THE OBSERVATORY
for the Protection of
Human Rights Defenders

Same-Same But Different

Repression of human rights defenders in the Philippines under President Marcos Jr.

Journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio (R) and woman human rights defender Marielle Domequil (L) arrive at Tacloban Regional Trial Court in Leyte Island on 22, January 2026. - © Jam STA ROSA / AFP

FIDH INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

OMCT Réseau SOS-Torture

June 2026

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FIDH and OMCT are members of ProtectDefenders.eu, the European Union's mechanism for the protection of human rights defenders, implemented by international civil society. This report was produced as part of ProtectDefenders.eu. FIDH and OMCT would like to thank the Republic and Canton of Geneva, the City of Geneva, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), the European Union, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs for making the publication of this report possible. The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of FIDH and OMCT and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of these organisations.

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LEGAL DEPOSIT:
June 2026

FIDH (English ed.) = ISSN 2225-1804
Electronic file in compliance with the law of 6 January 1978 (Declaration No. 330 675)

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Executive summary

Under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who took office in June 2022, civil society actors and human rights defenders in the Philippines have continued to operate in an environment widely characterised as highly restrictive and dangerous. A climate of impunity for past and ongoing human rights violations has also persisted under his administration.

These findings are drawn from a rapid assessment by the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders - a partnership between the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) - following a six-day fact-finding visit conducted by FIDH from 2 to 6 March 2026 in Metro Manila.

While the scale of the repression has decreased compared to that under Rodrigo Duterte's presidency, the situation for human rights defenders and civil society organisations has not fundamentally changed. Many abusive policies introduced under the previous administration have remained in force and have continued to be implemented under President Marcos Jr.

Repressive counter-terrorism laws, such as the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act (2012) and the Anti-Terrorism Act (2020), have been frequently used to attack and criminalise human rights defenders and other civil society actors.

President Marcos Jr.'s perpetuation of counter-insurgency policies, notably through the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), has resulted in ongoing attacks against human rights defenders and other members of civil society, including threats, harassment, red-tagging, arbitrary arrests and detentions, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances.

The continuation of the so-called war on drugs, albeit on a reduced scale compared to the Duterte era, has also contributed to a climate of fear in affected communities. Human rights defenders have been among those targeted in war on drug-related killings.

Land and environmental rights defenders have remained at particular risk, facing serious attacks by security forces, including arbitrary detentions, attempted abductions, enforced disappearances, and killings.

Human rights lawyers, particularly those representing victims of human rights violations in the provinces, have continued to face threats and intimidation. Journalists have operated in a persistently dangerous environment, with attacks against them intensifying under President Marcos Jr. Killings of trade unionists and related impunity have also continued.

Women environmental and indigenous human rights defenders have faced compounded risks, including rape, rape threats, and harassment, including during protests.

LGBTIQ individuals have remained marginalised, with limited legal protections. The adoption of key legislation to safeguard them against discrimination on the basis on sexual orientation and gender identity has been repeatedly delayed.

A significant reduction in funding has further constrained civil society organisations, with particularly severe impacts on groups operating in the provinces.

Measures aimed at protecting human rights defenders and tackling impunity for abuses against them have remained largely insufficient and ineffective. Proposed protective legislation, such as the Human Rights Defenders Protection Act, has yet to be adopted or implemented, while existing judicial remedies and measures have remained inadequate to ensure effective protection.

Despite these challenges, there have been several positive developments. These include the emergence of a new wave of youth-led activism, such as the Gen Z-led anti-corruption protests in September 2025, and proceedings against former President Rodrigo Duterte at the International Criminal Court (ICC), which have renewed hope for accountability among families of the victims of the war on drugs.

The report makes a series of recommendations to national and international stakeholders aimed at advancing measures that could help create a safer and more enabling environment for human rights defenders and civil society organisations.

List of acronyms

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
BDR	Barangay Development Programme
BJMP	Bureau of Jail Management and Penology
CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CHR	Commission on Human Rights
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DDoS	Distributed Denial-of-Service
DILG	Department of Interior and Local Government
DND	Department of National Defence
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FIDH	International Federation for Human Rights
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
IACDI	Inter-Agency Committee on Diversity and Inclusion
IBP	Integrated Bar of the Philippines
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICPPED	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
ICMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
KMU	Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU)
LCDE	Leyte Center for Development and Empowerment
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPA	New People's Army
NPM	National Prevention Mechanism (NPM)
NSP	National Security Policy
NTF-ELCAC	National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict
NUJP	National Union of Journalists of the Philippines
NUPL	National Union of Peoples' Lawyers

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OMCT	World Organisation Against Torture
OPCAT	Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture
PDG	Paghidaet sa Kauswagan Development Group
PHP	Philippine peso
PHRCS	Presidential Human Rights Committee Secretariat
PICOP	Paper Industries Corporation of the Philippines
PNP	Philippine National Police
RTC	Regional Trial Court
SENTRO	Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa
SLAPP	Strategic lawsuits against public participation
SOGIE	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity or Expression
TUCP	Trade Union Congress of the Philippines
UN	United Nations
UP	University of the Philippines
YACAP	Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines

1. Introduction

This report is based on information gathered during a fact-finding visit carried out by FIDH from 2 to 6 March 2026 in Metro Manila, Philippines.

The visit was conducted within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders - a partnership between FIDH and OMCT. The visit's primary objective was to gather information to assess the situation of human rights defenders and civil society under President Marcos Jr.

During the six-day visit, a three-member delegation met with a wide range of stakeholders to conduct a rapid assessment of the situation for human rights defenders and civil society in the Philippines. FIDH held discussions with 55 representatives from 25 civil society organisations, including human rights, labour rights, and environmental rights defenders, as well as lawyers and journalists. The delegation also met with four victims of enforced disappearances, six family members of victims of the war on drugs, and three elected members of the House of Representatives. Prior to the visit, the delegation held a consultation with two Filipino women human rights defenders in exile. Overall, the majority of interlocutors were women.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders expresses its heartfelt gratitude to all those who facilitated the visit and shared testimonies, insights, and information with the delegation.

The identities of all the individuals who spoke with the delegation have not been disclosed to prevent any potential acts of reprisal against them.

The delegation primarily engaged with activists based in the Metro Manila area. Many of them emphasised the significant differences between the situation in the capital and in the provinces. They stressed that, in some provinces, violence is far more widespread, militarisation is significant, and human rights violations are less visible and under-reported, contributing to impunity.

Who are human rights defenders?

The term "human rights defender" refers to any individual who, individually, or in association with others, acts peacefully in the name of individuals or groups, to promote, defend, and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and guaranteed by various international human rights instruments. As a result of their active commitment in the defence of human rights, defenders are prone to acts of reprisals, harassment, and violations of their rights by both state and non-state actors.

2. Background: A legacy of human rights violations and impunity

The past six decades of the Philippines' history have been marked by serious and recurring human rights violations.

While human rights defenders and civil society have been consistently targeted under successive administrations, the repression was particularly acute and prolonged under President Ferdinand Marcos Sr., who ruled the country from December 1965 to February 1986.

In September 1972, Marcos Sr. declared nationwide Martial Law in response to security threats posed by communist insurgencies and growing civil unrest. The period under Martial Law was marked by widespread and grave human rights violations committed by the military and security forces. Thousands of individuals, including human rights defenders, journalists, labour leaders, and political opponents were subjected to arbitrary arrests, prolonged arbitrary detentions, torture, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings. Severe restrictions were also imposed on freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, including the closure of major media outlets and harassment of government critics. The imposition of Martial Law further entrenched authoritarian rule, consolidated political power under Marcos Sr., and significantly weakened democratic institutions.

Although Martial Law was formally lifted in January 1981, a range of emergency decrees and expanded executive powers remained in place. The period left a lasting legacy of extensive militarisation in the Philippines. Military and security forces became highly influential institutions and were implicated in serious human rights violations committed with impunity.

Political tensions increased in the early 1980s amid growing opposition to the government. The assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino Jr. upon his return from exile in August 1983 prompted widespread public outrage and mobilisation, exposing the depth of state repression and contributing to growing anti-government sentiment.

Mass protests and civic mobilisation expanded in the following years, culminating in the People Power Revolution of February 1986, a largely peaceful four-day uprising in which millions of Filipinos took to the streets. The events led to the ouster of Marcos Sr. from office and the restoration of democratic rule under President Corazon Aquino, the widow of Benigno Aquino Jr.

The ebb and flow of human rights violations reached another peak during the term of President Rodrigo Duterte, who was in office from June 2016 to June 2022.

President Duterte implemented a nationwide war on drugs as a central policy of his administration. The war on drugs was characterised by large-scale law enforcement operations that targeted suspected drug users and traffickers. The campaign has been widely linked to tens of thousands of extrajudicial killings, including of children,[1] as well as other human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests and systematic due process violations.

Civic space dramatically deteriorated during this period, as human rights defenders and civil society actors were publicly stigmatised and subjected to intensified attacks, particularly in relation to their opposition to the government's war on drugs, counter-terrorism measures, and repressive policies unduly used to target civil society. During Duterte's presidency, there was a significant escalation in the systematic repression of activists, journalists, lawyers, land and environmental rights defenders, and labour rights advocates. They faced extrajudicial killings, torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, judicial harassment, and other forms of intimidation and harassment. Women human rights defenders were targeted as well, through gender-based and sexual violence, including

[1] OMCT, *"How could they do this to my child?" – Extrajudicial killings of children during the "war on drugs" in the Philippines*, June 2020; **https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/Philippines_child-report_06.2020.pdf**

online harassment and sexualised threats. A pervasive culture of impunity prevailed under Duterte's administration, further reinforced by his public encouragement to kill alleged drug offenders.

In 2018, the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened a preliminary examination into the situation in the Philippines in relation to the thousands of extrajudicial killings committed during Duterte's war on drugs. In 2021, a formal investigation was launched into alleged crimes against humanity committed between November 2011 and March 2019, covering both Duterte's tenure as President and earlier as Mayor of Davao City in Mindanao Island. Although the Philippines withdrew from the Rome Statute in 2019, the ICC maintained jurisdiction over crimes committed while the country was still a state party to the treaty. In March 2025, Duterte was arrested by Philippine authorities pursuant to an ICC warrant for crimes against humanity and transferred to the court's custody in The Hague. Proceedings before the ICC remain ongoing [See below, *4. War on drugs continues*].

