

September 14, 2021

Dear Senator/Representative,

On June 17, 2021, Representative Susan Wild (D. PA) introduced the Philippine Human Rights Act, HR 3884. This critical legislation calls for the suspension of security assistance to the Philippines until human rights violations cease and perpetrators are held responsible.

As denominations and faith-based organizations, many with longstanding partnerships on the ground in the Philippines, we urge you to support the Philippine Human Rights Act.

Bishops, priests, pastors, women religious, church workers, and laity have been threatened, intimidated, harassed, and murdered for speaking out against extrajudicial killings and the war on drugs. President Duterte has threatened to “kill useless Bishops” who speak out against Duterte’s infamous Drug War, a war which has been widely condemned as a cruel and unjust killing spree without due process. The Armed Forces of the Philippines recently included the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (the largest Protestant church body in the country) in a list of organizations it described as “communist terrorist groups.”

The targeting of dissent in the country is widespread; faith leaders, human rights defenders, journalists, indigenous people, workers, youth, women and children face constant attack. In a joint statement, three Catholic archbishops described the situation in the Philippines: “How may we describe the present social condition of our nation? It is like a valley of death with the killing of drug users and opponents, death by governance without vision, death by shameless corruption that seems to break all records.”

Gross human rights violations under the Duterte Administration are indeed well documented. Amnesty International has reported that killings of alleged drug users, which have taken the lives of at least 8,663 people, “persist in a climate of impunity” and that attacks on activists “have surged and grown more brazen.” A recent report from Investigate PH, an international independent investigation on the Philippines, concludes: “State security forces have killed 394 Filipino civilian political actors, broadly described as human rights defenders or advocates, in Duterte’s War on Dissent, up to the end of March 2021.” The report further notes, “officials from the President down” have made statements “to vilify, isolate, intimidate and eventually to either arrest or arbitrarily kill the unarmed civilian targets.”

While some have argued that U.S. aid is needed to defend against China, U.S. military assistance to the army and police does not serve to defend the Philippines against the Chinese intrusions in the West Philippine Sea under Philippine jurisdiction. Instead, it is being turned against the most vulnerable and marginalized among the country’s population.

We earnestly ask you to join us in advocating for the rights of the most exploited and oppressed in the Philippines and to co-sponsor the Philippine Human Rights Act.

Sincerely,

Pax Christi USA

Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Presbyterian Church (USA)

National Council of Churches USA

United Methodist Women

The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

United Church of Christ, Pacific Islander & Asian American Ministries

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center

National Association of Filipino-American United Methodists

Methodist Federation for Social Action

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces

International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines

Ecumenical Advocacy Network on the Philippines

National Interfaith Forum on the Philippines

Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community