

UN Member States Fall Short on Accountability for Philippine Mass Killings

By [International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines](#)

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ICHRP supports the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), but is concerned by a general lack of support for action among UN member states.

The United Nations Human Rights Committee is a treaty body composed of 18 experts, established through the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The Committee meets for three four-week sessions per year to consider the periodic reports submitted by the 173 state parties to the ICCPR on their compliance with the treaty.

The 2022 report of the Human Rights Committee highlights the ongoing failure of the Philippine government in ensuring that human rights are upheld. The recommendations take note of the issues and instruments that have contributed to a system of impunity and state-orchestrated terror, such as: the red-tagging of human rights defenders and attacks on journalists and lawyers; continued extra-judicial killings under the guise of the war on drugs; and the repressive provisions of the Anti-Terror Law which target the fundamental foundations of democracy, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and the right to dissent.

The Committee's recommendations are timely, given the continuing human rights violations under the new Marcos administration. The current administration must not ignore nor downplay these recommendations and instead find concrete ways of upholding its treaty

obligations under the ICCPR.

There was a great deal of interest expressed among member states in the Philippines UPR here in Geneva. A total of 107 states intervened and about 40% took a critical stand and supported the Committee's recommendations. There is a general reticence among the majority of member states to be critical towards the Philippines' abysmal human rights record. Despite the UN's ongoing documentation of the Philippine's poor civil and political rights record which dramatically worsened under the Duterte administration, only a minority of states are willing to openly express concerns and even fewer were willing to make strong recommendations for action (specifically some European and Latin American States). We specifically laud the intervention of Sierra Leone who called for the abolition of the NTF-ELCAC (National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict) which has functioned as one of the main instruments of state terror against dissidents.

Several member states including Lichtenstein, Sierra Leone, Sweden, Romania, and the USA, called for an end to the practice of red-tagging, a process by which individuals and organizations are labelled as fronts for the Communist Party of the Philippines. The Philippine representative Jesus Crispin Remulla, Secretary of the Department of Justice, for his part angrily responded to the US criticism claiming, "there is no government policy of red-tagging, it is a term invented by the left". This was a complete turnabout from Remulla's contention two weeks earlier that red tagging was a government right and a vibrant part of the democratic process. This is an example of the Philippine government's state of denial to the international community regarding its continuing war on dissent.

ICHRP Chairperson Peter Murphy expressed "profound appreciation to those member states who spoke out pressing for greater accountability from the Philippine government," but he urged the international community to "press member states for concrete action on human rights from the Marcos administration". He further called for an immediate need for an end to the supply weapons to the Marcos government, noting that "the United States has recently extended \$100 million in credit for weapons purchases, and supplied \$1.14 billion [2015-21] in weapons to the Philippine government during the worst period of rights violations".

The recommendations stem from a recognition of the dire human rights situation in the Philippines. The experts do not appear swayed by the claim that the justice system in the country is working for the victims of human rights violations. ICHRP Global Council Member, Rev. Patricia Lisson, indicated that "all evidence to date points to a failure of domestic measures with less than 15 prosecutions among the thousands of cases of rights violations. Given such weak evidence to the contrary, the experts and a number of member states are clearly not convinced that the human rights situation has greatly improved".

ICHRP calls on UN member states to hold the Philippines accountable to act on the findings of the UPR, to take concrete action to support an end to impunity, and to support the struggle of the victims and their family for justice and to finally conduct an independent international investigation as a follow-up to the 2020 Bachelet report. In the interim, the most visible and effective measure will be a cessation of all arms trade with the Philippines.

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