The assessment of the impact of Duterte's campaign of terror on human rights defenders was the focus of a 10-day fact-finding visit to the Philippines, conducted by FIDH in August 2017. The findings of that assessment were published in a report by the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in February 2019 [See box below, *"I'll kill you along with drug addicts"*], launched publicly in Manila in May 2019, and presented to the Philippine authorities at the time.

"I'll kill you along with drug addicts"

The report titled "*'I'll kill you along with drug addicts' - President Duterte's war on human rights defenders in the Philippines*",[2] documented the dramatic deterioration of the situation for human rights defenders under Duterte, which was the direct result of his administration's systematic disregard for human rights, exacerbated by his violent rhetoric, the war on drugs [See below, *4. War on drugs continues*], persistent impunity for human rights abuses, and the imposition of martial law over the entire island of Mindanao.

The report concluded that numerous land and environmental rights defenders, journalists, and civil society and labour activists were killed in connection with their work between July 2016 and November 2018, while many others were subjected to attacks, threats, judicial harassment, and acts of intimidation. It further noted that members of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) of the Philippines and United Nations (UN) experts were routinely slandered, with their mandate publicly questioned. In addition, several political opponents known for their pro-human rights stances were detained on spurious charges.

On 30 June 2022, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., commonly known as "Bongbong", succeeded Duterte after securing nearly 59% of the vote in the presidential election held on 8 May 2022. A significant contributing factor in his victory was the electoral alliance formed with the daughter of Rodrigo Duterte, Sara Duterte, who was elected as the country's Vice-President. In February 2026, Sara Duterte announced her intention to run for the presidency in 2028.

Marcos Jr.'s electoral victory followed widespread disinformation on social media aimed at rehabilitating Marcos family's public image and reshaping perceptions of the Martial Law period under his father. His election raised renewed concerns about the legacy of Martial Law and the persistent lack of accountability for past human rights violations. These concerns were further amplified by Marcos Jr.'s repeated defence of abuses committed during his father's regime.

In a historical link between President Marcos Jr. and his father, FIDH's visit began two days after the release of two human rights activists who had been arbitrarily detained since 25 February 2026 in connection with their participation in a peaceful demonstration marking the 40th anniversary of the People Power Revolution in Metro Manila.[3]

[2] Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, *"I'll kill you along with drug addicts"- President Duterte's war on human rights defenders in the Philippines*, February 2019; **https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapport-philipppines2019web.pdf**

[3] Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, *Philippines: Arbitrary detention of Edel Parducho and Three Odeña*, 27 February 2026; **https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/the-philippines-arbitrary-detention-of-edel-parducho-and-three-odena**

3. Civil society remains under attack amid rampant impunity

Nearly all interlocutors who spoke with the delegation underscored that many of the abusive policies pursued under Duterte, and their harmful impacts on human rights defenders and civil society organisations, continued to be actively implemented under President Marcos Jr.

The continuation of counter-insurgency policies under his administration has been associated with ongoing extrajudicial killings, red-tagging, and arbitrary arrests and detentions of members of civil society, including human rights defenders. The delegation also received reports of intimidation, attacks, and enforced disappearances targeting human rights defenders [See below, *7. Ongoing repression amid mounting challenges*].

Red-tagging

Red-tagging (also known as red-baiting) is the practice of labelling individuals or organisations critical of the government as state enemies, communist terrorists, or members of communist front organisations.

Over the past several decades, red-tagging has been abusively and extensively used by the authorities against human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, and other members of civil society in the country to delegitimise and dehumanise them. The targeted persons encounter surveillance, harassment, including at the judicial level, and even killings.[4]

One activist stated that Marcos Jr. "comes from the same mould [as Duterte] and is not any better [than him]". Compared to Duterte – another activist commented - President Marcos Jr. "might seem an improvement", but he has retained the "legal and operational infrastructure" of repression set up by his predecessors.

A key example cited of Marcos Jr.'s failure to dismantle Duterte's abusive policies has been his continued support for the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), which - in the words of an activist - "created a formal operational structure to attack legal organisations". Under Marcos Jr.'s, the NTF-ELCAC has continued to receive substantial budgetary allocations, especially for its Barangay Development Programme (BDR).[5] This programme channels development funds to barangays — the smallest administrative divisions in the Philippines — declared "cleared" of insurgent influence, to support infrastructure, basic services, and livelihood projects at the community level. The proposed budget allocations for the BDP for 2026 increased from approximately PHP two billion (EUR 30.1 million) in 2025 to PHP 8.1 billion (EUR 122 million).[6]

The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC)

The NTF-ELCAC is a government body established on 4 December 2018 under Executive Order No. 70, signed by then-President Rodrigo Duterte, which institutionalised a "whole-of-nation approach" to tackling the communist rebellion. Human rights organisations and UN bodies have extensively documented its use as a tool of repression through red-tagging. Under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the NTF-ELCAC has continued operating with full presidential backing, targeting designated individuals.[7]

[4] OHCHR, *Philippines: UN report details widespread human rights violations and persistent impunity*, 4 June 2020; **https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/06/philippines-un-report-details-widespread-human-rights-violations-and**

[5] The NTF-ELCAC oversees the programme and determines beneficiary communities within the framework of the government's counter-insurgency strategy.

[6] 1 EUR = 66.347 PHP (August 2025); GMA, *NTF-ELCAC's barangay development program gets P8.1-B*, 13 August 2025; **https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/955771/ntf-elcac-s-barangay-development-program-gets-p8-1-b/story/**

[7] KARAPATAN, *Attacks vs human rights defenders, communities rife under Marcos Jr.*, 18 July 2025; **https://www.karapatan.org/media_release/karapatan-attacks-vs-human-rights-defenders-communities-rife-under-marcos-jr/**

In a worrying trend, the delegation heard from several activists that the NTF-ELCAC had been particularly active in schools, conducting campaigns against supposed "communist" infiltration in secondary and tertiary educational institutions. Some schools established formal partnerships with the NTF-ELCAC. "They are conducting massive 'educational activities' and I have seen posters saying that these are recruitment grounds of the CPP-NPA",[8] an activist reported witnessing at a school in Bataan Province. As part of this campaign, the NTF-ELCAC also targeted youth organisations, seeking to portray them as linked to rebel groups. "You stifle the right of organisations to freedom of expression, just because certain groups are critical of the government - that's what the NTF is doing now, it's a national effort", another activist noted.

While some of the interlocutors acknowledged that the scale of the repression had decreased since the end of Duterte's presidency, most considered that the situation for human rights defenders and civil society organisations had not fundamentally improved. They emphasised that the environment in which they operated remained highly restrictive under President Marcos Jr., despite his efforts, particularly on the international stage, to present himself as a champion of human rights and the environment.

"Generally, the sentiment of the embassies and the diplomatic community is that the current administration is better [than Duterte's] because it's not very 'in your face' with the threats", a journalist told the delegation.

Yet, activists decried there had not been any improvement in the situation of political prisoners - estimated by one organisation at nearly 700 - with many of those arrested under Duterte remaining detained under the Marcos Jr. administration. "Many were also arrested under Marcos [Jr.], so we're seeing no slowing down in terms of arrests, especially with the anti-terror law and the terrorism financing law", an activist said.

In addition, almost all stakeholders met by the delegation affirmed that a climate of impunity for human rights violations prevailed under Marcos Jr. and that his administration had done little or nothing to promote accountability for past or ongoing human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings committed as part of the war on drugs and enforced disappearances [See below, *4. War on drugs continues* and *5. Inaction on enforced disappearances*].

Many activists expressed concerns that if Sara Duterte were to be elected President in 2028, she would pursue her father's abusive policies. Her possible election was described by an activist as an "existential threat".

[8] The communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), founded in 1968, and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), an insurgent armed group of Marxist inspiration, have been active for more than half a century.

4. War on drugs continues

Abusive policies under the Marcos Jr. administration have included the continuation of the war on drugs and associated extrajudicial killings, which have persisted – albeit on a reduced scale compared to the Duterte period - creating a chilling effect in communities. Some of the killings have targeted human rights defenders.

Duterte's war on drugs

In June 2016, then-President Duterte launched a brutal anti-drug campaign in the Philippines, during which thousands of people, the vast majority from poor and marginalised communities, were killed by police or armed individuals allegedly linked to law enforcement on suspicion of drug use or drug trafficking.[9] Civil society groups reported widespread falsification of evidence by police to justify unlawful killings, and concluded that Duterte and other senior officials may have instigated, authorised, or contributed to a pattern of killings that could constitute crimes against humanity.[10]

The war on drugs was explicitly weaponised against those who documented or criticised it. Duterte encouraged police attacks against human rights groups and advocates, instructing police to shoot them "if they are obstructing justice".[11]

Under President Marcos Jr., drug-related killings have continued at a lower, but still significant, rate. According to independent research, as of 11 June 2026, there had been 1,267 reported drug-related killings during the Marcos Jr. administration.[12]

"The drug lists remain, especially in community-based operations. It starts there - when you arbitrarily draw a place, then you single out persons, your target persons without due process", an activist said.

Many interlocutors also expressed concern over the ongoing attacks on the victims' families. "The victims' families are now facing the consequences of bringing Duterte to court", a journalist told the delegation, noting that they were being targeted with threats and harassment, particularly online. For example, in a case mentioned by another interlocutor, a woman whose brother was killed in Duterte's war on drugs, and who brought the case against Duterte at the ICC, had to "lay low" because of online attacks against her. "There is heightened disinformation, here in the Philippines and abroad. And there is a campaign to discredit victims as well as their lawyers", a lawyer said. "Because they [the families of the victims] are on the watch list of the police, they can be targeted again in the future", an activist added. Indeed, families of the victims of the war on drugs did not feel safe and remained in situations of vulnerability. Some of them refused to travel to The Hague for the ICC proceedings due to security concerns.

