loaded with muslim passengers, passed by the road. Fr. Peter was not with them. Another group of heavily-armed men was seen at the highway in Baguadatu.*

*MONDAY, OCTOBER 9. A muslim Datu went to the Mayo Military Detachment in Colombio where he met the commanding officer. They talked about the circulating extortion letters with threats to kill.*

*They discussed the threat against Fr. Peter. It was alleged that the commanding officer of the military detachment in Colombio held a negative attitude towards Fr. Peter. The Datu remarked that, "Kung sino ang nakakatulong sa mas marami, bakit pinag-initan?" [He who helps many, why is he on the watch?]. He added that two CAFGUs in Colombio are contacts of the armed group and the two inform the group of the movements of Fr. Peter.*

*TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10. The president of the parish pastoral council of Colombio, sent Fr. Steve [who was*

*then in Kidapawan] a note stating that a muslim informant was sent by the chief of police of Colombio to the parish convent to confirm the threat against Fr. Peter and Fr. Steve. The note stated further that, "a group plans to kidnap you by the crossing at the National Irrigation Administration Road in Katil or Mao. They will be on board a black Yamaha 125 motorcycle. They are armed with a 45 cal. and 2 UZI machine pistols."*

*That night, ten armed men were seen near the parish convent looking for Fr. Steve. It is believed that the group of armed men threatening the priests is composed of christians and muslims. It seems that their main target is Fr. Peter, and Fr. Steve stands as an alternative. Fr. Peter was earlier threatened by the Manero group, the convicted killers of the late Fr. Tulio Favali. Their influential backers caused Fr. Peter to be imprisoned in 1987 on fabricated charges of rape and in 1992 on charges of robbery. Both cases were dismissed.*

*Early this year, Norberto Manero was released by Pres. Estrada, but the executive clemency was revoked upon discovery that it was fraught with fraudulence. Fr. Peter was warned that some influential politicians and military sources planned to target him again and if something will happen to him, it will be charged against the MILF or the Abu Sayaf.*

*The priests are in Colombio to bring God's presence of love. "Do this in memory of me." [Lk. 22:19]. This love invites "all men to form but one community. . . because all men stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth . . . and also because all share a common destiny." [NA,1].*

*In this predominantly-muslim parish, I address myself to our muslim brothers and sisters with the endearing words of our Mother Church that she ". . . has a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men." [NA, 3]. Some hostilities may have happened in the past, but we now plead to heal the past, and together, let us work for peace. Our common ancestor Abraham has shown us the way of peace. Let us, together, walk Abraham's way of peace.*

*I close my plea with a special blessing for the muslims, tribals and christians in the parish of Colombio.*

*+ ROMULO G. VALLES, DD  
Bishop of Kidapawan*

*Thursday, November 9, 2000*

*THE CONTINUING WAR  
[Diocese of Kidapawan]*

*ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS!*

*Will our military institution in Colombio, Sultan Kudarat, please stand up for uprightness and integrity?*

*October 26, 2000, 5:00 p.m.. Seven tribesmen of Colombio, all married, were arrested by soldiers belonging to the 64th IB stationed in Tupi with one company deployed in Colombio. The men were:*

- 1. Delfin Bayam of Purok Lomboy, Poblacion. Coordinator of the Tribal Filipino Program in Sultan Kudarat.*
- 2. Rakim Dabi of Sitio Lamgawel, Barangay Datalblao. Chairman of La Bugal, a tribal organization in Colombio.*

3. Pinggoy Berres
4. Garcia Malid
5. Abraham Dabi all of Lam-alis, Datalblao.
6. Cerilo Lasib
7. Danilo Lasib

*All seven tribesmen were on their way home from carpentering a bunkhouse that was being built by the parish to serve as a nursery for fruit and indigenous trees. The Tribal Filipino Program of the diocese has a project of reforesting the ancestral domains with fruit and indigenous trees. The reforestation project aims to protect the water shed and the rainforest and provide the tribes with fruits and a place to do rainforestation farming. The bunkhouse is situated in Sitio Gosmolo, Barangay Datalblao, an ancestral domain some thirty kilometers uphill from the poblacion of Colombio.*

