

**Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger,
Permanent Representative of Austria to
the United Nations Office in Geneva and
President of the United Nations Human Rights Council**



Dear Honorable Ambassador,

I am writing on behalf of the Organization for World Peace to draw your attention to the Duterte administration's newly-signed Anti-Terrorism Bill, which is compounding on the Philippines' degenerating human rights situation and the COVID-19 pandemic. As the chair of the United Nations Human Rights Council, I urge you to launch an independent international investigation on this issue to ensure international accountability measures are in place to protect and support activists in the Philippines.

The Anti-Terrorism Bill gives cause for grave concern as it undermines human rights, the rule of law, and removes accountability. The government's broad definition of terrorism, and perceived notion of it, assails people's liberty. The safeguard provision against law enforcement is excised from the law, cutting accountability for authorities violating suspects' rights, and withdrawing assurance against unjustified detention. The law enables citizens to be indicted not on their committing of terrorism, but primarily on intent. Suspects can be apprehended without a judicial warrant, making arbitrary arrests and unjustified prison sentences legal and silencing opinions the government deems displeasing. This law is conducive to selective justice, discriminatory enforcement, privacy infringements, and suppression of peaceful dissent – an ultimate weaponization of the law.

Amidst the Philippine's regressing democratic stage, this Bill will pit Filipinos against an Anti-Terrorism Council acting as the prosecutor, judge, jury, and jailer. This will only exacerbate the long-running crackdown on human rights activists, journalists, environmentalists, and other critics, led by the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency and the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.

In the Philippine government's endeavors to silence its perceived critics and disparage dissent, institutionalized harassment against human rights defenders is being increasingly normalized in ways that must be addressed and reversed. Action must be taken to dismantle these institutions criminalizing messengers and silencing the messages they carry. The need to reclaim the mired space for freedom of expression and debate has never been more urgent. These concerns come amid the longstanding degeneration of the human rights scene, the ongoing war against drugs, and the government's inability to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

As an advocate for peace, we trust that you will investigate this issue and understand the weight an international investigation will hold.

Sincerely,

Adrienne Ramirez
Advocate, Organization for World Peace



Jonathon Arrell
Vice President, Organization for World Peace