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**HUMAN RIGHTS
LEGISLATIVE AGENDA
FOR THE 20TH CONGRESS**

**SAGOT MO BA AKO?
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SAGOT MO BA AKO?
SAGOT MO BA AKO?**

**FOR
REAL,
NOT
FAKE!**

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**NEW RESEARCH REPORTS OUT!
WRITE FOR RIGHTS ROUND UP**





**ANG BOTO MO AY
ISANG LONG-TERM
COMMITMENT PARA
SA SARILI, SA KAPWA,
AT SA BAYAN. KUNG
DI NILA TAYO SAGOT,
SAGUTIN NATIN ANG
ISA'T ISA.**

IF YOU ASK AN ORDINARY PINOY ABOUT PHILIPPINE ELECTIONS, IT WILL POTENTIALLY SOUND LIKE THIS: SAGUTIN NA LANG KAYA NATIN ANG ISA'T ISA?

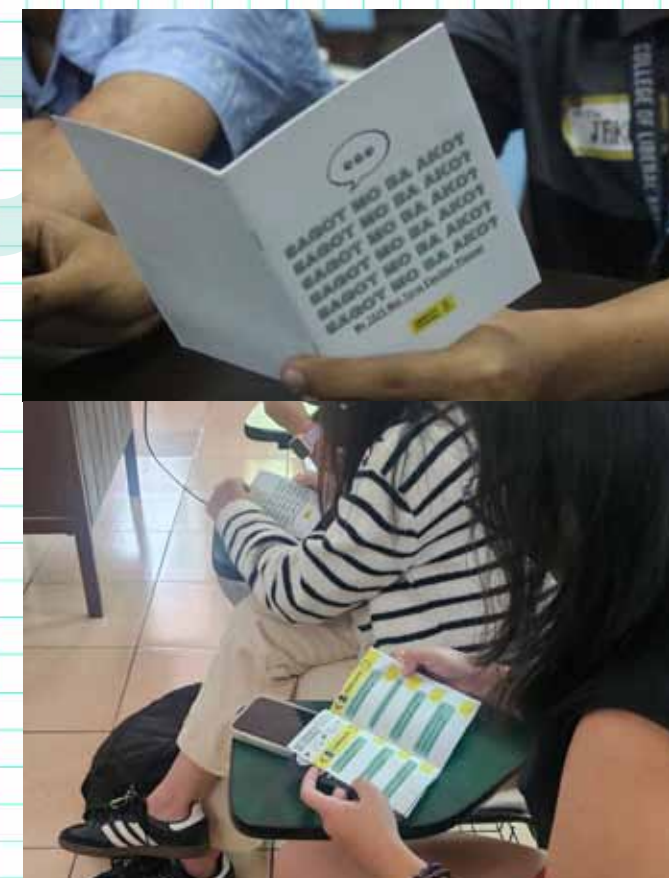
During campaign season, the enticing narrative of progress and development (regardless of its debatable standards) are capitalized by same-same political surnames and supported by large corporations to attract public approval. We would learn early on that these are merely false promises dissipating from any or all conversation almost as soon as all votes are in. The results? Electoral violence, dynastic democracy, and neglect for human rights. The same cycle would be disappointing but expectedly seen in three or six years, when another election begins.

And so, while we can't yet answer all the challenges that come with this elections, we can still start with building an understanding of what our vote means, why the most important time to talk about human rights is now.

During the 2025 mid term elections, Amnesty International Philippines' Electoral Project "Sagot Mo Ba Ako? (SMBA)" is back to bring human rights at the forefront of candidate and voter consciousness. We focus on a unique structure to the Philippines that would have suitably modeled democracy and people's representation in government: the Partylist System.

By reflecting on the challenges in genuine peoples' representation, we hope to start and stir conversations about how and whom we choose the voices who speak on our behalf, and whose interests and needs are represented in the laws and institutions that eventually shape our culture and values as a society.

It's time we reclaim the elections to serve the voices of the people and not politicians! Here's how Amnesty worked on that between March and May --



SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Amnesty mobilized members, family, friends, and supporters to join our "Sumagot ka Naman!" Facebook and Instagram story templates. Check out what they had to say:



ELECTION PLANNER

Amnesty gave away Election Planners or handy interactive workbooks that provide basic information about the 2025 mid-term elections and engage users in activities that help reflect about who to vote for, and why. This can be saved and reused for the next elections!

VOTERS AWARENESS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Amnesty facilitated a three-day Training of Trainers (ToT) on Sagot Mo Ba Ako? Voters Awareness. The module covered discussion on political rights; the party-list system; and the relevance of the elections in the daily exercise of human rights.

Through the dedicated work of Amnesty members, they were able to rollout SMBA Voters Awareness in Baguio for CAR, Antique, Dumaguete, and Iloilo for Region 6, Zamboanga City for Region 9, Cagayan de Oro City for Region 10, across our community-based local groups in Misamis Occidental for Region 10 and CARAGA for Region 13, and General Santos City for Region 12.



