

COM01 Just and Lasting Peace in the Philippines

Origin: Adedeji Akintayo

1. What is the issue? Why is it important?

The president of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos Jr and the vice president Sara Duterte have commended the infamous policies of former President Duterte by continuing to advocate for extrajudicial killings, consistently calling for the murder of “drug personalities” and urging the police and military to eliminate all communist rebels while dismissing human rights. The ongoing National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) activities and the institutionalization, legitimization, and intensification of “red-tagging” – (the labelling of unarmed civilians, human rights defenders, and church members as a tactic of state terror to suppress dissent) frequently lead to extrajudicial executions and embedding these practices into law. Over the past six years, this has fostered a hostile atmosphere towards human rights defenders and church workers. This situation endangers the country's human rights defenders, church workers, and activists.

In this context, we highlight Canada’s obligation to advocate for human rights. This fall, we believe Canada has a critical opportunity to influence the resumption of the peace talks and demonstrate its commitment to international human rights, peacebuilding and women’s participation in peace processes. It is also vital that Canada ensure it is not complicit in human rights violations and extra-judicial killings in the Philippines and prioritizing human rights over economic interests. Unfortunately, Canada’s current policy regarding the Philippines, which includes our ongoing trade and military relations, turns a blind eye on human rights (HR) issues, implies that we might directly or indirectly contribute to HR abuses. An immediate audit of Canada’s provision of financial, programmatic, and technical support to the Government of the Philippines is crucial to assess on our participation in HR abuses. This audit should be completed and reported publicly to Parliament before any new agreements are considered, including visiting forces agreements that could place Canadian troops on the ground in the Philippines.

2. What is happening now?

The United Church of Canada (UCC) has a long history of supporting partners in the Philippines through justice, peace, advocacy, emergency support, etc. We continue to walk with them in mutual radical accompaniment. During its 42nd General Council, the United Church of Canada called for a full communion agreement with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

In recent years, the UCC has engaged in human rights work in various capacities in the Philippines, internationally, and across Canada. The UCC is one of the founding members of the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines Canada (ICHRP Canada), in 2019. UCC continues to be an active participant alongside the Beaconsfield Initiative and the Nakonha:ka Regional Council. Through the ICHRP-Canada, the UCC became a significant contributor to the report *Investigate PH*¹ which produced three reports documenting human

¹ <https://ichrp.net/iph/>

rights violations under the Duterte government, shared with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other international organizations.

Recently, Canadian organizations, including KAIROS and ICHRP-Canada, have urged Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to prioritize peacebuilding over militarization, particularly as concerns grow regarding Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy, which heavily emphasizes defence and military engagement. This strategy risks implicating Canada in systemic human rights abuses, as detailed in a recent ICHRP-Canada briefing paper.

Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy, initiated in 2022, commits \$2.3 billion to strengthen the South China Sea engagement by prioritizing defence partnerships, naval deployments, and security capacity-building. While these initiatives aim to enhance Canada's position in the region, they signal a troubling departure from its historical role as a peacekeeper and humanitarian actor. Instead, they align Canada with the military-industrial-complex policies that compromise its commitments to human rights and democracy.

Canada's foreign policy should comply with its own "Voices at Risk" guidelines, which focus on safeguarding human rights defenders and promoting women's involvement in peace processes. Instead, Canada and Global Affairs Canada are siding with economic and military interests overshadowing human dignity and peace. Canada should be supporting the resumption of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) peace talks—reaffirmed by both parties in October 2023, not the sale of arms.

3. What is the recommendation?

1. The United Church of Canada to participate in opportunities for solidarity and advocacy by urging:
 - a. The Government of Canada to:
 - i) publicly support the resumption of peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and repeal counter-insurgency policies and address the root causes of armed conflict.
 - ii) take the following steps to ensure human rights are a priority for Canada in its relations with the GRP:
 - (1) Perform an audit of Canada's provision of financial, programmatic, and technical support to the GRP;
 - (2) Halt negotiations of the Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA);
 - (3) Suspend Canada's Memorandum of Understanding on Enhanced Defence Cooperation; and
 - (4) Commit to the participation of women in the peace process.
 - iii) To reinstate the funding to the NCCP initiated by Canadian Food Grains Bank in 2024.

- 2) United Church Regional Councils and communities of faith to:
 - a) engage in solidarity and advocacy through prayer and action with church partners in the Philippines toward addressing the root causes of the current conflict with the goal of acquiring a just peace, to stop extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and 'red-tagging' which have primarily targeted human rights defenders, lawyers, social activists, journalists, peasants, and church workers since 2001.
- 3) The General Council to:
 - a) provide prayer, educational and advocacy resources to church members, including the Annual September 1st Day of Prayer for Just and Lasting Peace in the Philippines, connecting local solidarity efforts with NGO's, ecumenical and international efforts for just and lasting peace in the Philippines; and
 - b) continue to financially support the United Church of Canada's partners in the Philippines: National Council of Churches in the Philippines, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Cordillera Peoples Alliance, Ecumenical Bishops Forum, Ecumenical Voice for Peace and Human Rights in the Philippines, Regional Ecumenical Council in the Cordillera in their deep capacity for and implementation of programs that work toward addressing the root cause of the conflict and seeking a just and lasting peace in the Philippines.

