



## ARCHDIOCESE OF AGANA

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### Declaration of Archbishop Anthony Apuron regarding the Yona Property

Regarding the recent news about the “former *Hotel Accion* in use by the *Archdiocesan Missionary Seminary Redemptoris Mater* and by *Blessed Diego Luis de San Vitores Theological Institute for Oceania* which claimed that “Hon: Apuron defied Pope”, I wish to declare that this is absolutely false and it is causing real, grave, and immediate damage to the Church in Guam and to my good name, spreading scandal and confusion among the faithful.

I have always obeyed the Holy Father and it is my firm intention to continue to do so.

I decided to erect the Seminary and the Institute, supported by thirty-one ordinaries of the Pacific, because the duty of every bishop is that of “*fostering vocations ... so that the needs of the sacred ministry in the universal Church are provided for sufficiently*” (Can 233 §1); the property was purchased for this specific purpose without any expense to the Archdiocese.

Thanks to these two ecclesial institutions, 17 priests have been ordained and are serving the Archdiocese, 4 deacon candidates are awaiting their ordination. Moreover, almost 40 seminarians from Guam and from other dioceses of the Pacific are studying at the seminary and the Institute.

The restriction of the use of the property was decided and done by me as Archbishop of Agana to protect two fundamental ecclesial goods which are serving this island and the whole Pacific without jeopardizing in any way the ownership of the Archdiocese. I am pleased to see that the Apostolic Administrator – contrary to false statements spread by the media - has publicly declared that the Archdiocese is the legal owner of the property. This had already been indicated in the numerous documents previously presented to *Propaganda Fide*:

- (i) the response of Bishop Arrieta Secretary of the *Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts*, which stated that there was no alienation;
- (ii) the response of the *Lewis & Roca* law firm, which stated that the Board of Guarantors did not limit in any matter whatsoever the ordinary’s ownership and authority.
- (iii) the Certificates of Title in the name of the Archdiocese confirming the ownership of the property.

However, I must add that the recent declaration that “*such act of concession was not done in a usual way by an internal Ecclesiastical agreement,*” does not correspond to the truth. In 2002, I received unanimous consent and support by both the College of Consultors and the Finance Council to acquire the property “*known as Hotel Accion for the purpose of permanently housing the Redemptoris Mater*”. The restriction of use was placed on the property following proper canonical procedures of consultation with both the Finance Council and the College of Consultors; Mons. Hon



personally received the documentation during the apostolic visit in January 2015, and, since his appointment, he has had access to all the documents in the Chancery.

The property on which the Seminary/Institute resides is an ecclesiastical good of this Archdiocese and it is not controlled by any “community”. The *Archdiocesan Missionary Seminary Redemptoris Mater* is a public juridic person of this Archdiocese; the act of granting a restriction on use of the property to the Seminary/Institute is an act of justice and law because it insures to this entity the proper and basic means to achieve its mission, which are those of *stability* and *continuity* (Can. 114 and 120 §1). To lift the restriction would not only damage the ability of the Seminary to exist and carry out its canonical mission, but it would eliminate the fundamental canonical requisite for the existence of a public juridic person.

A restriction on use is obviously not an alienation, and only I, the Archbishop of Agana, or my successor, as Ordinary and Sole Member, have the authority to lift this restriction. The Rector, the Board of Directors and the Board of Guarantors, do not have any authority to lift it. Under both civil and Canon law, the approval and consent of the Ordinary, the Archbishop of Agana is required to modify this property restriction.

I am convinced in conscience that I cannot lift the restriction on this property: first of all because during my leave of absence neither I nor the Apostolic Administrator are supposed to take decisions which would alter the future of the archdiocese; second, because if I had not put this restriction, probably the property would have been already sold, losing an important ecclesiastical good; third, because I believe that the formation of priests is the most fundamental challenge today for the Church and for the evangelization and I acquired that property for this purpose.

I have always defended the moral life of the island opposing establishments which would bring money to few and moral misery and degradation to many. Recently big investors have begun to do that in Saipan investing billions of dollars. Some people proposed to me the sale of the property as a way to solve some short-term financial issues thinking that the Yona property would be the ideal place for such establishment. If I had listened to them I would have probably have avoided the present turmoil. Instead, my answer was: “Over my dead body”, because it would be irresponsible for a father to forfeit the future of his children, that is, to cash in on the property and destroy the possibility to form priests for the future. I believe that the future of the Archdiocese and its prosperity are ensured not by these short-sighted financial proposals, but by forming men willing to give their life for the good of the people as those being formed in the Seminary and the Institute.

As the reading of this XXI Sunday says, the seminary and the Institute are an answer to the mandate of Jesus to announce the gospel *to the far off islands* which are facing right now a catastrophic shortage of priests. I have strived and I will strive until I am alive to put evangelization at the center of my mission, and for this purpose the most fundamental means are the priests, who can transmit the grace of God.

I must conclude saying that Pope Francis never directed me to rescind the deed of restriction on the property. The Holy Father sent an Apostolic Administrator *sede plena*, which means without removing the Ordinary, while I am involved in clearing my name and proving my innocence. Now that the Holy Father has granted my request of a canonical trial, I hope that things will be cleared soon.

Servus tuus,

/s/

Most Rev. Anthony Sablan Apuron, O.F.M. Cap.,  
Metropolitan Archbishop of Agana.