



HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE PHILIPPINES UNDER MARCOS JR.

ABOUT THE AKTIONSBÜNDNIS MENSCHENRECHTE – PHILIPPINEN

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP – Action Network Human Rights – Philippines) uses lobbying and public relations work to influence political decision-makers and multipliers in Germany as well as at EU and UN level with the aim of contributing to an improvement of the human rights situation in the Philippines. Member organizations of the AMP are Amnesty International Germany, Brot für die Welt (BfdW), International Peace Observers Network (IPON), MISEREOR, Missio Munich, philippinenbüro e. V., and the United Evangelical Mission (UEM). The thematic focus of the work is on extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and fabricated charges against political activists. The AMP also addresses the underlying structural problems of impunity and restricted civic space.

The AMP was founded in 2007 by church agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Germany that have maintained partnerships with civil society activists and networks in the Philippines for many years. The AMP responded to reports from these Philippine partners that the number of politically motivated killings and other serious human rights violations had increased significantly since 2001. Employees and human rights defenders from these partner networks were among the victims and those who were criminalized on trumped-up charges or forcible disappeared.

IMPRINT

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Layout: Zaadstra Design, Cologne

Print: DieUmweltdruckerei

Editorial deadline: June 2024

ISBN 978-3-933341-95-7

Pictures: Raffy Lerma (Title, p. 11, p. 14), Joem Febiar Saguiquit (p. 2/3), AMP (p. 6, p. 8, p. 10, p. 17), Karapatan (p. 13), Jacqueline Hernandez, Rappler (p. 15), IDEALS (p. 16), Iglesia Filipina Independiente (p. 19), Karapatan Cagayan Valley (p. 20), United Church of Christ in the Philippines (p. 21)



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ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines	IPRA	Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act	UCCP	United Church of Christ in the Philippines
AMP	Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (Action Network Human Rights-Philippines)	ISAFP	Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines	UN	United Nations
AMLC	Anti-Money Laundering Council	KADUAMI	Katinnulong Daguiti Umili iti Amianan (English: “Cooperation between people in the north”)	UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
ATA	Anti-Terrorism Act	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	UNJP	United Nations Joint Programme
ATC	Anti-Terrorism Council	NPA	New People's Army	UPR	Universal Periodic Review
BIDA	Buhay Ingatan, Droga'y Ayawan (English: “Take care of your life, and don't take drugs”)	NTF-ELCAC	National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict	VIHDA	Visayas Human Development Agency
CERNET	Community Empowerment Resource Network	OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights		
CHR	Commission on Human Rights	PAHRA	Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates		
CIDG	Criminal Investigation and Detection Group	PCIJ	Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism		
CPA	Cordillera Peoples Alliance	PDEA	Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency		
EU	European Union	PNP	Philippine National Police		
GSP+	Generalized Scheme of Preferences	RESBAK	Respond and Break the Silence Against the Killings		
HRDs	Human Rights Defenders	SC	Supreme Court		
ICC	International Criminal Court	SMNI	Sonshine Media Network International		
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	SONA	State of the Nation Address		
IFI	Iglesia Filipina Independiente				



Civil society groups commemorate the EDSA People Power Revolution on February 25, 2024, in Metro Manila.

FOREWORD

Since its foundation, the Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP – Action Network Human Rights – Philippines) has regularly published reports to highlight and document human rights violations in the Philippines during the respective periods under review. Based on case studies, these reports identify specific patterns of human rights abuses. The Philippine government has been repeatedly called upon to investigate past human rights violations, to prevent future human rights violations, to hold perpetrators accountable, to introduce legal reforms, and to protect Human Rights Defenders (HRDs).

The 2024 Human Rights Report follows these same objectives. It makes it clear that since President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. assumed office on June 30, 2022, the situation regarding impunity and human rights violations has remained unchanged, and there have been no significant improvements in the protection of HRDs in the Philippines.

President Marcos Jr. presents his government as being more committed to human rights than his predecessor. However, he continues to pursue the repressive policies of the Duterte administration. Drug-related killingsⁱ still occur and the justice system remains dysfunctional. To date, there have been only three court convictions for drug-related killings under Marcos Jr.'s leadership. The political persecution of HRDs also remains alarming. During the period under review, the AMP observed an increasing number of enforced disappearances of HRDs, so-called *red-tagging*,ⁱⁱ and the systematic criminalization of HRDs.

The Philippine government has consistently declined to fully cooperate in International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations into possible crimes against humanity in connection with the so-called “war on drugs.” This refers to the period between 2011 and 2019, when Rodrigo

Duterte was mayor and vice mayor of Davao City and president of the Philippines. This refusal underscores the lack of political will to end impunity. Human rights groups estimate that at least 27,000 drug-related killings occurred under the Duterte administration.

Two years into the presidency and with no significant improvements in the human rights landscape in the Philippines, the international community is nonetheless intensifying diplomatic relations with the country. However, despite the increasing geopolitical importance of the Philippines in the Indo-Pacific region for the international community's foreign and security policies, particularly amid political tensions with China and Russia, it is crucial that human rights are not neglected. From the perspective of civil society, lack of progress in this area is regrettable. The international community should have seized the opportunity presented by the Marcos Jr. administration's openness to collaboration to reinforce its criticisms and push forward the clear recommendations formulated in previous years regarding the human rights situation.

