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AsiaNews (28.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2WsQdos> - A few hours after the twin attack on the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jolo (Sulu) yesterday morning, the Filipino bishops invite Christians to "shake hands with all the peace-loving communities , in defense against violent extremism ".

The Islamic State (IS) claimed last night the latest act of violence against the Catholic community of Jolo, an Islamist stronghold on the southern island of Mindanao. This is stated by the SITE Intelligence Group, an organization that monitors jihadist activities on the internet. The terrorist group has released an official statement stating that two suicide bombers detonated their explosive belts inside the church and near the parking lot.

Meanwhile, the police of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Armm) revises the death toll: the spokesman Gerry Besana declares that five soldiers, a Coast Guard member and 12 civilians were killed in the attack. 83 other people were injured. From Pamama, Pope Francis expressed "the strongest condemnation for this episode of violence, which brings new loss of life to this Christian community".

Msgr. Angelito Rendon Lampon, former bishop of Jolo and new archbishop of Cotabato, said: "In my 20 years, from 1998 to last week, there have been seven hand grenades launched at our cathedral".

Below the full text of the document issued by the Episcopal Conference (CBC) after the terrible attack.

We, Catholic Bishops gathered in our Plenary Assembly in Manila, received today the sad news from Fr. Romeo S. Saniel, OMI, Apostolic Administrator of Jolo, of the bombing of the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Cathedral in Jolo during the Sunday Mass.

We condole with the families of the several soldiers and civilians who were killed by the explosions. We also express our sympathies with those who were wounded and extend our solidarity with the rest of the church-goers inside the Cathedral and the rest of the church community in the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo.

At the same time, we condemn this act of terrorism that has taken place only a few days after the plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

As we begin a new phase in the peace process with the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARRM), we ask our Christian brethren to join

hands with all peace-loving Muslim and Indigenous People communities in the advocacy against violent extremism.

May all our religions of peace guide us in our quest for a brighter future for the peoples of Mindanao.

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

+ Romulo G. Valles

Archbishop of Davao

President, CBCP

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