

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# PHILIPPINES: ADOPT RECOMMENDATIONS OF UN REVIEW TO ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

The Philippine government should support and fully implement key recommendations made in the Universal Periodic Review, to prove that it is serious in its declared commitment to improve the human rights situation in the country. Supporting and implementing recommendations that would end grave human rights violations is critical to ensuring the international credibility of the new government as well as restoring respect for human rights in the Philippines.

On 14 November, UN member states reviewed the human rights record of the Philippines over the past five years. States made recommendations to address past and ongoing human rights violations and the climate of impunity. Key recommendations included ending the extrajudicial execution of people suspected of using and selling drugs; replacing the punitive approach to the so-called “war on drugs” with a policy that upholds and protects health and human rights; ensuring investigations into and accountability for all allegations of extrajudicial killings; and supporting victims of human rights violations and their families, including by providing compensation.

A large number of states urged the government to ensure a safe and enabling space for human rights defenders and civil society. They also called on the government to end red-tagging or the linking of activists and human rights defenders to the armed insurgency; protect judges, prosecutors and lawyers, as well as journalists against public threats, intimidation, harassment and violence, including killings.

States recommended the government take concrete measures to protect and promote the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, as well as media freedom, by amending legislation including cyber libel laws and the Revised Penal Code. States also recommended the Philippines re-accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; ratify outstanding international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and extend standing invitations to UN expert mandate holders.

The last five years scrutinized during the review have seen a severe deterioration in human rights in the country, including ongoing extrajudicial executions, a climate of impunity for human rights violations, and attacks on human rights defenders and journalists. Extrajudicial executions of people accused of using or selling drugs have persisted since the government began its so-called “war on drugs” and despite a change in administration. Apart from unlawful killings, arbitrary detention and violations of the right to health of people accused of using and selling drugs continue and there is still almost no justice for families of victims, despite the government declaring that domestic accountability mechanisms are working.

Since the start of the Marcos administration in July, the government has made no clear declaration to end the violent approach to drug policy, and several officials have indicated that it will carry on. Data from Dahas PH – a university-based research project looking into violence in the Philippines – shows a rise in drug-related killings after the new administration took office. Former Senator Leila de Lima, a prisoner of conscience and staunch critic of the government, has been arbitrarily detained since authorities arrested her in February 2017 after she sought to investigate extrajudicial executions and other human rights violations associated with the “war on drugs”. In September, she survived alleged hostage-taking inside her detention cell at the headquarters of the Philippine National Police; the incident has not yet been independently investigated.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa and her website Rappler continue to collectively face multiple lawsuits and investigations, which Amnesty International believes are politically motivated. Ressa and Rappler were consistent critics of President Duterte and his administration, publishing detailed investigations into drug-related cases of extrajudicial executions and attacks on human rights defenders. Meanwhile, red-tagging has escalated following the creation of the National Task Force to end Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) in 2018. Since then, there has been a renewed campaign of harassment, threats and killings of human rights defenders, activists, lawyers, trade unionists and others who have been red-tagged.

On 3 October, unknown assailants gunned down hard-hitting broadcast journalist Percy Lapid in Metro Manila. Lapid’s murder sparked public outrage and distrust in the government-led investigation; just two weeks later, the government announced that the alleged middleman who ordered the killings had died while in detention. The probe remains ongoing,

with complaints filed against several individuals including the chief of the Bureau of Corrections who has since denied any involvement.

Since taking office, the Marcos administration has repeatedly promised the international community it will improve the human rights situation in the country, pointing to investigations the Department of Justice is meant to be carrying out on drug-related killings, and the presence of a UN Joint Programme among other initiatives. Unfortunately, none of these measures has produced tangible results, despite significant investment from UN member states and insistence from the government that the situation is improving. During the UPR review, Secretary of Justice Jesus Crispin Remulla repeatedly stated the government was firmly committed to human rights and the rule of law.

To prove it is serious about improving the situation, and ensure that these statements are more than just words to placate the international community, Amnesty International calls on the government to make clear its support for the recommendations from the UPR at the 52<sup>nd</sup> UN Human Rights Council session in March and to implement them without delay. The government should also report on progress towards implementation in a mid-term report and communicate the report to UN Member States through an Item 6 General Debate at the Human Rights Council. The government should further implement the recommendations [published](#) by the Human Rights Committee in its September review of the Philippines' adherence to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Amnesty International regrets that during the most recent session of the UN Human Rights Council, UN member states failed to renew the monitoring and reporting mandate on the Philippines which was critical to holding the government accountable for its lack of progress in implementing key human rights commitments including those accepted at the UPR. The organization calls for the renewal of this mandate as soon as possible.