This fifth AMP Human Rights Report concludes with concrete recommendations for the Philippine government, the European Union and its member states, as well as other international parties. These include recommendations on how to improve HRD protection in the Philippines.

On behalf of the members of the Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen:

Jochen Range
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ⁱ The Dahas Project by the University of the Philippines defines a “drug-related killing” as a drug-related incident in which the victim was killed by violent means (e.g. beaten, shot, or stabbed to death), which meets at least one of the criteria specified by Dahas (see <https://dahas.upd.edu.ph/reports/>).

ⁱⁱ *Red-tagging* is the practice of branding individuals or organizations as “terrorist” and accusing them of being members or supporters of the armed communist rebel group New People's Army (NPA).

ONGOING HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS UNDER MARCOS JR.

Press conference with German Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz on the occasion of the visit of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to Berlin on March 12, 2024.



Despite the change of administration in June 2022, the human rights situation in the Philippines remains problematic. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has reaffirmed his government’s commitment to human rights in various international forums, presenting himself to the international community as open and willing to cooperate. However, concrete measures to actually improve the human rights situation have yet to be implemented.

President Marcos Jr. has thus far continued to pursue the repressive policies of the previous government of Rodrigo Duterte (2016–2022). He has ended neither impunity nor the political persecution of human rights defenders (HRDs). Despite the purported new prioritization of rehabilitation in the government’s anti-drugs campaign (also known as the “BIDA Program,”ⁱⁱⁱ

November 2022), drug-related killings continue to occur. Investigations into these predominantly extrajudicial killings – including the 700 deaths under Marcos Jr. (as of June 30, 2024)ⁱ and at least 27,000² committed in the context of former President Duterte’s so-called “war on drugs” – remain inadequate.^{iv} Furthermore, the Marcos Jr. administration has so far declined to cooperate in International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations into possible crimes against humanity committed during Rodrigo Duterte’s time as president of the Philippines and mayor and vice mayor of Davao City in the context of the “war on drugs” (2011–2019).

ⁱⁱⁱ BIDA stands for “Buhay Ingatan, Droga’y Ayawan” in the Tagalog language, which means: “Take care of your life, and don’t take drugs.”

^{iv} The latest published government statistics on killings that occurred during police anti-drug operations cite 6,252 cases between July 1, 2016, and May 31, 2022. The Commission on Human Rights estimated that at least 27,000 extrajudicial killings took place during the “war on drugs” between 2016 and 2018, including killings by state security forces and unidentified perpetrators.

The 305 killings of HRDs^v documented by the AMP between July 1, 2016, and March 30, 2024, have still not been fully investigated. Instead, the criminalization and *red-tagging* of HRDs have increased further under the Marcos Jr. government.

Former President Rodrigo Duterte plunged the Philippines into a veritable human rights crisis. During his time in office, numerous member states of the United Nations (UN) fiercely criticized the Philippine government for failing to comply with international human rights standards. Since the change of government in 2022, however, human rights issues have been increasingly sidelined in diplomatic relations, despite the persistently problematic human rights situation in the country.

In the meantime, the government of President Marcos Jr. is gaining increasing recognition on the international stage, as illustrated by the Philippine president's visit to Berlin on March 12, 2024.³ Talks there centered on expanding bilateral cooperation in the fields of skilled labor migration, coastal protection, and climate initiatives.⁴ The Philippine president strategically used Germany's cautious critique of his administration's human rights policies to create the impression that the country's human rights situation had generally improved.⁵ Marcos Jr. was able to do this in part because of a further escalation of geopolitical tensions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The Philippines has assumed a more prominent political role in the Indo-Pacific region for the international community's foreign and security policy.⁶ As a result, the European Union (EU), Germany, Australia, and the US have increasingly prioritized securing trade routes in the Indo-Pacific region in their diplomatic relations with the Philippines. In March 2024, the EU announced a resumption⁷ of negotiations on a bilateral free trade agreement with the Philippines. In 2023, the EU also renewed trade privileges for the Philippines under the Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+),⁸ which are conditional on adherence to international human rights standards. After the US reaffirmed its security partnership⁹ with the Philippines in 2023, Australia signed a strategic

partnership¹⁰ and an agreement to promote maritime cooperation¹¹ with the island nation. The international community is monitoring the increasing number of clashes between China and Philippine Coast Guard in the West Philippine, or South China Sea, with growing concern.¹² These developments are convenient for Marcos Jr.'s government as they divert attention away from the country's human rights issues toward the interests of the international community.

LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

To this day, the Philippine government denies ongoing brutal police violence and impunity in the country. Since Marcos Jr. took office, the University of the Philippines research project *Dahas*^{vi} has documented 700 drug-related killings (as of June 30, 2024).¹³ Official government statistics are still pending. In January 2024, the Philippine president touted the achievements of his new anti-drugs campaign (BIDA program), highlighting, in particular, charges against over 170 police officers for drug-related offences, including the planting of evidence and excessive violence.¹⁴ In March 2024, Sebastian "Baste" Duterte, Davao City mayor and son of the former president, announced that he was resuming the "war on drugs" in his city. This could prompt a massive surge in drug-related killings again, with even fewer perpetrators being called to account.¹⁵

Despite continued impunity for serious human rights abuses, the Philippine government insists that its justice system is still fully functional.¹⁶ Marcos Jr. endeavored to illustrate this by highlighting progress made in two high-profile court cases, which attracted considerable international attention: firstly with the acquittal in September 2023¹⁷ of journalist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa, who had been accused of tax evasion with her media company Rappler; secondly, with the acquittal in June 2024 of former Senator Leila de Lima, who had been imprisoned for over six years.¹⁸

v AMP documentation about killed HRDs and journalists can be found in the AMP reports from 2017, 2019, 2022, and 2024.

vi "Dahas" means "violence" in Tagalog and is a project carried out by the Third World Study Center at the University of the Philippines' College of Social Sciences and Philosophy. Dahas has been monitoring drug-related killings in the Philippines since June 2018.



