



March 23, 2018

BY EMAIL

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Re: Deterioration of the human rights situation in the Philippines

Dear Prime Minister,

The Asia-Pacific Working Group (APWG)¹, a regional working group of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, is deeply troubled about the severe and rapid deterioration of the human rights situation in the Philippines and specifically the recent listing of over 600 individuals as terrorists. We feel that it is essential that Canada respond to these developments.

A recent petition filed in court by the Philippine State Prosecutor of the Department of Justice (DOJ), labels several indigenous peoples' leaders and human rights defenders as terrorists and outlaws pursuant to the National Security Act of 2007 (also known as the Anti-Terrorist Act).

Among those listed are Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People, Beverly Longid, Global Coordinator of the International Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self-Determination and Liberation (IPMSDL), Windel Bolinget, Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA) Chairperson, Jose Molintas, former member of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) and at least 10 Lumad (Indigenous) leaders in Northern and Southern Mindanao. Others on the list include peasant leaders, union organizers, and human rights defenders, all of whom are defending socio-political and cultural rights, social justice, and democracy in the Philippines.

APWG members have raised concerns in the past about the staggering number of extrajudicial killings since President Rodrigo Duterte took office in 2016. An estimated 13,000 people were killed under the guise of the "*war on drugs*", and an additional 126 human rights defenders (HRDs) have been killed by targeted state violence. There is a general climate of repression, violence, and impunity in the Philippines, aggravated by the imposition of martial law in Mindanao. In this context, this new list constitutes what human rights groups call "a government hit list".

¹ APWG brings together NGOs, faith-based organizations, unions and solidarity groups from across Canada that have a specific interest in development, social justice, and human rights in Asia.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has made public statements raising concern about the escalating crackdown on dissent in the Philippines, deeming the listing of prominent human rights defenders "completely unacceptable". Numerous reports over the years, including by UN special rapporteurs, have found that terrorist or communist-labelling had frequently been used to justify the extrajudicial killing of individuals who oppose government policies and actions.

You raised Canada's concerns about the human rights situation in the Philippines with President Duterte during your latest trip to the region. We welcome this leadership, as we believe Canada can play a proactive role in promoting human rights in the Philippines through bilateral diplomacy and discussions in regional forums such as ASEAN and APEC. This is in line with Canada's guidelines on supporting human rights defenders, as well as Canada's support for a strong and vibrant civil society sector globally, as notably expressed in the Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance.

Accordingly, we ask the Government of Canada to issue a public statement registering its strong concerns regarding attempts to target or harm human rights defenders and advocates in the Philippines. We also reiterate our call for the Government of Canada to review the various forms of support it provides to the Government of the Philippines, including cooperation with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

We trust you will seriously consider our concerns and requests.

Sincerely,



Kelti Cameron
APWG-Philippines convener



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c.c.: Philippine Embassy in Canada; Embassy of Canada in the Philippines; Minister of Foreign Affairs;
Opposition Foreign Affairs Critics; Director Southeast Asia Global Affairs Canada

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