

Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen

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Murder of Zara Alvarez

The Philippine human rights defender, teacher and single mother of an underage daughter, Zara Alvarez, was shot dead by unidentified perpetrators near her apartment in Bacolod City, Negros Island (Philippines) on August 17, 2020.

The members of the Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen (AMP) are shocked and in deep grief about the murder of Zara Alvarez. Our thoughts are with Zara 's family, friends and colleagues.

Zara Alvarez was a dedicated and renowned human rights activist and community organizer, who stood up for the rights of landless peasants and rural workers, especially in her homeland, the Philippine island Negros. In doing so, she worked closely with other human rights NGOs and church organizations. Lately she had been working with the NIHP-CD (Negros Island Health Integrated Program for Community Development) as a research and advocacy officer. The AMP accompanied Zara Alvarez' effort to support disenfranchised peasant families and victims of human rights violations during many years. The AMP already described the repressions she was exposed to in its Human Rights Report 2014. Zara Alvarez also committed herself to human rights in the Philippines in the international context. Invited by the AMP, she participated as a speaker on the subject of "Rule of Law" at a conference with the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung in Berlin and Potsdam in October 2019.

Zara Alvarez had received death threats for years. This began during the term of office of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and finally led to a trumped-up charge against her and to her illegitimate detention in October 2012. She was accused of being a member of the communist rebel group New People's Army (NPA) by the Philippine military and, based on fabricated evidence, charged with murder. As a result, she remained imprisoned for almost two years. Zara Alvarez was released on bail in July 2014, but the legal proceeding was prolonged for years, which obviously served the purpose to impose restrictions on her work and to intimidate her family, her colleagues, and the public. She was discharged for lack of evidence only in March 2020, eight years after the charge and her detention. Regardless her discharge, Zara Alvarez was exposed to continuing harassment. She was vilified as a terrorist and suffered further threats and menaces against herself and her family. In a petition of the Department of Justice, she – amongst 600 other persons - was once again accused of being a communist terrorist in February 2018. Zara Alvarez continued to receive death threats and lived under the Sword of Damocles with the constant danger of her life and substantial legal uncertainty. Past Monday evening, the years of harassment, threats, and repression culminated in her murder.



For years, the AMP has been pointing out that the Philippine Government, under the guise of counterterrorism, brutally cracks down on human rights defenders and other civil society players. Thereby, the Government seeks to hamper and delegitimize the commitment of the civil society to human rights, a clean environment, a just distribution of land and the rights of Indigenous People. The Anti-Terror Bill, which was signed in July 2020, has got to be put in this context. It is based on a far too broad definition of terror and as a result dismantles legal proceedings of the rule of law for the protection of defendants. Above all, the bill serves to legitimize repression, violence, and even extralegal killings against civil society players.

Zara Alvarez is one of the many victims of the deteriorating human rights situation in the Philippines. Under President Duterte, the Philippines are one of the deadliest countries for human rights defenders worldwide. At least 182 such cases of murder have been documented since Duterte took office in June 2016. The numbers of these extralegal killings are continuously rising. In the past 18 months alone 48 human rights defenders were murdered.

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen strongly condemns the murder of Zara Alvarez and calls upon the Philippine Government to

- Investigate and clear the murder of Zara Alvarez immediately and prosecute the perpetrators and all parties involved in the crime,
- Stop all kinds of intimidation, threat and violence by state security forces and state and government officials against human rights defenders in the Philippines immediately,
- Take back the recently signed Anti-Terror Bill.

We call the German Government to

- Immediately and publicly condemn the murder of Zara Alvarez,
- Press for the end of impunity in the Philippines under the diplomatic relations,
- Press for an extension of the UN Human Rights Council investigation mechanism into human rights violations in the Philippines,
- Ensure that human rights violations and especially the denounced reintroduction of the death penalty will be handled as severe breaches of international treaties and as will have an impact on trade relations in the EU, as for example the suspension of the GSP+-status of the Philippines,
- Support Philippine civil society organizations in their claims for human rights the EU and the UN.

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP – Action Network Human Rights - Philippines) is an initiative of seven major German church-based agencies and human rights organizations to promote advocacy and information work in Germany and the EU regarding the human rights situation in the Philippines. Member Organizations of the AMP are Amnesty International Germany, Bread for the World – Protestant Development Service, International Peace Observers Network (IPON), MISEREOR, Missio Munich, philippinenbüro e.V., and the United Evangelical Mission (VEM). The main focus of the network lies on the core human rights issues of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and fabricated charges against political activists.

