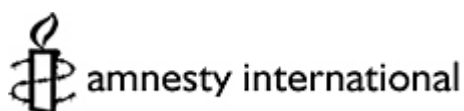


Title	Amnesty International Annual Report 2012 - Philippines
Publisher	Amnesty International
Country	Philippines
Publication Date	24 May 2012
Cite as	Amnesty International, <i>Amnesty International Annual Report 2012 - Philippines</i> , 24 May 2012, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4fbe3919a.html [accessed 28 November 2012]
Disclaimer	This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.



Amnesty International Annual Report 2012 - Philippines

Head of state and government: **Benigno S. Aquino III**

Death penalty: **abolitionist for all crimes**

Population: **94.9 million**

Life expectancy: **68.7 years**

Under-5 mortality: **33.1 per 1,000**

Adult literacy: **95.4 per cent**

Benigno "Noy" Aquino III began his second year as President in June. Reports of torture, extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearance persisted, with hundreds of past cases remaining unresolved. The first ever criminal prosecution for torture was launched in September. Women and men continued to face severe restrictions on their right to reproductive health, including access to contraception. In August, the Philippines ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Internal armed conflict

In February, the government began peace talks with the two main armed opposition groups, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army. Following a reduction in hostilities, clashes erupted again later in the year.

- In the worst fighting since the 2008-2009 conflict on Mindanao island, hostilities broke out in October between the military and the MILF in the southern island of Basilan. The joint ceasefire committee was tasked with investigating the military's claim that six of the 19 government soldiers killed in the clash were captured and summarily executed by the MILF. A military incursion to apprehend members of the Abu Sayyaf armed group used aerial bombardment and ground strikes, displacing as many as 30,000 civilians. At least one civilian was reported killed.
- In northern Mindanao, New People's Army forces attacked private mining operations in Surigao del Norte province in October, killing three security guards. In response, President Aquino approved the previous administration's policy of augmenting security at private mining operations by deploying civilian militias. Such militias, which operate without proper military discipline or accountability,

have been implicated in torture, arbitrary detention, and the killing of local Indigenous leaders.

Unlawful killings

Politically motivated killings of political activists and journalists continued. In November, the USA announced it would withhold a portion of military aid until the Philippines made progress in resolving extrajudicial executions.

- Rodel Estrellado, a member of leftist political party Bayan Muna, was abducted in February near his home in Albay province by men claiming to be members of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency. After two days of searching, his family found his body in a funeral parlour, registered under a fictitious name. Several hours before the abduction, the military issued a statement claiming that a person with this name had been killed in an armed encounter in another province. In May, the military confirmed that nine soldiers, including two officers, had been charged with his murder.
- At least three journalists were killed, including Gerardo Ortega in January. A radio broadcaster in Palawan island, he had opposed mining operations on the island. Police arrested a suspected gunman and traced the weapon to a former employee of provincial Governor Joel Reyes, whom Ortega had criticized for corruption. In June, the Department of Justice dropped murder charges against the governor.
- Two years after the Maguindanao massacre, in which an armed group killed 57 people accompanying an election caravan on Mindanao island, trials of the alleged perpetrators continued. Police had arrested at least 93 suspects, including former local officials, but no one had been convicted by the end of the year.

Enforced disappearances

Hundreds of cases of enforced disappearance remained unresolved. According to figures released in August by Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance, the average number of enforced disappearances per year had barely changed since the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. There were 875 documented cases during his 21-year rule, compared with 945 in the 25 years since.

- In July, the Supreme Court ordered the armed forces to produce Jonas Burgos, an activist abducted from a Manila shopping mall in 2007 in a car previously impounded by the military. In its report to the Court, the Commission on Human Rights recommended that criminal charges be filed against a major who had been implicated by a witness. In June, Burgos' mother filed a criminal case after the government failed to bring charges against the major.
- The Senate passed a landmark bill to criminalize enforced disappearances in July. The bill, first filed in 1995, remained pending in the House of Representatives.

Torture and other ill-treatment

For the first time, members of the security forces were prosecuted under criminal anti-torture legislation. Yet reports of torture and other ill-treatment by the security forces continued. Prosecutions of criminal suspects remained highly dependent on individual testimony, including forced confessions.

- In September, prosecutors filed the first criminal case under the Anti-Torture Law of 2009. The Department of Justice recommended that criminal charges be filed against a senior police inspector and six other police officers. A mobile-phone video shot in 2010 showed robbery suspect Darius Evangelista writhing in pain as the police inspector yanked Evangelista's penis with a cord; the video was broadcast on a television news programme in August that year.
- In August, four army rangers were arrested in connection with the alleged torture of Abdul Khan Ajid in July. They were accused of dousing him with gasoline and setting him alight to force him to confess to being a member of Abu Sayyaf. The

four soldiers, including one officer, were relieved of their duties in Basilan province, pending charges.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

Peaceful activists faced the risk of harassment, arrest and detention by the military near areas where battalions were deployed.

- In February, military officers arrested journalist Ericson Acosta in Samar province. During his interrogation at a military camp, he was threatened with death unless he confessed to being an official of the Communist Party of the Philippines – which is no longer illegal. The military then filed charges against Acosta on a non-bailable offence: illegal possession of explosives. Although the Speedy Trial Act specifies a maximum of 180 days from arraignment to trial, at the end of the year he remained in jail without trial after 10 months.

Sexual and reproductive rights

Government policies on birth control discriminated against women and violated their right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health, by restricting access to contraception and information on family planning. Abortion remained criminalized in all circumstances, except where a medical board certifies that the pregnancy endangers the woman's life. Debate continued in Congress on the Reproductive Health Bill, which aims to remove current prohibitions and obstacles to services and information related to reproductive health.

- In January, a local authority in Manila passed an ordinance banning sex education, condoms, contraceptive pills and other contraceptive devices. The ordinance required a doctor's prescription for buying condoms, and imposed penalties for advertising birth control methods.
- In a speech in March, President Aquino recognized the scale of unsafe illegal abortions in the Philippines, saying there were 300,000 "induced miscarriages" each year.
- Lesbians, gay men and bisexual and transgender people continued to be subjected to violence and discrimination, with 28 bias-related killings in the first half of 2011, according to the Philippine LGBT Hate Crime Watch. An anti-discrimination bill, introduced in 1999, remained blocked in Congress.

Copyright notice: © Copyright Amnesty International
