

July 17, 2020

Via Email

The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, MP
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons Office
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, MP

We are writing this letter to raise alarm regarding the gravity of the human rights situation and rapid erosion of democratic space in the Philippines. We ask that you take immediate action to address it.

On June 4, 2020, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet issued a draft report to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation in the Philippines.¹ The report identifies human rights violations arising from policies and laws related to public order and national security. On June 25, 2020, eleven United Nations human rights experts declared that “the human rights situation in the Philippines has now reached a level of gravity requiring a robust intervention by the UN.”²

We are writing to you to request that your office support the UN High Commissioner’s report, and that you aid in the establishment of independent mechanisms to monitor and investigate human rights violations. We would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and to discuss our concerns and the recommendations in this letter.

Under the Duterte government, attacks against human rights defenders and journalists have increased, while rights violations in relation to the drug war continue. In the past two months, human rights defenders like peasant leader Gloria Apique and relief worker Jory Porquia were killed. Rights workers and people in the church sector continue to face falsified (referred to as ‘trumped-up’) criminal charges such as the case of Karapatan, Gabriela and the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines. Instead of releasing prisoners, including political prisoners, to decongest jails and to mitigate the impact of the pandemic inside these facilities, rights defenders such as elderly Teresita Naul have been arrested and put in jail.

The human rights situation in the Philippines has deteriorated even further as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Emergency measures employed by government, supposedly to address the impacts of the pandemic, have been used as pretext for further constriction of democratic

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PH/Philippines-HRC44-AEV.pdf> This report was issued for the 44th UN Human Rights Council session in June 2020 and follows the adoption of the UN Human Rights Council resolution (41/2) last July 11, 2019 on the human rights situation in the Philippines.

²OHCHR | Philippines: UN human rights experts renew call for an on-the-ground independent, impartial investigation, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25999&LangID=E>

and civic spaces in the country.³ More than 30,000 individuals have been arrested for allegedly violating the government's 'enhanced community quarantine'⁴, for actions such as not wearing face masks or for going outside one's home for valid reasons. Detainees have been subjected to arbitrary arrests and cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment. Many of the documented cases show that those arrested were daily wage earners and homeless persons, who were merely asking for food aid from the government.

The rights to freedom of speech and of expression have also been increasingly curtailed through the arrest and penalization of ordinary individuals who express discontent with government measures regarding the pandemic. On July 10, 2020 ABS-CBN, the country's largest news network, was shut down after being critical of Duterte's government.

The need for support is now more urgent following the passage of the Anti-Terror Act on July 3, 2020. This law is expected to come into force on July 18, 2020. Families of victims of the war on drugs, peasant and indigenous communities, trade unionists, lawyers, faith-based formations, human rights defenders and the political opposition in the Philippines have raised deep concern about dangerous implications the Act will have on the worsening climate of impunity under President Duterte. Bachelet's report indicates that the Act would "weaken human rights safeguards, broadens the definition of terrorism and expands the period of detention without warrant." In a press release following the ratification of the law, members of EcuVoice expressed their "grave concerns that the new, draconian measure will only worsen the Philippine government's human rights abuses and violations."⁵

In light of the grave concerns raised in Bachelet's report and the worsening human rights situation, we urge your office to:

1. Publicly support Bachelet's report to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and its recommendations.
2. Convey to the Members of the Human Rights Council that Canada strongly supports and urges immediate action towards the creation of a mechanism for the independent monitoring and investigation on the rights situation in the country, including ensuring that Special Procedures mandate holders have access to the country.
3. Suspend all support for and cooperation with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP), including training, and redirect Canada's assistance towards strengthening the capacity of human rights defenders and organizations.
4. Suspend the sale and transfer of all military and defence equipment to the Philippine government and invoke the *Special Economic Measures Act* which can be used to

³ Several civil society organizations have engaged in the UN Human Rights Council resolution processes through written submissions which can be found here: <https://www.karapatan.org/ecuvoice>.

⁴ https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/4/18/quarantine-violators-arrested-coronavirus-lockdowns.html?fbclid=IwAR1_IMMCIUW8F1T1YekxSC1RX-7Y1P1v8CrUSCNDzTJpvVIADpnEp6iuSg

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/273728780152/videos/654100191849991/>

prohibit the transfer or trade of goods to a specific country because of their human rights record.⁶

5. Respond to the recommendation of the eleven United Nations human rights experts that states that Member States initiate, whenever possible, governmental sanctions and criminal prosecution against individual Philippine officials who have committed, incited or failed to prevent human rights abuses.

Thank you for your consideration, we look forward to receiving your response to these urgent concerns, including an opportunity to meet and discuss these recommendations

Sincerely yours,

Alliance for Peoples' Health
Anakbayan Canada
Anakbayan Toronto
Andrea Mann, Director of Global Relations, Anglican Church of Canada
BAYAN Canada
Beaconsfield Initiative
Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
Canada Philippines Solidarity for Human Rights
Filipino - Canadian Writers and Journalists Network
GABRIELA British Columbia
International Coalition on Human Rights in the Philippines - Canada
International League of Peoples' Struggle in Canada
ICHRP Quebec
KAIROS-Canada
KAIROS - British Columbia and Yukon
Migrante British Columbia
Mining Watch
Mission Inclusion
National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE)
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)
Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)
Stop the Killings Network in the Philippines - Canada Network
Sulong - University of British Columbia
Unifor
United Church of Canada
United Steelworkers (USW)

⁶ https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/controls-controles/reports-rapports/military_goods-2018-marchandises_militaires.aspx?lang=eng#a6_1

Cc'

Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations Office;

Official Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs;

NDP Critic for Foreign Affairs;

Global Affairs Canada Director General (Southeast Asia);

Global Affairs Canada Director, Myanmar & Philippines;

Global Affairs Canada Deputy Director, Philippines;

Canadian Ambassador to the Philippines;

Canadian Council for International Cooperation;