



49th Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 3: General Debate

16 March 2022

The situation of human rights defenders in the Philippines

Delivered by Budi Tjahjono

Thank you, Mr President

We would like to raise the situation of human rights defenders in the Philippines.

Despite the commencement of the implementation of the Philippines-United Nations (UN) Joint Programme on human rights,¹ the human rights situation in the Philippines has not improved. The war on drugs continues. The civic space decreases. Human rights defenders and other critical voices are still being killed and assaulted, in different ways including enforced disappearances, torture, arbitrary arrests and legal harassment. They are also victims of intensive public denigration, in particular through red tagging, falsely accused of being members of the communist party.

In January 2022, the House of Representatives completed the final reading of the Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill.² However, we are very concerned that the current political situation ahead of the general elections will delay the adoption of the Bill by the Senate. We are also preoccupied by the constant opposition to the enactment of the Bill by a high-ranking officer of the current administration.³

Human rights defenders in the Philippines urgently need a strong legal protection. Therefore, we commend the call of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders⁴ who urges the Senate of the Philippines to adopt the the Bill without delay.

Finally, we reiterate our on-going call to the Council members to adopt a resolution on the Philippines this year, which should include strong accountability mechanisms on the on-going human rights violation.

I thank you.

¹ Following the adoption of the Human Rights Council Resolution 45/33 in October 2020, the Government of the Philippines and the United Nations signed an agreement on joint human rights programme which outlined specific areas for capacity-building and technical cooperation for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines. See further information at <https://philippines.un.org/en/166140-phl-un-and-partners-endorse-roadmap-accelerate-implementation-human-rights-joint-programme>

² This is also known as the House Bill No. 10576 also known as the Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill.

³ Statement of Undersecretary Mr Severo Catura, National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) spokesperson for International Affairs, Peace Process and Human Rights Concern. Information available at <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1166171>

⁴ Statement of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders urging the Senate to enact the human rights defenders law, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26914&LangID=E>