

A DECLARATION OF SUPPORT FOR PHILIPPINE HUMAN RIGHTS

A Resolution of Witness

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS On July 3, 2020 the Anti-Terrorism Act of the Philippines was passed into law by then President Rodrigo Duterte.¹ While purporting to counter terrorism, the bill rolls back civil liberties by lessening requirements for judicial warrants, allows for extended pre-trial detention, and allows for the prosecution of conduct that is considered protected political speech. The Anti-Terrorism Act is viewed by many as a threat to Freedom of Speech in the Philippines and yet another tool the administration will use to silence critics and political rivals.² Representative Jan Schakowsky, along with 49 other members of the U.S. Congress urged the government of the Philippines to repeal “this repressive legislation.”³ Rep. Susan Wild authored the bill HR1433, known as the Philippines Human Rights Act PHRA as our responsibility to hold the Philippine Government to accountability for upholding human rights.⁴

WHEREAS In a 2007 Preliminary note on the visit to the Philippines, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Philip Alston defined red-tagging as “labeling”, or guilt by association [involving] the characteristics of most groups on the left of the political spectrum as ‘front organizations’ for armed groups whose aim is to destroy democracy.” This practice of red tagging, wherein the government labels critics as terrorists to isolate individuals and organizations and mark them for harassment or assassination by state security forces, the development of the Anti-Terror Act (ATA) and the work of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) are the results of the Philippine government’s counter-insurgency programs that broadly become attacks against civilians and human rights defenders.⁵

WHEREAS The United States continues to arm state security forces of the Philippines. Despite clear documentation of abuses and international condemnation, in April 2020, the United States announced a pair of arms sales to the Philippines government totaling \$2,000,000,000 for items including hellfire missiles and attack helicopters. In July 2020, the United States announced an additional sale of \$126,000,000 worth of assault boats and armaments. In 2021 money given for arms sales was \$348,000,000 and in 2022 it was \$338,000,000.⁶

WHEREAS The National Council of Churches and the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform renewed its call for the resumption of the peace talks between the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NCCP). According to the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, counter-insurgency programs of the Philippine government (designed after US counterinsurgency tactics) to the rebellion in the Philippines has only created further human rights violations and displacement of peoples. Thus, the NCCP insists, “Calling for the ways of peace through principled negotiations is to

reject a militarist solution.”⁷

WHEREAS The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) maintains a campaign against the ongoing communist rebellion in the Philippines, as well as against groups that it claims to be front organizations of the communist group. It maintains that it has the duty to warn the public against "dubious groups with links to communist terrorist organizations" They regularly charge any humanitarian group as being a front organization and have brought about stepped-up political repression against the political opposition, trade unionists, community organizers, journalists, artists and writers, peace and human rights advocates and ordinary people. This includes red-tagging of social activists including church people and churches; attacks on indigenous communities and their schools; and harassment of humanitarian aid groups and their workers.⁸

WHEREAS Per the US State Department’s 2023 country report on human rights practices for the Philippines, “There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in the Philippines during the year (2023), although the number of incidents of arbitrary and extrajudicial killings and of some other abuses by government agents decreased. Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearance; torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment by and on behalf of the government, and other physical abuses by nonstate actors.”⁹

WHEREAS It is against the Leahy Law of the United States to arm a country that turns lethal force on its own citizens.¹⁰

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ declares its support of and joins in solidarity with the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) in their advocacy for the peace process between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ strongly condemns the violent acts and unjust actions against all people who are in solidarity with and caring for all the people in the Philippines who are experiencing social, political, or economic injustices and violations of their basic human rights.¹¹

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ unequivocally condemns any and all extrajudicial killings, the lack of investigation and accountability of the militarized police force of the Philippines, and the absence of due process which their own constitution and laws require.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls on all settings of the Church to advocate for legislation supporting Philippine human rights.¹²

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church

of Christ calls upon local churches and conferences to provide education about the situation in the Philippines and how we can be in solidarity with our siblings in Christ there.

FUNDING: The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION: The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/philippines-dangerous-antiterror-law-yet-another-setback-for-human-rights/>

² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/05/philippines-new-anti-terrorism-act-endangers-rights>

³ <https://humanrightsp.org/statements/us-congresswoman-jan-schakowsky-and-49-other-us-legislators-call-on-philippine-government-to-rescind-anti-terror-law>

⁴ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/1433/text>

⁵ <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/publications/red-tagging-in-the-philippines-the-modern-mccarthyism-threatening-freedom-of-expression/>

⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/810259/philippines-arms-imports/>

⁷ <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/ecumenical-backing-for-philippines-peace-talks>

⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/26/philippines-officials-red-tagging-indigenous-leaders-activists>

⁹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/philippines/>

¹⁰ <https://www.state.gov/key-topics-bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/human-rights/leahy-law-fact-sheet/>

¹¹ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/philippines>

¹² <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/1433>