

Manila, October 22, 2007

For the attention of the President of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and the Philippines' National Police, Armed Forces and Department of Justice

Open Letter: Initial findings and recommendations of the second Hong Kong Mission for Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines

We the undersigned,

Have participated in a follow-up fact-finding mission to the Philippines between October 16 and 22, 2007, in order to document the situation of human rights in the country, notably the ongoing extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances. An initial fact-finding mission was held in July 2006.

We wish above all to express our solidarity with the people of the Philippines and our support for all victims of human rights violations, as well as their families and communities.

We condemn the gross human rights violations that are taking place in the country, along with the deeply entrenched impunity that accompanies these abuses. In particular we are gravely concerned by the increasing poverty and deprivation facing large sections of the population as well as the extra-judicial killings and forced disappearances that continue to be perpetrated in the country. Over one year beyond the initial fact-finding mission from Hong Kong, there is no evidence that acceptable levels of progress are being made in terms of providing justice to the victims of abuses by the State.

We hereby recommend that the President of the Philippines take all necessary measures to ensure that the relevant authorities:

- Ensure that all extra-judicial executions and forced disappearances are immediately ended;
- Immediately release all people being arbitrarily detained, and improve prison conditions in all of the country's detention facilities;
- Ensure the creation of a well-resourced, credible, independent and effective system of witness protection;
- Immediately and effectively investigate all allegations of human rights violations, making use of physical and forensic evidence as well as testimony from witnesses;
- Without delay, bring all perpetrators to justice through fair and transparent trials before civilian courts and ensure that adequate reparation is provided to the victims and their families, in line with international standards;
- Ensure that all institutions tasked with investigation and prosecutions are provided with sufficient resources and funding;
- Desist from taking any measures that may weaken the use of writs of amparo;
- Uphold and promote not only civil and political rights but social and economic rights, such as housing rights and ensure that no forced evictions and illegal demolitions are carried out, notably with regard to the urban poor;
- Halt the use of blacklists, such as the so-called "Order of Battle" that brand individuals as being "Enemies of the State";
- Ensure that individuals and organisations are able to carry out their work in favour of human rights without risks, threats, reprisals or impediments, and especially that these individuals are not killed as a result of or in connection with their work;
- Improve the transparency and accountability of all State institutions;
- Resume peace negotiations and at all times respect international humanitarian law and human rights laws and standards.

Further and more detailed findings and recommendations will be issued as part of a report on the fact-finding mission in the near future.

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Joseph Ching, Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students
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