

Rape victim's relatives deny that politicians prodded them

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There is no politics involved in the allegations of rape against the parish priest of Maslog, Danao City, Fr. Jose Belcina, said relatives of the 18-year-old woman who lodged the complaint.

The victim's relatives, represented by her uncle Luis Nunez, told The Freeman that after consultation with members of their family, they decided to come into open to deny accusations that his niece was used by some politicians to file the complaint against Fr. Belcina.

"Ako maoy unang mubabag kon mao man gani na, pero wala gyud nay igong basihanan, tingali nagka tugma lang nga mao usab ang pagawas niining maong kaso," Nunez said.

According to Nunez, he asked permission from his sister, the mother of the victim, before he granted the interview with The Freeman yesterday afternoon.

The victim's father was not around when The Freeman visited barangay Sabang.

They said that he was fetched by Msgr. Cayetano Gelbolingo, a

member of the Presbyteral Council created by Ricardo J. Cardinal Vidal to look into the incident.

The team headed by Msgr. Robert Alesna was in Danao the other day to start its investigation on the allegations against Fr. Belcina the other day.

Results of the investigation will however be revealed only when enough information shall have been gathered.

Provincial board member Agnes Magpale confirmed that Msgr. Gelbolingo indeed fetched the victim's father.

"Nananghid siya nako kon mukuyog ba siya sa pari, akong giingnan nga siya maoy muhukom," (He asked if he should go with the priest, I told him that it is his decision) Magpale said.

"Grabe kaayo ang ilang pagbugal-bugal sa among pag-umangkon, nga mao pa ang nabiktima tapos siya pa maoy gihimong sad-an karon," (They have really made fun of my niece, who is the victim, but is the one who is blamed for the incident) Nunez said.

Nunez said he confronted his niece after they the filling of the case before the Danao City Prosecutor's Office last February 10.

He recalled that his niece was crying at that time when she narrated to him that the priest raped her. He added that his niece told him that Fr. Belcina owned a gun.

He also denied the statement of the boyfriend of his niece, who said that the victim is not telling the truth.

According to Nunez, when the boyfriend of her niece came to

their house last Saturday, a day after he filing of the case, he admitted that he knew about the incident.

"Miingon pa kana siya sa among paryente na si Roy Almaden nga mibahad akong pag-umangkon nga maghikog kon may lain nga mahibawo ilabi na gayud sa iyang mga ginikanan," (He even told our relative, Roy Almaden, that my niece warned that she would commit suicide if somebody else will know especially her parents) Nunez said.

"Dili hinoon mi mahibulong nga dauton niya akong pag-umangkon kay may igsoon man daw siya nga gigastohan sad sa pari," (We are not however surprised that he would discredit my niece since he has a sibling, who is also a scholar of the priest) Nunez said.

They said that the teacher of his niece was the one who first knew the incident and informed the school dean, Mrs. Linda Flores, about it.

Flores then informed Provincial Board member Agnes Magpale, who owns the school.

Magpale referred the victim to the Provincial Women's Commission, Children's Legal Bureau and the End Child Prostitution and Trafficking in Cebu City to help her with the case.

Magpale has also earlier denied that the filling of the rape case against the priest politically motivated.

Meanwhile, more than 1,000 parishioners and supporters of Fr. Belcina held a prayer rally yesterday afternoon in support of the priest, who has already taken a leave of absence.

Carrying placards emblazoned with "I Love You Fr. Joey", they marched from the boundary of barangay Looc and Sabang up to

the Maslog church.

They said that Fr. Belcina is innocent and the charges filed against him are purely harassment and fabricated. They also hope that the truth will prevail.

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Sitoy confirmed to The Freeman that Fr. Belcina asked him to be his legal counsel.

Sitoy, the dean of the College of Law of the University of Cebu, said he asked the priest to submit all the necessary papers and brief him of the incident.

The 18-year-old girl, who was a scholar of the priest and worked in the convent, has alleged that the priest had raped her in three occasions since she was 17 years old.

The victim alleged that she was first raped on July 22, 2005. The molestation was allegedly repeated last December 25, 2005 and on January 28 this year.

The family of the victim hopes that church authorities and other government agencies will conduct an impartial investigation so the truth will come out. - Jose P. Sollano