President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. holds a press conference at Malacañang Palace on July 27, 2022, to mark the aftermath of an earthquake in the north of the island of Luzon.

However, these instances stand in stark contrast with the tens of thousands of unsolved drug-related killings and hundreds of killed HRDs. Since 2016, under President Marcos Jr., only three further court convictions have been secured in two cases of drug-related killings.¹⁹ Furthermore, the trials of numerous imprisoned HRDs also drag on for years without a verdict being reached.

While AMP documentation reveals a slight decline in the number of killings of HRDs under Marcos Jr., enforced disappearances are on the rise. Since 2023, at least nine human rights and environmental activists²⁰ have been disappeared. Only six have reappeared to date (see the case of Gumanao and Dayoha on p. 15).²¹

FURTHER RESTRICTIONS ON CIVIC SPACE

Civic space continues to be restricted under Marcos Jr. The government is systematically criminalizing HRDs, exploiting weaknesses in the dysfunctional justice system and laws to combat terrorism and money laundering. The criticized National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) has been neither censured nor dissolved by the Marcos Jr. government.²² Since it was established in 2018, the NTF-ELCAC has been known for systematically *red-tagging* human rights defenders. *Red-tagging* usually leads to further defamation, criminalization, and, in many cases, even fatalities. Contrary to the claims of the Philippine government,²³ numerous cases highlight that *red-tagging* remains a prevalent form of repression under Marcos Jr.²⁴ In January 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, Irene Khan,²⁵ and in November 2023, the UN Special



On the eve of All Saints' Day, October 31, 2023, the families of drug war victims gathered at the "Bantayog ng mga Bayani" (Monument of Heroes) in Quezon City to remember their deceased loved ones.

Rapporteur on the protection of human rights in the context of climate change, Ian Fry,²⁶ called for the abolishment of the NTF-ELCAC.

The controversial Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) passed by the Duterte government in 2020 is also being used by the new administration to undermine HRDs.²⁷ In November 2022, the UN Human Rights Committee called for problematic sections of the ATA to be amended.²⁸ Several UN member states recommended the same in the context of the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on the Philippines in November 2022.²⁹ UN Special Rapporteur Fry even called for the ATA to be disbanded in 2023.³⁰ The government of Marcos Jr. has so far rejected all recommendations for the ATA.³¹

The situation for media and press freedom remains critical in the Philippines – this was also a conclusion reached by UN Special Rapporteur Irene Khan in January 2024.³² In the Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index, the country dropped from 132nd place in 2023 to 134th in 2024.³³ According to the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), the media landscape in the Philippines remains problematic in April 2024 with at least 135 attacks against media professionals recorded under Marcos Jr.³⁴ The AMP has documented the deaths of three journalists since Marcos Jr. took office (see list on page 27).

Since the defeat of former Vice President Leni Robredo in the 2022 presidential elections, the opposition camp has struggled to field a strong opposition candidate. Currently, with House member Edcel Lagman and Senator Risa Hontiveros, the opposition remains in an absolute minority in Congress.³⁵

SPOTLIGHT I – HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The critical situation faced by Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) remains deeply concerning under the government of President Marcos Jr. In 2023, for the tenth consecutive year, Global Witness ranked the Philippines as the most dangerous country in Asia for land or environmental defenders.³⁶ Civicus' monitoring described the situation in the Philippines in 2023 as "repressed," indicating that civic space is severely restricted.³⁷ According to the Global Rights Index, the Philippines was one of the ten worst countries in the world for working people in 2023.³⁸ The dysfunctional justice system continues to encourage the criminalization of HRDs, using the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), among other things, to do so. Local human rights organizations also describe the practice of *red-tagging* HRDs under Marcos Jr. as especially problematic.³⁹ The number of enforced disappearances of activists also rose, particularly in 2023.⁴⁰

The narrative that human rights are a "terrorist idea," promoted, in particular, by former president Duterte, has persisted since the change of government in mid-2022. The increasing number of *red-tagging* attacks and use of the ATA targeting HRDs have only served to endorse the narrative further. The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) and controversial broadcaster Sonshine Media Network International (SMNI) continue to brand HRDs as "terrorists."^{vii} *Red-tagging* attacks by the NTF-ELCAC against HRDs came to a head on March 13, 2023, during a press conference on the draft of the Human Rights Defenders Protection Act.⁴¹ The task force criticized the bill's broad definition of HRDs, which it claimed could also include terrorists, criminals, and other enemies of the state.⁴² It accused human rights groups, such as the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) and Karapatan, of supporting terrorist organizations.⁴³ The bill has been awaiting approval by the Senate since September 2023.⁴⁴

