

27 March 2024

55th Session of the Human Rights Council

Dear Member and Observer States of the United Nations Human Rights Council,

We, national and international non-governmental and civil society organizations, call the Council's attention to the ongoing UN Joint Programme on Human Rights (UNJP) in the Philippines, concluding in 2024. We urge the Philippines and the United Nations to renew and reconfigure its mandate towards improving human rights accountability mechanisms.

The UNJP aims to develop the Philippine government's capacities to improve the human rights situation, especially by engaging with civil society. However, since President Marcos Jr. took office in June 2022, we have neither observed any significant improvements in the human rights situation nor an end to impunity in the Philippines. The UNJP failed to address key issues of its engagement, especially accountability for human rights violations as well as repressive policies, such as the Anti-Terrorism Law, the "Double Barrel and Oplan Tokhang" campaign and the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC).

In various forums, the Marcos Jr. government has reaffirmed its commitment to human rights but did not break with the repressive policies of its predecessor. He neither amended nor abrogated laws and policies perpetuating human rights violations. With at least 593 victimsⁱ, drug-related killings continue to take place despite an alleged human-rights-based approach in combatting illegal drugs. The current government has failed to address the lack of accountability for the at least 27,000 drug-related killings under Ex-President Duterte and the murders of hundreds of human rights defenders. Political prosecution of activists remains, with at least 12 defenders disappearedⁱⁱ and many more unlawfully imprisoned during the Marcos Jr. administration. Contrary to the claims of the Philippine government, numerous cases emphasize that so-called "red-tagging" or "terrorist-tagging" of activists is part of government policy. This has also been highlighted by the UN special rapporteurs Ian Fryⁱⁱⁱ and Irene Khan^{iv} who visited the Philippines in 2023 and 2024, respectively.

Instead of extending and strengthening the UNJP in collaboration with the UN and civil society organizations, the Philippine government plans to establish a government agency-led national mechanism, called "Human Rights Coordinating Council."^v However, over the years, the Philippine government has already created a multitude of bodies and mechanisms to investigate and prosecute severe human rights violations, such as Administrative Order No. 32 and Executive Order No. 23. So far, none of these mechanisms have included civil society and have proven effective in ensuring accountability. There are worrying signs that the latest such mechanism will be no different.

The Human Rights Council should monitor the implementation of the recommendations made to the Philippines during the 4th Universal Periodic Review and the 5th review by the Human Rights Committee.

We call on the Council to support an extended and reconfigured UNJP that includes meaningful participation by survivors and victims' families. We also call for an independent assessment by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the effectiveness of the UNJP in addressing impunity and preventing human rights violations.

Finally, we call on the council to strengthen the monitoring and reporting mandate of the OHCHR in the Philippines and to prompt the government to cooperate with the International Criminal Court.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

1. Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP)
2. Caritas Philippines
3. L'Organisation Mondiale Contre La Torture (OMCT)
4. CIVICUS
5. Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND)
6. Franciscans International
7. In Defense of Human Rights and Dignity Movement (iDEFEND)
8. Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission – Conference of Major Superiors in the Philippines (JPICC-CMSP)
9. Karapatan
10. Kasarinlan-Kalayaan, Inc.
11. Medical Action Group (MAG)
12. Partido Manggagawa
13. Philippine Alliance for Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)
14. Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights)
15. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)
16. 11.11.11 Asia

ⁱ Third World Studies Center, University of the Philippines Diliman and the Department of Conflict and Development Studies of Ghent University, March 23, 2024, available at: [2024 - Violence, Human Rights, and Democracy in the Philippines \(upd.edu.ph\)](#) .

ⁱⁱ Without A Trace, Asia Democracy Chronicles, January 24, 2024, available at: [Without a trace - Asia Democracy Chronicles \(adnchronicles.org\)](#) .

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Disband NTF-ELCAC,' UN special rapporteur urges PH gov't, Rappler, November 15 2023, Available at: ['Disband NTF-ELCAC,' UN special rapporteur urges PH gov't \(rappler.com\)](#)

^{iv} Preliminary Observations on visit to the Philippines, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression Ms Irene Khan, 2 February 2024, available at: [20240202-eom-philippines-sr-freedex.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](#)

^v Information according to the statement delivered by the Philippine Justice Undersecretary Raul T. Vasquez at the High-Level Segment of the 55th Session of the Human Rights Council on 27 February 2024 in Geneva. See <https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/news-from-our-foreign-service-postupdate/34203-ph-to-un-hrc-national-ownership-key-to-effective-and-sustainable-multilateral-human-rights-action>