

STATEMENT
UPR Pre-session on The Philippines
Geneva, 30 August 2022
Delivered by: Karapatan Alliance Philippines

SLIDE 1: (Introduction)

This statement is delivered on behalf of Karapatan Alliance Philippines (or Karapatan), a non-governmental organization that promotes, protects and advances human rights in the Philippines. Karapatan has participated in the UPR process at the national level since 2008.

Karapatan conducted consultations among its members, partners and networks, and participated in the consultations by the Philippine Commission on Human Rights for the development of our report for the UPR.

This statement addresses the following issues: 1) freedom of expression; 2) freedom of peaceful assembly and association and on human rights defenders.

SLIDE 2 ISSUE 1: Freedom of expression
(Implementation of previous recommendation/s)

Ten countries - Estonia, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Botswana, Lebanon, Norway, Ukraine, and Latvia - gave specific recommendations on freedom of expression, which remains a significant issue in the Philippines, considering the numerous challenges facing journalists and human rights defenders.

SLIDE 3 ISSUE 1: Freedom of Expression (New Developments)

According to Reporters Without Borders' (RSF), the Philippines is one of the world's deadliest countries for journalists, with 22 killed during the past administration. Government critics face judicial harassment and imprisonment; attacks on and blocking of websites; online and offline attacks, including use of misogynist threats, red-tagging or what UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders has called a context-specific death threat in the Philippines, and other forms of intimidation. Those critical of government actions during the pandemic were criminalized.

SLIDE 4 ISSUE 1: Freedom of Expression (Recommendations)

In our view, there have been no significant measures to address the concerns in the recommendations in 2017, and worse, the exercise of freedom of expression has become more dangerous for journalists, defenders and citizens in general.

We recommend the following:

- ensure protection and a safe and enabling environment for those advocating for freedom of expression;
- hold accountable all perpetrators of violations against journalists, human rights defenders and citizens exercising their freedom of expression; and
- decriminalize libel and repeal anti-terror legislations that infringe on freedom of expression.

SLIDE 5 ISSUE 2: Freedom of peaceful assembly and association and on human rights defenders (*Implementation of previous recommendation/s*)

Nine countries - Ireland, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway, Ukraine and France - provided specific recommendations on freedom of peaceful assembly and association and human rights defenders. Twenty seven countries have called for a halt to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and other rights violations, including those against defenders. To this date, a large majority of the cases involving defenders have remained unresolved.

SLIDE 6 ISSUE 2: Freedom of peaceful assembly and association and on human rights defenders (*New Developments*)

Civicus has recently rated civic space in the Philippines as “repressed,” with various obstacles faced in the protection of the rights of human rights defenders and of freedom of peaceful assembly and association. At least 222 human rights defenders were killed from July 2016 to June 2022. Online and offline red-tagging, defamation, and disinformation inciting violence on human rights defenders, their organizations and families, and their communities have become more pervasive, with a government counterinsurgency body committing such violations. Most of the 802 political prisoners are defenders facing criminal charges inside overcrowded prison cells and have experienced inhumane treatment and prolonged incarceration, while many defenders face judicial harassment. This includes Karapatan human rights workers.

Despite numerous court cases against officials involved in these acts, there have been no meaningful prosecution nor penalties imposed against them, while other judicial mechanisms of redress have been inadequate in addressing threats to lives, security and liberties of defenders. Proposed legislation for the protection of defenders was opposed by government officials, while a new anti-terror legislation is seen as one that will have immense impacts on the freedom of association. Numerous protest or civic actions especially during the pandemic have been violently dispersed or have resulted into violent arrests and detention of defenders.

SLIDE 7 ISSUE 2: Freedom of peaceful assembly and association and on human rights defenders (*Recommendations*)

In our view, the recommendations in 2017 in relation to these issues remain unheeded by the State under Review. We therefore state the following recommendations:

- stop extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, arbitrary/illegal arrest and detention, red-tagging, and other attacks against human rights defenders and civil society actors;
- ensure prosecution and conviction of perpetrators of these violations;
- enact legislation and other necessary legal domestic remedies for the protection of human rights defenders and repeal/rescind anti-terror legislations or counterinsurgency programs which target defenders; and
- release all detained human rights defenders.

SLIDE 8 Last slide (Thank you)