Amnesty was also able to secure partnerships that enabled members to engage with new human rights supporters and advocates, and gathered youth leaders in Dasmariñas, Cavite for Region 4A, and with the efforts of Amnesty formations in Regions 9 and 12, some youth individuals in Isabela City, Basilan and BARMM as well.

Congratulations to all Amnesty International Philippines local groups, regional formations, and individual members whose efforts created human rights impact in the elections by participating in or leading SMBA actions!



Missed any of the SMBA activities? Join our ongoing letterwriting action by sending a letter addressed to your District Representatives to create public pressure into adopting our human rights legislative agenda. Scan the QR code for information.

When Amnesty members and participants were asked about their general sentiments around the elections, a common answer was the feeling of frustration due to the persistent dominance of traditional politics. But this feeling was still meaningfully disrupted, and dare we say, trumped by hope mainly because of the generational shift of the voting population - majority of which coming from Gen Z and millennials.

Let's continue the conversation consistently after the elections, starting within our own circles, take a step closer to demanding better answers when we ask once again: Sagot Mo Ba Ako? Until then, sagutin muna natin ang isa't isa! Let's look out for each other by fighting for human rights.

ON 28 APRIL, AMIDST AMNESTY'S SAGOT MO BA AKO: 2025 MID-TERM ELECTION CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, THE SECTION LAUNCHED THE PHILIPPINE HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 20TH CONGRESS. THIS DOCUMENT OUTLINES SEVEN (7) PRIORITY HUMAN RIGHTS AREAS DEMANDING PROMPT AND DECISIVE ATTENTION FROM THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES; AND LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS THE SECTION WILL MONITOR AND CAMPAIGN FOR IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS.

THESE SEVEN HUMAN RIGHTS AREAS WERE IDENTIFIED FROM CONSULTATIONS WITH MEMBERS, SUPPORTERS, AND ACTIVISTS; AND INFORMED BY AMNESTY'S RESEARCH AND REPORTS, AND MONITORING OF PRESIDENT MARCOS' HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVES AND GAPS IN THE 19TH CONGRESS.

PROTECTION OF ACTIVISTS, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, AND OTHER GOVERNMENT CRITICS AND TARGETED GROUPS FROM RED-TAGGING, HARASSMENT AND KILLINGS

Human rights defenders and political activists have long been the subject of attacks from the government over the years. Government authorities increasingly subjected political activists, human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, and government critics to "red-tagging". Primarily perpetrated by the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) and promoted by harmful legislations and willful inaction by the administration, this state-facilitated public vilification of any individual or group expressing concern or opposition has disproportionately targeted students, indigenous peoples, LGBTI activists, and other members of vulnerable groups. The state's red-tagging tactics ranges from online harassment to offline intimidation and surveillance, and even enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. The absence of any legislated operational definition and subsequent policy penalizing red-tagging essentially reinforces the practice as a state tool for silencing dissent.

In addition to red-tagging, activists and human rights defenders are targeted by the government through the use of anti-terrorism legislation. The Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) continues to pose a threat to those wrongly accused of terrorism, by granting the government excessive and unchecked powers and being susceptible to arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement.

Our recommendations to the legislative include, but are not limited to:

- Pass the Human Rights Defenders Protection Act --a legislation recognizing the work of all human rights defenders and political activists and ensuring protection of their rights as they carry out their work, including the rights to life, due process, freedom of expression, and freedom of peaceful assembly, and ensure that they are able to carry out their work free from harassment, threats, and harm
- Defund, and support the call for abolition of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) which has consistently been proven to target activists and curtail humanitarian work and peaceful dissent.
- Repeal or significantly amend the Anti-Terrorism Act to ensure it is consistent with international human rights law and standards, and not used to unduly target those who are critical of the government.
- Launch prompt, independent, impartial and transparent investigations into abuses in the application of the Anti-Terrorism Act and related laws, including the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act, especially against human rights defenders and media workers.



MEDIA FREEDOM, AND THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

A free media plays an indispensable role in upholding the right to freedom of expression and enabling people to seek and receive information. Amnesty International is concerned that press freedom in the Philippines has been severely eroded and assaulted over the last few years. The Philippines remains one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a journalist. The country ranked 134 out of 180 countries in Reporters without Borders' Press Freedom Index published in May 2024, slipping two places further since 2023. The most recent killing of Ali Macalintal, a journalist and transwoman human rights defender, further underscores the unchanging hostile environment for free speech, and the underlying culture of impunity in the country.

On freedom of assembly--AIPh has monitored a rise in local government's restrictive bureaucracy and the local police's violent response to peaceful protests with increasing concern. The excessive volume of police, even in permitted protests conducted in freedom parks, diminishes the realization of the people's right to assemble as such state forces bear excessive 'non-lethal' weapons, dress in full combat gear, and utilize trucks to block or disperse people.