*On the way, a few families complained to the men that some of their belongings at home were missing after the combat operation of the military in their area. The men documented the complaints. Proceeding to Sitio Lamgawel, they chanced upon eighty military men on combat operation who ordered them to stop and who asked them where they came from. The men answered that they came from carpentering the bunkhouse in Gosmolo. The soldiers scrutinized their bags, handcarried items, and their bodies. They saw the documentation on the missing things from Delfin Bayam. The soldiers then proceeded to impose shirts printed with Bagong Hukbong Bayan [New People's Army] on Rakim, Delfin, Abraham, Cerilo and Pinggoy and took their pictures. One soldier dragged Garcia to join the picture taking with the printed shirt imposed on him but he refused. The men complained that they do not want to be pictured with the shirts because they do not own the shirts. The soldiers changed tone. They gently persuaded the men to sign a paper stating that they were not maltreated. After having signed, the men were interrogated anew. Rakim was asked pointblank whether he was an NPA.*

*The interrogation, which has become rowdy, was accompanied by sounds of rifle cockings and with threats of shooting unless they "admit". Rakim was forced to admit by a "witness" who was brought before him by the soldiers. After this, all six of them were separated from each other. Danilo Lasib, who rode on a horseback with a sick child and with some rootcrops was allowed to go home. Everyone of the six men were separately brought to different houses where they were interrogated. Rakim was forced to own that he is an NPA and a recruiter for the NPA. They were not allowed to go down from the house. They were physically assaulted. Some of them narrated of their hands being hogtied behind them. An armalite butt was forced into their mouths. Garcia Malid and Abraham Dabi were punched while Delfin Bayam was slapped. The interrogation went on deep into the night and the wee hours of the morning.*

*The following day, October 27, at 9:00 a.m., the soldiers began their journey to Palo 19, Tampacan. The men were told to escort the soldiers to Palo 19 after which they will be released. The men were made to carry the packs, kettles, gallons, rice, weapons, etc.. At Palo 19, the men were interrogated anew, this time, the interrogation was tape-recorded. It was during this interrogation that Rakim explained the purpose of the bunkhouse which they were constructing. They were then pictured anew with their names on it. At 5:00 p.m., they were ordered to board a dump truck that took them to Tampacan Police Station. They spent the night there. The following day, they were told to submit themselves for a medical check-up.*

*October 28. The men were brought to the military headquarters in Kablon, Tupi where they underwent another round of interrogation, primarily by Colonel Salvador, the commanding officer, who later ordered to hasten their release papers. Before their release, some of them were persuaded to become informers or assets and will be visited often by soldiers. They were released by Capt. Jamorabon and Capt. Araujo. Back home, they are anxious for their security.*

+ ROMULO G. VALLES, DD  
Bishop of Kidapawan

15 November 2000

*THE CONTINUING WAR*  
*[Diocese of Kidapawan]*

*CIVILIANS KILLED, WOUNDED; HOUSES BURNED*

*NOVEMBER 3, 2000, 5:00 a.m.. Early in the morning, the residents of Barangay Mayo in Colombio, Sultan Kudarat, were roused from sleep by firings. They saw armed men believed to be MILF soldiers attacked the military detachment and then surrounded their area. Victims of this armed confrontation were Mohammed Mando, 5, killed on the spot; Perfecto Estabillo and two soldiers were wounded.*

*The houses of Mr. and Mrs. Rudy Austria, Mr. and Mrs. Roberto Fernandez and another one in Sitio Bila were burned. The house of Barangay Captain Eutiquio Estabillo was badly damaged. Carabaos, pigs and goats were either killed or stolen. Residents of Brgy. Mayo and nearby villages evacuated to the following evacuation centers:*

*Residence number of families in Evacuation Center*

- 1. Mayo Center 58 DAR, Poblacion Colombio*
  - 2. Lomoyon 236 Manindolo, Datu Paglas*
  - 3. Upper Lomoyon 131 Katil & Poblacion, Datu Paglas*
  - 4. Makat 54 Katil, Datu Paglas*
  - 5. Bila, Kafingol, Mayo 174 Poblacion Colombio*
  - 6. Polomolok, El Bebe, Marang 142 Manindolo/Katil*
- TOTAL 795 families in evacuation center*

