

The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada



The
Presbyterian
Church
in Canada

May 10, 2023

The Honourable Minister Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
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Ending Canada's support to the counter-terrorism campaign of the Philippine Government

Dear Minister Joly,

We write to share our deep concern on Canada's support for "counter-terrorism measures" by the Philippine Government.

By providing financial, programmatic and technical support, Canada is inadvertently enabling the Philippine Government to use the counter-terrorism campaign as a tool of repression, to curtail the rights and freedoms of citizens, to brand those who dissent, including human rights defenders, as enemies of the state and make them targets of its dubious counter-terrorism campaign. Canada risks being complicit in gross and systematic violations of the human rights of citizens in the Philippines that result from the Philippine Government's counter-terrorism policies and programs.

In July 2020, the Government of the Philippines approved the Anti-Terrorism Act allowing the government to legalize attacks on the basic rights of its critics in the name of fighting "terrorism". The Act's definition of terrorism remains vague such that it blurs the distinction between legitimate criticism of the government and criminality. Executive arrests and extended detention without charges are sanctioned. The exercise of civil rights such as advocacy and peaceful protests, as well as humanitarian assistance could be interpreted or branded as acts of terrorism by security forces.

The Philippine Government's counter-terrorism policies and programs to prevent and respond to terrorism activities do not conform with international counter-terrorism and human rights norms, standards and obligations.

We request that the Government of Canada:

- 1. Make available how projects funded through ASEAN or bilaterally to build the capacity of the military, police and other security agencies to fight terrorism have been monitored to ensure compliance with international human rights;**
- 2. Withdraw support from the Philippine Government's counter-terrorism campaign;**
- 3. Call on the Philippine Government to repeal the Anti-Terror Law.**

Through Canada's new Indo-Pacific strategy, we are specifically concerned about the Philippines being named in the following program activities:

- *Expand existing military capacity building initiatives and launch new training programs*
- *Build capacity in the region by dedicating new funding for cooperation, including on borders and law enforcement, cyber-crime, anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing through investment in intelligence and cyber security*

Canada's [Voices at Risk](#) guidelines on supporting human rights defenders is a key tool to strengthen the rules-based international order that protects universal human rights, democracy and respect for the rule of law. How Canada responds will be a true test of its commitment to protect human rights and human rights defenders.

We look forward to hearing how the Government of Canada will act.

Sincerely,



The Rt. Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne
Moderator
The United Church of Canada



Aisha Francis,
Executive Director
KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives



The Most Rev. Linda Nicholls
Archbishop & Primate
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