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Statement on the Crackdown Against Civil Society Organization in the Philippines

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP) expresses its deep concern about recent attacks by the Philippine government and its security forces against civil society organizations in the country, including long-standing partners of its network.

On October 31 and November 1, several offices of civil society organizations in Bacolod City and Escalante City, Negros Occidental were raided, and 57 persons arrested, including 12 minors, who were then accused of being members of the communist New People's Army (NPA). While 44 persons, including the minors, were subsequently released for lack of probable cause, 13 leaders and organizers of the National Federation of Sugar Workers, media group Altermidya, partylist Bayan Muna, labor union Kilusang Mayo Uno, peasant organization Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, human rights organization Karapatan, and the cultural groups Teatro Obrero and Teatro Kaling remain detained or on bail on charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives. Eyewitnesses however maintain that the evidence was planted by police officers conducting the raid.

On October 21-22, the Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen together with the Sri Lanka Advocacy Network and the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung held a conference on Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Potsdam, Germany. One of the speakers was Zara Alvarez, a known human rights defender and advocacy and campaign officer of the Negros Health Integrated Program for Community Development (NIHPCD). Upon her return to the Philippines, the office of her organization was among those being raided by the Philippine security forces in Bacolod City. Zara Alvarez has been openly vilified as alleged member of the NPA. She has received death threats and experienced surveillance.

And the vilification goes on: In a briefing in the House of Representatives the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Department of National Defense (DND) presented 18 organizations as alleged front organization of the NPA, among them the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), the Farmers Development Center (FARDEC), the Community Empowerment Resource Network (CERNET), Katinnulong Daguiti Umili iti Amianan (Kaduami), as well as the Mindanao Interfaith Service Foundation Inc. (MISFI), which the AMP has partnered with since its founding in 2007. These organizations assist victims of human rights violations in their quest for justice, and work with marginalized groups such as farmers in their peaceful struggle for land and sustainable development. A work badly needed due to lack of government support.

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



Threats and false accusations against human rights defenders have a long history in the Philippines. Open defamations have often been followed not only by threats, but also by harassments, arrests and even killings. However, the number and ferocity of attacks against human rights defenders has increased dramatically since the collapse of the peace process between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in late 2017. According to the recent Human Rights Report of the AMP, 200 human rights defenders and 14 journalists have been killed nationwide between July 2016 and August 2019.

On November 22, 2018, President Duterte had issued Memorandum Order 32 instructing the ministries for Defense and Interior to immediately increase the deployment of security forces in Negros to escalate the campaign against terrorist forces. The authorities were also told to step up their secret service operations against individuals and organizations suspected of terrorism. Designated to fight a “state of lawlessness” in Negros, Samar and Bicol, Memorandum Order 32 and the whole nation approach of Executive Order 70 instead unleashed a crackdown against civil society organizations and individuals.

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen condemns the continuing attacks against human rights defenders and civil society organizations as a clear attempt to silence any criticism against the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. The network therefore calls upon the Philippine government to:

- 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,
- Order the Philippine Armed Forces to desist from filing fabricated charges against human rights defenders.

We also call on the European Union to:

- Publicly declare its support for all human rights and development organizations in the Philippines, especially those on which it has received accusations including individual human right defenders.

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.

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