Despite attempts in 2004 and 2016 to amend, repeal, or otherwise favorably strengthen the Batas Pambansa 880--the only active legislation operationalizing the right to peaceably assemble and petition the government--none of these have significantly progressed in both legislative houses.

THE 2025 EDITION OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S ANNUAL REPORT, THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS, ASSESSES NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF HUMAN RIGHTS THEMES. IT IDENTIFIES WORLD TRENDS RELATED TO VIOLATIONS IN ARMED CONFLICTS, REPRESSION OF DISSENT, DISCRIMINATION, ECONOMIC AND CLIMATE INJUSTICE, AND THE MISUSE OF TECHNOLOGY TO INFRINGE ON HUMAN RIGHTS. IT ALSO HIGHLIGHTS HOW POWERFUL STATES HAVE DELIBERATELY UNDERMINED THE INTERNATIONAL RULES-BASED SYSTEM, HINDERING THE RESOLUTION OF PROBLEMS THAT AFFECT THE LIVES OF MILLIONS. THE REPORT DOCUMENTS HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS DURING 2024 IN 150 COUNTRIES, CONNECTING GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ISSUES AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE.

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS



The world is at a historic juncture. Unprecedented forces are hunting down the ideals of human rights for all, seeking to destroy an international system forged in the blood and grief of World War 2 and its Holocaust. This religious, racial, patriarchal crusade, which aims for an economic order predicated on even greater inequality between and within states, imperils hard won equality, justice and dignity gains of these past 80 years.

A multiplicity of assaults - against human rights accountability, against international law, and against the UN - have been but some of the hallmarks of the first 100 days of US President Donald Trump’s “reign” in 2025.

But those reckless and punishing offensives, against efforts to end global poverty and undo long standing racial and gender-based discrimination and violence, did not start this year. Red lines don’t turn green overnight.

Since his second inauguration, President Trump’s actions are accelerating in directions that Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have already flagged - our warnings were dismissed; our appeals, ignored. His trajectory is continuous with, and the product of systemic, deliberate, and selective decisions taken over the past decade but reaching new depths in 2025.

Make no mistake. This is not merely about President Trump. The roots are far deeper. And unless there is concerted and courageous resistance, this historic juncture will mutate into a historic transformation: not merely an era of change but a change of era.

A NIGHTMARE THAT BEGAN IN SLOW MOTION

For a decade or more, the world has witnessed a steady spread of authoritarian laws, policies and practices, shrinking civic space and eroding enjoyment of freedom of expression or association. Policy choices have deepened inequality, increased poverty and nourished billionaires. The Covid pandemic laid bare the greed, racism and selfishness of powerful states prepared to let millions die. And confronted with the climate crisis, States largely failed to live up to their promises made in Paris in 2015.

With multiple red lights flashing critical warnings, there then came, in 2024, genocide.

2024: GENOCIDE LIVE-STREAMED AS IT HAPPENED

Since 7 October 2023 - when Hamas perpetrated horrific crimes against Israeli citizens and others, and captured more than 250 hostages - the world has been made audience to a live-streamed genocide. States watched on as if powerless, as Israel killed thousands upon thousands of Palestinians, wiping out entire multigenerational families, destroying homes, livelihoods, hospitals and schools.

2024 will be remembered for how Israel’s military occupation grew ever more brazen and deadly, for the way the USA, Germany and a handful of other European states supported Israel; the way the USA, under the Biden administration, repeatedly vetoed UN Security Council Resolutions calling for a ceasefire and States continued arms transfers to Israel.

In 2024, Israel and its powerful allies, first among them the USA, claimed that or acted as if international law did not apply to them, willfully ignoring orders of the International Court of Justice and indictments of the International Criminal Court.

In 2024, President Vladimir Putin continued the systematic attacks on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, killing more civilians than in 2023. Destroying or occupying the majority of Ukraine’s thermal energy power plants, Russia caused regular blackouts for thousands. It illegally tried scores of Ukrainian prisoners of war in Russia and in areas of Ukraine it occupied.

In 2024, thousands of Sudanese deaths from conflict and hunger, in the midst of the largest forced displacement crisis in the world, were met with near-complete global indifference as was the lethal escalating violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso, Niger or Myanmar. The associated opportunities for arms trade were not ignored, and calls for arms embargoes fell on deaf ears.

2024 demonstrated States’ willingness to deploy propaganda to the service of armed conflicts, amplified by social media algorithms and powerful voices, and without regard to accuracy or hate-ridden consequences.

In sum, 2024 dehumanized us all.

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE AND MULTILATERALISM

South Africa, however, signaled that other choices can be made. Its International Court of Justice case against Israel for allegedly breaching the Genocide Convention is a crucial step towards justice. The International Criminal Court (ICC) issuance of arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas military chief Mohammed Al-Masri for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity was a historic breakthrough.

Yet countries that vigorously supported the ICC in its prosecution of President Putin for the alleged abduction of Ukrainian children took a very different response when it came to Israel. A number of US senators threatened the ICC Prosecutor in 2024 and President Donald Trump later sanctioned the Prosecutor in 2025.

The time has passed for lamenting the double standards of the architects of the post-World War 2 rules-based system. Before 2024 was over, many states were actively undermining that system’s institutions and working against its values, resulting in a situation where little more than a shell of its original intentions was left standing.

President Trump is just a super-accelerator of trends already well advanced.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE MEDIA: CANARIES IN THE COAL MINE

In 2020, Amnesty International warned of authoritarian tendencies emerging across and within countries. We were right to be worried. In 2024, more authoritarian laws and practices were adopted. Attacks against political dissent intensified, including through mass arrests and enforced disappearances. More NGOs and more political parties were forcibly disbanded, suspended or targeted arbitrarily as “extremist”. There were disproportionate responses to civil disobedience and unprecedented criminalization of human rights defenders, climate activists, students and others expressing solidarity with Palestinians; many were labelled as “terrorists”. Feminists and other campaigners for the rights of women and LGBTI people continued to face massive backlash. At least 21 states brought forward laws or bills aimed at suppression of free speech or banning media outlets. The number of journalists killed in 2024 reached new heights: according to the NGO, the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 124 journalists and media workers were killed last year, nearly two thirds of them Palestinians killed by Israel.

“DRILL, BABY, DRILL” MEETS “BURN, BABY, BURN”

In 2024, no region was left unscathed by the climate crisis. An intense heatwave in South Asia was followed by devastating

floods affecting millions and forcing the displacement of thousands. Record wildfires in South America destroyed Amazon rainforests and imperilled ecosystems stretching across entire countries. In Somalia, droughts and floods destroyed communities, collapsed local economies, and displaced families and communities.

2024 was the first calendar year in which the global average temperature rose to more than 1.5°C above the 1850-1900 average.

Blazing temperatures demand trail-blazing climate action. Yet on top of States’ failures to phase out use of fossil fuels, COP29 negotiations delivered a miserly financing agreement that risks trapping lower income countries in a cycle of indebtedness.

President Trump’s mantra of “drill, baby, drill” merely echoed what was already underway, with his 2025 decision to withdraw the USA from the Paris Climate Agreement welcomed by other fossil-fuel dependent states.

And so, across the world, communities will keep burning, drowning, dying.

A TOXIC MIX FOR MILLIONS

In 2024, the World Bank warned that “global poverty reduction slowed to a near standstill during the past five years, raising concerns that 2020-30 would be a lost decade” in its report *Poverty, Prosperity and Planet: Pathways out of the Polycrisis*.

The toxic mix of manufactured poverty, conflict, political oppression and the climate crisis displaced an estimated 110 million people in 2024. Yet rather than address root causes, many governments and political movements weaponized xenophobic and racist rhetoric, inciting hatred. Ignoring or circumventing judicial orders, they used extreme and violent measures to push back irregular arrivals at their borders.

GENDER EQUALITY? ATTACKS ON WOMEN’S AND LGBTI RIGHTS

In Afghanistan, 50% of the population, namely women and girls, were condemned to what many have described as a “slow death”. The Taliban government criminalized the public existence of women and girls, passing so-called vice and virtue laws, denying their rights to work and education. Dozens of women protesters were forcibly disappeared or arbitrarily detained.

In Iran, new compulsory veiling laws intensified oppression of women and girls, imposing flogging, exorbitant fines and harsh prison sentences, while officials and vigilantes who violently attack women and girls for defying the law continued with impunity.

Violations of LGBTI rights escalated in many places, while governments from Argentina to Russia introduced laws and/or policies that restricted access to sexual and reproductive health services. In the USA, Meta and TikTok removed certain abortion information online. Meanwhile, gender-based violence including femicide, and sexual violence in armed conflict were reported on the rise in many parts of the world.

THE END OF AN ERA?

Powerful states are deriding our history. They pretend that the lessons of the 1930s and 1940s - from the Genocide Convention to the Geneva Conventions to the UDHR and the UN Charter - can be set aside, forgotten, erased.

With Donald Trump’s election and significant corporate capture of his administration, we are turbo-thrusted into a brutal era where military and economic power trumps human rights and diplomacy; where gendered and racial hierarchies and zero-sum thinking shape policy, where nihilistic nationalism drives international relations.

HOW DO WE RESPOND?

In 2024, all 193 member states of the UN General Assembly agreed to pave the way for a first ever treaty on crimes against humanity. In 2024, the UN General Assembly also agreed to create a Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, paving the way for international cooperation to stop tax abuse and potentially providing essential funding for rights realization. In 2024, Gambia rejected a bill to repeal the 2015 Women’s Amendment Act which bans female genital mutilation. Poland adopted a consent-based definition of rape, becoming the 19th European country to do so, and the Bulgarian Parliament voted down a bill to create a Russian-style foreign agents registry. In 2024, Belgian national courts recognized the country’s responsibility for crimes against humanity committed during colonization. And early in 2025, the Filipino authorities handed over former President Duterte to the ICC to face crimes against humanity charges for his deadly “war on drugs”.

The UN Summit for the Future in September 2024 had its limitations. However, states agreed to create a more equitable international system by enabling greater representation within the Security Council, especially for Africa, transforming the international financial architecture, addressing the debt crisis and increasing development funds.

Crucially, the year of elections - 64 took place across the world in 2024, three did not result in a victory lap for anti-human rights forces. Around the world, a large number of citizens voted for a different path, demonstrating that the rise of authoritarian practices is not inevitable, that it can be resisted.

The future is not set, but the world is at a critical juncture. One hundred days into the Trump administration, some States are rising to the challenge, but the majority are not. Instead, many pretend the new emperor is honourably garbed; many are adopting the new emperor’s clothes. The naked reality is very different: the silencing of dissent, attacks on academic freedom, escalating military budgets, plundering of aid allocations, trade retaliations: these are the see-through garments of a world in deep crisis.

Yes, we must address the international system’s systemic failures to uphold human rights. But today, we are facing re-energized forces that are working to impose a new system altogether: not one better equipped for equality and justice, but one without human rights protections; not one better serving the rule of law, but one designed to serve the rule of profit over justice.

Organized resistance against those forces is not merely essential; it is our only legitimate recourse. As they have always done when states fail to uphold human rights, community organizers and human rights defenders are standing up. They are resisting these regimes of power and profit that recklessly imperil our common dignity. They are showing once again that civil society is the front line of defense of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

RESIST WE MUST. RESIST WE WILL.

Agnes Callamard

FORMER PRESIDENT RODRIGO DUTERTE WAS ARRESTED ON AN ICC WARRANT SERVED BY THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE UPON HIS RETURN TO MANILA FROM HONG KONG IN MARCH 2025.

THIS ARREST SHOWS THAT SUSPECTED PERPETRATORS OF THE WORST CRIMES, INCLUDING GOVERNMENT LEADERS CAN AND WILL FACE JUSTICE WHEREVER THEY ARE IN THE WORLD.

DUTERTE’S ARREST IS ALSO A HOPEFUL SIGN FOR THE FAMILIES OF VICTIMS OF HIS ADMINISTRATION’S “WAR ON DRUGS” WHICH WAS A DELIBERATE, WIDESPREAD, AND WELL-ORGANIZED CAMPAIGN OF STATE-SANCTIONED KILLINGS THAT INCLUDED CHILDREN.

A HUGE MOMENT FOR THE POWER OF INTERNATIONAL LAW.



In June 2016, then President Duterte launched a brutal campaign against drugs in the Philippines. Thousands of people, the vast majority from poor and marginalized communities, were killed by the police or by armed individuals with links to them for allegedly using or selling drugs.

Amnesty International concluded that widespread and systematic extrajudicial executions and other human rights violations in the context of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines reach the threshold of crimes against humanity.

Though drug-related killings have reduced under the current administration of President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr., they continue to be reported. Since 2016, Amnesty International has been dedicated to documenting human rights violations in the “war on drugs” and calling for justice and accountability.

The work is not over yet.

More needs to be done to stop killings in the “war on drugs” completely, to hold all those responsible to account, and to reform punitive drug laws and policies that violate human rights.



An economy of murder: Duterte’s “war on drugs”

In 2016, Duterte promised as part of his electoral campaign to “shoot dead” criminals and end the drug trade in the country in six months. Once he became President, killings by police and other persons – many of whom were believed to be linked to or often paid by police – soared.

This was a new phenomenon for the Philippines at large, but not for Duterte. Similar violent tactics for addressing drugs and crime were well-known since his time as Mayor of Davao City, as the alleged founder of the Davao Death Squad.

Incited by the words of the President, police followed unverified lists of people allegedly using or selling drugs, stormed into their homes and shot dead unarmed people, including those who posed no risk nor resisted the arrest.

Fabricating their subsequent incident reports, the police routinely claimed they were fired upon first, as part of ‘copy past narrative’. Witnesses told Amnesty International how the police conducted late night raids, did not attempt an arrest, opened fire on unarmed persons, and in many cases, planted drugs and weapons they later claimed as evidence.

Driven by pressures from the top, including evidence of financial incentives, police engaged in an informal economy of murder.

Duterte at the ICC

When Duterte launched the “war on drugs” in 2016, the Philippines was a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). In February 2018, when the ICC opened a preliminary examination into the situation, the government swiftly declared its intention to withdraw from the Rome Statute.

The Philippines officially left the jurisdiction of the ICC in March 2019, six months before the Court moved forward its probe and opened an investigation into possible crimes committed from

2011 to 2019 in the context of the “war on drugs”, including Duterte’s time as Mayor of Davao City.

In March 2025, former President Duterte was arrested by the government of the Philippines pursuant to a warrant issued by the ICC and was transferred to The Hague, Netherlands, to stand trial for the crime against humanity of murder.

Calls for justice and accountability

Although Duterte’s arrest was a monumental step, much more remains to be done to ensure truth, justice and reparations for survivors and victims.

Apart from the arrest of the former President, there remain almost no other forms of accountability for those responsible within the government and law enforcement agencies, and others involved in the thousands of extrajudicial executions. Justice and reparations for families of the victims remain almost completely lacking.

Although they have been reduced under the Marcos government, drug-related killings continue to be reported. The current administration has failed to credibly investigate, let alone prosecute, those suspected of committing and ordering extrajudicial executions despite past promises to deliver “real justice in real time”.

Amnesty International is calling on the Philippine government to carry out thorough, independent, impartial and effective investigations into every case where there is reasonable suspicion of extrajudicial executions in the “war on drugs”. Where investigations uncover sufficient, admissible evidence of criminal responsibility, the government should ensure genuine criminal prosecutions in fair trials. This would complement the ongoing investigation by the ICC.

The need for wider reform

While drugs can certainly pose risks to individuals and societies, it is precisely because of these risks that governments need to shift away from policies based on prohibition and criminalization in favor of evidence-based alternatives that protect public health and the human rights of people who use drugs and other affected communities.

The “war on drugs” has failed to decrease the use and availability of drugs and has instead undermined the rights of millions, exacerbated the risks and harms of using drugs and intensified the violence associated with illicit markets.



Amnesty International has documented the lack of adequate health and social services for people who use drugs, who are instead being arbitrarily detained in government-run facilities where they are forced to go through programmes that are stigmatizing and not evidence-based. People held in those centres in the name of “drug treatment” are punished for using drugs and coerced into abstinence; forced to undergo repeated mandatory drug testing in violation of their right to privacy; and subjected to severe punishments for rule violations, including weeks or months in isolation and extensions of their stay as punishment where there is no medical necessity.

On 4 April 2025, Amnesty International Philippines, released its first-ever youth-led research report “Left to Their Own Devices: The Chilling Effects of Online Harassment Among Young Human Rights Defenders (YHRDs) in the Philippines.”

Amnesty International’s first ever youth-led report reveals that online harassment by the Philippine authorities, including the practice of “red-tagging” or labelling individuals as communists, creates a climate of fear that is deterring young human rights defenders from engaging in activism and expressing themselves freely.

In the report, “Left to their own devices: The chilling effects of online harassment among young human rights defenders (YHRDs) in the Philippines”, young activists aged 18 to 24 shared experiences of being red-tagged, doxed with personal information published online without their consent, and trolled. They describe how online harassment has led to self-censorship, infringed their rights to freedom of expression and association, and in some cases, forced them to abandon their work as activists or journalists.

The report highlights how young activists’ age, sexual orientation, student status and institutional affiliations magnify the risks and impact of online harassment that they experience.

This current research is part of RightUp, Amnesty International’s first youth-led research project in which young voices, often overlooked in traditional human rights work, take centre stage. Nine young researchers documented and investigated the experiences of YHRDs through desk research, an online questionnaire, and interviews with young people. Amnesty International provided resources, guidance, and technical support.

REPORT FINDINGS

Through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, the research has found these key findings:

1. YHRDs are subjected to multiple types of online harassment: trolling, doxing, verbal abuse and physical violence; red-tagging, smear campaigns, and cyberstalking
2. Online harassment becomes a significant hurdle that impedes the pursuit of human rights advocacy. It results in a chilling effect that manifests in manifold ways, particularly, as psychological distress, self-censorship, inactivity, isolation, downplaying negative impacts, and barriers to remedy and redress such as lack of trust, bureaucratic red tape, and anonymous aggressors. In general, these manifestations discourage and demotivate activists and may even lead to temporary or permanent disengagement from important causes.
3. These manifestations are aggravated by the YHRDs’ SOGIESC, political beliefs, affiliations, and age. Online harassment thus emerges as a multi-layered experience that is often legitimized by the state and other sociocultural factors and is further compounded by facets of identity that may be targeted by harassers.

YOUTH-LED CARE STRATEGIES

In response to red-tagging and its effects, interviewees said that their organizations provide them support by establishing of internal well-being committees, enforcing safety protocols, and providing access to mental health services and legal support when needed.

LEFT TO THEIR OWN DEVICES

“THE CHILLING EFFECT OF ONLINE HARASSMENT SEVERELY IMPAIRS THE RIGHTS OF YOUNG HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS. IT NOT ONLY THREATENS THE INDIVIDUAL, BUT ALSO UNDERMINES THEIR CAPACITY TO DO THEIR WORK TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS.

Mia Tonogbanua
Vice-Chairperson and former
Youth Board Representative
Amnesty International
Philippines



Some of the interviewers added that their organizations try to create safe spaces to nurture each other’s wellbeing, discuss issues, and exchange best practices. Some of the practices mentioned include selectively publishing content online with consideration to the public attention it may receive, maintaining anonymity and limiting personal details. In-person safety measures include avoiding identifiable clothing and wearing masks and travelling and attending events with a companion. These considerations are seen by members as a shared responsibility that ensures each other’s and the overall group’s well-being and mental resilience.

On a personal level, red-tagged YHRDs practice self-care through journaling, meditation, gaming, and positive reinforcement from social circles.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The report emphasizes the existing calls of Amnesty Philippines and local organizations and activists to put an end to all forms of state-sponsored red-tagging.

Specifically, the report offers the following recommendations:

1. Abolish the NTF-ELCAC and establish a prompt, independent, impartial, and transparent investigation into the task force’s practices and activities throughout its operational period;
2. Repeal the Anti-Terrorism Act or Republic Act 11479 and mandate an investigation into the abuses in the application of the Act, focusing on cases involving HRDs, NGOs, and media workers;
3. Amend the Cybercrime Prevention Act or Republic Act 10175 to remove provisions such as libel clauses which have been used to suppress freedom of expression;
4. Develop and fund specialized programs through the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Justice (DOJ) to provide psychological and legal aid for individuals who have been red-tagged or harassed online and offline;
5. Direct the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), and the National Youth Commission (NYC) to collaborate with human rights groups in the development and integra-

- tion of digital rights education and related information campaigns addressing the dangers of red-tagging and offer resources for responsible online engagement;
6. Direct the Civil Service Commission (CSC) to strongly enforce the code of conduct for government officials on social media, mandating ethical behavior with explicit anti-harassment policies; and
 7. Improve the Commission on Human Rights’ capacity to independently and effectively investigate reported human rights violations, including online harassment and red-tagging, and to ensure the institution’s independence through appropriate resources and full cooperation from state authorities in CHR’s investigations.

Additionally, the report recommends the Philippine Congress to (1) Pass the Human Rights Defenders Bill to provide formal recognition and protection for HRDs in the country and to define and criminalize red-tagging explicitly, to ensure that provisions are not weaponized against them; and (2) Enact the Campus Press Freedom Bill to institutionalize protections for student journalists, ensuring their ability to report on critical issues without fear of harassment or legal persecution.

Educational institutions are also called to:

1. Revise their current policies to safeguard the students’ rights to engage in civic and political discourse and remove restrictive policies impeding their engagement;
2. Create a red-tagging and online harassment registry to document incidents that would inform policy decisions and proactive institutional lines of response;
3. Set up comprehensive support systems by ensuring access to counseling, legal assistance, and peer support for students, faculty, and staff who experience red-tagging and online harassment;
4. Protect the independence of student councils, campus publications, and youth organizations through implementing protocols of non-interference from administrative authorities; and
5. Uphold educational institutions as “Safe Havens,” explicitly prohibiting any military presence and ending affiliations with the NTF-ELCAC given their record of red-tagging, undue intimidation, and stigmatization.

Funders of Human Rights groups in the Philippines are also recommended to ensure sustainable funding to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of YHRDs in their communities. Both the Philippine Government and the University of the Philippines have responded privately to Amnesty International’s report. The former’s reply was a denial of accountability; while the latter gave a response detailing their implementation of a system-wide guideline and protection mechanism which holds promise until it adopts the rest of the report’s recommendations.

ABOUT THE RIGHTUP REPORT

The report is the output of 9 Filipino young researchers who underwent a capacity-building project, supporting them as they lead their own Human Rights research while centering youth participation and wellbeing. By capacitating young people to situate their lived experiences at the heart of inquiry, they are no longer left to their own devices.



WHAT DO WE GET IN RETURN?

HOW THE PHILIPPINES NICKEL BOOM HARMS HUMAN RIGHTS

The climate crisis threatens the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of present and future generations, and ultimately, the future of humanity. It is critical that the world transitions away from the use and production of fossil fuels to renewable energy sources to address the climate crisis. However, in the Philippines and beyond, poorly regulated extraction of raw materials needed for the energy transition is leading to deforestation, environmental damage and serious harm to rural communities and Indigenous Peoples.

The Philippines is the world’s second largest producer of nickel after Indonesia, and the world’s largest exporter of nickel ore. Nickel is a key component in lithium-ion batteries used to power electric vehicles (EVs) and renewable energy storage units. According to the International Energy Agency, the demand for minerals for EV batteries is set to increase by approximately ninefold between 2024 and 2050. In the Philippines, it is predicted that the country could have as many as 190 new mining projects by 2026, with nickel accounting for one third of the new mines.

