

Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen

c/o philippinenbüro e.V. im Asienhaus
Hohenzollernring 52
D - 50672 Köln/ Germany

Ph: +49 [221] 7161 21 22

E-Mail: info@amp.ngo

Web: www.amp.ngo



Cologne, 17.08.2021 | AMP – Statement

Anniversary of the murder of Zara Alvarez

The Philippine human rights defender, teacher, and single mother, Zara Alvarez, was killed by unidentified perpetrators near her apartment in Bacolod City, Negros Island (Philippines) one year ago, on August 17, 2020.

When we, the members of the Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen (AMP) received the information, we were shocked and in deep grief. Today, our thoughts remain with Zara's family, friends, and colleagues. Yet, no perpetrators have been identified, nobody has been held accountable.

Meanwhile, the situation for those who worked and lived with Zara and engage for the cause of human rights has further worsened. The escalating campaign of the Duterte administration against human rights defenders, church workers, and civil society members leads to a climate of fear and constant harassment. The so-called war on drugs is ongoing, even with rising numbers of extrajudicial killings amidst the pandemic. Impunity for grave human rights abuses remains a major problem.

Zara Alvarez had been receiving death threats for years. This finally led to a trumped-up charge against her and to her arbitrary detention in October 2012. She was accused of being a member of the communist rebel group New People's Army (NPA) by the Philippine military and, based on fabricated evidence, charged with murder. As a result, she remained imprisoned for almost two years. Zara Alvarez was released on bail in July 2014, but the legal proceeding was prolonged for years, which served the purpose of imposing restrictions on her work and to intimidate her family, her colleagues, and the public. She was acquitted for lack of evidence only in March 2020, eight years after first being charged. Regardless of her acquittal, Zara Alvarez was exposed to continuing harassment. She was vilified as a terrorist and suffered further threats against herself and her family. In a petition of the Department of Justice, she – amongst 600 other persons – was once again accused of being a communist terrorist in February 2018. Zara Alvarez continued to receive death threats and lived under immense pressure with the constant danger for her life and substantial legal uncertainty. On August 17, 2020, the years of harassment, threats, and repression culminated in her assassination.

The AMP has accompanied Zara Alvarez' effort to support victims of human rights violations and for years, we have been pointing out that the Philippine Government, under the guise of counter insurgency and through the omnipresent political vilification, brutally cracks down on human rights defenders, civil society members, social workers and generally those who dissent. Thereby, the Government seeks to hamper and delegitimize the commitment of the civil society to human rights, a clean environment, a just distribution of



land and the rights of indigenous people. The Anti-Terrorism Law of 2020 (ATA), which is systematically abused to repress human rights defenders, is based on a far too broad definition of terror and as a result dismantles legal proceedings for the protection of defendants. As it puts the concept of rule of law in the Philippines at stake, the bill serves to legitimize repression, violence, and even extralegal killings against civil society players and human rights defenders.

Zara Alvarez is one of many victims of the deteriorating human rights situation in the Philippines. Under President Duterte, the Philippines is one of the deadliest countries for human rights defenders worldwide. At least 242 such cases of extrajudicial killings have been documented since Duterte took office in June 2016. The numbers of these killings are rising, and we fear with our partners in the Philippines that they will continue to rise.

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen strongly condemns the murder of Zara Alvarez and calls upon the Government of the Philippines to

- Immediately and impartially investigate the murder of Zara Alvarez and other extrajudicial killings and prosecute the perpetrators and all parties involved in the crimes,
- Immediately stop all intimidation, criminalization, threats, and violence against human rights defenders and civil society by state security forces, civil servants, and government officials in the Philippines,
- Withdraw the recently adopted Anti-Terrorism Law of 2020,
- End the so-called War on Drugs.

We call upon the German Government and the European Union to

- Publicly condemn human rights violations in the Philippines, especially those connected to the government's counterinsurgency campaign along with the application of the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2020 against human rights defenders and civil society members,
- Demand the end of impunity for severe human rights violations in the Philippines within the framework of diplomatic relations,
- Call for the establishment of an independent international investigation into human rights violations in the Philippines within the framework of the UN Human Rights Council,
- Immediately commence the withdrawal procedure of the trade preferences granted to the Philippines under the GSP+ mechanism and set clear human rights-based criteria the Philippines has to fulfill to avoid the withdrawal,
- Support Philippine civil society organizations and their advocacies on EU and UN level for respect and protection of human rights in the Philippines.

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP – Action Network Human Rights - Philippines) is an initiative of seven major German church-based agencies and human rights organizations to promote advocacy and information work in Germany and the EU regarding the human rights situation in the Philippines. Member Organizations of the AMP are Amnesty International Germany, Bread for the World, International Peace Observers Network (IPON), MISEREOR, Missio Munich, philippinenbüro e.V., and the United Evangelical Mission (UEM). The main focus of the network lies on the core human rights issues of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and fabricated charges against political activists.