[9] Amnesty International, *The Philippines War on Drugs*; **https://www.amnesty.org/en/projects/the-philippines-war-on-drugs/**

[10] Human Rights Watch, *Philippines: Duterte's 'Drug War' Claims 12,000+ Lives Government Harassment, Threats Against Rights Defenders*, 18 January, 2018; **https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/18/philippines-dutertes-drug-war-claims-12000-lives**

[11] Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, *"I'll kill you along with drug addicts"- President Duterte's war on human rights defenders in the Philippines*, February 2019; **https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapport-philipppines2019web.pdf**

[12] DAHAS, *The Latest numbers* [last viewed on 11 June 2026]; **https://dahas.upd.edu.ph/sources/**

Victims of war on drugs seek justice at the ICC

During the visit to the Philippines, the delegation met with six women whose relatives had been killed in Duterte's war on drugs and heard their testimonies. All of them detailed their struggle for justice and their ongoing difficulties, including the dangers they continued to face in their communities. They unanimously expressed hope that proceedings before the ICC would eventually deliver the justice they had long been seeking. The delegation also met with groups and individuals who had been providing support to relatives of victims of the war on drugs, including children. They shared with the delegation the risks and challenges the victims faced, including re-traumatisation, insecurity, and attacks.

Duterte was surrendered to the ICC on 12 March 2025 after being arrested by Philippine authorities in relation to alleged crimes against humanity committed in the context of the war on drugs. The Prosecution's application for an arrest warrant included allegations of murder, attempted murder, torture, and rape. However, the Pre-Trial Chamber limited the charges to murder and attempted murder, citing insufficient linkage evidence for the remaining counts.

Following an unsuccessful challenge to his fitness to stand trial, on 26 January 2026 the Chamber confirmed that Duterte was fit to take part in pre-trial proceedings. The confirmation of charges hearing proceeded from 23 to 27 February 2026, albeit in his absence, following the Chamber granting Duterte's request to waive his right to attend the hearing. On 22 April 2026, the ICC Appeals Chamber confirmed the Court's jurisdiction over crimes committed in the Philippines between 1 November 2011 and 16 March 2019, notwithstanding the country's withdrawal from the Rome Statute, which took effect on 17 March 2019. On 23 April 2026, the Pre-Trial Chamber confirmed the charges of murder and attempted murder as crimes against humanity against Duterte, paving the way for a full trial, which is scheduled to begin on 30 November 2026 in The Hague.

The confirmation of charges hearing in The Hague was closely followed by civil society representatives from the Philippines. Many who observed the proceedings in person gained a clearer understanding of how the Court operates in practice, as well as a more grounded appreciation of the evidentiary basis of the case, beyond polarised public narratives. For some, direct engagement with Court representatives and the opportunity to communicate their perspectives publicly were important steps in countering persistent disinformation. At the same time, competing narratives highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by victims, their lawyers, human rights defenders, and journalists in engaging safely and meaningfully with the justice process.

Civil society actors continue to call for investigations against other senior officials implicated in the campaign that reflect the broader pattern of alleged crimes, including enforced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence.

Former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is seen on a screen in the courtroom during his first appearance before the ICC in The Hague on 14 March 2025. Peter Dejong / POOL / AFP

While the ICC's detention of Duterte and its proceedings against him galvanised families of the victims of the war on drugs and renewed hope for justice [See below, *9. Glimmers of hope*], some interlocutors underscored the continued absence of efforts to ensure accountability at the national level. "We have to have local accountability here [in the Philippines]. I don't think the government is doing enough to establish a mechanism that would ensure local accountability", a journalist told the delegation.

5. Inaction on enforced disappearances

Enforced disappearances continued to be perpetrated, with at least 56 new cases reported across the country during the Marcos Jr. administration. As of March 2026, six of these cases remained unresolved, including two cases of environmental rights defenders.

Activists told the delegation that, whereas under President Duterte enforced disappearances involved victims of the war on drugs, under Marcos Jr. enforced disappearances "mostly" targeted human rights defenders, including those working on environmental and Indigenous Peoples' issues.

Activists acknowledged some positive judicial developments, including the issuance of *writs of amparo* in some cases.[13] Nonetheless, they stressed that in recent cases the biggest challenge remained the government's inaction in response to cases of enforced disappearance, particularly in relation to prompt and thorough searches for victims and accountability for perpetrators.

Activists also pointed to the inadequate implementation of the Anti-Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance Act (2012) as a key ongoing challenge, particularly regarding the investigation of enforced disappearances.

"Families were met with denial and dismissal of enforced disappearance. We heard from police and army officers that these may not be cases of enforced disappearance, but rather [cases of] human trafficking. They also tend to put the blame on the families for not properly reporting cases", one activist recounted.

"Even if the law was enacted way back in 2012, there hasn't been a single conviction. It's also because there aren't really cases filed. The families may have gotten the impression that it wouldn't lead to anything fruitful for them if they do file a case, because the test case - the very first case of disappearance [filed under the law][14] - was dismissed without even a preliminary investigation, and the reason was that it violates the prohibition of *ex post facto* law", another activist noted.

Activists were also critical of the adoption of new rules by the Department of Justice in July 2024, approved by the Supreme Court in 2026, which require a stricter evidentiary standard of "reasonable certainty of conviction" for filing criminal cases, including those involving enforced disappearances.[15]

Families of victims of enforced disappearance faced obstacles in their quest for memorialisation. There is currently one monument to memorialise the disappeared in Parañaque City, Metro Manila. However, this memorial, called "The Flame of Courage", is not a state-sanctioned initiative and is located on the grounds of a local church, which means commemoration activities cannot be held on certain days.

Activists bemoaned the ongoing lack of progress in the establishment of a museum honouring the victims of human rights violations committed during President Marcos Sr.'s rule. The establishment

[13] The *writ of amparo* is a judicial remedy that is available to any individuals whose right to life, liberty, and security is violated or threatened with violation by an unlawful act or omission of a public official or employee, or of a private individual or entity. The writ covers extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances or threats thereof. It can be issued by any relevant courts (Regional Trial Courts, Sandiganbayan, Court of Appeals, or Supreme Court).

[14] The case concerned the enforced disappearance of six workers from the Paper Industries Corporation of the Philippines (PICOP) in Agusan del Sur Province in October 2000 involving members of the Philippine military. Following the enactment of the Anti-Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance Act in 2012, the victims' families filed a complaint before the prosecutor's office. However, the complaint was dismissed on the grounds that the disappearances had occurred prior to the enactment of the Act and were therefore not covered by its provisions. A petition for review was subsequently filed before the Office of the Secretary of the Department of Justice, which upheld the prosecutor's dismissal.

[15] Under the new rules on the standard of proof in preliminary investigations and inquest, prosecutors must ensure that the evidence to charge a person with a crime must sufficiently establish all the elements and consequently warrant a conviction. The Philippine Supreme Court described the reform as raising the standard "from probable cause to *prima facie* evidence with reasonable certainty of conviction".

of such museum is mandated by Republic Act No. 10368 (2013).[16] A site for such museum has been identified inside the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman in Quezon City, but the project has not broken ground, and activists believed any progress was unlikely during the presidency of Marcos Sr.'s son.

The government has made no efforts to accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) and has justified its inaction by saying that the Philippines has already enacted a domestic law and that the country does not have enough extradition treaties with state parties to the convention. The Presidential Human Rights Committee Secretariat (PHRCS)[17] has similarly claimed that the accession is hampered by the insufficient number of extradition treaties the Philippines has with other states - a justification activists called "very weird".[18]

[16] Republic Act No. 10368 was adopted on 15 February 2013 under the title "An act providing for reparation and recognition of victims of human rights violations during the Marcos regime, documentation of said violations, appropriating funds therefor and for other purposes", or in short "Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act of 2013".

[17] The Presidential Human Rights Committee Secretariat (PHRCS) is a government body attached to the Office of the President of the Philippines that provides technical and administrative support to the Presidential Human Rights Committee, an inter-agency body mandated to advise the President on all human rights concerns and issues.

[18] Article 13 of the ICPPED allows states parties to use the convention as the legal basis for extradition in enforced disappearance cases, even in the absence of bilateral extradition treaties.

6. Laws weaponised against civil society

Most interlocutors raised the issue of the use of repressive laws to attack and criminalise human rights defenders and other members of civil society.

The Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act (2012) and the Anti-Terrorism Act (2020) are the two laws that have been more frequently used by the authorities in recent years to target human rights defenders and civil society organisations.

One activist said the implementation of the Anti-Terrorism Act was "the most damning" of the policies implemented by President Marcos Jr.

The Anti-Terrorism Act

On 3 July 2020, then-President Rodrigo Duterte signed into law the Anti-Terrorism Act, which replaced the Human Security Act (2007). The law allows suspects to be detained without a judicial warrant for up to 14 days - extendable by a further 10 - and be placed under surveillance for up to 60 days - extendable by 30 more days. It also grants the government excessive and unchecked powers, which has gone hand in hand with increasing attacks against human rights defenders. The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression deplored that the Anti-Terrorism Act contains an "overly broad and vague definition of terrorism, which leaves it open to abuse".[19]

Multiple interlocutors explained that the sharp increase in the use of the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act in recent years was intended to ensure the Philippines could be removed from the "grey list" of jurisdictions monitored by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) for money laundering and terrorist financing.[20]

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

FATF is an intergovernmental organisation founded in 1989 on the initiative of the G7 to develop policies to combat money laundering and terrorist financing globally. In 2001, its mandate was expanded to include terrorism financing. The FATF Secretariat is administratively hosted at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris, but the two organisations are separate.

The 40-member body sets international standards to ensure national authorities can effectively take action against illicit funds linked to drugs trafficking, the illicit arms trade, cyber fraud, and other serious crimes. In total, more than 200 countries and jurisdictions have committed to implementing the FATF's standards as part of a coordinated global response to preventing organised crime, corruption, and terrorism. This global framework is compiled in 40 Recommendations.[21]

Among them, FATF Recommendation 8 aims to ensure that non-profit organisations are not misused by terrorist organisations. However, this recommendation has been abused by governments in many countries to criminalise human rights NGOs on fabricated accusations related to money laundering and terrorism financing.

