

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 24, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Janet L. Yellen
Secretary of Treasury
U.S. Department of Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretaries Blinken and Yellen,

Following the Biden Administration’s global Summit for Democracy, we are urging the Administration to unveil a concerted, public-facing strategy to address the continuing human rights crisis in the Philippines. Specifically, we are asking you to hold officials responsible for grave human rights violations in the Philippines to account through targeted sanctions.

Reports from human rights groups like the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch have documented widespread harassment, arbitrary imprisonment, torture, and assassination of journalists, dissidents, opposition leaders, members of the clergy, and labor organizers and leaders. State forces continue to use “red-tagging,” a practice in which activists and human rights groups are demonized and characterized as terrorists, as a pre-emptive move leading up to targeted assassinations, arrest without cause or other human rights abuses. The United Nations Human Rights Council has also documented this practice, and the International Criminal Court (ICC) has now begun a probe into possible crimes against humanity during Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s infamous so-called “war on drugs”—a pretext for an estimated 30,000 killings by security forces during the Duterte presidency.

Those behind these corrosive violations should no longer operate with impunity. In our stand for democracy, the United States cannot overlook the crisis in the Philippines, and we must take tangible action if we are to truly stand for human rights and the flourishing of freedom around the world. To this end, we urge the imposition of sanctions on individuals who are behind these major human rights violations, particularly via the use of the Global Magnitsky Act. Below is a non-exhaustive list of individuals found by human rights organizations to be responsible for human rights violations committed by Philippine security forces during the Duterte regime:

1. Eduardo Manahan Año has served as the Secretary of the Interior and Local Government since 2018 in the cabinet of President Duterte. Año has a long record of atrocities, including command

responsibility for troops implicated in the 2007 kidnapping and disappearance of farmer and activist Jonas Burgos. Army battalions under his command have been implicated in a variety of human rights violations. Among these are the 69th Infantry Battalion, which is under the 10th ID, responsible for the 2015 Paquibato massacre, which killed three indigenous individuals in Davao City. He is also responsible for bombings and attacks against civilian targets and as such may be responsible for actions that amount to crimes against humanity as defined by the Rome Statute of the ICC. Año was also behind the implementation of the notorious National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) program, which mobilized the Philippine state and local government machinery in a war against political dissent.

2. Delfin Negrillo Lorenzana is the Secretary of National Defense in the Cabinet of President Duterte, and was appointed administrator of martial law in Mindanao. Under his watch, hundreds of thousands of indigenous Maranao individuals were forced from their homes and into internal exile as internally displaced persons. Four years later, more than 100,000 people remain displaced. Lorenzana implemented elements of the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2020 that allow the detention of suspects for up to 24 days without charges. He has also "red-tagged" international organizations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), stating that because of its exposure of human right abuses, "[i]t is obvious that the HRW is acting as the spokesperson of the [armed insurgency]."
3. Lt. Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr. is the Southern Luzon Command chief and spokesman of the NTF-ELCAC. In September 2021, Palarde was named as deputy director-general of the National Security Council. Parlade has attacked progressive lawmakers, journalists and celebrities, and cast doubts on the intent of community pantry organizers. Parlade conducted a "red-tagging" spree, publicly accusing activists, journalists, and public figures of being members or supporters of the New People's Army, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines.
4. Hermogenes Cendaña Esperon Jr. serves as National Security Adviser in the Cabinet of President Duterte. He was the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines from 2006 to 2008 and Commanding General of the Philippine Army from 2005 to 2006 under President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Esperon has long been associated with the killing, enforced disappearance, and torture of hundreds of civilians, including activists.
5. Debold Menorias Sinas served as chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP) for six months from November 10, 2020, to May 8, 2021. As chief of the PNP, Sinas bears command responsibility for the "Bloody Sunday Massacre" of March 7, 2021, when nine trade union leaders and human rights activists were killed in simultaneous police raids. Despite these brutal killings, Sinas maintained that the operations were legitimate. Sinas has command responsibility for actions that may amount to crimes against humanity.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with the Administration to address these concerns as we reassert the importance of defending human rights in United States foreign policy.

Sincerely,



Susan Wild
Member of Congress

/s/
Dean Phillips
Member of Congress

/s/
Dina Titus
Member of Congress

/s/
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

/s/
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

/s/
Andy Levin
Member of Congress

/s/
Angie Craig
Member of Congress

/s/
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

/s/
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

/s/
Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

/s/
Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

/s/
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

/s/
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

/s/
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

/s/
Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress

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Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

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Earl Blumenauer
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Pramila Jayapal
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Jim Costa
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Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

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Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress