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Oral Statement: Item 2 General Debate

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL TO COMMIT TO UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO COVID-19 DIAGNOSTICS, TREATMENT AND VACCINES; AND ADDRESS CRISES IN ETHIOPIA AND THE PHILIPPINES

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Madame President,

This session marks one year since the COVID-19 pandemic began. As detailed in the [OHCHR report](#), the crisis has had a significant and far-reaching impact on the rights of people around the world. Nearly 2.5 million people have lost their lives. Many more have lost their livelihoods and up to 150 million are at risk of extreme poverty.¹ Frontline workers have faced reprisals for speaking up to shape or criticise the response, while minorities and marginalised communities have faced further discrimination. As of early February, over 75% of global vaccine supply had been used by 10 countries while some other 130 countries, representing 2.5 billion people, had yet to administer a single dose. As [noted](#) by the Secretary General on Monday, some states have used the pandemic as a pretext to “crush dissent, criminalize basic freedoms, silence independent reporting and curtail the activities of non-governmental organisations.”

States must work together – in close and meaningful consultation with civil society and frontline workers – if they are to effectively end this pandemic; truly “build back better”; and ensure that no one is left behind. They must urgently commit to work together – including at this Council – to guarantee the rights of all people no matter where they live – without discrimination – by ensuring fair and universal access to diagnostics, treatment and vaccines. No state should use the pandemic as a cover to curtail rights. This Council should ensure continued space for discussion on the broad human rights impacts of the pandemic.

We welcome the OHCHR’s attention to the crisis in Ethiopia, particularly in relation to the conflict in the Tigray region. For the past three months, the full scale of human suffering in Tigray has been largely unknown, compounded by restricted access to the region, and internet and telephone blackouts. There is, however, significant evidence of massacres of civilians, indiscriminate bombardment, extrajudicial killings, looting and sexual violence. Over 450,000 people have been displaced and 2.3 million people are in urgent need of life-saving assistance. We urge all parties to the conflict to comply with international human rights and humanitarian

¹ “COVID-19 to Add as Many as 150 Million Extreme Poor by 2021”, The World Bank, 7 October 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/07/covid-19-to-add-as-many-as-150-million-extreme-poor-by-2021>.

law, and to allow full access to humanitarian assistance and human rights monitors to the region. This Council must take action to prevent further violations and abuses and to ensure accountability.

We remain alarmed by increased violations in the Philippines over the past months. Attacks against activists,² human rights defenders,³ and Indigenous peoples,⁴ have escalated and extrajudicial killings⁵ in the context of the 'war on drugs' continue to be reported, fuelled by ongoing impunity and further incitement by the President.⁶ We urge states to hold the government of the Philippines to the commitments made to this Council in resolution 45/33 and remain convinced an investigation is warranted.

Thank you.

² Amnesty International, Philippines: Release 'red-tagged' journalist and activists and drop fabricated charges against them, 18 December 2020, Index number: ASA 35/3469/2020, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa35/3469/2020/en/>.

³ Amnesty International, Philippines: end deadly practice of red-tagging, 2 November 2020, Index number: ASA 35/3293/2020, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa35/3293/2020/en/>.

⁴ Amnesty International, Philippines: End attacks against Indigenous peoples, 11 February 2021, Index number: ASA 35/3677/2021, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa35/3677/2021/en/>.

⁵ Philippine Daily Inquirer, 3 found bound and shot dead on Bulacan roadside were abducted from MM, by Carmela Reyes-Estropo, 16 January 2021, available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1384354/3-found-bound-and-shot-dead-on-bulacan-roadside-were-abducted-from-mm#Echobox=1610775614>.

⁶ INQUIRER.net, 'Pour gasoline' on drug lords and 'set them on fire,' Duterte tells public, by Gabriel Pabico Lalu, 28 December 2020, available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1377067/duterte-encourages-violence-vs-criminals-criticizes-human-rights-advocates-aneu>.