

## Public Version 2

### International Ecumenical Convocation on the Defense of Human Rights in the Philippines 17 September 2020 – 7:00PM to 9:00PM Philippine Standard time

Co-sponsored by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, in cooperation with the Ecumenical Voice for Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines (EcuVoice)  
and

ACT Alliance, The Asia Pacific Forum, <sup>1</sup>Christian Conference of Asia, Council for World Mission, International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, National Council of Churches in Korea, United Evangelical Mission, World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, World Student Christian Federation

*(Other organizations will be added in this list once they indicate their interest in co-organizing)*

To register for participation, please visit - <http://bit.ly/intlecuconvohrph>

## Context

While Philippines is bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic, the human rights situation in the country has been exponentially worsening. On July 3, 2020 President Rodrigo Duterte has completely legalized his disregard over people's rights with the signing of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 which took effect on July 18, 2020. This Act replaced the Human Security Act of 2007. This new law legitimizes unlawful arrests and detention, undermines the due process of law, and runs contrary to Philippine Constitution. The legislation in effect, cancels all basic rights stipulated in the Philippine Constitution's bill of rights guaranteeing to every Filipino basic and fundamental rights and liberties.

Even before this draconian law was enacted, Pres. Duterte's administration has been internationally criticized for human rights violations on its own people. On June 30, 2020, during the 44<sup>th</sup> UN Human Rights Council (UN HRC) session in Geneva, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, in her report (HRC/44/22), gave a critical view of the Philippine government's human rights record and its "overarching focus on public order and national security, including countering terrorism and illegal drugs." The High Commissioner warned that the Anti-Terrorism Act "dilutes human rights safeguards" and may "violate the principle of legality"<sup>2</sup>.

Attacks against people's fundamental rights have been intensifying every day, leading to the passing of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020. With the new Act in place, these human rights violations have continued at an unabated rate, and church people have not been spared. The National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) submitted a report to the OHCHR, including a joint statement with the World Council of Churches through its Commission the Churches in International Affairs (CCIA) to the UN Human Rights Council during its 44<sup>th</sup> regular session in July 2020<sup>3</sup>. The statement underscored the transgressions committed against church people and violations of civil and political rights, including the right to freedom of religion and to exercise ministry in furtherance of religious beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup> The Asia Pacific Forum brings together 12 primarily North American denominations and partner agencies for ecumenical collaboration and action in solidarity with partners in the region: Anglican Church in Canada, KAIROS - Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiative, Presbyterian Church in Canada, Presbyterian World Service and Development, United Church of Canada, Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ - Common Board of Global Ministries, Episcopal Church – USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia, International Ministries/American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Presbyterian Church – USA, United Methodist Church – General Board of Global Ministries; General Board of Church and Society, Uniting Church of Australia – Uniting World

<sup>2</sup> Situation of human rights in the Philippines Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PH/Philippines-HRC44-AEV.pdf>, June 29, 2020

<sup>3</sup>For a copy of the NCCP report to the UN OHCHR (A/HRC/44/NGO/116) please visit <https://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/2837062.77608871.html> or [https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?m=86](https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?m=86)

The Philippine Commission on Human Rights is now investigating a total of 89 cases involving deaths of human rights activists from 2017 to 2019. Included in these cases being investigated are the most recent deaths of Randall Echanis and Zara Alvarez<sup>4</sup>.

The situation today is reminiscent of the time under the Macapagal-Arroyo government when an activist was being killed every other day. Civic space is shrinking, endangering free speech and the airing of legitimate political grievances in the public square. The human rights crisis under an increasingly authoritarian government is getting worse.

### **An Appeal to the Global Ecumenical Community for solidarity and action**

In critical times such as these, the NCCP, in cooperation with the Ecumenical Voice for Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines (EcuVoice), calls on the accompaniment and solidarity of the wider international ecumenical community for the protection and promotion of human rights in the Philippines. In this light, partner organizations and churches are invited into a space of deep reflection and concrete action through an online **International Ecumenical Convocation on the Defense of Human Rights in the Philippines**.

This convocation seeks to:

1. Gather church leaders around the world to stand in solidarity with the Filipino people in their call to uphold human rights, seek peace, and enact justice.
2. Collectively reflect on the effects and implications of the Anti-Terrorism Act 2020—both in the Philippines and in the global promotion and protection of human rights-- and offer an analysis and draw a common stand on the said law.
3. Encourage churches around the world to lobby governments, especially the member states of the UN Human Rights Council, to press the Philippine government to take heed of the recommendations contained in the June 2020 report of the OHCHR, A/HRC/44/22<sup>5</sup>, and explore other venues for accountability like the International Criminal Court.
4. Launch a Unity Statement for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights in the Philippines that can be used to strengthen the advocacy of churches and other human rights advocates world-wide.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1325163/chr-89-human-rights-defenders-killed-from-2017-to-2019?fbclid=IwAR2xSzLPoJrS27ojeE1c5NwNi1\\_hmOeXS6rAF5Fgvk1Tzr5zCHAJfy2R72U](https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1325163/chr-89-human-rights-defenders-killed-from-2017-to-2019?fbclid=IwAR2xSzLPoJrS27ojeE1c5NwNi1_hmOeXS6rAF5Fgvk1Tzr5zCHAJfy2R72U)

<sup>5</sup> For copy of the report with recommendations please visit: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PH/Philippines-HRC44-AEV.pdf>

**Proposed Date and Time:** Thursday, September 17, 2020, 7:00-9:00 PM (Manila Time)

**Proposed Convocation Program Flow**

Opening Prayer	National Council of Churches in Korea (TBC)
Opening Remarks (5 mins each)	Ms. Ma. Kay Cathrine Almario, NCCP Vice-Chairperson, Youth Bp. Gerardo Alminaza, Diocese of San Carlos
Briefing on the Human Rights Situation in the Philippines (10-12 minutes)	Ms. Cristina Palabay, Secretary General, Karapatan
Implications of the Anti-Terrorism Act 2020 on Civic and Democratic Space in the Philippines (10 mins)	Atty. Ephraim Cortez, National Union of Peoples' Lawyers
Testimonies on the Ground (3 minutes)	From churches and sectors: Rise Up, Clarizza Singson, Sr. Ellen Belardo, Bp. Hamuel Tequis, Fr. Marco Sulayao
Challenge from the Philippine Ecumenical Community	Bp. Reuel Norman O. Marigza, NCCP General Secretary
Cultural Presentation	
Open Forum	
Ecumenical Response from the International Community	WCC, CCA, WCRC, Asia-Pacific Forum, WSCF, UEM
*Reading of Unity Statement with Symbolic Action	
Conclusion	

\* Note: The Unity Statement will be sent to participating organizations/individuals for approval prior to the convocation.