

*Pastoral Letter on Human Rights Day
Of the Catholic Church in Thailand*

**“Treat Others as They Are
Human Beings Like Us”**



Sunday, November 15, 2009

Pastoral Letter on the Occasion of Human Rights Day of the Catholic Church in Thailand

Sunday, November 15, 2009

“Treat Others as They Are Human Beings Like Us”

To all Christians and People of Good Will

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand has dedicated the third Sunday of November to celebrate a human rights day of the Church in Thailand. This day is here again this year. It is a good opportunity for us Christians to stop and reflect and understand meaning of 'human rights', human values and dignity that all people in society regardless of race, language, religion, social status, education or political orientation, possess equal value and dignity. All have full rights to live their life happily in this world, and have access to protection of rights without being violated. With Christian faith, we are aware that all human beings are brothers and sisters and united in the love of God.

We cannot refuse the reality in society that violation of human rights and dehumanization still prevails, which is worsening further and becomes more and more violent, especially conflict of opinions and political interest that divided people into factions. Both sides will not tolerate opinions or methods different from theirs. It is worse that they would attack opposing ideas as evil and lack of patriotism. Often this conflict led to irrational dispute and even to violence verbally and physically. Time and again, this conflict penetrated family institution, which should be a warm place for love and affection, understanding and forgiveness.

At personal level, there is still a reflection of prejudice and narrow minded, insult of some Thai people against people from neighbouring countries who came to Thailand to look for job but get low pay. There still exists the scene in society where mutual treatment is less kind and lack of respect to dignity of the weaker, especially children, women, the elderly, the disabled and the poor who are objects of unjust structures. They even become victims of exploiters and manipulators or the stronger. In society of authoritarianism, there are many street children and children of foreign workers from neighbouring countries who do not have access to education in school system despite the fact that Ministry of Education has a clear policy on equal access to education for all children who reach school age, including those who do not have proper document, house registration or stateless children.

Believe in the living and teaching of Jesus, we as Christians need to give true witness to this with our boy and spirit. Discipleship should not limited only to Holy Mass or other pious activities, but

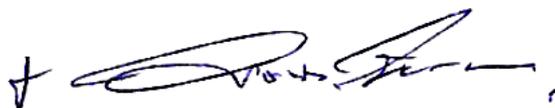
in our actual living we should respect value of other people as equal to ours because God has granted love, freedom and liberty equally to all.

The teaching of Jesus on the love of neighbours is that "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." (*Lk* 10:27) and we must love even those who hate us or do bad things against us "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (*Lk* 6:27-28). Furthermore, all human beings should not have prejudice or make judgment on others as they using mob rule. Instead, they should give opportunity and forgiveness to offenders because we all are sinners and have committee mistakes (*cf. Jn* 8:1-11). These teachings are the principles for Christians to abide by, especially in time when society needs people to give witness in their life.

On this occasion, let Christians reflect on our life if we have treated our neighbours well, especially those who are different from us in their opinions and physical outlook, with love, concern and service as much as possible. If we still have prejudice without seeing humanity in them who have their opinion, sensation and needs that are not different from ours and abuse them by words, body and mind, let us be brave to gradually change ourselves from today onward, because society of peace will only be a reality when each one of us have convert our hearts first.

Let us pray together for everyone to treat one another with respect to human dignity. As Christian we have encountered God in all our neighbours. All conflicts in society will ultimately be pacified with love and understanding, and our hearts will be "peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." (*Jas* 3:17-18)

May Our Lord Jesus grant abundant blessing for all peacemakers.



(Bishop Philip Banchong Chaiyara)

Bishop of Ubolratchathani

Chairperson of Department of Justice and Peace

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand