



PRESS RELEASE

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Manila

International Day of Peace, Martial Law 48th Commemoration

DRR, FAITH GROUPS FILE 36TH PETITION vs ATL

FOUR NATIONAL networks of humanitarian, development, and faith-based organizations file on Monday the 36th petition questioning the Constitutionality of several draconian provisions of the Anti-Terror Law (ATL) or the Republic Act 11479.

As part of the groups' commemoration of Martial Law and the International Day of Peace, the groups representatives stood in front of the Supreme Court bearing calls for peace and to protect the local civil society organizations.

"Our partners, member organizations, and even the poor communities we are working with in building their resilience have experienced harassment through malicious tagging," Yolanda Esguerra of the Philippine Misereor Partnership Inc. (PMPI) said.

She added that with the law's provisions, the law will legitimize these attacks against humanitarian and development organizations, which is no different during the Martial Law era.

"Once branded as terrorist by the council under ATL, these provisions allow state forces to simply freeze the organizations' operation and arrest its staff while under investigation. This is legitimizing the current attacks against local humanitarian and development workers," she added.

DRRNetPhils or the Disaster Risk Reduction Network Philippines (DRRNetPhils) representative highlighted that local organizations working on disaster risk reduction and management in vulnerable communities must be protected.

"We are ensuring that everyone is part of the development and when there are emergencies, we ensure that everyone receive the appropriate aid they need per Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability," Dr. Susan Balingit, the Chairperson of Citizen Disaster Response Center (CDRC) said.

She added that every humanitarian organization following the Humanitarian Principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence shall be "*violating*" Section 12 or providing material support if the communities or sectors who are receiving aid are being labeled as terrorist. On the other hand, humanitarian workers might fear to fulfill their duties, especially in conflict hotposts.

"Since CDRC has been established 35 years ago, we have received threats and harassment and we can only hope every organization is protected and not be put in a more harmful position as what this law's provisions are doing. For instance, helping displaced lumad communities in Mindanao can be an even more difficult situation," Dr. Balingit said. CDRC is a co-lead convener of DRRNetPhils.

The National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA)/Caritas Philippines said that even the Church-work is not exempted from this propaganda against humanitarian and development sectors, especially in high-risk areas.

“Not only in conflict-ridden areas but even in cities, we are being branded as part of terrorist fronts. Many of our staff are afraid of such vilification but we continue working,” NASSA-CARITAS Executive Secretary Fr. Tony Labiao said.

He added that development and humanitarian organizations are also one with the government in its fight against terrorism and this is possible if every sector is part of nation-building through policy-making and planning as prescribed by the Philippine Constitution.

“The United Nations’s Sustainable Development Goals that we all adopt highlight the importance of including everyone: *Nothing about us without us*. It is already disappointing that they failed to consult us in crafting this law, these provisions even placing us in greater peril,” Sandino Soliman, the lead advocacy officer of the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO), said.

One of the largest networks in the Philippines, CODE-NGO works with the government especially in the localisation process of the SDG in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) in 2015.

“How can we build a better path to just and lasting peace, to sustainable development, or to assist our communities reduce their risk to natural and human-induced hazards if we are cowering in fear because we are only one hearsay away from getting arrested?” Soliman added.

PMPI and NASSA Caritas are one of the biggest national networks of faith-based humanitarian and development organizations in the Philippines. DRRNetPhils represent CSO networks in the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC).

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