

Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen

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

Ph: +49 [221] 7161 21 22

E-Mail: info@amp.ngo

Web: www.amp.ngo



Cologne, 04.06.2024 | AMP – Statement

On fabricated charges against CERNET members in the Philippines

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte Philippinen (AMP) strongly condemns the fabricated charges, filed on May 8, 2024, against 27 individuals affiliated with the organization Community Empowerment Resource Network (CERNET) for allegedly violating Section 8(ii), in relation to Section 9, of the "Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act" (Republic Act No. 10168) from 2012. We find these charges to be unsubstantiated, seemingly designed to tarnish CERNET's reputation and to hinder its operations.

Founded in 2001, CERNET has consistently worked alongside grassroots organizations to improve poverty conditions in their communities with provable impact on the lives served. Despite their recognized work, for years, CERNET has been the target of unfounded accusations of supporting the communist insurgency in the Philippines. This practice of so-called "red-tagging," meaning the branding of individuals or organizations as "terrorist," has been a common strategy employed by Philippine security forces to prevent progressive organizations and their staff from carrying out their work. "Red-tagging" often leads to further harassment, public defamation, unlawful surveillance, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and even killings. Shortly before the said charges were pressed against CERNET, Philippine security forces "red-tagged" CERNET and its members during a press conference in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, on April 30, 2024. Among the accused individuals are former and active development and human rights workers who were or still are affiliated with CERNET. The fabricated charges do not only put them and their families at risk but also hamper their respective organizations and their essential work with marginalized communities.

AMP records indicate a significant increase in the number of human rights defenders who have been killed in recent years under the guise of the government's counterinsurgency. Only recently, in January 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression Irene Khan has denounced the recurring practice of "red-tagging" and called for the abolishment of government agencies known for harassing activists. Such actions hamper and delegitimize community-led development and poverty reduction work.

In this context, AMP is deeply concerned by the potential weaponization of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism laws against NGOs and activists. After being once again grey-listed by the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG) in February 2024, the Philippine government seems to be pressured to show progress in the prosecution of money laundering and terrorism financing cases. And, as a consequence, the government seems to crack down on civil society organizations.

We urgently call on the Philippine government to retract all fabricated charges against CERNET and to conduct thorough investigations to bring those responsible for "red-tagging" and fabricating the charges to justice.

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP – Action Network Human Rights - Philippines) is an initiative of seven major German church-based 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, Brot für die Welt, 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.

