

61st Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders

3 March 2026

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Mr. President,

We thank the Special Rapporteur for her report and welcome the recommendations urging States to strengthen protection frameworks for defenders, including safeguards against criminalisation, increasing accountability in cases of reprisals, and protecting access to international financial support.

We remain deeply concerned about shrinking civic space in the Philippines for civil society organisations, human rights defenders and journalists. According to Global Witness, the country ranks highest in Asia for individuals killed or disappeared in the context of their work protecting land and environmental rights. In this context, we would like to raise the following issues:

First, Indigenous women defenders who expose human rights and environmental abuses linked to extractive projects on Indigenous lands, such as loss of livelihood, environmental destruction and forced displacement, face heightened risks, including threats, criminalisation, unlawful killings and enforced disappearances.

Second, the law is systemically weaponised against defenders to criminalise legitimate dissent. Legislation such as the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012 and the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 is used to freeze access to financial resources, making it impossible to carry out human rights work. The practice of “Red-tagging” continues to be employed to harass and intimidate defenders, through arbitrary surveillance and by bringing spurious criminal charges.

Third, accountability remains elusive for families of victims of the “War on drugs”. For the approximately 6000 victims officially recorded between July 2016 and May 2022, only 5 convictions have taken place. While we welcome the ongoing criminal proceedings against former President Rodrigo Duterte at the International Criminal Court, we stress that at the domestic level, this accountability is not replicated, and justice has not been served.

We therefore call on the international community to urge the Government of the Philippines to:

1. Immediately abolish the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC).
2. Adopt the Human Rights Defenders Protection Act without delay.
3. Ensure independent, transparent and expedited investigations into cases of unlawful killings during the “War on drugs”.

Thank you.