



Human Rights Newsletter
Philippines

Welcome to the AMP Newsletter 05/2020!

AMP Coverage and Asienhaus

This month's newsletter contains a link to the new homepage of the Asienhaus: Corona in Asien (German) and AMP analysis on the lockdown and the language of the "War on Corona".

- [Neue Webseite: Corona in Asien](#)
- [Crackdown instead of Lockdown](#)
- ["Shoot them dead": The War on Corona](#)

Press Review on the Weakening of Human Rights amid Corona

COVID-19 still dominates not only media coverage all over the world, but also the circumstances under which people in the Philippines manage their lives. Concerns were raised by human rights groups and political institutions like the United Nations regarding the civic and social human rights sphere early in the chronology of the pandemic. Unfortunately, one must admit that in the Philippines these concerns were more than justified. Below you find a press review of the dominating concerns due to the weakening of human rights amid Corona.

- [Current numbers](#)
- [Killings, arrests and red-tagging of human rights activists and social workers continue amid pandemic](#)
- [The instrumentalization of justice and human rights during COVID-19](#)
- [The most vulnerable groups in lockdown: children, women and the poor](#)
- [UN and Philippine rights groups call for release of political prisoners](#)

The State of Press Freedom

Another event occurred on May 5th, that left us disillusioned: in times when the access to journalistic information should be assessed as crucial as a counterweight of biased information through informal channels, Philippine broadcaster ABS-CBN received a Cease-and-Desist Order (CDO) and was thereby urged to stop broadcasting right away. We have taken this as a reason for a broader press review regarding, journalism in crisis and coronavirus effects on press freedom (see below).

- [Journalism in crisis and coronavirus effects on press freedom](#)

Read also:

- [Communist ceasefire negotiations](#)

AMP Coverage and Asienhaus

Neue Webseite: Corona in Asien (German)

Die Corona-Pandemie entlarvt die Ungerechtigkeiten der globalen Ordnung besonders deutlich. Die Stiftung Asienhaus und das philippinenbüro sammeln

auf einer neuen Seite zivilgesellschaftliche Länderperspektiven, um Handlungsoptionen für eine gerechtere Welt und internationale Solidarität zu finden. Im Vordergrund steht dabei die Frage was die Corona-Pandemie für die Menschen im Globalen Süden bedeutet

[Hier geht's zur neuen Homepage über Corona in Asien](#)

Crackdown Instead of Lockdown: An overview of COVID-19 restrictions in the Philippines and the struggle for vulnerable groups

Enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), a measure employed by the Philippine government to prevent the spread of Covid-19 infections in the Philippines, is supposed to protect the people, to provide safety and aid for endangered groups, and to lighten the pressure on the Philippine health care system. After weeks of restrictions on movement, delayed aid and arrests of thousands of quarantine violators, the Philippine lockdown has turned into a crackdown on human rights. This article aims to give you an overview of the lockdown measures by the Philippine government and the consequences especially for vulnerable groups.

[View full article](#)

"Shoot them dead" - Parallels between the "war on Corona" and the "war on drugs"

Similar to other leaders around the world, Duterte described his government's measures against the pandemic as warlike. War rhetoric in Duterte's regime is nothing new. But this time, the extent of violence in the official language stood out above that of others so that President Duterte secured himself and his country a place in the news headlines worldwide, when he announced his order to "shoot them dead".

This article analyses the martial language of the administration and its intention in the context of Corona. It discusses the possibility of a re-implementation of martial law and the skills really needed to successfully deal with COVID-19.

[View full article](#)

Press Review

Current numbers

As of May 6th, 2020, the Philippines' department of health registers 10.004 cases of Covid-19 nationwide. 7.840 of these cases are active, 658 have died and 1.506 have recovered. If you want to keep updated on the official numbers in the Philippines consult the [COVID-19 Tracker website of the Department of Health Philippines \(DOH\)](#).

The instrumentalization of justice and human rights during COVID-19

Several human rights actors have stressed the importance to view the pandemic and according government responses with a human rights lens. In an [online discussion among the In Defense of Human Rights and Dignity Movement \(iDEFEND\) and the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates \(PAHRA\)](#), the importance to center human rights in any action in response to the crisis was the subject: Given the extraordinary circumstances, international human rights laws recognize that certain rights may be limited, as with the freedom of movement restricted by the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) put in place by the government. However, the Coronavirus crisis should not be instrumentalised to restrict human rights.

In a [Rappler Talk, human rights lawyer and former Philippine Supreme Court](#)

[Spokesperson Ted Te made a statement against detentions for alleged violations of ECQ.](#) He said that while health and order are the main components of the government's strategy against the Pandemic, it is missing justice. Te said: "You are already overworking an overcongested court." He said there must be a top-level policy from either the Supreme Court (SC), Department of Justice (DOJ), or the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), or all of them, ordering ground personnel not to arrest and charge people for light offenses. "It's high time the High Court revisits that justification because it's very very dangerous".

