

Philippines: End killings of defenders working on economic, social and cultural rights

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While all human rights defenders in the Philippines are exposed to a wide range of obstacles and risks, those working on economic, social and cultural rights (with land and environmental rights defenders in particular) are among the most vulnerable, shows a new [report on the situation of human rights defenders in the Philippines](#).

Violence and pressure are used on a regular basis to impede their work and silence dissent, including through:

- Extrajudicial killings, kidnappings and death threats
- Forced evictions and evacuations
- Judicial harassment in the form of arbitrary detention and fraudulent charges
- Stigmatisation associating human rights defenders with guerrilla groups
- Restrictions on the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, association, and peaceful assembly
- Harassment, surveillance, and intimidation

Some of the most vulnerable groups include women human rights defenders, defenders of indigenous rights, trade unionists, and journalists. Land and environmental rights defenders are more prone to suffer vilification, particularly when their work brings them into opposition of businesses and developmental projects.

The most significant threat facing such defenders in the Philippines is homicide. Research shows that 67 killings of land and environmental defenders in the Philippines occurred between 2002-2013 while, in 2015 alone, the Philippines accounted for 60% of defenders killed in Asia.

'The situation facing defenders working on economic social and cultural rights in the Philippines is just scary', said ISHR's Advocacy, Training and Communications Manager Ben Leather. 'They currently have to put their lives on the line on a daily basis just to demand that the basic rights of communities and individuals are protected. It is high time for the government to take this seriously: recognise how important these people are to the peaceful development of the country, and take strong steps to keep them safe'.

The 57th Pre-sessional Working Group of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, currently being held in Geneva (22 February to 4 March) will consider the joint submission in developing a list of issues to be posed to the Philippines at its next examination. The aim of the review will be to assess the Philippines' progress towards compliance with the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#).

'The Committee should take this opportunity to ask the Philippines to detail the legal and practical steps it intends to take in order to guarantee the protection of defenders working on ESC rights defenders and combat impunity', said Mr Leather.

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*This joint submission was made by the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), the Philippine Task Force for Indigenous Peoples Rights (TFIP), Cordillera Indigenous Peoples Legal Center (DINTEG), Rural Missionaries of the Philippines - Northern Mindanao Region, Inc. (RMP NMR), Medical Action Group (MAG), Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) and Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)

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