In October 2022, the Philippine Secretary of Justice, Jesus Crispin Remulla, defended the practice of *red-tagging* as

a "right of the government."⁴⁵ During the EU Human Rights Dialogue in October 2023, the Philippines finally condemned⁴⁶ *red-tagging* and, in February 2024, stressed that there was no such policy under its government.⁴⁷ This last statement could be seen as a response to criticism from UN Special Rapporteur Irene Khan in January 2024, who accused government authorities of deliberately *red-tagging* HRDs.⁴⁸ She also recommended adopting an Executive Order on *red-tagging* and the Human Rights Defenders Protection bill, as well reforming libel laws.⁴⁹ On May 8, 2024, the Supreme Court (SC) announced a landmark decision in which *red-tagging* is declared a threat to "a person's right to life, liberty, and security."⁵⁰ According to the SC, this also justifies the issuance of a writ of amparo, which allows protection orders to be extended.⁵¹

Marcos Jr. is continuing his predecessor's policies of repression not only by maintaining the NTF-ELCAC, but also by increasing the use of the ATA to target HRDs. The ATA is a highly problematic law, first and foremost because of its overly broad and vague definition of terrorism.⁵² The Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC) can classify individuals and organizations as "terrorist" even in the absence of any evidence. Suspects can be detained for up to 24 days without an arrest warrant, and their bank accounts, as well as those of their organizations, can be frozen.

The ATA has institutionalized the criminalization of HRDs, as illustrated by the case of four human rights defenders from the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) in mid-2023.⁵³ An ATC resolution of June 7, 2023 declared the CPA members Windel Bolinget, Stephen Tauli, Jennifer Awingan-Taggaoa, and Sarah Abellon-Alikes as "terrorists."⁵⁴ The four activists only learnt of the resolution through an ATC press release almost a month later.⁵⁵ Shortly afterwards, the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) ordered their private accounts as well as those of their relatives and their organization to be frozen.⁵⁶ On November 23, 2023, the CPA members challenged their designation as terrorists and the freezing of their bank accounts before a court in Baguio.⁵⁷ They declared they had been denied their constitutional right of due process and access to appropriate legal remedies.⁵⁸ In early February 2024, however, the Court of Appeal rejected their petition.⁵⁹

vii SMNI is owned by the pastor Apollo Quiboloy, who is wanted for child sex trafficking in the US. The station was hosted by Rodrigo Duterte and former NTF-ELCAC spokesperson Lorraine Badoy, among others. For years, SMNI systematically spread disinformation and *red-tagged* government-critical individuals and organizations at home and abroad. On December 19, 2023, SMNI was suspended for 30 days for violating license conditions.



The disappeared and resurfaced environmental activists Jonila Castro and Jhed Tamano.

Under Marcos Jr., at least nine cases of enforced disappearances of HRDs have occurred.^{viii} On January 10, 2023, for example, Dyan Gumanao and Armand Dayoha were abducted at a busy port in Cebu City. They were released days later, probably in response to considerable public pressure (this case is discussed in greater detail on page 15).⁶⁰ Indigenous rights activist Gene de Jesus and his companion Dexter Capuyan from the Cordillera region have been missing since April 25, 2023.⁶¹ On September 2, 2023, environmental activists Jonila Castro and Jhed Tamano were abducted near Metro Manila.⁶² Two weeks later, the government presented the two women at a press conference, claiming they were surrendered fighters in the armed insurgency of the New People’s Army (NPA).⁶³ The two women denied the

claims, saying they had been abducted by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).⁶⁴ Perjury charges against the two women were dismissed in 2023.⁶⁵ In early 2024, the Department of Justice recommended that Castro and Tamanao also be charged with grave oral defamation.⁶⁶ On March 24, 2024, the two environmental activists Francisco “Eco” Dangla and Joxelle “Jak” Tiong disappeared in Pangasinan, reappearing three days later.⁶⁷ Labor rights activist William Lariosa of Bukidnon has been missing since April 10, 2024.⁶⁸ Under the military dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. (1972–1986), more than 900 people disappeared, including numerous activists.⁶⁹

In 2012, the Philippines became the first country in Asia to pass a law criminalizing enforced disappearances (Anti-Enforced Disappearance Act).^{ix} To date, however,

^{viii} Enforced disappearance means that state agents are involved in abducting, holding captive, and concealing the whereabouts of victims. This was systematically carried out under previous governments.

^{ix} The law also bans the use of secret detention facilities and allows for compensation and reparations for victims and their families.

On June 12, 2017, the artist group Respond and Break the Silence Against the Killings (RESBAK) unfurled its “STOP THE KILLINGS” banner for the first time during a protest march in Manila to condemn the numerous murders under the administration of former President Rodrigo Duterte.



no perpetrators have been convicted under this law. The case of human rights defender Elena Tijamo, who disappeared in 2020 (see the AMP 2022 report) and was discovered dead one year later, has still not been solved. In none of the cited cases of enforced disappearances of HRDs in 2023 have the perpetrators been held accountable. If investigations were initiated, they ended with perpetrators not being identified. According to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the reasons for this include lack of political will, lack of forensic expertise,⁷⁰ bogus testimonies or lack of statements from witnesses, denied access to police reports and missing or switched-off police body cameras.⁷¹ Most of the investigations into the 305 killings of HRDs documented by the AMP face the same challenges. These include the killings of human rights defender Zara Alvarez and nine Indigenous leaders of the Tumandok community (see the AMP 2022 report).

