

Press Release

Terrorism and Human Rights in the Philippines: Fighting Terror or Terrorizing?

Publication of an International Fact-finding Mission Report

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International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)

International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)

Paris-Manila-Geneva-Copenhagen, 11 April 2008:* On the eve of the examination of the human rights record of the Philippines under the newly established mechanism of Universal Periodic Review in Geneva, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in cooperation with its national member, the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), and with the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), make public a report entitled *Terrorism and Human Rights in the Philippines: Fighting Terror or Terrorizing?* [[1](#)]

The report highlights that torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings are common practice in the Philippines in the context of the « war on terror ». The Human Security Act (2007), the main legislation aimed at combating terrorism, enshrines a very vague definition of the crime of terrorism and gives extensive and unchecked power to the Executive. The lack of a law punishing superior officers for the acts of their subordinates and the absence of a law specifically penalizing acts of torture are condoning the use of torture.

“In most cases, suspected “enemies of the state” are arrested without a warrant and with no explanation, blindfolded and handcuffed before they are brought to a military camp or a secret detention place, where they are forced to admit that they are members of « terrorist groups»”, said Ms. Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President.

These practices are widespread, both against suspected members of Muslim armed groups in Mindanao and against people suspected to belong to the left insurgency. Victims met by the mission unanimously pointed out to the responsibility of the AFP or the Philippine National Police (PNP). Civilian auxiliaries under the control of the AFP are also accused of practicing torture.

FIDH, PAHRA and IRCT ask the Philippine government, primarily responsible for the respect of human rights in the country, to ensure that « terrorism » is not invoked as an excuse for human rights violations, notably for extrajudicial killings, acts of torture and enforced disappearances and to respect the international human rights instruments ratified by the Philippines.

In particular, all people arbitrarily detained should be freed or immediately charged with a cognizable offence. *“Very few perpetrators of extrajudicial killings, and no high-ranking official have been prosecuted so far and the measures taken by the government and the Armed Forces of the*

Philippines seem merely cosmetic. Impunity for human rights violations is a scourge that the authorities should address as a matter of priority”, said Max de Mesa, Chairperson of PAHRA.

“Fighting terrorism and respecting human rights are compatible, but also necessary in order to ensure the effectiveness of the fight against terrorism. It is now time for the Philippine government to put an end to the policy of terror against people suspected of links with the left insurgent groups and against the Muslim armed groups. The due process of law, the right to life and the prohibition of torture must be guaranteed in all circumstances”, concluded Brita Sydhoff, Secretary-General of the IRCT.

Background of the mission:

The international fact-finding mission took place in August 2007. During the mission’s visit to the Philippines, the team conducted most of its work in different areas of Metro Manila and in the island of Mindanao. They met with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) together with the Chief of Staff of the Philippines National Police, a representative of the Commission on Human Rights, members of the House of Representatives and of the Senate, local authorities, the Joint Enforcement and Monitoring Committee to Implement the Peace Agreement between the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, representatives of civil society, victims of torture and their family, detainees suspected of belonging to insurgent groups, as well as representatives of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

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View online : <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/ph493a.pdf>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/ph493a.pdf>