

Solidarity statement: “Stop the killings of human rights defenders in the Philippines”

We, the undersigned civil society organisations and partners in the [HRD Memorial](#) network, wish to express our ongoing concern about the persistent killings of human rights defenders (HRDs) and impunity for perpetrators in the Philippines.

The HRD Memorial gathered and verified information on the killings of 25 human rights defenders in 2020 in the Philippines. In the first 6 months of 2021 alone, 15 HRDs have been killed in the country. Each of these 40 killings¹ in the 18-month period from January 2020 to June 2021 is abhorrent, and the trend is particularly worrying because these killings have taken place with absolute impunity.

Among the defenders killed in the past 18 months were [Zara Alvarez](#) (38), a paralegal with human rights group Karapatan and research and advocacy officer of Negros Island Health Integrated Programme, and [Randall "Ka Randy" Echanis](#) (72), a long-time peasant leader and peace consultant. Their murders follow a pattern of violence and “red-tagging” of HRDs in the country. In 2018, both their names appeared on a list of at least 600 people that the Philippine Department of Justice asked a court to declare as “terrorists”, and while their names were subsequently removed, this type of harassment against activists, which sees officials in the Duterte administration labelling HRDs as “communists”, “terrorists”, and “sympathisers”, clearly carries with it lethal consequences. Twelve months after their murders, no suspects have been arrested or charged.

Land and environmental rights defenders and defenders from indigenous communities face very serious risks in the Philippines as they attempt to peacefully defend their land and oppose major industrial projects. These HRDs are disproportionately represented in the figures of the HRDs killed in the past 18 months. On 30 December 2020, indigenous rights defender [Roy Giganto](#) was among nine farmers and HRDs killed in a massacre that took place in various villages on Panay Island in a coordinated police and military operation. Before the massacre, these leaders had been “red-tagged” and accused by the military of being members and supporters of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army (CPP-NPA). In fact, they were all leaders of the Tumanduk organisation, an alliance of indigenous people’s communities in Capiz and Iloilo provinces, and they consistently opposed human rights violations in their localities and advocated for the protection of their rights as Indigenous People. Prior to this attack they had been actively opposing and delaying progress on the Jalaur River Multi-Purpose Project Mega Dam, a joint project of the Philippine and South Korean governments that is feared to lead to the displacement of at least 17,000 indigenous Tumandok².

Under the Duterte administration, perpetrators – be they police, military or non-state actors – know that they can get away with killing human rights defenders in the Philippines. The killings of HRDs are rarely investigated, which increases the vulnerability of HRDs who remain active, while undermining the human rights community’s confidence in the justice system. In addition, the Anti-

1 The names of the 40 HRDs killed in the Philippines between 01 January 2020 and 30 June 2021 are Jennifer Tonag, Jay-ar Mercado, Emerito Pinza, Romy Candor, Marlon Maldos, Nora Apique, John Faroichilin, Jose Reynaldo Porquia (Jory), Allan Aguilando (Mano Boy), Carlito Badion (Karletz), Froilan Reyes (Kawing), Jose Jerry Catalogo, Randall Echanis, Zara Alvarez, Armando Buisan, Ignacio Jr. Arevalo (Tukoy), Roy Giganto, Reynaldo Katipunan, Galson Catamin, Eliseo Jr. Gayas, Maurito Diaz, Artilito Katipunan, Mario Aguirre, Jomar Vidal, Rolando Diaz, Aldren Enriquez, Vernel Mondreal, Antonio Arellano, Romeo Torres, Lucrecia Tasic, Ana Mariz Evangelista, Ariel Evangelista, Emmanuel Asuncion, Melvin Dasigao, Mark Bacasno, Miguel Dandy, Jesus Jr. Pason, John Heredia, Willy Rodriguez and Lenie Rivas.

2 [Another series of coordinated raids](#) took place on 7 March 2021, just two days after President Duterte ordered the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Philippine Army (PA) to “ignore human rights” and “kill” and “finish off” communist rebels in any armed encounters with them. This massacre saw nine alleged members of “communists and terrorist groups” killed, including five human rights defenders.

Terrorism Act, which was hastily passed in July 2020, has further compounded the precarious situation for HRDs by legally formalising the practice of “red-tagging” defenders with overly broad and vague definitions of terrorism.

Today, in solidarity with the human rights community in the Philippines, we call on all governments to condemn the killings of HRDs in the Philippines and to send a message to the Duterte administration calling for thorough, impartial, and independent investigations into all the 40 killings which have taken place in the past 18 months, as well as a commitment from the administration to bring the perpetrators to justice. In addition, we call on governments to take long-overdue action at the UN Human Rights Council and support an international level investigation into unlawful killings and other serious violations in the Philippines. These killings are part of an all-encompassing persecution of the human rights community in the country, and must be challenged by immediate investigations into these murders, the repeal of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, and a commitment from the Duterte administration to promote and protect HRDs.

Signed:

ACI Participa (Honduras)

Amnesty International

Comité Cerezo México

El Programa Somos Defensores (Colombia)

FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Front Line Defenders

Global Witness

Justiça Global (Brazil)

KARAPATAN (the Philippines)

Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles de Derechos Humanos "Todos los Derechos para Todas y Todos" Red TDT (made up of 85 human rights organisations in 23 states of the Mexican Republic)

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders