

Senator the Hon. Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
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8 September 2020

Human and trade union rights violations in the Philippines

Dear Minister

I write to you on behalf of the Australian union movement in relation to the escalating human and trade union rights violations in the Philippines. The International Trade Union Confederation ranks the Philippines as among the ten worst countries in the world¹ for working people, with no guarantee of rights for workers or trade unions. Since our last correspondence to you on this issue on 10 December 2019, the situation has worsened, with 50 union members and officials now killed by extrajudicial violence under President Duterte's administration. As we noted in our previous correspondence, the persecution of unionists and civil society activists has increased through the process known as 'red tagging', where unionists and activists are spied on, profiled, portrayed as terrorists, arrested, unjustly detained and even killed by police and paramilitary groups, in attempt to suppress dissent. We fear that the passing of the Anti-Terror Act in July will further increase this repression, with the new law criminalising acts that are legitimate forms of freedom of speech, expression and peaceful assembly; creating a new offence of 'inciting to commit terrorism' where a person could be sentenced for up to 12 years for inciting others through speech, writing or other representations; and giving more power to military and law enforcement to carry out warrantless arrests and detain suspects for 14 days without charge.

In June 2020, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released a comprehensive and alarming report on the human rights situation in the Philippines. The report verifies the killings of 208 human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists. The report makes a number of recommendations to the Philippines Government to stop the repression, extrajudicial killings, violence and harassment, and ensure that rights to freedom of expression, association and freedom of assembly are respected. None of the recommendations have been implemented to date.

We urge the Australian Government to sponsor a resolution at the upcoming 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council to follow up on the progress of the recommendations in the UN High Commissioner's report, and call on the Philippines Government to implement the recommendations as a matter of urgency. Furthermore, we request an urgent meeting with your office to brief you on the worsening human and trade union rights situation in the Philippines. Please have your office contact Clare Middlemas, international officer (cmiddlemas@actu.org.au) to arrange a meeting at your earliest convenience.

¹ https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc_globalrightsindex_2020_en.pdf

Yours sincerely



Michele O'Neil
President