

Resolution of Witness

Declaring the Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ in support of H.R. 1433 in the 118th Congress of the United States of America, commonly known as the Philippines Human Rights Act, “to suspend the provision of security assistance to the Philippines until the Government of the Philippines has made certain reforms to the military and police forces and for other purposes.”

Brought forward by the Central Pacific Conference Wider Church Ministries committee.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Human Rights situation in the Philippines is deeply rooted in the Filipino people's long history of colonial and elitist rule thereby resulting in the Philippine state's systematic repression of the Filipino people's collective struggles for their legitimate economic, social and civil-political rights, and rampant gross violations of their human rights.

From initial colonization in 1902 to the current form of neo-colonization today, the United States has a decades-long history of dominating and exploiting the Philippines. While oppression & exploitation in the Philippines remain severe today, the United States maintains economic & political domination of Philippine military, economy, politics and culture & foreign powers continue to plunder the country for labor and natural resources, including agricultural, maritime and mineral wealth.

As people of faith in the US, we see our interest and solidarity is with those poor and oppressed sectors of Philippine society against oppression and exploitation. We have common goals with the Filipino people for a peaceful and just society and will not loiter along while lives are at stake in the Philippines. We see the role of the United States in upholding oppression and exploitation in the Philippines and we have a responsibility to hold the U.S. accountable.

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

This system of injustice has a long history including the peoples of the Hebrew scriptures who lost their sustainable lands to the production of wine and other profitable crops in the times of the Kings. The practice of agricultural intensification took the land from the sustainable farmers and gave it into the care of overlords whose only concern was to make money for the Kingdom.

We join the voices of old saying “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Proverbs 31:8-9) Let us join our voices in solidarity with the Filipino people.

STANDING IN SOLIDARITY WITH OUR SIBLINGS, SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN FAITH

In the context of widespread poverty, inflation, lack of jobs, uneven distribution of farmland, destructive foreign mining practices, and countless other injustices, the people of the Philippines have participated for decades in various forms of political struggle against the ruling elites and foreign control. The struggle against this system has taken many forms, including a popular legal democratic movement demanding basic rights for various sectors, participation in national and local elections by progressive parties, and an underground communist-led revolutionary movement which engages in armed warfare against the existing state.

In response to these various political movements, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) engages in its “counterinsurgency” strategy, which in practice amounts to conflating these various forms of struggle in order to altogether shut down any criticism of the existing system. This tool of conflating all progressive leaders and organizations with the underground communist movement is called “red-tagging” and is carried out systematically and publicly by top government officials, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police (PNP), and the more recently established National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC).

Red-tagging means that legal democratic activists who have no connection to the communist movement are publicly accused of being armed fighters, terrorists, and a threat to the safety of others. Various individuals of faith organizations and their denominations have been red-tagged, including the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, and the Philippine Independent Church. Activists who have been red-tagged are often the victims of subsequent crimes against humanity, such as arbitrary arrest and detention, forced surrender, forced disappearance, and killing.

The issue of red-tagging has become known internationally, in part because of the advocacy work of various ICHRP chapters around the world. In 2022, several countries explicitly called on the GRP to end the practice of red-tagging during the Universal Periodic Review of the Philippines. It is vital that we continue to propagate the reality of this issue to as broad of an audience as possible and call on national governments to condemn the practice of red-tagging and end financial and military support to the counter-insurgency program of the GRP. As people of faith, we must make our solidarity with the people of the Philippines clear to the world.

WHEREAS

As documented in H.R. 1433, ‘the United State State Department’s 2021 Human Rights Report on the Philippines found “significant human rights issues” ... “serious restrictions on free expression and media, including violence, threats of violence, and unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, and the use of criminal libel laws to punish journalists; high-level and widespread government corruption; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic human rights organizations; and threats and violence against labor activists.

WHEREAS

As documented in H.R. 1433, “the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported in September 2022 that major human rights issues persist in the Philippines.”

WHEREAS

As documented in H.R. 1433, “A 2021 international independent investigation, Investigate Philippines, found that since 2020, ‘the perpetuation of human rights violation by State forces has become more institutionalized, streamlined, and entrenched, and domestic remedies for such violations are insufficient, ineffective at providing redress and halting continued abuses.”

WHEREAS

As documented in H.R. 1433, “The practice of ‘red-tagging’, wherein the Government labels activists, critics, and non-governmental organizations as terrorists, has been growing in the Philippines, including over-seas Filipinos, United States citizens, and Philippines election observers. This tactic is used to isolate individuals or groups and chill political speech, and in many cases, mark them for harassment of assassination by Philippine security or paramilitary forces.”

WHEREAS

The National Council of Church of the Philippines (NCCP) and the United Church of Christ of the Philippines (UCCP) among other faith and social service organizations, as well as individual clergy, lay-leaders and social workers have been red-tagged and this action has led to arrests, assassinations, loss of positions, ostracism from communities, and closing down of churches and organizations.

WHEREAS

The UCCP declares in the statement UCCP Identity: Its Being and Becoming, “It has become the conviction of the Church that the Christian task is not ‘merely the verbal proclamation of the Gospel, but also the development of the individual potential and the alleviation of human suffering, to enhance the quality of life. The concerns of the Church go beyond the denominational lines to include the sectoral concerns that of the farmers, peasants, women, children and youth. This has led to the formation of programs and ministries, plans and direction-setting so that the Church is girded towards its vision of God’s reign.”

WHEREAS

In spite of the widespread red-tagging that this conviction has brought to the UCCP, and the severe consequences they have faced, they stand firm. As Bishop Jerby A. Salor, East Visayas area Bishop, said, “The Church has only one task, to stand with the poor and oppressed.”

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ, moved by the faithfulness of our siblings, sisters and brothers in the Philippines, affirm that we will stand by them and with them as we, in our responsibility as Citizens of the United States of America, actively support our Congressional H.R. 1433, The Philippine Human Rights Act by

- Signing the petition of support. <https://www.maryknollogc.org/action/tell-congress-pass-philippine-human-rights-act>
- Write or call your representative and your senators to encourage their co-sponsorship and ongoing support of the bill.
- Create educational gatherings in your church to learn about the situation in the Philippines and how we can stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters there.
- Submit a resolution to Thirty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ in 2025 asking General Synod to affirm ongoing congressional support for human rights in the Philippines.

