

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations



**LAWYERS FOR
LAWYERS**



International Service
for Human Rights



**The Law Society
of England and Wales**



Human Rights
Institute



Union Internationale des Avocats
International Association of Lawyers
Unión Internacional de Abogados

Organization: Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

Item: Item 10: General Debate

Date: 7 October 2021

Speaker: Catherine Morris

Oral Statement to the 48th Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA), International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, and The Law Society of England and Wales, NGOs in consultative status, and endorsed by the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL) in the Philippines

Philippines: Halt the attacks on lawyers and human rights defenders

Madame President,

This is a joint statement. We deplore the ongoing pattern of murders and attacks against lawyers and human rights defenders in the Philippines.¹ Impunity for attacks against lawyers undermines the rule of law by depriving people of their right to legal representation to seek remedies for violations.

Since 2001 at least 197 members of the legal profession have been murdered. Killings of lawyers have escalated since President Duterte took office in July 2016. Since then there have been at least 58 prima facie work-related murders of jurists – lawyers, judges and prosecutors² – with only a handful of investigations leading to prosecutions. There have also been numerous murders and attacks against defenders.³

Despite two Council resolutions in 2019 and 2020, initiatives by the Philippines Supreme Court, and a UN joint programme agreed in July 2021,⁴ extrajudicial killings in the Philippines continue. The Philippines government has expressed a refusal to cooperate⁵ with the recently authorized investigation by the International Criminal Court.⁶ Vilification and “red tagging” of defenders continues.⁷

Impunity for extrajudicial killings must be stopped. We urge the Council to establish an adequately-resourced international investigative mechanism to collect and preserve evidence of extrajudicial killings and other serious human rights violations in the Philippines.

Thank you.

References

¹ Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), the International Bar Association's Institute for Human Rights (IBAHRI), Lawyer for Lawyers (L4L), and the Association of American Jurists (AAJ), together with the National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL), "Philippines, Statement to UN Human Rights Council on Independence of Judges and Lawyers," Oral video statement to the 47th session of the UN Human Rights Council, 28 June 2021, available at:

<https://www.lrwc.org/philippines-turkey-iran-statement-to-un-human-rights-council-on-independence-of-judges-and-lawyers-oral-video-statement/>; Joint letter of 62 non-governmental organizations to UN Human Rights Council member and observer States, "Acceleration of extra-judicial killings of jurists in the Philippines: UN Human Rights Council should urgently launch an independent international investigative mechanism on human rights situation," 28 August 2020, available at: <https://www.lrwc.org/philippines-un-human-rights-council-should-urgently-launch-an-independent-international-investigative-mechanism-on-human-rights-situation-joint-letter/>; Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada and the Asian Legal Resource Centre, Acceleration of extra-judicial killings of jurists in the Philippines, Joint Written Statement to the 44th session of the UN Human Rights Council, <https://www.lrwc.org/un-human-rights-council-acceleration-of-extra-judicial-killings-of-jurists-in-the-philippines-written-joint-statement-to-the-44th-session-of-the-un-human-rights-council/>; Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, Lawyers for Lawyers, and International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), and Asian Legal Resource Centre, Philippines: Extrajudicial killing of jurists as part of a pattern of widespread and systematic violations of human rights, Joint written statement to the 42nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council, 9 September 2019, available at: <https://www.lrwc.org/philippines-extrajudicial-killing-of-jurists-written-statement-to-the-hrc/>.

² According to the National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL) in the Philippines, there have been 65 publicly known killings of members of the Philippine legal profession from July 1, 2016 to the present. At least 58 of the murders appear to be prima facie related to the victims' work in the legal profession.

³ Cathrine Gonzalesm "CHR: 89 'human rights defenders' killed from 2017 to 2019," Inquirer, 21 August 2020, available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1325163/chr-89-human-rights-defenders-killed-from-2017-to-2019#ixzz785k7qSxe>.

⁴ Philippines, UN launch first-ever national joint programme for human rights following Human Rights Council resolution 45/33 <https://philippines.un.org/index.php/en/137080-philippines-un-launch-first-ever-national-joint-programme-human-rights-following-human>.

⁵ Karen Lema and Neil Jerome Morales, "Philippines refuses to work with ICC 'war on drugs' probe," Reuters, 16 September 2021, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-will-not-cooperate-with-icc-probe-war-drugs-spokesperson-2021-09-16/>.

⁶ Situation in the Philippines: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I authorises the opening of an investigation, International Criminal Court, 15 September, available at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=PR1610>

⁷ Ravina Shamdasani, Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Press Briefing Notes on Philippines, OHCHR, 9 March 2021, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26865&LangID=E>.