CASE: DYAN GUMANAO AND ARMAND DAYOHA^x



Dyan Gumanao is a long-time employee and coordinator of the non-governmental organization (NGO) Community Empowerment Resource Network (CERNET) and a volunteer with the Alliance of Concerned Teachers. Her partner Armand Dayoha is a labor rights organizer of Alyansa sa mga Mamumuo sa Sugbo-Kilusang Mayo Uno and coordinator of the Alliance of Health Workers. Dayoha also works as a capacity-building coordinator with the NGO Visayas Human Development Agency (VIHDA).

Gumanao and Dayoha were abducted in broad daylight in Cebu City on January 10, 2023. Their families reported them missing on January 13, 2023. A concerned citizen shared a video of the incident with the victims' families after news of the missing activists circulated online. The video showed the couple being

forced into a vehicle by men in plainclothes in the port of Cebu City. Numerous people witnessed the incident.

Strong public pressure and the joint efforts of various organizations likely contributed to the release of Gumanao and Dayoha on the morning of January 16, 2023, in Carmen Town, North Cebu. The two were found to be physically unharmed but traumatized. The HRDs reported that their kidnappers had posed as police officers. They were blindfolded, held captive without any contact to the outside world, and interrogated separately. Their abductors tried to force them to sign an affidavit confessing membership of the armed communist rebel group NPA.

The Philippine National Police (PNP) denies any involvement in the incident. However, CCTV footage enabled the CHR to identify one person and a motorbike, which were involved in the abduction and could be linked to the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP).

The CHR began sending summons to the AFP in July 2023. In November 2023, the identified individual submitted an affidavit denying any involvement in the incident. At a hearing on December 18, 2023, the AFP's legal department responded to the CHR, requesting questions that need further clarification. The CHR can now submit a final report with a recommendation or file a complaint (insofar as it believes it has sufficient grounds to do so). Criminal charges have not yet been filed.

^x The information on specific cases of human rights violations against HRDs cited in the report is based primarily on information and data supplied to the AMP by civil society partners in the Philippines.

SPOTLIGHT II – IMPUNITY AND THE RULE OF LAW

The funeral of Jerhode “Jemboy” Baltazar, who was killed during a police operation on August 2, 2023, in Navotas in Metro Manila.



Impunity persists and adherence to the rule of law remains limited in the Philippines under the government of President Marcos Jr. The country slipped from seventh to eighth place on the Global Impunity Index in October 2023.⁷² The main reasons for this are the lack of or inadequate investigations into killings or cases of extrajudicial executions and fabricated charges against human rights defenders (HRDs). The Marcos Jr. administration has so far implemented no significant reforms or adopted any measures to effectively combat impunity and therefore other human rights violations in the country. Neither the revised anti-drugs campaign in 2022 nor the government’s engagement in technical cooperation with the UN (UN Joint Programme/UNJP) for investigations into extrajudicial killings have brought about any notable improvement.

The case^{xi} of the murdered 17-year-old Jerhode “Jemboy” Baltazar highlights the ongoing issue of police violence under President Marcos Jr. and the challenges posed by the Philippines’ dysfunctional justice system. On August 2, 2023, police officers shot and killed Baltazar during a police operation in Navotas, a district of Metro-Manila.⁷³ Baltazar was in a fishing boat at a river near his home together with a friend when the police fired several shots at him.⁷⁴ According to his companion, he was hit in the head and hand, before he fell into the river.⁷⁵ The police claimed they had mistaken Baltazar for a wanted person.⁷⁶ According to the results of an autopsy, the location of the gunshot wounds suggest a position of self-defense.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Baltazar would have survived had he not been left in the river for

^{xi} This case is not considered a drug-related killing. According to local organizations, clear classification is not possible because the victim was mistaken for a wanted person.



Police protection on the occasion of the State of the Nation Address (SONA) by former President Rodrigo Duterte in July 2021.

several hours.⁷⁸ The police officers did not follow the prescribed protocol for handling an unarmed person like Baltazar.⁷⁹ On October 5, 2023, six police officers were arrested on suspicion of murder. On February 27, 2024, a regional court finally sentenced police officer Gerry Maliban to four years' imprisonment for homicide.⁸⁰ According to the judge, it was not murder because there was no malicious intent.⁸¹ Maliban claimed Baltazar had ignored the police officers and jumped into the river, forcing them to use their firearms.⁸² Four police officers received four-month prison sentences for unlawful use of their firearms, while one police officer was acquitted.⁸³ The Department of Justice and Baltazar's family announced they will appeal against the verdict.⁸⁴

The charges against 17 police officers for the murder of labor leader and Secretary-General of BAYAN-Cavite

Emmanuel "Manny" Asuncion were dropped on January 16, 2023, highlighting persistent impunity and the ongoing problem of a dysfunctional justice system under the administration of Marcos Jr.⁸⁵ Asuncion was killed on March 7, 2021, during a PNP raid in Cavite province.⁸⁶ In the course of the so-called "Bloody Sunday" massacre, raids were also carried out in the provinces of Rizal and Batangas, when a total of nine activists were killed.⁸⁷ The Department of Justice dropped the charges against Asuncion due to allegedly insufficient evidence.⁸⁸

