

Friends of the Filipino People in Struggle open letter to Ursula von der Leyen European Commission President

Dear Ms. von der Leyen,

On Tuesday, August 8, 2023 you stated during a television interview that the European Union (EU) sees that “there is much improvement” when it comes to the human rights situation under the leadership of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. You even reiterated that what is important for the EU is that the “environment is much better” and that there is “improvement in the steps forward.” As concerned citizens of various European nations that are in support of the Filipino people and their aspirations for genuine social change, we express alarm over these statements.

According to Karapatan, a human rights watchdog in the Philippines, in just the first year of the Marcos administration there were already 60 cases of extra judicial killings documented (not including drug war-related victims). This translates to 5 killings every month or one or two every week. In addition, at least 6,931 individuals have been subjected to state-sponsored aerial bombings and at least 78 were victims of illegal arrest and detention.

All the mechanisms built and used by the previous Duterte administration have been sustained, if not strengthened by the Marcos Jr. administration. Among these are the notorious Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC) and National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), both of which have been used as a red-tagging machinery to silence government critics and essentially weapons of state terrorism. Furthermore, the latest move by Marcos Jr to appoint 17 of his cabinet officers as so-called “Cabinet Officers for Regional Development and Security (CORDS)” to the NTF-ELCAC shows that the current regime continues on the same, if not worse, militaristic path as the previous Duterte administration.

In fact, the Marcos Jr. administration has not held Rodrigo Duterte accountable for his war crimes related to the bloody ‘war on drugs’ which saw between 12,000 to 30,000 people killed between 2016 to 2022.¹ Instead, the Marcos Jr. administration protects Duterte by refusing to engage the International Criminal Court.

For these reasons, we wonder what the supposed “improvements” are on the human rights situation under the current Marcos Jr. administration, when extra-judicial killings, illegal arrests and detention, aerial bombings on communities, and red tagging persist? What do we tell those who lost their parents, their sons and daughters, their siblings, their loved ones to the military and police and other fascist rabid dogs that are unleashed by the violence of the Marcos-Duterte clique? How do we comfort those who are still waiting for their release from baseless and trumped-up charges?²

¹ The Economist (November 22, 2021). How many people have been killed in Rodrigo Duterte’s war on drugs? Retrieved from: <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/11/22/how-many-people-have-been-killed-in-rodrigo-dutertes-war-on-drugs>

² Karapatan (July 2023). Hold Ferdinand Marcos Jr. accountable for the grave human rights violations under his regime. Retrieved from: https://www.karapatan.org/media_release/hold-ferdinand-marcos-jr-accountable-for-the-grave-human-rights-violations-under-his-regime/

What do we tell the parents of the still missing Indigenous Peoples' rights defenders Dexter Capuyan and Gene Roz Jamil "Bazoo" de Jesus?³

As Friends of the Filipino People in Struggle, we have close relations with Filipinos both in their home country and overseas, who are working towards a just and lasting peace in the Philippines. A peace that would bring genuine agrarian reform to the millions of landless peasants, and genuine national self-determination. And more importantly, a kind of peace that guarantees a future where the Filipino people cease to be subjected to relentless state terrorism.

As we write this letter, we caution the EU on the implications of your statements for the Filipino people.

We fear that statements like yours only embolden the Marcos Jr. administration. We fear that statements like yours discredit the sufferings of the Filipino people and leave them without any avenue for grievance and redress. We believe that Marcos Jr.'s red-tagging frenzy and extra-judicial killings are a blatant disregard for the values of the EU on human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights.

We fully share the sentiment of the National Democratic Front, who in their statement have comprehensively pointed out how the current Marcos Jr. regime has in no way adopted any of the changes urged by the European Parliament's 2022 resolution to the Duterte regime.⁴

As citizens of the EU, we refuse to be part of Marcos Jr.'s disinformation campaign and we hold the EU leadership on that same regard. Thus, we urge the EU to look closely and objectively re-examine the human rights situation in the Philippines, remain impartial and uphold its values especially on human rights.

³ Amnesty International (16 May 2023). Philippines: Indigenous rights activists reported missing: Dexter Capuyan and Gene Roz Jamil "Bazoo" de Jesus. Retrieved from: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa35/6791/2023/en/>

⁴ National Democratic Front of the Philippines (4 August 2023). EU should re-examine human rights record of the Marcos regime. Retrieved from: <https://ndfp.info/eu-should-re-examine-the-human-rights-record-of-the-marcos-regime/>