More related articles:

[Ramento Project Rights Defenders, April 29, 2020 \(Respect for human rights essential in tackling the pandemic, UN officer says\)](#)

Killings, arrests and red-tagging of human rights activists and social workers continue amid pandemic

Amid the continuing pandemic, killings, arrests and insults of Philippine human rights activists continue. The **philippinenBüro** released a statement concerning the [brutal killing of social and environmental activist Jory Porquia](#) a few days ago, on April 30.

Human rights alliance [Karapatan](#) strongly condemns the murder of cultural worker Marlon Maldos in Cortes, Bohol and the massacre of peace consultant and former political prisoner Julius Giron and his two companions, including a medical doctor, in Baguio City, as well as the arbitrary arrest of Manobo leader Gloria Tumalon based on trumped-up charges, all in the month of March 2020. As the country grapples with the militarized Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) against the 2019 coronavirus disease pandemic, Karapatan Secretary General Cristina Palabay decried the murders as "shameless and brazen acts characteristic of the Duterte government's murderous policies." "Even amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the government's fascist attacks and violations of people's rights show no signs of stopping. Brutal and wanton killings and illegal arrests of activists continue with impunity, proving that the Duterte administration's so-called malasakit (concern) for the people is nothing more than a farce. The militarist interests of this regime and its State policy of murder is still the top priority without addressing the people's urgent needs and legitimate demands amid this public health crisis," Palabay said. Also in the same month, on March 21st, [Nora Apique, a peasant leader was shot](#) by two unidentified assailants in San Miguel, Surigao del Sur.

There is no break from harassment and red tagging for activists and social workers amid the Coronavirus lockdown. Online-newspaper [Davao Today](#) reports that the Community Technical College of Southeastern Mindanao (CTCSM), a privat charity boarding school located in Maco, serving Lumad and farmers, was red-tagged by local officials and the military. Parents of their students were "summoned" by local officials to a military camp where they were warned not to enroll their children to the school. The parents were told that the school is a "training ground for communist rebels". Online-newspaper [Bulatlat](#) reported that the military has been involved in multiple incidents of right violations in the municipalities of Lopez, Catanauan, Macalelon, Unisan, Agdangan, Padre Burgos, and Atimonan. According to the group, and that some units were reported to be forcing residents to "admit to being members of the NPA".

The most vulnerable groups in lockdown: children, women and the poor

Online magazine [Bulatlat has warned that the most vulnerable groups in lockdown may be children, women](#) and the [poor](#). While incomes are reduced, women and children will be particularly affected, domestic violence might also increase. [Rappler informes that the Commission on Human Rights](#) has now implemented an online system where people can report incidents of gender-based violence during the lockdown.

[Philstar reports: UNICEF has warned that at least two million Filipino kids could miss out on immunization](#) against vaccine-preventable diseases as the pandemic forces movement restrictions and pressure on the overburdened health system.

Poor communities in the Philippines face a variety of problems when it comes to

Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). Many poor neighborhoods have not received any help from national or local governments during the nationwide lockdowns, which has caused many poor to violate quarantine rules to look for food and aid. Human rights groups denounced the misuse of Covid-19 law against poor, but also against local helpers. On April 1, 21 people were arrested in Quezon City for violation of the assembly law, amid other accusations, while queuing up for assistance outside their community. On another occasion, seven activists trying to distribute food aid in Bulacan province were stopped by the police, as [Human Rights Online Philippines](#) reported. They now face charges of violating the emergency law on Covid-19 and incitement to commit sedition after newspapers and magazines with anti-government content were found in their vehicle. The activists, including former opposition congressman Ariel Casilao, said they had proper permits for their relief activity.

UN and Philippine rights groups call for release of political prisoners

At the beginning of April, numerous rights groups called to release especially sick and elderly political prisoners to lighten the burden on crowded Philippine prisons during the pandemic. Human rights organization [Karapatan](#) said that the government should decrease the pressure on prisons and increase testing instead of arresting more quarantine violators. "Continuing the punitive policy of arresting alleged quarantine violators combined with the lack of the needed public health measures to combat the pandemic is "a deadly disaster in the making" for the country's highly congested prisons where measures like physical distancing and isolation are virtually impossible", Karapatan warned. At the end of April, there were at least 3 deaths and 242 cases reported in prisons. The government has so far defended its stance that prisoners are safer inside prison walls and refuses to release prisoners.

More related articles:

[Karapatan, April 29, 2020 \(With 3 deaths, 242 coronavirus cases in jails, Karapatan asserts call for release of prisoners\)](#)

[Rappler, April 28, 2020 \(Supreme court told: Non-release of vulnerable prisoners can cause riots\)](#)

[Bulatlat, April 1, 2020 \(Rights groups push for release of sick, elderly political detainees\)](#)

Updates on ceasefire and peace talks

[The communist rebels have declared a ceasefire with the Philippine government](#) in compliance with the UN chief's call for a global halt in armed clashes during the Coronavirus pandemic. New People's Army guerrillas have been ordered to stop assaults and shift to a defensive position from March 26 to April 15, the Communist Party of the Philippines said in a statement. The ceasefire despite many disruptions was later extended until April 30. President Rodrigo Duterte threatened to declare martial law, which was just lifted at the end of last year, if the New People's Army continued attacking government forces. Duterte, in a warning aired on national television, was reacting to reports that two soldiers were killed in an encounter with NPA rebels in Aurora province. He added that due to numerous incidents that allegedly disrupted government aid measures, he would end peace talks with the communist rebels. "I am not, and I will never be ready for any round of talks," Duterte said.

