



The Ecumenical Bishops' Forum or EBF, a fellowship of church leaders from various religious groups in the Philippines, belatedly condemned President Rodrigo Duterte for what the church leaders believed as criminal incitement hate speech advising his followers "to kill the Catholic bishops."

The speech was delivered by Mr. Duterte last December somewhere in Mindanao as part of his repetitive verbal attacks against the Catholic Church and its priests.

Last week, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, while in the Vatican attending the Sexual Abuse

Conference called by Pope Francis, sent a note to President Duterte informing the President that Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of Caloocan City Diocese, a critic of Duterte's extrajudicial killings related to the anti-drug campaign, had been receiving death threats.

Immediately, Mr. Duterte made a turnaround and made an announcement that the bishops should not be hurt.

EBF issued the following statement: "Like a modern-day Pontius Pilate, President Duterte washes his hands to the lurking danger over the bishop's life. We suspect that President Duterte's real intention is to protect himself from any accountability should evil befalls the bishop."

The group also said, "But much as he tries to appear guilt-free under the pretense of taking back his threats, he only makes a fool of himself. When he foul-mouthed the bishops, he had knowingly sent dangers and threatened them to death."

We share the view that it's not self-realization, but self-interest and self-protection that made Mr. Duterte change his unpresidential advice.

Maybe, he also wanted to make it appear that he was unfriending the devil because of what Pope Francis said earlier that whoever keeps criticizing the Catholic Church is a friend of the devil.

The Philippines faces politico-economic problems that need attention and action.

It would be good if the president of the native country will divert his attention to solve those problems instead of indulging in counterproductive subjects.