



Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)

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AFAD's Human Rights Day Statement – Philippines

On this day, 69 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its third session, which was held at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, France. The adoption of this historic document marked a big leap in the struggle to defend and uphold human rights everywhere in the world.

69 years ago, humanity was breaking milestones in the history of human rights.

69 years later, humanity is caught in a standstill.

In 2017, the climate of impunity that prevails in the Philippines has resulted in a serious deterioration in the situation of human rights in the country. This year, the only “historic milestones” we achieved were the unprecedented levels of extrajudicial killings and cases of human rights violations, all of which were even lauded by the present administration.

The violent crackdown of President Duterte on illegal drugs has led to 13,000 victims of unlawful killings, which speaks volumes regarding the current state of human rights in the country. The on-going attack on legal progressives has also reached a disturbing level, following the assassination of several human rights defenders. Human rights defenders are the most recent victims of killings.

More than a decade since its abolition, capital punishment is again working its way towards restoration, and the House of Representatives has already approved the bill imposing the death penalty on its final reading. The protection of children's rights is also under attack following the recent filing of a Senate version of the bill lowering of the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

In addition to this, the Government of the Philippines has not yet signed and ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. This is despite numerous recommendations from other UN States Parties during the Third UPR Cycle to ratify it.

The local law that criminalizes perpetrators of enforced disappearances is also yet to be effectively implemented, since its implementation has been impeded by the prosecutor's lack of understanding of the law. Of the 2,259 reported victims, only 1,941 have been documented; 1,170 are still disappeared, 525 surfaced alive and 248 were found dead. Eleven cases are documented under the current administration— a figure which is below the actual number of cases as many have been underreported due to various reasons.

Our democratic rights are also threatened following the relentless "state-sponsored" mobilizations pushing for the transition into a revolutionary government, as its premise includes the removal of all government positions, abolishment of the Constitution, forcible installment of Federalism, and the concentration of power into the hands of one man. This would mean unbounded power that is unaccountable to no one, or in other terms, a full-blown dictatorship.

This is what our country gets after electing a leader who has no regard for the human rights of his constituents. President Duterte is adamant that he does not need human rights to rule.

As human rights defenders, our path is clear. As the world commemorates the 69th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there are all the more reasons for human rights defenders to work steadfastly amidst repression.

We, the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances, are one with the whole human rights community in vehemently condemning this government's efforts to return to dictatorship. We will continue to oppose the war on drugs, death penalty, lowering of minimum age of criminal responsibility, violent crackdowns on legal progressives, and the State's rejection of international mechanisms to protect our human rights.

This depressing turn of events will not break our ranks. In this dark period for the plight of defending our human rights, we shall remain true to our cause. Sixty-nine years after the adoption of the UDHR, and the flame of courage of human rights defenders is all the more needed than ever.

To all our human rights defenders, *PADAYOM!*

To a world without *desaparecidos*!

To a world without human rights violations!

END IMPUNITY NOW!

Signed by,



KHURRAM PARVEZ
Chairperson



MARY AILEEN D. BACALSO
Secretary-General