



ICHRP

International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines

<https://ichrp.net/>

April 17, 2020

H. E. Mr Rodrigo Duterte,
President of the Republic of the Philippines
Malcanang Palace
E-mail: op@president.gov.ph or <http://op-proper.gov.ph/>

Urging the Supreme Court of the Philippines to send political prisoners home

Dear Excellency,

The International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP) is urging the Supreme Court of the Philippines at its virtual en banc session today to release political prisoners on humanitarian grounds, as the whole country battles the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are appealing to the leaders of the Philippine judiciary to make the just, humane and compassionate decision of freeing the elderly, sick and vulnerable political prisoners. Around 609 political prisoners are detained in congested prisons and 47 of them are of the elderly while 63 are with pre-existing medical conditions and suffering from life-threatening illnesses.

Twenty-three of these detainees filed their petition to the Supreme Court last April 8, asserting that they are not flight risks because they are old, frail and sickly. On March 29, 2020, Karapatan also made an urgent appeal for the release of political prisoners, especially those suffering from debilitating illnesses and the elderly.

We in ICHRP support the families, lawyers and human rights advocates in the Philippines working towards sending them home from these high-risk prisons.

ICHRP also notes that these political prisoners are Filipino farmers, union leaders, critics of your government and human rights defenders jailed under trumped-up charges. Most of them are still to undergo trial which according to the Philippine Constitution and international law makes them innocent until proven guilty beyond reasonable doubt.

The filed [petition](#) also includes the creation of a Prisoner Release Committee which is intended to "urgently study and implement the release of all other prisoners in various congested prisons throughout the country who are similarly vulnerable but cannot be included in this Petition due to the difficult circumstances."


Releasing prisoners had been endorsed by the [United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms Michelle Bachelet](#). Other international groups such as the [Prison Policy Initiative](#) called for the release of low-risk detainees while [Human Rights Watch](#) warned about "catastrophic public health problems" if the government does not address the worsening situation of the Philippine prison system.

As of March 2020, the recorded congestion of Philippine prison facilities is 534%. Combined with unsanitary facilities, lack of water, nutritious food and medical services, this situation has led to [outbreaks of tuberculosis](#), other infectious diseases and now the current threat of COVID-19.

Finally, ICHRP urges the Court to heed the call of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms Michelle Bachelet: “governments should release every person detained without sufficient legal basis, including political prisoners and others detained simply for expressing critical or dissenting views.”

At the time of writing, countries that have released prisoners as part of their response to the pandemic include the USA, Canada, Germany, Iran, India, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Morocco, and Egypt. We ask that the republic of the Philippines does the same.

Sincerely,



Peter Murphy, Chairperson, Global Council,
International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines

Cc: Mr. Diosdado M. Peralta, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines; Mr. Menardo Guevarra, Secretary of the Department of Justice; Mr. Jose Luis Martin Gascon, Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights; Mr Antonio Guterres, United Nations; UN Special Rapporteur on EJK; DFAT Desk; Senator Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs; Senator Penny Wong; Senator Richard Di Natale, Andrew Wilkie MHR; Julia Dean.