4. Background information:

There is a critical opportunity now for Canada to influence the resumption of peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and to demonstrate the strong commitment of Canadians to international human rights, peacebuilding and women's participation in peace processes. It is also vital that Canada ensure it is not complicit in human rights violations and extra-judicial killings in the Philippines and that human rights remain a priority in Canada's foreign policies.

This motion for just and lasting peace in the Philippines is supported by many communities of faith across Canada with longstanding partnerships with churches, civil society organizations, and human rights defenders in the Philippines: The Anglican Church of Canada, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, Development and Peace/Development et Paix - Caritas Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Philippine Independent Church, Nakonha:ka Regional Council, ICHRP-Canada, ICHRP-Québec, as well as various unions (CUPE, Steelworkers of America, NUPGE, CSQ, FTQ, CSN, AFPC, etc.). As Christian churches and organizations, we firmly believe in justice and political negotiations to achieve long-term peace and justice for all.

The people of the Philippines have endured dictatorship, militarization and counterinsurgency attacks on human rights defenders for more than 50 years. Following the long dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, there was hope for peace with the transition to a democratic government in 1986 and the initiation of peace talks with the signing of the Hague Joint Declaration in 1992.

Despite several peace talks suspensions, significant progress was made until former President Rodrigo Duterte terminated talks in November 2017. All agreements achieved between the two

parties during those negotiations were voided and replaced by counter-insurgency policies and strategies. There has been a wide use of red-tagging which vilifies individuals and groups as communists or terrorist. The red-tagging is being used against civil society and humanitarian groups, human rights defenders, Indigenous leaders, journalists, and even faith leaders. Red-tagged people have been harassed by the military, killed extra judiciously, or have disappeared. United Nations experts and human rights organizations point to the counter-insurgency campaign as the cause for the unprecedented escalation of human rights violations against civilians during Duterte's administration. Human Rights Watch characterized his presidency as "the worst human rights crisis since the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos."

Today, the Philippines under President Marcos Jr. (son of the former dictator) and Vice-President Sara Duterte (daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte) remains plagued by serious human rights violations, militarization, red-tagging, extra-judicial killings and attacks on human rights defenders and civil society. Duterte's counter-insurgency policies and strategies have been kept in place by President Marcos Jr. Our church partners in the region are victims of red-tagging, counterinsurgency, and being labelled as terrorists. Our UCC members, members of ICHRP Canada, and similarly many partner human rights organizations in the Philippines are increasingly "red-tagged" for their efforts toward just peace.

Canada's current trade and military policies and relationships with the GRP could directly or indirectly contribute to the continuation of human rights abuses. An immediate audit of Canada's provision of financial, programmatic, and technical support to the Government of the Philippines is essential. This audit should be completed and publicly reported to Parliament before any new agreements are contemplated, including visiting forces agreements that could place Canadian soldiers on the ground.

Recent developments in the Philippines present an opportunity for Canada in 2025 to support a path towards a just peace. On November 23, 2023, the GRP and the NDFP released a Joint Statement indicating a possible resumption of peace negotiations. In October 2024, both parties reaffirmed their commitment to resuming the peace talks, and the Presidential Peace Adviser acknowledged the need to remove the conditions hindering the forging of a final peace agreement with the NDFP. Canada's public support and encouragement would be key.

5. How does this proposal help us to live into our church's commitments on equity?

These words from the Song of Faith and the excerpt from the United Church web page explains perfectly why this proposal lives supports our commitment to equity:

"We sing of God's good news lived out,
a church with purpose:
faith nurtured and hearts comforted,
gifts shared for the good of all,
resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize,
fierce love in the face of violence,
human dignity defended,

members of a community held and inspired by God,
corrected and comforted,
instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ,
creation's mending.
We sing of God's mission."

Government officials, elected and non-elected have responsibilities to listen and engage with their communities to ensure that government decisions have the community's best interests at the forefront. Unfortunately, the loudest voices can often represent corporate interests—rather than those who most need justice and equity.

When people of faith build relationships with elected officials and structures, we can collaboratively create a vision of Canadian society

- that honours diversity, opposes hate and xenophobia, and is open to people fleeing persecution;
- that leads a movement of healing and protecting places and people being negatively affected by climate change, in our own communities and around the world;
- that leads with integrity in the international community—Canada's global relationships must demonstrate an unwavering commitment to human rights, dignity, and international law;
- that individually and collectively lives out in action the belief that all human beings are created in the image of God, equal, and infinitely precious.

For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:

Please select the appropriate option and provide the key discussion points for items being forwarded to the General Council:

- ☒ Agree
☐ Disagree without forwarding to the General Council
☐ Disagree and forwarding to the General Council

Comments _____

Who will present (by prerecorded video) this proposal on behalf of the transmitting body?

Email contact:

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to: GCinfo@united-church.ca