[19] OHCHR, *Philippines: UN expert calls for more sustained reforms to prevent threats and killings of journalists and activists*, 2 February 2024; **https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/philippines-un-expert-calls-more-sustained-reforms-prevent-threats-and**

[20] The FATF's "grey list" identifies countries that are actively working with the FATF to address "strategic deficiencies" in their regimes to counter money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing. When the FATF places a jurisdiction on a grey list, it means the country has committed to resolving swiftly the identified strategic deficiencies within agreed timeframes and is subject to increased monitoring. The FATF placed the Philippines on its grey list in June 2021 and removed it in February 2025.

[21] FATF, *The FATF Recommendations*; **https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Fatfrecommendations/Fatf-recommendations.html**

In November 2023, the FATF released amendments and an Interpretive Note to Recommendation 8 to address its misuse against human rights NGOs.[22]

"We feel that [counter-terrorism laws] are not driven by domestic security needs. The justification is purely to comply with FATF recommendations, not really to address some internal threats", a lawyer told the delegation.

"Human rights organisations and activists faced a lot of terrorism cases and terrorism financing cases and the reason behind that is that the Philippines was vying to be removed from the FATF grey list for terrorism financing", a journalist confirmed.

The overzealous and extreme enforcement of the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act has led to cases described by lawyers as "ridiculous". For example, at least two individuals, including one woman human rights defender, were charged under the Act on accusations of providing *adobo* [a traditional Filipino dish] to alleged rebels.[23]

Lawyers expressed concerns over the independence of the judiciary regarding its handling of terrorism financing cases, due to pressure and interference from various elements within the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). "Judicial independence may be compromised because of threats from the military and the NTF-ELCAC", a lawyer told the delegation.

Lawyers were further concerned by the Supreme Court's designation, in 2022, of 15 Regional Trial Courts (RTC) to exclusively handle cases under the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act.[24] "That is totally unnecessary. Why do you have to name specific branches of original trial courts that would be handling terror cases? That's pinpointing the judges who will be handling terrorism cases in certain regions, so that they and the court personnel are exposed to surveillance, threats, and pressure from the military operating in the regions", a lawyer explained.

With regard to media-related legislation, journalists were most commonly prosecuted under criminal libel provisions under Articles 353-355 of the Penal Code, which carry penalties ranging from six months to four years' imprisonment and/or fines, and under cyber libel provisions of the Cybercrime Prevention Act (2012), which impose penalties ranging from four years, two months, and one day to eight years.

Criminal libel has been frequently used against journalists in the regions, often initiated by local authorities and politicians - a practice described by a journalist as "barbaric" and "very uncivilised". Cyber libel has been particularly insidious, as penalties are harsher than criminal libel and cases can be filed in courts anywhere across the country and can last for several years.

"We have documented a case, for example, of a journalist who is based in a southern Tagalog province, but the cyber libel was filed in Pasay [City] – that's a five-hour travel by land. So, they do that just to harass you", an activist said.

[22] FATF, *Protecting non-profits from abuse for terrorist financing through the risk-based implementation of revised FATF Recommendation 8*; **https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Fatfrecommendations/protecting-non-profits-abuse-implementation-R8.html**

[23] Inquirer, *Red-tagged for giving NPAs groceries, adobo*, 17 October 2024; **https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1993346/red-tagged-for-giving-npas-groceries-adobo**

[24] Philippine News Agency, *SC designates 15 anti-terror courts*, 30 March 2022; **https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1171031**

7. Ongoing repression amid mounting challenges

All members of civil society met by the delegation reported acts of repression aimed at human rights defenders. Such acts involved: threats; harassment, including at the judicial level and online; red-tagging; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; physical attacks; killings; and enforced disappearances. Several interlocutors had been in fact targets of some of these acts.

Environmental activists Jhed Tamano (L) and Jonila Castro (C) speak with media representatives at the Commission of Human Rights, in Quezon City, Metro Manila, on 19 September 2023. Jam STA ROSA / AFP

Various forms of harassment, including surveillance and intimidation, were reported to the delegation. Young human rights defenders were often among the targets. "Military agents would visit the homes of young human rights defenders. They would talk to the parents. They would tell them to tell their kids to stop being activists. That would scare the kids. That would scare the families", the delegation was told.

Human rights organisations also reported various forms of harassment. "Our staff from Mindanao were conducting a training with a community and there were police that came and said that they could not go on with the training because they did not have a permit. So, they were just forced to stop the training for the safety of the participants", a representative of a human rights group told the delegation.

Nearly all the interlocutors cited red-tagging as one of the most common forms of harassment against human rights defenders, members of civil society, and human rights organisations. Most of the human rights defenders or organisations met by the delegation had indeed been red-tagged. This resulted in difficulties for civil society organisations working with local communities. As one interlocutor explained, communities had sometimes grown "weary of activist groups, human rights groups, because they feared that the military will have a reprisal against them".

Independent research showed a significant increase in the number of cases of red-tagging. According to independent research presented to the delegation, in 2025 there were 1,240 documented incidents of red-tagging nationwide, which was double the number of the incidents (about 600) documented in 2024.

Perpetrators of attacks against defenders included: national and local authorities; the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP); the Philippine National Police (PNP); private security firms working for extractive companies; and conservative religious groups.

The significant shrinking of financial resources was an additional challenge reported by nearly all civil society members met by the delegation. "We're scraping by", a representative from a civil society organisation commented.

Financial constraints were particularly felt by civil society groups in the provinces, despite local actors' efforts to mitigate the negative impact of international funding cuts. "Our colleagues in the regions are more at a disadvantage, because there's nothing trickling down there anymore", a human rights defender said.

In certain regions characterised by a particularly dangerous environment for human rights defenders, such as Mindanao, international funding cuts threatened the safety of the defenders. "It's not easy when people are staying in hiding or in their location and then you have to look for money for operations and for relocation and safety", a human rights defender told the delegation.

Notable individual cases of targeted human rights defenders raised during the visit

- Journalist **Frenchie Mae Cumpio** and woman human rights defender **Marielle Domequil**, arbitrarily detained after being found guilty of terrorism financing on 22 January 2026, for which they face between 12 and 18 years in prison.
- **Joselito Macapobre**, Paghidaet sa Kauswagan Development Group (PDG) community organiser, victim of an attempted kidnapping by suspected military personnel/armed men on 17 January 2026 in Negros Occidental Province.
- **Deo Montesclaros**, photojournalist and correspondent for *Pinoy Weekly* and *Northern Dispatch*, specialised in environmental and human rights issues in Cagayan Valley, charged with terrorism financing in January 2026.
- **Noel Bellen Samar**, a radio journalist who died on 21 October 2025 of injuries sustained after being shot a day earlier in Albay Province.
- **James Jazmines** and **Felix Salaveria Jr.**, two activists subjected to enforced disappearance on 23 and 28 August 2025, respectively, in Albay Province. Their fate and whereabouts remain unknown.
- **Felipe Levy Gelle**, PDG rights advocate, detained on 24 June 2025 on charges of terrorism financing and released on bail after six days.
- **Jonila Castro** and **Jhed Tamano**, two young women environmental rights defenders, abducted by armed men on 2 September 2023 in Bataan Province, and released on 19 September 2023 after 17 days in custody.
- **Dexter Capuyan** and **Gene Roz Jamil "Bazoo" de Jesus**, two indigenous rights defenders missing since 28 April 2023, after being abducted in Rizal Province.
- **Jazmin "Minet" Jerusalem**, Executive Director of the Leyte Center for Development and Empowerment (LCDE), charged with three counts of terrorism financing after the Anti-Money Laundering Council froze her assets in April 2024. The charges were dismissed in March 2026.
- **Percival Mabasa**, known as **Percy Lapid**, a radio journalist, killed on 3 October 2022 in Las Piñas, Metro Manila.
- **Emmanuel "Manny" Asuncion**, a trade unionist killed in Dasmariñas, Cavite Province, during "Bloody Sunday" raids conducted by the police in three provinces on 7 March 2021, which resulted in the killing of eight other activists and indigenous peasants.
- **Antonio Gabriel Maestrado La Viña**, known as **Tony La Viña**, a prominent human rights lawyer and environmental advocate, subjected to repeated red-tagging.
- **Benjamin Ramos**, human rights lawyer and founding member of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL), killed by unknown gunmen in Kabankalan, Negros Occidental Province, on 6 November 2018.

Due to the precarious situation for human rights defenders in the Philippines, some of them had to seek refuge abroad. For example, woman human rights defender **Clarisa Ramos**, who worked particularly on militarisation and land-grabbing in the Negros Island Region with PDG for nearly three decades, has been living overseas following the killing of her husband, human rights lawyer Benjamin Ramos in November 2018. She has continued to carry out advocacy and human rights work on the Philippines from abroad. She has also remained a target of judicial harassment by the Philippine authorities, who charged her with terrorism financing in 2024. Because of this open case against her, she is fearful of returning to the Philippines, and she faces the ongoing threat of a potential extradition to her home country.

Family members of some of the victims of the war on drugs were also among those who fled the Philippines due the dangers they faced at home.

Below is a summary of the patterns of repression reported to the delegation, categorised by type of defenders.

7.1. Land and environmental rights defenders

In militarised areas, especially in Mindanao, land and environmental rights defenders, including from indigenous communities, faced risks of serious attacks by security forces, which included arbitrary detention, attempted abductions, enforced disappearances, and killings. In addition, women and indigenous women environmental defenders were subjected to additional gender-based violence and other challenges [See below, *7.4. Women human rights defenders*].

Environmental defenders who petitioned or protested mining activities were subjected to surveillance, threats, intimidation, harassment, SLAPP, and red-tagging.[25] Some of these violations were perpetrated by private mining companies.

Environmental group interlocutors highlighted the government's militarisation and aerial bombing of communities opposing infrastructure and development projects. Under the Marcos Jr. administration, environmental and climate issues were integrated into the country's security framework through the National Security Policy (NSP) 2023–2028, which environmental groups said reflected the administration's militarised response to governance, including environmental and climate issues. According to a representative of an environmental group, this involved, for instance, "the military assigning infantry battalions or organising paramilitary groups" in areas affected by large-scale mining, plantation, and investment projects, to protect corporate interests. Environmental and land rights activism was further linked to counter-insurgency and national security narratives, exposing activists and affected communities to heightened risks of human rights violations by military and security forces.

All environmental groups that met with the delegation raised concerns about human rights violations and the destructive impacts on the environment stemming from mining activities - particularly the extraction of copper and nickel - by foreign companies. This trend accelerated in recent years amid growing global demand for these minerals.[26]

A representative of an environmental group commented that, compared to the Duterte administration, "[the] Marcos [Jr.] government really tried to speak human rights and renewable energy, so [it's] both whitewashing human rights and greenwashing". An anti-mining activist explained that under President Marcos Jr., permits for mining companies were "easily acquired" and "way faster than [under] Duterte, using the green transition, just transition, and critical minerals narratives".

At the same time, more oil exploration projects continued to be approved, the delegation was told.

[25] SLAPP are unfounded and abusive legal actions that aim to silence those working in the public interest on matters such as fundamental rights, the environment, and public access to information.

[26] The Philippines is a mineral-rich country and one of the world's largest producers of nickel, which plays a critical role in the global energy transition away from fossil fuels. It is also one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change and extreme weather events, which has a direct and lasting impact on local communities who are heavily reliant on agriculture.

Mining exploration and extraction projects were reported to have regularly encroached upon Indigenous Peoples' territories and adversely affected their livelihoods. Mining companies failed to conduct meaningful consultation with affected communities, in violation of their right to free, prior, and informed consent.

Anti-mining demonstrations were often met with violent dispersals. A representative of an environmental organisation noted that violence against anti-mining protesters and communities escalated, if the mining company had links to "political dynasties". For example, residents who protested against the nickel extraction operations of Altai Philippines Mining Corporation - which was owned by Senator Sherwin Gatchalian's family - in Sibuyan Island, Romblon Province, were violently dispersed by the police in 2023.[27]

In addition, in the cities, there was an escalation of attacks on human rights organisations who worked to support communities and grassroots groups, including by red-tagging them and freezing their bank accounts and assets on suspicion of being terrorists, which further affected their finances amid funding cuts.

Despite the existence of legal protections relating to the environment, natural resources, and indigenous communities, interlocutors raised concerns regarding weak implementation and enforcement in practice. For example, under the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (1997), Indigenous Peoples are entitled to collective land titles over their ancestral domains. These protections were challenged by private companies, which argued that the recognition of ancestral land rights conflicted with the state's ownership of natural resources.[28] Although the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Act in 2000, concerns remained regarding the effective implementation and enforcement of these protections in practice, particularly in areas affected by mining and extractive projects.

Interlocutors also identified two key pieces of proposed legislation, the enactment of which would be critical to protecting land and environmental defenders — the People's Mining Bill and the Environment Defence Bill.[29]

7.2. Human rights lawyers

Human rights lawyers remained at risk, particularly those assisting victims of human rights violations in the provinces.

A human rights lawyer who assisted land and environmental rights defenders in local communities met with the delegation and reported receiving frequent death threats and being subjected to constant surveillance.

The delegation was informed that not many lawyers in the country were willing to take up cases of human rights defenders and environmental rights defenders because of the risks and reprisals they could face by providing such assistance. "It's not safe to become a human rights lawyer in the Philippines and to be a lawyer for development NGOs", a human rights lawyer told the delegation.

Interlocutors reminded the delegation that no one had been held accountable for the killing of human rights lawyer **Benjamin Ramos** in November 2018.[30]

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[27] Karapatan, *Karapatan scores violent police dispersal of anti-mining barricade, lauds people's protest*, 3 February 2023; **https://www.karapatan.org/media_release/karapatan-scores-violent-police-dispersal-of-anti-mining-barricade-lauds-peoples-protest/**; Politiko, *Altai 'Authorized By DENR': Gatchalian-Linked Mining Firm Denies Politiko Ties*, 12 February 2023; **https://politiko.com.ph/2023/02/12/altai-authorized-by-denr-gatchalian-linked-mining-firm-denies-politiko-ties/daily-feed/**

[28] Philippines Law Journal, *Constitutional redemption and the road to recognising indigenous Filipinos in a transplanted charter*, 2014; **https://philippinelawjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/88PLJ640_NADATE.pdf**

[29] The People's Mining Bill, initially filed in 2011, seeks to address the human rights gaps in the Mining Act (1995) by decentralising the authority to grant mining permits through a multi-sectoral body that includes affected communities, local government units, and civil society organisations. The Environment Defence Bill, filed in 2020, emphasises the government's responsibility to strengthen the protection of the environment from further destruction as well as environmental defenders from violence, threats, discrimination, or any other violations in relation to their activism.

[30] Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, *Philippines: Killing of human rights lawyer Benjamin Ramos*, 9 November 2018; **https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/philippines-killing-of-human-rights-lawyer-benjamin-ramos**

Interlocutors also told the delegation that there was increasing awareness about the dangers faced by human rights lawyers and the need for their protection. "There were threats that our colleague Ben Ramos might have observed but took for granted. So, this time we're more vigilant", a human rights lawyer said.

The delegation also heard concerns about attempts to undermine the independence of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP).[31] "The IBP is succumbing to pressure. They are being enticed to enter into a memorandum of agreement with the DND [Department of National Defence] in certain areas, which compromises the independence of the bar", a human rights lawyer said.

7.3. Journalists

Journalists in the Philippines continued to operate in a dangerous environment and attacks against them intensified under President Marcos Jr. "Marcos [Jr.] hasn't done anything to protect journalists", a reporter told the delegation.

"The main difference between Marcos [Jr.] and Duterte is that Marcos [Jr.] portrays himself as a champion of media freedom. He does not resort to verbal attacks, like Duterte, who demonised and discredited the media several times publicly. So, many people think that Duterte was worse but, in fact, the types of attacks undertaken by Duterte were the same forms of attacks that are being done under Marcos", a journalist told the delegation.

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) documented 216 cases of attacks against journalists during the first three and a half years of Marcos Jr.'s presidency (June 2022-December 2025). This represented a 49% increase from the 145 attacks documented by NUJP during the same period of the Duterte administration (June 2016-December 2019).

Under President Marcos Jr., harassment (including surveillance) and red-tagging of journalists accounted for nearly half of the incidents documented by NUJP, in addition to the killing of eight journalists. Government officials and state security personnel (mostly police and AFP) accounted for the relative majority (around 40%) of the perpetrators of attacks against journalists.

"We have to always be on our toes whenever we are outside, especially if we are going to be covering very public actions, because there are a lot of instances where we see that we are being surveilled", a reported said.

Journalists operating in local communities in the provinces, including environmental journalists, were particularly exposed. "There's a steady rise of attacks against environmental journalists", a reporter told the delegation. Among such journalists were **Frenchie Mae Cumpio** and **Deo Montesclaros**.

Threats and harassment associated with red-tagging frequently led to physical attacks.

"That's the pattern that we have seen. It usually starts as red-tagging, but a lot of times it translates into something else. The maximum would be killing, which was the case for **Percival Mabasa**, who received a lot of threats because of his anti-Duterte commentaries on his radio [programme]", the delegation was told. "A lot of red-tagging happened during the Duterte period, which eventually translated into surveillance and verbal harassment in the current administration", a journalist explained.

"Since Marcos [Jr.] took office, we have not seen any improvement in the way he's handling media related cases. He keeps on saying that [he] is for the media, for press freedom, but, in reality, he's not doing anything to stop the institutionalised red-tagging from the government and state authorities", another journalist told the delegation.

Interlocutors underscored the chronic impunity for attacks against journalists, including killings, with no efforts made by the authorities to bring those responsible to justice. The Philippines has been

[31] The IBP is the official national organisation of lawyers in the Philippines, mandated with upholding the standards of the legal profession.

regularly listed among the world's top 10 countries in the Global Impunity Index since the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) began publishing this annual study in 2008.[32]

"The problem here in the Philippines is that the perpetrators of these journalists' killings roam around freely", a reporter commented.

In addition to the frequent use of criminal libel and cyber libel against journalists [See above, *6. Laws weaponised against civil society*], reporters who met with the delegation highlighted numerous other challenges, particularly occurring online. These included: censorship through the blocking of news websites; cyber attacks, such as Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS); online disinformation campaigns; social media impersonation; trolling; and deep-fake content. Limited access to information for journalists was also cited as a key obstacle to their work. In addition, interlocutors decried attacks by law enforcement agents with batons and tear gas against journalists who were covering the anti-corruption protests in Manila on 21 September 2025.[33]

Business ties and disputes were mostly responsible for self-censorship. "Many media entities would not really touch on issues that involve their funders. For example, there are certain media organisations which would not report about mining because their funders are involved in mining, some media networks would not report about issues of labour, because their network faces labour issues", a reporter told the delegation.

7.4. Women human rights defenders

Many interlocutors highlighted the prominent role played by women human rights defenders, including those from Indigenous Peoples' communities, particularly in environmental justice advocacy and activism.

Women were often at the forefront of resistance against large-scale mining operations and the protection of their communities' lands and resources. "Especially in highly militarised contexts, it is mainly the women environmental defenders who are able to resiliently navigate the treacherous waters of a very shrunk civic space", commented an environmental defender.

Women environmental rights defenders, especially among indigenous and rural communities, faced gender-based violence and additional gender-motivated attacks, in addition to the same challenges experienced by their male colleagues. These included rape, rape threats, sexual abuse and harassment, and disinformation, including online, perpetrated by both state and non-state actors.

"As a woman, you have another layer of fear, because the military here has a history of sexually harassing women", a woman environmental rights defender told the delegation. Indigenous women leaders also faced judicial harassment through SLAPP and libel cases. "We have reports from the communities where the military would threaten to rape the women. That's still the case in many parts of the country", another woman environmental rights defender added.

Some of the violations against women environmental rights defenders were committed during protests. Community and indigenous women leaders on the front line of protests against operations of mining companies in their communities were targets of physical attacks and other forms of repression. For instance, women made up the majority of those at the front lines of the human barricade against Woggle Corporation's mining exploration in Dupax del Norte, Nueva Vizcaya Province. On 23 January 2026, seven protesters, including six indigenous women, were forcibly arrested during a violent dispersal.[34] "It's an attack on all fronts", a woman human rights defender told the delegation.

