

Amnesty International Report 2020/21; The State of the World's Human Rights; Philippines 2020

Extrajudicial executions and other human rights violations continued under the government's "war on drugs". Human rights defenders and political activists were killed, harassed, detained and unjustly charged. Media freedom was unduly curtailed and dangerous anti-terror legislation was passed. Various groups condemned the government's heavy-handed approach to the COVID-19 pandemic. President Duterte renewed his call on Congress to reinstate the death penalty.

Background

Measures taken by the government to curb the spread of COVID-19 led to numerous abuses of human rights. President Duterte ordered security forces and local government officials to "shoot dead" those causing "trouble" during community quarantine.¹ Local officials faced charges for locking people in dog cages for alleged violations of the quarantine.

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted a resolution to provide technical assistance and capacity building to the government. The resolution fell short of calls for stronger action to address ongoing violations in the country.

Extrajudicial executions and impunity

Killings and other human rights violations continued under the government's "war on drugs". On several occasions, President Duterte incited violence against people suspected of using or selling drugs, while promising to protect those who kill them.² Reports of killings increased in cities where police chiefs who had previously overseen abusive operations were appointed. Based on government data, police killed at least 155 people from April to July, compared to 103 people from December 2019 to March. Killings by unknown individuals, many with suspected links to the police, continued. Victims were overwhelmingly poor.

Vice President Leni Robredo released a report in January countering government information on the "war on drugs". She stated that government efforts targeted people who use or sell small amounts of illicit drugs and called on the government to end its deadly approach known as Oplan Tokhang ("Operation Knock and Plead"), prosecute those involved in drug trafficking, and improve its collection and interpretation of drug-related data.³

In June, the UN Human Rights Office released a report detailing extrajudicial executions and attacks against human rights defenders, political activists and the media, among other violations.

In July, the government announced the establishment of an inter-agency panel to "review" cases of drug-related killings by the police. Human rights groups said the panel was formed to shield the government from international scrutiny.

Despite repeated calls for an international investigation, the UNHRC adopted in October a resolution providing technical assistance and capacity-building to the government. The resolution required the UN Human Rights Office to continue to provide the UNHRC with updates over the next two years.⁴

In December, the International Criminal Court stated crimes were committed in the "war on drugs", adding that it expected to decide in 2021 whether or not to open an investigation.

Repression of dissent

In February, prisoner of conscience Senator Leila de Lima marked her third year in detention on politically motivated charges after she sought to investigate drug-related killings.⁵ Also in February, a court issued arrest warrants against former Senator and critic of the "war on drugs" Antonio Trillanes IV, activist priest Fr. Flaviano "Flavie" Villanueva and nine others on charges of conspiracy to commit sedition. Five activists were arrested in raids by security forces in Tacloban City.

In March, a court issued arrest warrants for perjury against activists seeking court protection after the Philippine military tagged them as "terrorists".

In July, President Duterte signed into law Republic Act 11479 (Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020).⁶ Human rights groups criticized the new law for contravening international standards and granting the government unchecked powers to detain perceived enemies of the state. Over 30 petitions challenging its constitutionality were pending before the Supreme Court at year's end.

On 10 August, activist and peace advocate Randall Echanis and his neighbour were killed in Metro Manila.⁷ A week later, human rights defender Zara Alvarez was shot dead in Bacolod City.⁸ Echanis and Alvarez were branded as "terrorists" in a 2018 government list. Other human rights defenders and political activists were arbitrarily detained and faced increased threats and harassment after the government "red-tagged" or linked them to communist armed groups.

In October, police treatment of detained activist Reina Mae Nasino attending the funeral of her three-month-old baby sparked public outrage.

On 10 December, police arrested journalist Lady Ann Salem and six trade unionists during raids in Metro Manila on charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives. Human rights groups claimed the charges were fabricated.

On 30 December, police killed nine people and arrested 17 in Capiz and Iloilo provinces. Local groups said they were from an Indigenous community defending their land while police claimed they were members of the New Peoples Army and that the nine were killed after resisting arrest.

