

Message on occasion of the

Breakfast Meeting Commemorating United Nations' World Interfaith Harmony Week on February 4, 2013,

hosted by H.Em. **Luis Antonio Cardinal G. Tagle, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Manila**

H.Em. Luis Antonio Cardinal G. Tagle, Honorable Religious Leaders, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Representative to the Philippines of a German Political Foundation based with its worldwide projects on the Christian social teachings, I would like to say a few words on the implications of Interfaith Harmony for the political life of this country, the Philippines, which has grown close to my heart during the years which I have been living and working here, hand in hand with many Philippine friends and colleagues.

Let me quote His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in his speech at the German Parliament on September 22, 2011, titled ***The listening heart – reflections on the foundations of law.***

“For most of the matters that need to be regulated by law, the support of the majority can serve as a sufficient criterion. Yet it is evident that for the fundamental issues of law, in which the dignity of man and of humanity is at stake, the majority principle is not enough. ... How do we recognize what is right? In history, systems of law have almost always been based on religion. ... Christianity ... has pointed to nature and reason as the true sources of law...”

However *“the conviction that there is a Creator God is what gave rise to the idea of human rights, the idea of the equality of all people before the law, the recognition of the inviolability of human dignity in every single person and the awareness of people’s responsibility for their actions.”*

The core value of human dignity, based on the love of God and neighbor, is a sound fundament for harmony between the different religious communities in the Philippines. However, people in modern states are living in societies strongly dependent on the framework of laws, politics and actions of the State. Therefore we have to ask: is the core value of human dignity also the guiding principle of the main political groups and actors in the Philippines?

Human dignity starts with the right of self-determination of people, their right to participate effectively in decision making in their communities. How does this work, when – and here I quote former Chief Justice Reynato Puno – *“This vicious politics of patronage has allowed few oligarchs and bosses to rule us from colonial times to post colonial times and their rule has brought us nothing but a is nothing but a façade of democracy, its mirage but not its miracle.”* (from: *Transcending our Democratic Mediocrity*, published by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Philippines in 2010)

Human dignity includes the right and the obligation to be responsible for yourself and for your family. How does this work when nearly one quarter of the population continues without any improvements during the last 25 years to live in absolute poverty, and when more than 25% of the people who want to work and are able to work are jobless or hopelessly underemployed?

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines has published some days ago an impressive list of serious ongoing violations of the core value of human dignity in the daily reality of the life of the Filipinos – including the two problems I have just mentioned. It would make sense if the religious communities in this country would link up to jointly request from the political leaders to build their politics systematically on the common values and principles of all these religious communities and to address these problems in a serious way.

It is good to see the efforts of the actual administration in fighting corruption and achieving economic growth. But this is by far not enough for creating harmony and social peace. The country needs fundamental structural reforms in order to secure the core value of human dignity:

- a modern political party system with value based and program oriented parties building on citizens as members – not on patrons and politicians,
- a reform of the electoral system to make it participatory and inclusive,
- mechanisms to effectively hold accountable between the elections the executive power bearers on all levels of state,
- a state structure following the principle of subsidiarity,
- a competition law which opens the national and local markets for healthy and fair competition – as a precondition for job creation and effective fight against poverty
- a reform and clean up of the judicial system and of the security forces,

just to mention some of the most crucial issues.

The love of God obliges us to react on the suffering of so many of his children – our sisters and brothers – in an effective way. And for this we need not only changes of heart and mind, we need to reform structures and institutions in a way that they provide opportunities for all citizens to live in dignity, and incentives for all citizens to take over responsibility and to care for each other.

Dr. Peter Koepfinger
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