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[32] Published since 2008, the *Global Impunity Index* is an annual ranking of countries where perpetrators of journalists' murders continue to evade justice.

[33] Amnesty International, *Philippines: Testimony points to torture and other abuses by police as new protests loom*, 24 November 2025; **https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/11/philippines-testimony-points-to-torture-and-other-abuses-by-police-as-new-protests-loom/**

[34] Rappler, *Dupax del Norte anti-mining barricade continues despite dispersal*, arrests, 29 January 2026; **https://www.rappler.com/environment/barricade-dupax-del-norte-symbol-love/**

Attacks against women human rights defenders were also prevalent online, where they were harassed and defamed by individuals – often through coordinated attacks - in order to delegitimise their engagement.

Despite their vibrant participation, some interlocutors highlighted how gender stereotypes shaped the leadership and participation of women in human rights movements and protests.

Women tended to serve as negotiators and facilitators between the community and authorities "because of how this male dominated space is perceiving women", explained a representative of an environmental group. Women were also placed at the front lines of protests based on the perception that they were less likely to be targeted or harmed. "Sometimes it's too much putting women at risk because of how they have been typecast and their societal roles", he commented. "The community's thinking is that if you put women at the forefront, they [the authorities] will not target them. That's not true anymore", a woman human rights defenders said. "The trauma and the mental health of the women leaders who are on the front lines is something that we also have to deal with", she added.

Several interlocutors expressed concern over the prevailing misogynist culture in the country. An example of such misogynist culture was on display while the delegation was in Manila, when, on 3 March 2026, House of Representatives member Jesus "Bong" Suntay made sexist and objectifying remarks against an actress and television host during a parliamentary committee hearing. This triggered widespread condemnation, and a complaint filed with the Ombudsman by women's rights groups three days later for violations of various legal provisions, including under the Safe Spaces Act.[35]

"What this shows is that the culture that was created by the Duterte administration remains. It has emboldened men [human] rights violators to treat women as sex objects. It has emboldened those who have responsible positions to casually talk about women in very sexually objectifying way", a woman human rights defender said.

7.5. Trade unionists

Under Marcos Jr., killings of trade unionists and related impunity continued. At the time Marcos Jr. took office, there were more than 60 cases of killings of trade unionists – all unresolved. Since then, four more trade unionists were killed, as of March 2026.

"Even the families themselves, they never dare speak up, because they live in the community and killers are from their community. No one will step forward, and that makes all these cases cold cases", a labour activist told the delegation.

The Marcos Jr. administration failed to implement recommendations made by an International Labour Organisation's High-Level Tripartite Mission in January 2023 to ensure "rapid and effective protection measures" for trade unionists, address cases of extrajudicial killings of trade unionists, and "prompt prosecution and accountability" for such acts.[36] "None of these recommendations have been acted upon by the current government", the delegation was told.

"None of the policies and the institutions set up by Duterte, which allowed the government to launch a massive trade union repression, was ever changed", the delegation heard.

While under Duterte all trade unions were red-tagged regardless of their political ideology, during Marcos Jr.'s presidency "hardcore left" trade unions - such as Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa (SENTRO) and Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) - and those defending the rights of workers employed in the mining industry - such as the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) - were more frequently red-tagged, the delegation heard.

[35] The Safe Spaces Act, enacted in April 2019, penalises acts of gender-based sexual harassment in public spaces, online platforms, workplaces, and educational institutions. The Act also explicitly protects all individuals regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression.

[36] ILO, *Report of the High-Level Tripartite Mission, Philippines 23 - 26 January 2023 - Conclusions and recommendations*; **https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_norm/%40normes/documents/missionreport/wcms_874240.pdf**

"This is probably one of the worst administrations I've met in the past four decades because it's the first time that I've seen a president not even being interested in meeting the trade unions. All of the economic demands of the trade union movement have been stalled", a labour activist reported. "He [Marcos Jr.] just doesn't care about the working class. It's as simple as that. He has never imagined what it means to be a worker in this country. He doesn't really understand the working class issues", the same activist said.

The delegation also heard that women's participation in the trade union movement remained limited. The trade union movement remains "a very *macho* organisation", one interlocutor said.

7.6. LGBTIQ rights activists

The state of LGBTIQ rights in the Philippines under President Marcos Jr. was marked by both advancements and ongoing challenges.

Contrary to Duterte, who publicly made homophobic and transphobic remarks, President Marcos Jr. was "more open to LGBTIQ issues", a representative of a LGBTIQ rights group told the delegation. He also noted that the position of the influential Catholic Church with regards to LGBTIQ individuals "shifted from extreme opposition" to a "more moderate, ambiguous relation". "You get their support, but you know that they're not going to be the champions for LGBTIQ rights", he said.

"We have seen an exponential growth of LGBTIQ organisations and collectives, mostly informal. We have also seen a lot of groups from many provinces", a representative of an LGBTIQ rights group told the delegation. A number of LGBTIQ individuals held elected positions in local governments. At the national level, the establishment in 2023 of a Special Committee on LGBTQIA+ Affairs under the Inter-Agency Committee on Diversity and Inclusion (IACDI), mandated to influence policymaking within the executive branch of government, was highlighted as a positive development under the Marcos Jr. administration.

Student members of the LGBTIQ community celebrate as they attend a "Rainbow Graduation" in Quezon City, Metro Manila, on 22 June 2024. Jam STA ROSA / AFP

Despite these advancements, the LGBTIQ sector remained marginalised and with limited legal protections, the delegation was told.

LGBTIQ rights activists were frequent targets of threats and harassment, particularly online. The risks became heightened when they were involved in human rights movements or civil society organisations.

In addition, LGBTIQ rights activists also faced persistent conservative cultural norms, stigma, and stereotypes surrounding gender and sexuality, which undermined public recognition of their activism. They also encountered varying degrees of opposition from conservative and religious groups, both online and at protests. Student-led LGBTIQ groups were denied recognition by their schools.

Another significant challenge was the exclusion of LGBTIQ activists by other civil society organisations and actors from their work, which prompted calls for civil society organisations to adopt an intersectional and inclusive approach to human rights advocacy. "We need to include LGBTIQ rights in any human rights agenda, democratising and pluralising advocacy spaces to make sure that LGBTIQ groups are represented there", commented a representative of an LGBTIQ rights group.

While there are no legal restrictions on their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, the Philippines continued to lack comprehensive legal recognition of, and proper protections for, LGBTIQ individuals. The delegation was told that cases of gender-based violence, domestic violence, and conversion practices on LGBTIQ individuals continued to occur.

The enactment of several key pieces of legislation that would safeguard and protect LGBTIQ individuals from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity faced longstanding delays, namely the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity or Expression (SOGIE) Equality Bill[37] and the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Bill.[38] Other relevant proposed legislation that would have positive implications for LGBTIQ individuals included the Cagandahan Bill[39] and the Right to Care Bill.[40] The LGBTIQ rights movement also joined the call for the enactment of the Human Rights Defenders Protection Act [See below, *8.1. Protective legislation and local ordinances pending or not implemented*], which contains specific provisions for the protection of LGBTIQ defenders.

[37] The SOGIE Equality Bill seeks to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression in key areas including employment, education, healthcare, and access to goods and services. It has been filed in Congress in various iterations and has remained pending for over 20 years.

[38] The Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Bill takes a broader approach to prohibiting discrimination by consolidating protections against all forms of discrimination, including those based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, ethnicity, religion, age, and disability, under a single legislative framework.

[39] The Cagandahan Bill, filed in January 2026, aimed to protect the rights and dignity of intersex individuals by allowing them to change their sex and name in official documents without a court order.

[40] The Right to Care Bill, filled in January 2026, seeks to grant LGBTIQ individuals and those in non-marital relationships the legal right to make medical decisions for their partners.

8. Weak, insufficient protections

Measures aimed at protecting human rights defenders and tackling impunity for abuses against them remained largely insufficient and ineffective.

8.1. Protective legislation and local ordinances pending or not implemented

Many interlocutors expressed frustration at the ongoing delays in the adoption and enactment of the Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill,[41] which was approved by the House of Representatives in its third and final reading on 17 January 2022 but remained pending in the Senate and ultimately lapsed at the end of the 19th Congress in June 2025.[42] The proposed legislation has since been refiled in the 20th Congress in July 2025.[43] Activists also called for the establishment of an independent body tasked with the implementation of the law, once it is enacted.

Interlocutors noted that many progressive bills were stalled in the legislative process, with some of them pending for more than 20 years, due to a lack of political consensus. This included the SOGIE Equality Bill and the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Bill [See above, 7.6. *LGBTIQ rights activists*].

Despite the Philippines' ratification of eight of the nine core human rights treaties,[44] recognising a whole range of rights and establishing protective measures and mechanisms, the delegation was told that such measures had not been implemented. "We're very good at signing conventions. That's absolutely true. But we're the worst in terms of enforcing them", an activist told the delegation.

Besides, according to an activist, the ordinances that had been issued by various cities and municipalities in recent years to establish protective mechanisms and support services for human rights defenders at the local level were still "in the testing period", with some still needing the adoption of the implementing rules and regulations. For example, activists in Quezon City, Metro Manila, said they hoped the local ordinance for the protection of human rights defenders could be used to file complaints before the end of 2026.

8.2. Limited judicial remedies

The various judicial remedies and measures available to human rights defenders and other member of civil society remained insufficient to guarantee their adequate protection.

Interlocutors reported that the judicial system remained largely ineffective, with court proceedings involving human rights defenders often subjected to undue delays and judges and prosecutors themselves being pressured and harassed, including through red-tagging.

For example, in some cases judges were informed that military personnel intended to be present during hearings, in an apparent attempt of intimidation. Court personnel also faced surveillance and threats. "The judges sometimes are succumbing to pressure from the military. They are being threatened.

[41] The proposed legislation defines the rights and fundamental freedoms of human rights defenders and establishes mechanisms to protect defenders from intimidation, reprisals, vilification (including red-tagging), and other forms of harassment.