Freedom of expression

In May, unidentified assailants shot dead radio broadcaster and anti-corruption critic Cornelio Pepino in Dumaguete City. His murder was the first in a string of killings in Negros Oriental over nine days that left six others dead.

In June, Maria Ressa, Chief Executive Officer of news website Rappler, and former Rappler researcher Reynaldo Santos Jr. were convicted of cyber libel.⁹ A month later, Congress denied the franchise renewal of broadcast media network ABS-CBN.¹⁰ Both Rappler and ABS-CBN produced reports highlighting killings and other violations under the "war on drugs". In December, Maria Ressa was charged for a second time for cyber libel after sharing a tweet.

Freedoms of assembly and association

Violations of the right to freedom of assembly occurred amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In April, police violently dispersed residents of an urban poor community in Quezon City peacefully demanding government aid.

In June, police arrested eight people protesting anti-terror legislation in Cebu City, detaining them for three days. Police also arrested at least 20 people, including three minors, during a Pride march in the capital, Manila. Police accused the protesters of breaching restrictions on mass gatherings during the pandemic, among other alleged violations. They were released pending investigation four days later.

Right to health

There were repeated calls for the release of certain groups of prisoners, including people detained for political reasons, to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 in prisons after hundreds of prisoners and staff tested positive for the virus. As of October, the Supreme Court said over 80,000 prisoners were released.

There were concerns over the protection of health workers during the pandemic. A ban on their deployment overseas was partially lifted in November.

Abuses by armed groups

Clashes between government forces and the communist New People's Army continued. In August, two young members of the Manobo tribe died amid escalating violence in Surigao del Sur.

Death penalty

In his State of the Nation Address in July, President Duterte renewed his call on Congress to reinstate the death penalty, including for drug-related crimes. At least 24 bills reintroducing the death penalty were pending at year's end.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people

In February, Makati City police sparked an outcry after "profiling" 67 individuals as part of its "Oplan X-Men" targeting transgender women.

In April, a local government official subjected three LGBTI individuals to degrading treatment by forcing them to perform sexually-suggestive acts as punishment for alleged COVID-19 curfew violations. In December, a Senate panel approved a bill that aims to prohibit discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

-
1. [Philippines: President Duterte gives "shoot to kill" order amid pandemic response \(Press release, 2 April\)](#)
 2. ["My Job is to kill": Ongoing human rights violations and impunity in the Philippines \(ASA 35/3085/2020\)](#)
 3. [Philippines: Vice President's 'insider account' shows failure of deadly anti-drugs campaign \(Press release, 6 January\)](#)
 4. [Philippines: UN resolution a missed chance for justice but scrutiny continues \(Press release, 7 October\)](#)
 5. [Philippines: Free senator; end attacks on human rights defenders \(ASA 35/1854/2020\)](#)
 6. [Philippines: Dangerous anti-terror law yet another setback for human rights \(Press release, 3 July\)](#)
 7. [Philippines: Cold-blooded murder of another activist and peace advocate must be investigated \(Public statement, 10 August\)](#)
 8. [Philippines: Another human rights defender murdered; cycle of bloodshed must end \(Press release, 18 August\)](#)
 9. [Philippines: Quash conviction of Rappler journalists Maria Ressa and Rey Santos \(Press release, 15 June\)](#)
 10. [Philippines: Denial of ABS-CBN franchise another nail in the coffin of press freedom \(Public statement, 10 July\)](#)

© Amnesty International

ecoi.net summary:
Report on the human rights situation
covering 2020



Country:
Philippines

Source:
[AI – Amnesty International](#)

Original link:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/philippines/report-philippines/>

Document type:

Language:
English

Published:
7 April 2021

Document ID:
2048740

Austrian Red Cross Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)	Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583 F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589 info@ecoi.net	Contact Imprint & Disclaimer F.A.Q. Data Protection Notice
--	--	---

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

