

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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PHILIPPINES: RESTORE RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ON 46TH ANNIVERSARY OF MARTIAL LAW

As the Philippines marks the 46th anniversary of the declaration of martial law and remembers the human rights atrocities committed during this dark chapter, the Philippine government, lawmakers, and the international community must take urgent action to address the deteriorating human rights situation in the country.

The nine-year military rule ordered by then President Ferdinand Marcos in 1972 unleashed a wave of grave human rights violations, with tens of thousands of people arbitrarily arrested and detained, tortured, forcibly disappeared, and killed.

Over four decades hence, Amnesty International sees alarming trends in the current deterioration of human rights in the Philippines. Just as martial law claimed the lives of thousands, including human rights defenders, peaceful activists, and others from 1972 to 1981, the current administration's 'war on drugs' has resulted in the killing of thousands of people suspected of using or selling drugs, including children, and others caught up in the operations, as well as arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, and other human rights violations. The brunt of these deaths and other violations was borne by people from poor and marginalised urban communities, making it in fact a war on the poor rather than a 'war on drugs'.

Following the election of Rodrigo Duterte as President in 2016, the government has actively created a climate where people can be killed with impunity in the name of the government's anti-drug campaign. To date, there have been no independent and impartial investigations into the killings at the national level and the government has ignored calls to allow an international investigation into the killings and other human rights violations carried out in the name of the 'war on drugs'.

Despite promising before becoming President that the 'war on drugs' would be won within three to six months of taking office, in his State of the Nation Address in July 2018, Duterte said that "the war against illegal drugs is far from over", adding that it will continue to be "relentless and chilling". He went on to say less than a month later that this so-called war will not be won within his term. The killings continue, with over 4,500 drug suspects killed from July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2018 based on figures from the Philippine National Police as reported by media. Human rights groups, however, believe the real figure could be up to three times that number. More recently, there has been a notable increase in the number of police officers and former/incumbent local officials killed because of their alleged involvement in the illegal drug trade, further reinforcing the already serious doubts on the effectiveness and integrity of the policy.

Aside from ongoing extrajudicial executions in the 'war on drugs', Amnesty International notes with concern the continuing attacks on peaceful activists and civil society organisations critical about the human rights violations resulting from the government's anti-drug campaign. Senator Leila de Lima, one of Duterte's fiercest critics, remains detained for over a year now on politically motivated charges. Duterte revoked the amnesty – granted in 2011 by then President Benigno Aquino III and approved by Congress – issued to minority bloc Senator Antonio Trillanes IV for his role in the mutinies during the administration of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. In addition, Amnesty International remains alarmed by the continuing application of martial law in Mindanao, which has seen an increase of arrests and killings in the south of the country and lacks a clear timetable.

As the nation pauses to remember the horrors of martial law under Marcos, Amnesty International urges the Philippine government to heed the lessons of its past and restore respect for and protection of the human rights of all Filipinos.

In light of the government's continuing policy of extrajudicial executions and failure to investigate, prosecute or punish perpetrators, the organization has supported the decision of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to open a preliminary investigation into these executions as possible crimes against humanity. We also call on the international community to encourage independent investigations into extrajudicial executions and other human rights violations committed in the context of the 'war against drugs' and to address the deterioration of human rights, in

particular respect for the right to life and dignity.

Amnesty International further reiterates its calls on Philippine authorities to end all unlawful killings; order an independent, impartial and effective inquiry into killings by police in anti-drug operations and by unknown armed persons; ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice and survivors are provided reparations; and adopt a health- and human rights-based approach to drug-related issues.

BACKGROUND

On 21 September 1972, then President Ferdinand Marcos signed Proclamation 1081 and placed the entire Philippines under martial law, citing the growing communist threat as justification. Through the proclamation and several other orders that he subsequently issued, Marcos ordered the Armed Forces of the Philippines to prevent or suppress “acts of rebellion or insurrection”. Privately owned media entities were seized and closed; curfews were enforced; and assemblies, including strikes and picketing, were banned.

The period also saw an unprecedented wave of torture, extrajudicial killings, and other serious human rights violations against peaceful activists and members of the public across the country. From 1972 to 1981, some 70,000 people were imprisoned and 34,000 were tortured; over 3,200 people were killed.

Martial law was lifted on 17 January 1981. Marcos continued to rule as president until 1986 when he and his family were forced into exile following a popular uprising now known as the People Power Revolution.

To date, some victims and their relatives have been provided reparations, but no one has been brought to justice for the crimes committed during martial law.