

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](mailto:info@amp.ngo)

Web: [www.amp.ngo](http://www.amp.ngo)



Cologne, 24.08.2020 | AMP – Statement

## Murder of Zara Alvarez

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

The members of the Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen (AMP) are shocked and in deep grief about the murder of Zara Alvarez. Our thoughts are with Zara 's family, friends and colleagues.

Zara Alvarez was a dedicated and well-known human rights activist and community organizer, who supported landless peasants and agricultural workers for claiming their rights, especially in her homeland, the Philippine island of Negros. She worked closely together with other human rights NGOs and church organizations. She worked last with the NIHP-CD (Negros Island Health Integrated Program for Community Development) as a research and advocacy officer. The AMP has accompanied Zara Alvarez' effort to support peasant families and victims of human rights violations deprived of their rights for many years. The AMP already described the repressions she was exposed to in its Human Rights Report 2014. Zara Alvarez also committed herself to human rights in the Philippines in the international context. Invited by the AMP, she participated as a speaker at a conference with the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung on the subject of "Rule of Law" in Berlin and Potsdam in October 2019.

Zara Alvarez had been receiving death threats for years. This started during the term of office of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and finally led to a trumped-up charge against her and to her illegitimate 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 to impose 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 psycho-social pressure with the constant danger for her life and substantial legal uncertainty. Last Monday evening, the years of harassment, threats, and repression culminated in her assassination.



For years, the AMP has been pointing out that the Philippine Government, under the guise of counterterrorism, brutally cracks down on human rights defenders and other civil society players. 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-Terror Bill, which was signed in July 2020, has got to be understood in this context. It is based on a far too broad definition of terror and as a result dismantles legal proceedings for the protection of defendants. Above all, 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 182 such cases of extrajudicial killings have been documented since Duterte took office in June 2016. The numbers of these killings are continuously rising. In the past 18 months alone 48 human rights defenders were murdered.

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 prosecute the perpetrators and all parties involved in the crime,
- Immediately stop all intimidation, threats, and violence against human rights defenders by state security forces, civil servants, and government officials in the Philippines,
- Withdraw the recently adopted Anti-Terror Bill of 2020.

We call upon the German Government to

- Immediately and publicly condemn the murder of Zara Alvarez,
- Speak up for the end of impunity in the Philippines within the framework of diplomatic relations,
- 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 and in particular the announced reintroduction of the death penalty 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.

*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.*

