

Cologne, April 9, 2019

In a letter to the Secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government Eduardo Año and the Secretary of the Department of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana, the Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP) expressed its deep concern about increasing attempts by the Philippine government to discredit civil society organizations, including a number of long-standing partners of our network, by denouncing them as front organizations of the communist New People’s Army (NPA). These accusations frequently have deadly consequences since human rights defenders who work for organizations alleged by the security forces to have ties with the communist insurgency are at particular risk of becoming victims of extrajudicial killings.

On March 30, 14 people were killed in a single day in police operations in the province of Negros Oriental. The victims were described by the provincial police director of being communist rebels and accused of owning illegal firearms. Local human rights organizations and Bishop Alminaza of the Diocese San Carlos however maintained that they were peasants, members of farmers organizations, habal habal drivers and church workers respectively. Eye witnesses described the killings as executions with the victims being cornered and unarmed, drawing comparisons to the ‘drug-style’ killings in the Philippines’ brutal war on drugs.<sup>1</sup>

Ever since the breakdown of the peace talks between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in late 2017, harassment, defamation and murders of activists, including land and environmental rights defenders, who are wrongly portrayed as state enemies, communist rebels or terrorists, increased considerably.

While this defamation of civil society actors is nothing new in the Philippines, the Duterte government has also taken other steps to systematically hamper their work. In February, a delegation of the Philippine government which had toured Europe had accused several NGOs of acting as fronts for the NPA. These include Karapatan, one of the leading human rights organizations in the Philippines, the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP), an inter-congregational organization of church people working with rural poor communities, the independent think tank IBON Foundation, and ALCADEV which runs independent indigenous schools in Mindanao. In meetings with the EU and the Belgian government these NGOs were accused of diverting funds they had received from them to the communist rebels. In late March, the EU Delegation in Manila released a press statement that it had so far not been able to verify the allegations but would conduct a financial audit of one of the accused NGOs.<sup>2</sup>

Since the AMP and its members have worked with these organizations for many years, we can attest that the accusations are unfounded and aimed at silencing voices critical of the government.

<sup>1</sup> <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/31/19/witnesses-kin-relate-tokhang-style-executions-in-negros-oriental-killings>

<sup>2</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/philippines/60406/press-statement-eu-delegation-philippines-regarding-alleged-funding-ngos-linked-cpp-npa\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/philippines/60406/press-statement-eu-delegation-philippines-regarding-alleged-funding-ngos-linked-cpp-npa_en)

In November 2018, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) published a memorandum which mandates NGOs to disclose detailed information on their funding sources, current and intended beneficiaries, and amount of funds.<sup>3</sup> Based on an undisclosed points system, organizations will also be assessed whether they pose a risk of money laundering or financing terror. If an organization is deemed to be 'high-risk', it will be subjected to 'enhanced monitoring and supervision' measures.

Unlike some other countries, the Philippines so far has no specific NGO law intended to impede the work of civil society organizations. The AMP is therefore concerned about these recent administrative measures which seem to be designed to complicate the registration of NGOs and to limit their access to foreign funding.

The widespread defamation of NGOs, the increased violence they suffer as well as these new attempts to obstruct their work are part of a systematic crackdown against civil society in the Philippines. The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen therefore calls upon the Philippine government to:

- Immediately investigate the killings of March 30 in Negros Oriental and to bring possible perpetrators to justice,
- Take all necessary steps to protect human rights defenders from harassment, violence, and killings and protect their freedom of association in accordance with Article III, Section 8 of the Philippine Constitution,
- Direct the Philippine security forces and all government agencies to refrain from making statements that stigmatize human rights defenders, especially statements that suggest that defenders are members of the New People's Army,
- Immediately rescind SEC Memorandum Circular No. 15 (2018),
- Guarantee the right of all civil society organizations to seek, receive, and utilize funding from national, foreign and international sources without undue interference.

We also call on the European Union to:

- Publicly declare its support for all human rights organizations in the Philippines, especially those on which it has received accusations,
- Consider the withdrawal of the trade preferences given to the Philippines under the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) unless the government takes immediate steps to protect civil society actors from further harassment and violence.

*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 – Protestant Development Service, International Peace Observers Network (IPON), MISEREOR, Missio Munich, philippinenbüro e.V. im Asienhaus, 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.*

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.sec.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018MCNo15.pdf>

Members: Amnesty International, Brot für die Welt – Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst, IPON, Misereor, missio, philippinenbüro e.V., Vereinte Evangelische Mission

