



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF THE PHILIPPINES

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EDITORIAL

Solidarity with victims of state repression

The report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on the human rights situation in the Philippines reveals to the world what the Filipino people have been suffering in the past three years under the Duterte regime.

Systematic and widespread killing of poor people on utterly dubious suspicions of drug use, drug peddling and petty crimes. Systematic and widespread intimidation, repression and killing of Filipinos who oppose Duterte's repressive, kleptocratic and treasonous policies. Indeed, the Filipino people have been made to suffer intolerable and deadly repression by a government which purports to represent their interests and ideals.

Instead of delivering on its promises, the Duterte regime has driven the country into deeper poverty, unemployment, bankruptcy and underdevelopment. And Filipinos who demand better social conditions are terrorized by the regime's armed minions.

Ms. Bachelet's report strikes a blow against the denials of Duterte and his diplomats. They piously sit in the UN Human Rights Council and flatly deny the existence of gross human rights violations under their government. Worse, they spew invectives and threaten Filipinos and international human rights groups who dare to expose the real situation in country.

We join the call for increased international solidarity with the Filipino people against state repression in the Philippines. Among others, the protection for human rights defenders and political activists needs to continue and be strengthened. The call for the release of all political prisoners, especially the elderly and infirm, needs to be amplified. In the worsening climate of repression and fascism, international accountability measures should also be undertaken.

The Filipino people will not be cowed by the terrorism of the Duterte government. Support from the UN Human Rights Council and the international community will give the people greater courage and resoluteness in their fight against this anti-Filipino regime, and in their continuing fight for national and social liberation. **UP**



Ms. Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Photo: Photo: OHCHR.

UN Human Rights Commissioner issues report on the Philippines

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) Michelle Bachelet issued on 4 June 2020 her report on the human rights situation in the Philippines. The 26-page document was prepared to comply with UN Human Rights Council Resolution 41/2 requesting for such a report and to be presented at the 44th UNHRC Session starting on 15 June 2020.

The report gives an overview of the current human rights situation in the Philippines. It discusses issues, particularly

where there are indications of systemic causes underpinning the violations.

Prof. Jose Maria Sison, CPP Founding Chairman and NDFP Chief Political Consultant, said, "The report states clearly that human rights violations have been committed in the name of national security and war on illegal drugs and under encouragement by the highest officials... The (report's) recommendations include a call to the Duterte regime to rectify the dire human rights situation and render justice to the victims."

He added, "But we know the limits of such a call in the face of a regime that is hell-bent on ruling through state terrorism and aiming for a full-blown fascist dictatorship."

Duterte's 'war on drugs' figured extensively in Ms. Bachelet's report. The Manila government denies that there is a policy to kill people who use drugs. It also states that deaths occur during legitimate police operations. While the Philippine National Police (PNP) claims that 5,601 persons have been killed in the 'anti-drug war', other government agencies gave conflicting figures. The report states that PNP drug

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operations and killings perpetrated by unidentified persons resulted in 20,322 deaths from 1 July 2016 to 27 November 2017 – an average of nearly 40 deaths a day.

The PNP claims that they have launched 4,583 investigations into these killings. However, only one case, that of the killing of Kian delos Santos in August 2017, resulted in three PNP personnel being convicted of murder.

The report also expressed concern on the Duterte government's response to 'terrorism' and social conflict. It stated: "Worrying new laws and amendments have been proposed with the stated aim of strengthening public order and countering terrorism, which risk eroding constitutional and other legal protections."

The report mentions the restoration of the death penalty for drug related offenses, the lowering of the age of criminal responsibility and passing the Anti-Terrorism Act to replace the already problematic Human Security Act. It declared, "(The Anti-Terrorism Act) dilutes human rights safeguards, broadens the definition of terrorism and expands the period of detention without warrant from three to 14 days extendable by another 10 days."

The UNHCHR expressed great concern for Philippine human rights defenders, who receive death threats and intimidations via text messages, phone calls and on social media. It cited the case of human rights activist Honey Mae Suazo, who has been missing since 2 Nov 2019.

In a short section, the report cited reports from the Manila government alleging human rights abuses by the New People's Army, including killings, abductions, recruitment of children and extortion. It also admitted that, because the Duterte government has refused them access to the country, the UN has not been able to verify these reports.

Ironically however, the report also said that the UN has "verified the recruitment and use of 12 children by NPA in combat or support roles in 2019."

Coni Ledesma, Head of the NDFP Special Office for the Protection of Children, said that "the NPA has a very strict policy against the recruitment of persons below 18 years of age."

She added that the NDFP Monitoring Committee has a local office in Quezon City, which receives and investigates complaints on alleged violations of human rights by the NPA. Ms. Ledesma invited the UNHCHR to communicate with the NDFP Monitoring Committee for verification of the allegations. **UP**

ANTI-TERRORISM BILL

Duterte set to sign repressive 'Anti-Terrorism Law'

President Rodrigo Duterte is set to sign into law the 'Anti-Terrorism Bill' which legal and human rights experts

warn will escalate the suppression of public dissent and state-sponsored killings in the country. The administration-controlled Senate earlier approved the proposed law on 26 February 2020. Duterte certified the bill as urgent on 1 June, after which the House of Representatives approved and transmitted it for his approval on 10 June.

As proposed, the law defines acts of terrorism to include any form of advocacy, protest, dissent and planning which can be interpreted by authorities as to "cause death or serious physical harm to a person, to endanger a person's life, or to create a serious risk to public safety". It intends to create an 'Anti-Terrorism Council' composed of officials appointed by the President, and gives it the authority to designate individuals and groups as 'terrorists'.

This Council is also granted the authority to arrest individuals suspected to be terrorists or associated with terrorist groups, and detain them for up to 24 days without judicial charges. 'Suspect' individuals may be arrested without court-issued warrants. At the same time, the proposed law will repeal a current statute penalizing government officials for the wrongful detention of suspects.

The bill also authorizes government to conduct electronic surveillance and wiretapping of individuals for three months, purportedly to gather evidence against 'suspected terrorists' and their associates. It permits access to personal information, bank records, and private communications, and the freezing of private assets.

Barring any presidential veto, the bill will pass into law after 9 July 2020.

Prof. Jose Maria Sison, Founding Chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines and Chief Political Consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines said, "This law will be an instrument of state terrorism... It shall allow the tyrannical Duterte regime to abduct, torture and murder people, erase all evidence of the crime within 24 days and extort from the ordinary and well-to-do people under the threat of their assets being frozen or confiscated."

He added, "The state terrorism of Duterte is a sure-fire recipe for the advance of the people's democratic revolution, like the Marcos fascist dictatorship." **UP**



Protesters wore face masks & observed social distancing protocols as they call for the junking of Duterte's 'Anti-Terrorism' bill. Photo: Carlo Manalansan | bulatlat.com.

Proposed 'Anti-Terror Bill' meets massive resistance

President Rodrigo Duterte's 'Anti-Terror Bill' is facing massive resistance from various quarters of the Philippine population. On 12 June, thousands of Filipinos defied militarist epidemic restrictions and marched on the streets to demand: "Junk Terror Bill!" and "Activists not Terrorists!"

Renato Reyes, Secretary General of patriotic alliance Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) declared: "This is a dangerous law that can easily be abused!"

The National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL) issued a statement: This Anti-Terror Bill erodes human rights and institutionalizes impunity. It allows warrantless arrests up

to 24 days. Anyone opposing the Duterte government can be detained on orders of a Council composed of military and Duterte's leaders.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) expressed its opposition to the bill because of its "deviation from the life issues of our people" and its "deflection from priority of economic survival." The Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) likewise declared on 4 June that the Duterte government's meagre resources should be directed to setting and rebuilding the economic and social structures needed to fight the pandemic instead of using these for anti-terrorism expenditures. It stated that their enduring call is for a broader peace that addresses the root causes of dissent and seeks resolution through negotiation.

Among the signatories to the declaration were Archbishop Antonio Ledesma, SJ, PEPP Co-Chairperson; Bishop Rex R.B. Reyes, Jr., ECP, PEPP Co-Chairperson; and Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, UCCP. The PEPP is composed of the CBCP, National Council of Churches in the Philippines, Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines, Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches and the Ecumenical Bishops' Forum.

A very important development was the joint statement issued by eight business groups opposing the Anti-Terror Bill. Among them are the Bishops-Businessmen's Conference for Human Development, Makati Business Club, Investment House Association of the Philippines, and the Management Association of the Philippines.

The City Council of Bacolod also issued a resolution on 9 June opposing the Anti-Terror Bill. This was proposed by Hon. Wilson Gamboa, Jr., Chairman of the Committee on Human Rights. This act by a local government unit daring to oppose the Duterte government is a courageous act.

Peter Murphy, Chairperson of the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP), called on President Duterte to comply with the report and recommendations of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights which criticizes the Duterte government's gross violations of human rights. Mr. Murphy likewise called for the release of the 609 political prisoners in the Philippines.

The Concerned Lawyers for Civil Liberties (CLCL) also condemned the bill. This group includes deans of law schools and prominent lawyers, such as former Vice President Jejomar Binay, Jose Manuel Diokno, Manuel Quibod, Antonio Gabriel La Viña, Neri Javier Colmenares, Theodore Te and Lorenzo Tañada III. Other prominent groups which came out in opposition to the proposed law were the College Editors' Guild of the Philippines (CEGP), Association of Women in Theology, Ateneo Human Rights Center and the Association of Law Students of the Philippines (ALSP).

Rep. France Castro (ACT-Teachers Party) rejected the bill, stating that it would aggravate Red-tagging and suppression of civil rights. About 20 members of the House of Representatives are set to withdraw their earlier endorsements. **UP**



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