

For the immediate lifting of the state of emergency in the Philippines!

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The state of national emergency was imposed in the Philippines on February 24th, 2006 by presidential decree. The measure is extremely serious. With a few differences in formulation, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's Proclamation 1017 in fact employs the same terms as Proclamation 1081 of September 21st 1972, installing martial law, thanks to which Ferdinand Marcos embarked on thirteen years of dictatorship.

The presidency, the army and the police are given discretionary powers; fundamental liberties are suspended; citizens' gatherings have been dispersed; the press is under threat since the *Daily Tribune*, an opposition daily, was temporarily shut down; a first wave of arrests has struck officers accused of sedition as well as leaders, militants and elected representatives of popular organizations and left parties. The words "martial law" and the suspension of *habeas corpus* have not been mentioned so as to limit the political impact of the decree and to try and avoid intervention by the Congress or the Supreme Court. But that does not change the substance of the presidential decision.

So the regime is in crisis and the army affected by factional conflict? Certainly, but in the last twenty years, governments in the Philippines has had to face up to many other crises, without ever having recourse to measures of exception, as is the case at present. Nothing in the situation in the Philippines today justifies the imposition of a martial law that dares not say its name, other than the determination to protect at all costs a presidency that is totally discredited following a succession of scandals. In the eyes of the population, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is guilty in particular of electoral fraud on a vast scale, after the public circulation of the tape of her telephone conversations with the president of the Electoral Commission.

Rather than resign (which would have been the least she could do) and accept a democratic outcome to the crisis of regime that it itself has opened up, the presidency has decided to resort to arbitrary repression in order to silence its critics.

Although it has lost all popular legitimacy in the Philippines, the presidency still enjoys the support of Washington; it invokes a "plot" involving rebel factions within the army allied to the Communist Party and the threat of a coup d'état to justify the measures of exception. It relies on the police, who are actively searching for the leaders (including members of Congress) of the legal parties considered to be close to the CPP. In reality, all progressive forces are concerned by the repression; Thus, the demonstrations for the twentieth anniversary of the anti-dictatorial uprising of 1986 have been banned (what a symbol!) in the name of the state of emergency, and representatives of Laban ng Masas have been picked up.

The democratic forces in the Philippines are demanding the immediate lifting of the state of emergency and the release of the imprisoned militants, and they are calling for international solidarity. Their message must be heard.

1) See on the ESSF Internet site: Florin T; Hilbay, "Proclamation 1017 and the Deise of Free Speech": http://www.europe-solidaire.org/article.php3?id_article=1580.