More related articles:

[Business World, April 28, 2020 \(Duterte says he'll end peace talks with communist rebels\)](#)

[Mindanews, April 24, 2020 \(Duterte warns of martial law to suppress NPA lawlessness\)](#)

[The Diplomat, March 31, 2020 \(What's next for the Philippines communist insurgency under Duterte?\)](#)

State of Press Freedom

Journalism in crisis and coronavirus effects on press freedom

Having commemorated the International day of Press Freedom on May 3rd, one cannot fail to see that the Philippine government is cracking down on journalists critical of the government's Covid-19 response and seriously threatening press

freedom, the rights to free expression and access to information. The most obvious event pointing to a crackdown of press freedom is the shutdown of Philippine broadcaster [ABS-CBN](#). While bills seeking to renew its franchise, which regularly expired after 25 years on May 5th, were still pending in congress, the Department of Justice (DOJ) had already given the Congress the information that the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) could let ABS-CBN run its operations on a [provisional permit](#). Despite that information, the [NTC ordered ABS-CBN to go offair](#) on May 5th. Whether this is [due to political pressure and what the consequences might be for the NTC](#) will be an important issue in the upcoming days and weeks.

Reporters Without Borders have published their new ranking of the [World Press Freedom Index](#), where the Philippines again slipped by two places - and that was before the shutdown of ABS-CBN. The Philippines now rank 136th out of 180 countries in the 2020 ranking. The downslipp is due to both, the 11 politically motivated cases against chief editor of Rappler, Maria Ressa, and due to the threat to deny the renewal of the ABS-CBN franchise network. In the light of the ABS-CBN shutdown, we, at the AMP, are even more encouraged to shed light on the struggle for and the significance of press freedom. [Click here](#) to see Maria Ressa interviewing journalist Rana Ayyub, scientist Joseph Stiglitz and whistleblower Edward Snowden about journalism in crisis for Reporters Without Borders and [click here](#) to listen to Maria Ressa on the meaning of truth, facts and trust, its relation to power and the role of the Philippines in the international media landscape in an interview with German broadcaster SWR 2 (in english).

And as if that hadn't been enough bad news concerning press freedom, President Rodrigo Duterte signed a Covid-19 law that provides the administration funding, grants and emergency powers to address the coronavirus on March 24th. A last-minute provision criminalizes the spreading of "false information" with up to 2 months in prison and a 1 million peso (US\$19,600) fine. "National and local authorities have used Covid-19 and existing legislation against those critical of the government's response to the coronavirus outbreak", says [Human Rights Online Philippines](#), rightfully concerned that this law can easily be misused by Philippine authorities to crack down on online criticism of government efforts: The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) has so far initiated legal action against 17 people for allegedly posting "false information" online. Police filed cases against two journalists, citing violations of the Covid-19 law and other laws. Police also brought a case against a town mayor for allegedly "causing a Covid-19 scare." The online-newspaper [Inquirer](#) and [Reporters Without Borders](#) reported about the cases of journalists Joshua Molo, Mario Batuigas and Amor Virata who have been criminalised and intimidated with legal prosecution through the new law for spreading "false information" - by the way, a term without legal definition.

Meanwhile the online magazine [Bulatlat](#) has created a timeline of the violations of media and press freedom under the lockdown and cites almost daily incidents. Human rights lawyer Chel Diokno has taken on the cases of several people who were charged with the new law and states that the NBI is now going even after ordinary citizens for simply airing their sentiments on the government's response to the crisis.

Human rights group [Karapatan](#) has criticized that government officials still make false statements, for example that individuals can be arrested without warrant during the Luzon-wide "enhanced community quarantine", which lead to disinformation in the society and human rights abuses on the ground. While false statements by officials go largely unprosecuted, artists', bloggers' and journalists' responses to the government's relief efforts to the crisis are denounced as "fake news", making them prospects to political and judicial persecution.

More Related Articles:

[Philstar, April 2, 2020 \(NBI going after social media users who criticize government, too\)](#)

[Inquirer, April 20, 2020 \(COVID-19 posts: Human rights lawyers denounce "fake news" arrest of resto owner\)](#)

[Inquirer, April 15, 2020 \(UN chief: world faces misinformation epidemic about virus\)](#)

[Human Rights Online Philippines, March 25, 2020 \(Human Rights Watch on "fake news" provision of Bayanihan law\)](#)

Newsletter-Archive

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Disclaimer:

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The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen (AMP) advocates the sustainable improvement of the human rights situation in the Philippines.

Members are: Amnesty International Germany, Bread for the World - Protestant Development Service, MISEREOR, Missio Munich, philippinenbüro e.V., the International Peace Observers Network (IPON) and the United Evangelical Mission (UEM).

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