The police officers stated in the Asuncion case that they had acted in self-defense ("nanlaban" or "to defend one's self").⁸⁹ "Nanlaban" is a common narrative in the Philippines, according to which victims supposedly resist state security forces with firearms. An autopsy of Asuncion's body on March 12, 2021, however, concluded that the numerous gunshot wounds, especially to the

chest, indicate a targeted killing.⁹⁰ Moreover, since the forensic pathologist had no access to the deceased's clothing or the crime scene, it could not be proven that the officers had acted in self-defense, or that Asuncion had held or fired a weapon.⁹¹ Asuncion's wife appealed against the Department of Justice's decision in January 2023.⁹²

In other cases, prosecutors file charges and judges allow proceedings to continue without taking into account exculpatory evidence. This is also seen in numerous cases of fabricated charges against HRDs, reflecting both the ongoing abuse and the weaknesses of the Philippine justice system. Fabricated charges, often based on falsified evidence and false accusations, are used to discredit HRDs and keep them in prison for as long as possible. Typical charges include murder, arson, illegal possession of firearms and explosives, or terrorist financing. Release on bail is rarely possible for these charges. Due to overtaxed courts, slow bureaucracy, and corruption within the justice system, trials drag on for years (see the cases of Yañez, Adviento, and Vallente on pages 19 to 21).

The persistent refusal of Marcos Jr. government to fully cooperate with ICC investigations into possible crimes against humanity underscores its lack of political will to end impunity in the country. Marcos Jr. argues that the ICC investigations would be a threat to the sovereignty of the Philippines.⁹³ In January 2023, the ICC Pre-Trial Chamber decided to resume investigations in the Philippines after the government filed an appeal and claimed the ICC no longer had jurisdiction over the situation in the country following the Philippines' withdrawal from the ICC in 2019. According to former Senator Antonio Trillanes IV, ICC investigators visited the Philippines in December 2023.⁹⁴

The government also rejected an extension or reissue of the UNJP (07/2021–2024). The program was designed to help the Philippine government conduct appropriate investigations into extrajudicial killings that occurred during police operations. The report of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) from September 2022 noted one year after the UNJP came into force that “access to justice for victims of human rights violations and abuses remained very

limited.”⁹⁵ Despite the lack of any significant progress, the program remained an important platform for civic engagement with the Philippine government, the UN, and other parties in the field of human rights. On May 8, 2024, however, the government set up a Special Committee on Human Rights Coordination (based on Administrative Order 22), instead of extending and improving the UNJP.⁹⁶ The Special Committee is part of the Presidential Human Rights Committee and is chaired by the Executive Secretary and the Justice Secretary.⁹⁷ It addresses core elements of the UNJP and is intended to enhance mechanisms for the protection of human rights in the Philippines.⁹⁸ There are no clear plans to involve civil society groups and the CHR.⁹⁹

In the past 20 years, the Philippine government has set up a multitude of bodies and mechanisms to investigate and prosecute serious human rights violations. They include special investigative units, such as the Usig Task Force, human rights units within the police force and army, and the Inter-Agency Committee on Extra-Legal Killings (also known as Administrative Order 35). According to local human rights groups, none of these mechanisms have so far proved effective in investigating serious human rights violations.

CASE: ALDEEM YAÑEZ



Aldeem Yañez has been actively involved in peace-building and human rights work in the Philippines for three decades. Yañez is a volunteer with the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) Visayas-Mindanao Regional Office for Development.

On April 10, 2022, Yañez was arrested at his house in the barangay^{xii} of Iponan, Cagayan de Oro. According to the PNP and AFP, a pistol, grenades, and subversive documents were seized during the raid. His family saw individuals entering the house through the back door, giving them the opportunity to plant the seized items inside. Yañez was arrested on the basis of an arrest warrant dated April 6, 2022, for al-

leged violation of the Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act (Republic Act 10591) and the Illegal Possession of Explosives Act (Republic Act 9516). According to the reports of human rights groups, it is common practice for the PNP and AFP to plant weapons and explosives inside the homes of suspects during search operations in order to fabricate charges for the arrest of HRDs.

IFI members reported that Yañez had been a victim of *red-tagging* prior to this. In 2018 and 2020, Yañez and other HRDs were arrested arbitrarily and accused by the AFP of being members of the NPA. The courts dismissed the charges twice.

Following Yañez's detention, the Department of Justice pressed further charges against him on August 24, 2022, for alleged violation of the Anti-Money Laundering Act (Republic Act 10168). According to the indictment, he was involved in diverting foreign development funds to the NPA.

Since then, Yañez's family has been campaigning for the dismissal of over 50 fabricated charges. They claim that the illegal weapons and explosives were planted on Yañez and that the arrest warrant issued against him in connection with these allegations was based on false testimonies. Yañez is currently detained in Cagayan de Oro City Jail.

xii A "barangay" is the lowest administrative division in the Philippines.

CASE: ISABELO ADVIENTO



Human rights defender Isabelo Adviento has worked at the regional office of the NGO Katinnulong Daguiti Umili iti Amianan (KADUAMI) in Cagayan Valley in the Cordillera region in northern Luzon for 15 years. Adviento has spent years campaigning for the rights of peasants and marginalized groups in the region.

