

[Philippines | Calling on the Supreme Court to protect human rights defenders](#)

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As part of a response to increased human right violations in the Philippines, over 100 NGOs and individuals called on the Supreme Court for enhanced legal protections for human rights defenders.



Since President Duterte's election in 2016, the human rights situation in the Philippines has steadily worsened. Violence against human rights defenders has dramatically increased. There have been numerous extrajudicial killings including [Zara Alvarez](#) last August and the 'Bloody Sunday' killings this March, as well as others under the guise of Duterte's 'war on drugs'. [Reprisals against human rights defenders](#) have increased, progress has stalled on the [bill to enhance legal protections for defenders in the country](#) and new, restrictive laws have been passed. The [2020 Anti-Terrorism law](#) increases government power to take unsubstantiated legal action against activists by labeling them 'terrorists'. This contributes to 'red tagging', where State agents falsely brand activists leftist, communist, terrorist or subversive, thereby putting them in increased danger. The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression's [recent report](#) highlighted this practice as an example of State-led disinformation that can be devastating to human rights.

In this context, ISHR - along with more than one hundred NGOs, lawyers, academics, faith leaders, and civil society members from around the world - wrote [a letter](#) calling on the Supreme Court of the Philippines to establish greater legal protections for human rights defenders. The letter expresses 'profound and urgent concern [for] recent extrajudicial killings, judicial harassment, arbitrary arrests and detention and threats through red-tagging against human rights defenders...' and makes recommendations on how legal protections for human rights defenders can be strengthened.

This letter follows the submission of a number of cases by Philippine-based groups to the Court, which themselves were responses to the Court's March statement condemning violence against lawyers and judges. The Court noted that [Dutarte's five-year regime has been the deadliest period ever for lawyers and judges in the country](#), particularly those representing victims of government-sponsored violence, and stated its intention to provide greater security to those threatened.

National and international actors have called on the UN Human Rights Council to launch an independent investigation into the human rights situation in the Philippines. During the current 47th session of the Council, [Karapatan and the APWLD renewed this call](#), referencing the ICC's request for an investigation into alleged rights violations in the Duterte administration's 'drug war'.

'Despite the mounting and extreme challenges human rights defenders face in the Philippines, it is clear they will continue pushing for greater protection, security and accountability in all avenues available to them. We urge the Supreme Court to respond to this call and enhance protections for defenders,' said ISHR's Tess McEvoy.

Photo: picryl/President Rodrigo Roa Duterte at Clark Air Base in Pampanga