

Open Letter to HRV Claims Board

Dear Board Members,

My name is Fr. Brian E. Gore one of the many Human Rights Claim Victims from Negros Occidental.

This letter of complaint is in connection with the debacle last September 3, 2014 in Bacolod City.

I arrived in Bacolod City at 7am from Himamaylan City, one and a half hours away, to find hundreds of people already milling around looking for the venue to make their claim. I had come to make a claim on behalf of a fellow Columban, Fr. Niall O'Brien, who had died in 2004 and who was falsely accused and detained along with myself and 7 others. There was no one there to give any simple directions so confusion reigned. Eventually, we were directed by a security guard to the place where he said the claims would be made. After waiting out the front of the building for half an hour we were then directed by the security guard to go to the side of the building. That is when people rushed to line up knowing that to be late was to be subject to going home very late or having to return the next day! I don't blame the people for this mob style reaction, but I do blame the Claims Board for the lack of basic organization.

Processing started at around 8am. Only two people were there to give numbers to those milling outside in the open. By 11:30 only 131 people had got a number. Why were there not at least 4 people given the job of giving out numbers? Why could this not have started at 6am? You have from the very beginning grossly underestimated the number of claimants from Negros. Last July in Bacolod your Chair publically said that there were only about 500 claimants in the whole of Negros!

As for the venue it was totally inappropriate and inadequate. You were offered more suitable venues but you chose a dingy and dirty place that was an insult to all who have already been victimized. To consider such a venue as appropriate shows to me a total lack of sensitivity bordering on contempt.

I refused to be part of this debacle as I would not allow myself to be treated in such an undignified and humiliating way. As a result I was not able to make my claim on behalf of my dead colleague. I am 70 years old and have limited mobility so physically I was not able to be pushed around (as were so many others). Indeed, I also refused to push other people around so that I could make my claim. Unlike others, I have the option of making my claim in Manila, as I often go there for other matters. The poor and elderly claimants in Negros and in other parts of the Philippines do not have this option.

The best apology that the Board can make to the claimants in Negros and other parts of the Philippines is to have another round of interviews before the November 10 deadline. If this is not impossible then you must extend your deadline to make it possible for all those who have not yet made their claims to do so. We are discovering many more each day. You can extend the deadline as it is not a matter of law. A verbal apology is unacceptable.

We can only get a true picture of what abuses occurred during Martial Law if the vast majority, if not all, victims can make their respective claims. To do otherwise might be seen as trying to sanitize the facts and so attempting to rewrite history. As of now more than 1000 claimants in southern Negros have yet to make their claim!

Personally my greatest regret is that the perpetrators of these abuses, some still in very high positions, will never be accountable. I suppose our only consolation as Christians is that they will not escape the heavenly tribunal where true justice will be served.

Yours sincerely,

(sgd.) Fr. Brian Gore

Columban Missionary

Columban Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Coordinator

Chair Negros Nine Human Development Foundation Inc.