On the evening of April 8, 2022, Adviento was arrested in a restaurant in Bayombong Town in the province of Nueva Vizcaya by at least 30 members of the PNP and AFP. The PNP stated that the arrest was based on a warrant, issued on January 17, 2021, for alleged violations of the Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act (Republic Act 10591) and the Illegal Possession of Explosives Act (Republic Act 9516).

The charge was based on a PNP-AFP raid on December 2, 2020. Without presenting a search warrant, around 100 members of the 77th and 17th Infantry Battalions of the AFP and PNP stormed Adviento's house in Baggao in the province of Cagayan in the early hours of the morning. The state security forces forcefully entered the house. Adviento was not present at the

time. His wife, children, and grandchildren were told by the security forces to leave the house during the search. According to Adviento's wife, the surveillance cameras outside the house were covered with a jacket and the memory card removed from the cameras. The state security forces claimed they seized a bag containing firearms and explosive devices during the raid. Four hours after the search began, members of the PNP Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) and barangay arrived at Adviento's house to present the search warrant. Adviento and his family believed the security forces planted the firearms and explosives in the house during the search.

Adviento had been exposed to repeated *red-tagging* attacks prior to his arrest. He was followed by AFP forces, who filmed and photographed him, and he received threatening letters from unknown persons. Adviento's name and photos were displayed on posters in public places and posted on social media, where he was labeled a terrorist. A previous charge against Adviento, accusing him of three counts of kidnapping with homicide, was dismissed by a court in 2015.

In December 2022, a regional court in Tuguegarao City approved an application for bail. However, Adviento's family, friends, and colleagues were unable to raise the bail amount of approximately 1,000,000 Pesos (15,800 Euro). Due to the consistent commitment of Adviento's family, friends, colleagues, organizations at home and abroad as well as supporting diplomats, all fabricated charges against Adviento were dropped on April 17, 2024. Despite the acquittal, Adviento remains in a life-threatening situation.

CASE: NATHANIEL VALLENTE



For over eight years, human rights defender Nathaniel “Dodo” Vallente has been a pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) in President Garcia on the island of Bohol. Vallente is a defender of peasants’ rights, especially with respect to the implementation of the national agrarian reform program in the Philippines.

In the early hours of June 25, 2021, CIDG officers on the island of Bohol executed a search warrant against Vallente in his house in San Jose, Mabini, Bohol, for alleged violations of the Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act (Republic Act 10591) and the Illegal Possession of Explosives Act (Republic Act 9516). The CIDG officers mistakenly raided the

house of the pastor’s father-in-law, while “Dodo” was present in his own home a few meters away at the time of the search. Despite the mix-up, the CIDG officers insisted on searching the father-in-law’s house, ordering Vallente to go there. During the search, the CIDG officers found several pistols, a grenade, ammunition, and subversive documents. Vallente was subsequently arrested, even though the evidence had not been seized from his own home. Vallente’s family believes the evidence was planted in the father-in-law’s house before the search took place.

Since July 2021, Vallente has gone through at least six court hearings. In the initial phase of his imprisonment, he was transferred to several different detention facilities in Bohol without his family being informed. Pastor “Dodo’s” family, friends, UCCP colleagues, and supporting organizations are still calling for a fair trial and his immediate release from prison, with all fabricated charges against him to be dropped. Vallente is currently held at Bohol District Jail in Tagbilaran City.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT

ENDING IMPUNITY

- » End impunity for extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture, especially in connection with Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and victims of the Philippine government’s anti-drug campaign, by undertaking thorough and impartial investigations of all such cases, in particular when the perpetrators are members of state security forces.
- » Guarantee that all persons are equal before the courts and that there is a fair hearing by a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal according to Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
- » Prioritize a public health and human rights-based approach in the national anti-drug campaign (“Buhay Ingatan, Droga’y Ayawan”/BIDA) and align this with international human rights standards and the recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).
- » Repeal the directive of the Philippine National Police, the Command Memorandum Circular 16-2016, also known as “Project Double Barrel”, which is the basis for the operationalization of the controversial practice of “Oplan Tokhang” (“knock” and “plead”)^{xiii}.

PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

- » Immediately stop politically motivated intimidation, threats, criminalization of and violence against HRDs by state security forces, civil servants, and govern-

ment officials. In particular, steps must be taken to ensure that the Philippine Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) is not misused for the purpose of defaming HRDs. It must also be ensured that the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) refrains from all forms of politically motivated intimidation, harassment, and vilification of HRDs, especially *red-tagging*.

- » Enforce in national law the protection of HRDs against harassment, vilification, violence and murder in accordance with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, especially with regard to existing laws such as the Philippine Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA) and legislative proposals such as the Human Rights Defenders Protection Act.
- » Amend the ATA to comply with international human rights standards and, specifically, to align with the democratic principles of the rule of law and the presumption of innocence under Article 66 of the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines.
- » Ensure that prosecutors and judges do not initiate prosecution against HRDs in cases where charges are manifestly fabricated and exculpatory evidence has been presented according to Article 14 of the United Nations Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors. In this context, the independence of the judiciary should be guaranteed according to Article 14 (I) of the ICCPR.
- » Review all defamation laws, including those set out in Articles 353 to 355 and 358 to 362 of the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines and Section 4(c)(4) of the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012, and, where necessary, align to Article 19 of the ICCPR and UN General Comment 34 in order to eliminate any risk of abuse and the unjustified political persecution of HRDs and journalists.
- » Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and translate its provisions into national law. This should ensure that national legislation on enforced disappearance (Anti-Enforced Disappearance Act) is in compliance with international law and international standards and is also systematically implemented.