*In these troubled times, I will not stop crying for peace. I appeal to all Muslims and Christians with the words of our Holy Father, "The whole world, with its longing for greater peace, brotherhood and harmony, needs to see fraternal coexistence between Christians and Muslims in a modern, believing and peaceful Philippine nation." [Interreligious Dialogue, p.237].*

*+ ROMULO G. VALLES, DD*  
*Bishop of Kidapawan*

13 November 2000

*THE CONTINUING WAR*  
*[Diocese of Kidapawan]*

*VERY SAD SITUATION IN COLUMBIO*

*FOR THEIR SAFETY, THE BISHOP TEMPORARILY WITHDREW THE PIME FATHERS FROM THE PARISH OF COLOMBIO, SULTAN KUDARAT. A DIOCESAN PRIEST VISITS THE PARISH FOR THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION ON SUNDAYS.*

*It was very sad to see the parish without a priest who could have celebrated the Mass on November 1, All Saints Day and on November 2, All Souls Day. While the faithful throughout the country flocked to the*

*churches and the cemeteries to celebrate the feast of the saints and to lovingly remember their beloved departed, THE FAITHFUL OF COLOMBIO COULD NOT CELEBRATE THE MASS BECAUSE THEIR PRIESTS HAVE BEEN THREATENED WITH DEATH.*

*FATHER STEVE BAUMBUSCH, PIME, THE LONE PRIEST IN THE PARISH WAS CATEGORICALLY WARNED THAT HE WILL BE AMBUSHED BY A GROUP OF HEAVILY ARMED MEN ON BOARD A BLACK MOTORCYCLE. ON THE NIGHT OF OCTOBER 10, TEN ARMED MEN WERE SEEN NEAR THE PARISH CONVENT LOOKING FOR FR. STEVE.*

*FATHER PETER GEREMIA, PIME, WHO LIVES IN KIDAPAWAN, AND WHO HELPS FATHER STEVE EVERY WEEKEND WAS WARNED AGAINST GOING TO COLOMBIO AND OF AN AMBUSH.*

*Jesus prayed for his disciples, "Holy Father, keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one just as you and I are one." [Jn. 17:11].*

+ ROMULO G. VALLES, DD  
Bishop of Kidapawan

#### *THE CONTINUING WAR* *[Diocese of Kidapawan]*

*NOVEMBER 12, 2000, 4:00 a.m., in BARANGAY LASAK, COLOMBIO, SULTAN KUDARAT, 10 armed men awoke the family of Mr. and Mrs. Geronimo Eleccion and asked for coffee. After drinking their coffee, the armed group commanded the Eleccions to go down the house where they were all shot. Believing them to be dead, the men walked away. But Geronimo (50 yrs. old) survived to tell the horror. Killed on the spot were, his wife Luzviminda (35), his son (16) Richard, his daughter (18) Gemma, Gemma's boyfriend Allan Seroco (34), and Luzviminda's nephew Benjie Sujede (5). Their bodies, except Allan's, were brought to Upper Kadidang, Marbel.*

*ON THIS SAME DAY, THE MILITARY DETACHMENTS IN BARANGAYS NATIVIDAD, MAYO, LIBERTAD AND MALIGAYA, IN COLOMBIO WERE ATTACKED SIMULTANEOUSLY ALLEGEDLY BY MILF MEN. AS OF TODAY, HEAVY FIGHTING BETWEEN THE MILF AND THE GOVERNMENT FORCES IS CONTINUING IN MAYO, MALIGAYA AND TELEFAS, ALL BARANGAYS OF COLOMBIO.*

*We grieve with Geronimo Eleccion and his kins on this tragedy that befell them. We condole with the family of Allan Seroco. We assure them of remembrance in our prayers.*

*We continue to pray and cry for peace. We beseech you, Mary, our Mother, to come to our aid and guide us to the way of peace.*

+ ROMULO G. VALLES, DD  
Bishop of Kidapawan

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