[42] Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, *Philippines: Senate must adopt Human Rights Defenders Act*, 21 January 2022; **https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/philippines/philippines-senate-must-adopt-human-rights-defenders-act**

[43] Republic of the Philippines House of Representatives, *House Bill No.1431*, 7 July 2025; **https://docs.congress.hrep.online/legisdocs/basic_20/HB01431.pdf**

[44] These include: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW); and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

They are being vilified, they are being red-tagged, should they grant a *writ of amparo*", the delegation was told. "The judiciary is not responsive enough", a human rights lawyer said. A case was cited in which a victim sought protection through a petition for a *writ of amparo* and by the time the Supreme Court issued one, the victim had already fled the Philippines to seek asylum abroad.

Despite this challenging environment, the delegation heard that, in recent years, various courts, including the Supreme Court, had increasingly granted writs to victims of human rights violations. These included *writs of amparo* granted in cases involving enforced disappearances and red-tagging.

8.3. "Ineffective" national human rights institution

The delegation heard mixed views regarding the performance of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) of the Philippines under Chair Richard Palpal-latoc, appointed by President Marcos Jr. on 27 September 2022. Due to time constraints, the delegation was unable to meet with CHR representatives.

Among the positive aspects, interlocutors highlighted the fact that the CHR was taking progressive positions on environmental rights, women's rights and gender equality, Indigenous Peoples' rights, and children's rights. In many cases, the CHR acted as a bridge that facilitated interactions between members of civil society and government authorities or business enterprises.

However, most interlocutors described the CHR as "ineffective", saying it lacked resources, it was not fully independent from the executive branch, and its responsiveness varied considerably between the national office in the capital city and the regional offices. One activist described the CHR's performance as "lacklustre", particularly at the level of regional offices. "It leaves much to be desired", another interlocutor said.

"They would issue statements of support every now and then. So that's of course welcome, but, other than that, we have not seen any significant measures", one interlocutor commented. "They [CHR members] are so-so. They won't stick their neck out for people, but they won't antagonise human rights organisations either. There is public criticism of red-tagging and other human rights violations, but they won't stick their neck out", a human rights defender told the delegation. A representative of an environmental group added that communities affected by development and mining projects "were sometimes afraid to reach out to the CHR because of their connection with [the] government".

The CHR was also criticised for not providing enough support to the families of the victims of the war on drugs and enforced disappearances and for failing to carry out adequate investigations into human rights violations. Several activists also criticised the CHR's inaction and silence on the case of the two activists arbitrarily arrested on 25 February 2026 [See above, *2. Background: A legacy of human rights violations and impunity*].

It was reported that little progress had been made by the CHR in addressing extrajudicial killings, with many cases filed with the CHR that were still waiting to be processed and addressed, amid a growing backlog. Some civil society members highlighted the pressure that the CHR exerted on families of the victims of the war on drugs, requiring them to provide documentation of the cases rather than investigating them itself.

In addition, the already meagre financial support of PHP 30,000 (about EUR 482) initially provided by the CHR to each victim of human rights violations was decreased to PHP 10,000 (about EUR 140) in 2024 due to budgetary cuts.[45]

Victims of enforced disappearances also expressed their disappointment over the CHR's commitment to supporting the search for their loved ones and pursue accountability, which dwindled over time. "The CHR is an agency that is supposed to help the victims, but, in my experience, this hasn't been the case recently. Now I don't really feel their presence anymore", said one victim, whose husband disappeared in 1987.

[45] 1 EUR = 62.279 PHP (September 2024); Rappler, *'P10,000 is insulting': CHR seeks more funds for victims of human rights violations*, 5 September 2024; **https://www.rappler.com/philippines/commission-human-rights-seeks-more-funds-compensation-violations-victims-2024-budget/**

In July 2024, the CHR established an online platform to file complaints about human rights violations.[46] While those submitting complaints received acknowledgment of receipt, in most cases the status of such complaints did not progress, with the platform simply claiming they were being processed and referred to regional offices, without being resolved.

Many of those who spoke with the delegation bemoaned the Congress' ongoing failure to adopt a charter for the CHR. The charter would strengthen the powers and mandate of the CHR and would provide a stronger legal basis for the CHR to cover issues related to economic, social, and cultural rights, in addition to its existing mandate to tackle civil and political rights.

In this regard, legislators informed the delegation of the introduction of a bill in the House of Representatives to establish a CHR charter, grant the commission "full fiscal autonomy", and expand its investigative and protection powers.

8.4. Decreasing external pressure

The recent weakening of the multilateral system and the loss of influence of many international levers were cited as important factors that affected the ability of Philippine civil society to effectively advocate for human rights in international fora.

One activist underscored how the liquidity crisis that impacted the UN system had resulted in fewer opportunities for civil society to act at the UN level, particularly at the Human Rights Council.

8.5. Inaccessible prisons

The fragmentation of authorities responsible for the management of prisons remained a significant obstacle that prevented civil society organisations from accessing facilities to independently monitor conditions and gather information for documentation purposes.

Multiple authorities are responsible for the management of various prisons: the Bureau of Corrections under the Department of Justice; the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) under the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG); and Provincial Governments. A memorandum of agreement is required by the BJMP and provincial authorities for organisations to conduct prison visits, making the process highly bureaucratic, uncertain, and subject to intrusive controls from the authorities.

Meanwhile, prisons conditions remained concerning, particularly given the high number of political prisoners [See above, *3. Civil society remains under attack amid rampant impunity*]. Facilities were reported to be overcrowded and efforts to decongest them, including by addressing the issue of lengthy pre-trial detention periods, had been ineffective. No alternative measures to detention were being considered, and the deprivation of liberty was seen exclusively as a form of punishment. "There is not even a talk of those alternatives", an activist told the delegation.

Plans to convert the area of the New Bilibid Prison in Muntinlupa, Metro Manila, into a commercial zone meant the authorities had begun relocating prisoners to other regional facilities, making prison visits more challenging due to the long distances.

Legislators informed the delegation of the introduction of several bills in the House of Representatives aimed at reforming the prison system, establishing a "unified, professional, and humane correctional system", and prescribing minimum standards for the treatment of women deprived of their liberty.

The OMCT's Global Torture Index classifies the Philippines as a country where there is a high risk of torture, and notes that the establishment of a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) - a key obligation under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) - remains overdue.[47]

[46] CHR, *CHR launches MISMO, the new online complaint and request portal for Filipinos*, 1 July 2024; **https://chr.gov.ph/2024/statements/chr-launches-mismo-the-new-online-complaint-and-request-portal-for-filipinos/**

[47] OMCT, *Global Torture Index – Country Factsheet 2025 (Philippines)*; **https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index?country=philippines**

9. Glimmers of hope

Despite the numerous above-referenced challenges, several positive developments were highlighted by various interlocutors during their interactions with the delegation.

Young people in the Philippines have emerged as a significant force behind human rights, equality, and social justice movements, including by leading awareness raising campaigns online and organising protests. Youths, particularly in urban areas, were at the forefront of environmental and climate change activism. For instance, the Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines (YACAP), a prominent youth-led movement for climate and environmental justice, actively mobilised supporters nationwide through campaigns and protests.

Most interlocutors hailed the Gen Z-led anti-corruption protests in September 2025 as a hopeful development that led to the spontaneous mobilisation of youths outside the traditional social and human rights movements and circles. As a result of those protests, it was observed that many students were becoming interested and involved in human rights activities, particularly on university campuses. Many also participated in demonstrations to mark the 40th anniversary of the People Power Revolution.

Tens of thousands of people take part in a protest against corruption at Rizal Park in Manila on 21 September 2025. Daniel Ceng / Anadolu via AFP

In addition, youth played an active role in advocating for the rights of LGBTIQ individuals, including online and through other mobilisation efforts, such as organising Pride activities in public schools. “We have a new generation of young people who are now pushing the boundaries in many spaces”, commented a LGBTIQ rights advocate.

The mobilisation of communities led to the suspension, or even the complete halt, of certain mining projects. For instance, in Dupax del Norte Municipality, Nueva Vizcaya Province, sustained community protests and human barricade against the mining exploration activities of British-owned

Woggle Corporation resulted in the temporary suspension of the company's exploration permit in February 2026.[48]

There was also a growing movement of young indigenous women who became involved in activism, in some cases by developing art, music, and other creative forms of mobilisation.

Albeit infrequent, some judicial victories for human rights defenders, such as dismissal of politically motivated cases - including on charges of terrorism financing - were cited as positive developments.[49] In a landmark decision in February 2026, the Supreme Court ruled that LGBTIQ couples have the right to co-ownership of property.[50] Cases of favourable court decisions for workers' rights were also reported to the delegation.

The enduring public trust in journalism was another positive element underscored by an interlocutor. Indeed, according to an independent survey conducted in December 2025, the majority of respondents trusted the media more than government institutions to address corruption, particularly regarding flood control projects.[51]

The proceedings against former President Rodrigo Duterte at the ICC were also often cited as a positive development that energised the families of the victims of the war on drugs and gave them hope for justice for the crimes committed as part of Duterte's deadly campaign. More than 500 families of the victims had already organised to seek justice at the ICC. Some of them received training and turned into human rights defenders themselves by becoming human rights monitors and conducting documentation and other human rights activities in their own communities. There were hopes that the confirmation of charges hearing at the ICC in The Hague would spark growing interest among victims in the communities affected by the war on drugs, boosting victim participation in ICC proceedings despite the security concerns.

Lastly, one interlocutor noted that the repressive context and the growing financial constraints faced by civil society organisations [See above, *7. Ongoing repression amid mounting challenges*] had led to greater cooperation among many of them, including through the establishment of alliances and consortia with the aim to maximise the use of dwindling resources and strengthen synergies.