^{xiii} As part of the “Double Barrel” project, the government compiled “watch lists” of drug users and drug pushers who were visited by the local police or municipal authorities and forced to make a confession. “Tok-hang” translates to “knock and plead” and refers to these house visits.

COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS

- » Fully cooperate with the independent investigators of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and international human rights mechanisms, as well as with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).
- » Fully cooperate with and issue a standing invitation to all UN Special Rapporteurs with thematic mandates and working groups of the UNHRC.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS MEMBER STATES

- » Use the Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) in such a way that it significantly improves the human rights situation, specifically with regard to the principle of the rule of law.
- » Consistently utilize the annual EU Human Rights Dialogue to remind the Philippine government of its obligations to uphold its international human rights standards in a partnership and cooperation agreement. The possible consequences for the cooperation of not adopting adequate measures to end impunity and serious human rights abuses in the Philippines should be discussed.
- » Integrate clear and measurable conditionalities for the fulfillment of international human rights standards in a possible bilateral EU free trade agreement with the Philippines.
- » Establish or extend the positions of human rights officers at embassies in Manila, following the example set by the German embassy, to improve the human rights perspective on the Philippines within the respective foreign ministries or foreign office, and to intensify engagement with victims and civil society.

- » Prioritize human rights issues in bilateral and multi-lateral dialogs with the Philippine government despite geopolitical challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.
- » Implement the EU Global Human Rights Sanction Regime, as already determined by the ICC, for crimes against humanity committed in the context of the anti-drug campaign under former President Rodrigo Duterte, and impose sanctions, such as the freezing of assets and travel bans for those responsible.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER INTERNATIONAL PARTIES

- » Insist that the Philippine government cooperates with all international human rights mechanisms.
- » Consistently demand the creation of an international mechanism to investigate human rights abuses in the Philippines by the UNHRC.
- » Monitor trials in cases that criminalize HRDs to determine whether minimum standards of due process are being observed and, if necessary, demand they be closely checked if observance of due process is lacking.

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LIST OF KILLED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND JOURNALISTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

June 1, 2022, to June 30, 2024

Name	Date	Place	Conflict Background	Affiliation	Alleged Perpetrators
Reynaldo “Rey” Blanco	Sept. 18, 2022	Mabinay Town, Negros Oriental	Journalism	Radio journalist who published critical reports on corruption and social issues.	Lieutenant Colonel Roland Desiree Lavisto
Percival “Percy Lapid” Mabasa^{xiv}	Oct. 03, 2022	Las Piñas, National Capital Region	Journalism	Radio journalist who uncovered cases of corruption.	Joel Escorial (hit man); government official Gerald Bantag (ordered murder)
Alex Dolorosa	Apr. 24, 2023	Bacolod City, Negros Occidental	Labor rights, <i>red-tagging</i> , LGBTIQ-rights	Workers’ rights activist; legal advisor at BIEN Pilipinas; LGBTIQ activist at BEGLAD.	Unknown
Crescenciano “Cris” Bunduquin	May 31, 2023	Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro	Journalism	Radio journalist who uncovered cases of corruption.	Unknown
Maria Saniata Liwliwa Alzate	Sept. 14, 2023	Bangued Town, Abra	Civil-political rights	Public law attorney	Unknown
Jude Thaddeus Fernandez	Sept. 29, 2023	Binangonan, Rizal	Labor rights	Union leader	PNP-CIDG
Jerry “Boyet” Loyola	Jan. 11, 2024	Makilala, Cotobato	Indigenous rights	Defender of Indigenous rights and peace; local government employee assigned to the Indigenous Peoples’ desk.	Unknown

^{xiv} Self-confessed gunman Joel Escorial was sentenced to a maximum of 16 years’ imprisonment, for the murder of Percival “Lapid” Mabasa on May 6, 2024.

Disclaimer:

This list includes seven human rights defenders and journalists who were killed in the Philippines between June 1, 2022, and June 30, 2024. Our classification of “human rights defender” follows the definition of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which defines them as people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights while employing peaceful action. We have only included cases where the victim’s death has been confirmed. This excludes cases of enforced disappearances when the whereabouts of victims remain unknown. Our information is based primarily on publicly available online sources, mostly from local human rights organizations and credible media sources. We have only included killings in which a connection to the victim’s activity is to be assumed. The column “Conflict Background” indicates the issue to which the respective killing is most likely related. In some cases, several possible backgrounds have been indicated. However, since there was no reported conviction in any of these cases, the real motives of the perpetrators cannot be verified. Finally, we have also indicated the alleged perpetrators of the killings based on the allegations made in our sources. A verification of these allegations is again not possible due to the lack of convictions.

The information on specific cases of human rights violations against Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) cited in this report is based primarily on information and data made available to the AMP by civil society partners in the Philippines.

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ISBN 978-3-933341-95-7

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