

Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen

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## Statement on the Arrest of Dan Balucio

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen (AMP) and its member organizations express their deep concern about the recent human rights developments in the Philippines and especially about the arrest of human rights defender and United Church of Christ of the Philippines (UCCP) Pastor Dan Balucio on May 2, 2021.

UCCP Pastor Dan Balucio is a dedicated and well-known human rights activist, community organizer and coordinator of Andurog Mayon, an Ecumenical Disaster Response and Management Committee in Albay Province. In this function he lately coordinated the ongoing humanitarian response in communities affected by the typhoons Rolly and Ulysees. Through his humanitarian activities in the Philippines, he is part of the civil society movement that facilitates the governments humanitarian response to disasters such as typhoons. He is committed to serve the poor and vocal in his criticism of the current administration under President Duterte. Pastor Dan Balucio is also a member of the South Bicol Conference (SBC) which has a close partnership with the Protestant Churches in Germany.

On May 2, 2021 at 3.30 am, around 30 individuals of the police and military forcibly entered his bungalow at the Shannan Christian Academy in Barangay San Isidro in St. Domingo Albay Province, where Pastor Dan Balucio, his wife, their two children and one further UCCP staff member were staying. Pastor Dan Balucio serves as the administrator of the academy. They were brought outside the house where they had to wait almost 45 minutes while police and military went through their belongings without the presence of independent witnesses. Only when local officials arrived, a search warrant was shown to Pastor Balucio and the house was searched anew. This time, in the presence of the local officials, the state security forces allegedly found guns, ammunitions, a grenade and a red flag of the “armed rebels”.

In most other recent arrests of human rights defenders, and also in the killings known as the Bloody Sunday on March 7, 2021, police and military proceeded in the same way. State security forces allegedly found similar evidence, firearms, and explosives. Their possession leads to non-bailable cases and can, together with allegedly communist items, such as the red flag, lead to the allegation of terrorism. An alleged terrorist intention is already a crime under the new Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 (ATA). That means that the cases fall under the ATA, which critics say is based on a far too broad definition of terror and as a result dismantles legal proceedings for the protection of defendants.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> At this moment, 37 petitions against the ATA are pending at the Supreme Court. Petitioners are representatives of civil society organizations, lawyers, teachers, and representatives of the private business economy.

In most cases, the assault-like searches of police and military were based on search warrants, usually several issued by only one judge. In all incidents, the human rights defenders and their families vehemently deny the possession of the alleged evidence and complain to be vilified as terrorists. Philippine and international human rights organizations and church groups speak of planted evidence, trumped-up charges, and arbitrary arrests.

The Philippine Government, under the guise of counter-insurgency, brutally cracks down on human rights defenders and other civil society actors. Since the adoption of the ATA on July 3, 2020, the situation has further deteriorated. Repression and systematic attacks continuously intensify against rights defenders in the Philippines. By instituting legislative and policy restrictions, the government has weaponized the law. This is meant to silence dissent and to create a climate of fear. The instrumentalization of the counter-insurgency through the described vilifications, harassment, and red-tagging of civil society actors, such as Pastor Dan Balucio, has also been heavily criticized by the Opposition in the Philippine Parliament.

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen strongly condemns the arrest of Dan Balucio and calls upon the Government of the Philippines to

- Immediately drop the trumped-up charges against Pastor Dan Balucio,
- Hold accountable the individuals and entities responsible for the rampant red-tagging of NGOs and church workers,
- Immediately stop all intimidation, threats, and violence against human rights defenders and church workers by state security forces, civil servants, and government officials in the Philippines,
- Withdraw the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020.

We call upon the German Government and the European Union to

- Publicly condemn the arrest and the instrumentalization of legal proceedings,
- Speak up for a continuation of the investigation mechanism into human rights violations in the Philippines in the framework of the UN Human Rights Council,
- Work within the EU to ensure that human rights violations, the lack of Rule of Law and Good Governance are treated as severe violations of international agreements and that this will have corresponding consequences for trade relations, such as the suspension of trade preferences granted to the Philippines under the GSP+-status,
- Support Philippine civil society organizations and their advocacies on EU and UN level for respect and protection of human rights in the Philippines.