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[48] Center for Environmental Concerns Philippines, *Woggle's temporary suspension, a victory in the continuing fight of Dupax Del Norte*, 12 February 2026; **https://www.cecphils.org/woggle-suspension-statement/**

[49] For instance, in March 2025, Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 31 in Iloilo City, Iloilo Province, dismissed the charges of violating the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act (2012) against two PDG officers and a development worker. The charges alleged that they had provided financial support to the New People's Army for the purchase of firearms and ammunition; Bulatlat, *Court junks terror financing charges against Negros development workers,* 22 March 2025; **https://www.bulatlat.com/2025/03/22/court-junks-terror-financing-charges-against-negros-development-workers/**

[50] BBC, *Philippine top court says same-sex couples can co-own property*, 10 February 2026; **https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c70nwz7z7r1o**

[51] Pulse Asia, *Media Release*, 12 January 2026; **https://pulseasia.ph/updates/december-2025-nationwide-survey-on-the-flood-control-projects-scandal/**

10. Recommendations

Considering the findings of its rapid assessment visit, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders urges the Philippine authorities, UN member states, and intergovernmental organisations to take all necessary measures to implement the recommendations listed below to create an enabling environment for human rights defenders and civil society in the Philippines.

To the national authorities of the Philippines:

- Cease all stigmatisation campaigns, digital and physical harassment, and attacks against human rights defenders and civil society, including red-tagging.
- Immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners and human rights defenders and journalists, and cease their criminalisation in retaliation for their legitimate human rights work.
- Adopt a Human Rights Defenders Protection Act in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and establish an independent body tasked with the monitoring of its enforcement.
- End impunity for human rights violations against human rights defenders and other members of civil society, including by conducting swift and thorough investigations into all acts of harassment and attacks against them and holding the perpetrators accountable.
- Ensure accountability for extrajudicial killings, including those involving children, through prompt, thorough, independent, impartial, and effective investigations, and the prosecution and sanction of all perpetrators, regardless of their official capacity.
- Guarantee victims of serious human rights violations' rights to truth, justice, and full reparation, including through adequate compensation, rehabilitation, and guarantees of non-repetition, and ensure effective protection of victims, relatives, witnesses, lawyers, and civil society organisations against reprisals.
- Repeal repressive laws used to target human rights defenders, including the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act (2012) and the Anti-Terrorism Act (2020), and replace them with legislation that is consistent with international human rights law.
- Dismantle the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC).
- Amend or repeal legislation that infringes on the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including by decriminalising the offenses of libel (Articles 353-355 of the Penal Code), cyber libel (Cybercrime Prevention Act (2012), and defamation.
- Enact a Freedom of Information Act.
- Implement recommendations made by the UN Special rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression following her official visit to the Philippines in January-February 2024.
- Enact policies and measures aimed at the progressive decongestion of correctional facilities, including by adopting alternative measures to detention for certain pre-trial detainees and convicted inmates.
- Ensure prison conditions comply with the Philippine's obligations under international human rights treaties to which it is a state party and international standards, namely the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules).
- Bring the management of correctional facilities under a single authority.
- Allow non-governmental organisations with a relevant mandate to conduct visits to places of detention, interview inmates, and assess conditions without undue hindrance.

- Establish an independent and adequately resourced National Prevention Mechanism (NPM), in accordance with obligations under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT).
- Accelerate the enactment of proposed legislation that provides proper protection of LGBTIQ individuals from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, such as the SOGIE Equality Bill and the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Bill.
- Rejoin the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- Engage with civil society organisations and families of the victims of enforced disappearance to establish adequate protocols for the search of the disappeared and to raise awareness and sensibilisation among members of the security sector on a victim-centred approach to the issue of enforced disappearance.
- Establish official memorialisation initiatives for victims of enforced disappearance, including those provided for under Republic Act No. 10368 (2013).
- Issue a standing invitation for an official country visit to all UN thematic special proce-dures, including: the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights; the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Working Group on business and human rights; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons.

To UN human rights mechanisms:

- Closely monitor, publicly report on, and raise with the Philippine authorities the situation of human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, Indigenous Peoples' representatives, land and environmental defenders, trade unionists, LGBTIQ activists, women human rights defenders, and other civil society actors, including patterns of red-tagging, judicial harassment, arbitrary detention, threats, killings, enforced disappearances, reprisals, and attacks on civic space.
- Ensure sustained follow-up on individual cases of human rights defenders who have suffered killings, attacks, threats, and other forms of harassment in relation to their human rights activities.
- Express serious concerns and systematically condemn attacks, threats, red-tagging, judicial harassment, and other forms of harassment and intimidation against human rights defenders in the country, and seek clarifications from relevant authorities.
- Urge the authorities in the Philippines to guarantee the physical integrity and psychological well-being and the rights of all human rights defenders.
- Continue to pay particular attention to the protection of human rights defenders in the Philippines, in accordance with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and monitor the implementation of the recommendations addressed to the Philippines.
- Call on the Philippine government to fully cooperate with all UN human rights mechanisms, including by responding promptly and substantively to communications and agreeing on dates for pending country visit requests.

To the European Union, its member states, and other UN member states:

- Pay particular attention to the situation and protection of human rights defenders in the Philippines, in accordance with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders as well as the European Union and states' Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders.
- Support sustained scrutiny of the human rights situation in the Philippines at the UN, in particular at the Human Rights Council.
- Take all protective, preventive, and responsive measures necessary, in particular by:
  - Meaningfully and regularly engaging with human rights defenders and providing visibility to the activities of civil society, in the Philippines and abroad.
  - Publicly recognising the crucial role of human rights defenders, including by meeting with human rights defenders who have been harassed and/or criminalised and expressing solidarity with them.
  - Attending all public hearings in judicial proceedings against human rights defenders in the Philippines.
  - Providing financial support to human rights defenders and local civil society organisations to enable them to pursue their work in the Philippines and abroad.
  - Systematically and publicly condemn killings and any acts of harassment, including threats and attacks, carried out against human rights defenders in the Philippines.
- Continue to monitor the implementation of recommendations addressed to the authorities in the Philippines.
- Ensure that a comprehensive and inclusive Sustainability Impact Assessment of the EU-Philippines Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is conducted *ex-post* at least every three years, with meaningful participation from civil society.
- Ensure the FTA has state-to-state mechanisms for enforcement, effective complaint channels accessible to human rights defenders, civil society, and affected individuals and communities, and clear penalties (e.g., suspension of trade privileges or fines) for non-compliance with human rights, labour, or environmental obligations.

FIDH INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Establishing the facts

Investigative and trial observation missions – Through activities ranging from sending trial observers to organising international investigative missions, FIDH has developed rigorous and impartial procedures to establish facts and responsibility.

Experts sent to the field give their time to FIDH on a voluntary basis.

FIDH has conducted more than 1,500 missions in over 100 countries in the past 25 years. These activities reinforce FIDH's alert and advocacy campaigns.

Supporting civil society

Training and exchanges – FIDH organises numerous activities in partnership with its member organisations, in the countries in which they are based. The core aim is to strengthen the influence and capacity of human rights activists to boost changes at the local level.

Mobilising the international community

Permanent lobbying before intergovernmental bodies – FIDH supports its member organisations and local partners in their efforts before intergovernmental organisations. FIDH alerts international bodies to violations of human rights and refers individual cases to them.

FIDH also takes part in the development of international legal instruments.

Informing and reporting

Mobilising public opinion – FIDH informs and mobilises public opinion. Press releases, press conferences, open letters to authorities, mission reports, urgent appeals, petitions, campaigns, website... FIDH makes full use of all means of communication to raise awareness of human rights violations.

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OMCT SOS-Torture Network

Created in 1985, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) works for, with and through an international coalition of over 200 non-governmental organisations - the SOS -Torture Network - fighting torture, summary executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and all other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment in the world and fighting for the protection of human rights defenders.

Assisting and supporting victims

OMCT supports victims of torture to obtain justice and reparation, including rehabilitation. This support takes the form of legal, medical and social emergency assistance, submitting complaints to regional and international human rights mechanisms and urgent interventions. OMCT pays particular attention to certain categories of victims, such as women and children.

Preventing torture and fighting against impunity

Together with its local partners, OMCT advocates for the effective implementation, on the ground, of international standards against torture. OMCT is also working for the optimal use of international human rights mechanisms, in particular the United Nations Committee Against Torture, so that it can become more effective.

Protecting human rights defenders

Often those who defend human rights and fight against torture are threatened. That is why OMCT places their protection at the heart of its mission, through alerts, activities of prevention, advocacy and awareness-raising as well as direct support.

Accompanying and strengthening organisations in the field

OMCT provides its members with the tools and services that enable them to carry out their work and strengthen their capacity and effectiveness in the fight against torture. OMCT presence in Tunisia is part of its commitment to supporting civil society in the process of transition to the rule of law and respect for the absolute prohibition of torture.

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THE OBSERVATORY

Activities of the Observatory

The Observatory is an action programme based on the belief that strengthened cooperation and solidarity among human rights defenders and their organisations will contribute to break the isolation they are faced with. It is also based on the absolute necessity to establish a systematic response from NGOs and the international community to the repression of which defenders are victims.

With this aim, the Observatory seeks to establish:

> A mechanism of systematic alert of the international community on cases of harassment and repression of defenders of human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly when they require urgent intervention;

> The observation of judicial proceedings, and whenever necessary, direct legal assistance;

> International missions of investigation and solidarity;

> A personalised assistance as concrete as possible, including material support, with the aim of ensuring the security of the defenders victims of serious violations;

> The preparation, publication and world-wide dissemination of reports on violations of the rights and freedoms of individuals or organisations working for human rights around the world;

> Sustained action with the United Nations and more particularly the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, and when necessary with geographic and thematic Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups;

> Sustained lobbying with various regional and international intergovernmental institutions, especially the Organisation of American States (OAS), the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF), the Commonwealth, the League of Arab States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The Observatory's activities are based on consultation and co-operation with national, regional, and international non-governmental organisations.

With efficiency as its primary objective, the Observatory has adopted flexible criteria to examine the admissibility of cases that are communicated to it, based on the "operational definition" of human rights defenders adopted by FIDH and OMCT: "Each person victim or at risk of being the victim of reprisals, harassment or violations, due to his or her commitment, exercised individually or in association with others, in conformity with international instruments of protection of human rights, to the promotion and realisation of the rights recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and guaranteed by the different international instruments".

To ensure its activities of alert and mobilisation, the Observatory has established a system of communication devoted to defenders in danger.

This system, called Emergency Line, can be reached through:

E-MAIL: alert@observatoryfordefenders.org

FIDH TEL: + 33 1 43 55 25 18

OMCT TEL: + 41 22 809 49 39

We are watching