In the provinces of Zambales and Palawan – home to some of the largest nickel deposits in the Philippines – Indigenous People and rural communities are paying the price for the world’s scramble to extract energy transition minerals. Deforestation and environmental pollution stemming from nickel mining is undermining their right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and as a result, communities report adverse harms to their livelihoods, access to water and health. Impacted communities have not been properly informed of the adverse impacts of nickel mining, nor have they been adequately consulted – as required by domestic and international law. In Palawan, the rights of the Pala’wan Indigenous People to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and self-determination have been harmed. FPIC processes have failed to respect their customary representatives and decision-making processes, while the nickel mining projects are contributing to dispossession from their ancestral lands and an erosion of their culture and identity as Indigenous People.

United Nations (UN) experts have described places “where residents suffer devastating physical and mental health consequences and human rights violations as a result of living in pollution hotspots and heavily contaminated areas” as “sacrifice zones”. Santa Cruz in Zambales can be considered to be such a “sacrifice zone”, while Brooke’s Point in Palawan is at risk of becoming one if nickel mining operations continue and additional companies are given the green-light to push forward with proposals to extract more nickel in the area. As the Philippines exports most of its raw nickel for processing (which is where the value is added), beyond the mining companies themselves, the ultimate beneficiaries of these sacrifice zones are multinational EV makers and consumers in industrialized countries – amounting to environmental racism.

Amnesty International’s report “What do we get in return? How the Philippines nickel boom harms human rights” documents failings to adequately consult local communities and obtain consent from Indigenous Peoples about nickel mining projects which have left deforestation, metal contamination and health problems in their wake in the provinces of Zambales and Palawan. It is highly likely that nickel mined from these sites is entering the supply chains of major electric vehicle (EV) companies.

Cont’d on p.18

WRITE FOR RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



WRITE FOR RIGHTS 2024 IN REVIEW

What is Write for Rights?

Write for Rights is Amnesty International's annual global campaign that unites people around the world to fight injustice. Every year, we mobilize supporters to write letters, sign petitions, and share stories to protect individuals whose human rights are under threat.

Over the past few years, the campaign has made a real difference to people's lives. All over the world, activists have been freed, and justice has been served.

Write for Rights 2024

The campaign spotlighted nine urgent cases of human rights violations from around the world. In the Philippines, Amnesty International focused on five key cases, aiming to generate 8,500 "actions" in solidarity with them.

Here are the cases adopted:

- **Joel Paredes** from Argentina, who was blinded in one eye by a rubber bullet during a protest.
- **The Wet'suwet'en Nation** from Canada who are harassed and detained for defending their ancestral land from fossil fuel drilling.
- **Manahel al-Otaibi** who was sentenced to 11 years in prison for "terrorist offenses" in Saudi Arabia after advocating for women's rights online.
- **Kyung Seok Park**, a wheelchair user and disability rights activist in South Korea who is vilified by the Seoul city government, and
- **Dang Dinh Bach**, an environmental lawyer from Vietnam who was imprisoned on trumped up tax evasion charges

What is an action?

In Write for Rights, every written expression of solidarity matters.

An action can be:

- A letter of support to the individual,
- A letter to government authorities urging intervention, or
- A signature on a petition demanding justice.

Each letter or signature equals one action.

Your impact

From December 2024 to March 2025, we held various activities nationwide to raise awareness and rally support for Joel, the Wet'suwet'en Nation, Manahel, Kyung Seok, and Dang.

Thanks to the incredible dedication of Amnesty Philippines members, supporters, and staff, the total collected actions reached 14,789 - far surpassing our initial 8,500-action goal.



Legislative Agenda, con't from p.5...

Our recommendations to the legislative include:

- Publicly condemn attacks against journalists in the Philippines. Ensure independent, transparent and effective investigations into the killings of journalists, and bring those responsible to justice in fair trials.
- Repeal or substantially amend all laws unduly restricting the right to freedom of expression, including the Cyber-crime Prevention Act of 2012, and bring them in line with international human rights law and standards.
- Pass a legislation strengthening the people's right to peaceably assemble and express grievances against the government, essentially repealing the Batas Pambansa 880, and ensure that people are able to access multiple avenues to petition the government, and exercise their freedom of expression and assembly safely, effectively, and without unreasonable obstructions.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE "WAR ON DRUGS" ARE PROPERLY INVESTIGATED AND DRUG POLICIES ARE REFORMED IN LINE WITH HUMAN RIGHTS

Although drug-related killings have reduced under the Marcos government, they continue to be reported. The current administration has also failed to credibly investigate, let alone prosecute, those suspected of committing and ordering extrajudicial executions despite promises to deliver "real justice in real time" for victims of the "war on drugs."

While the arrest of former president Duterte by the International Criminal Court is welcomed, it is only just a first step towards justice and accountability for survivors and families of victims and the necessary reform of the country's drug policies. This development should spark further action. The government must finally carry out thorough, impartial and effective investigations into every case where there is reasonable suspicion of extrajudicial executions in the "war on drugs. They must also end the punitive approach to drugs and address drug-related problems by adopting a health-based approach which has, at its core, the respect for human rights.

Our recommendations to the legislative include, but are not limited to:

- Reinstate the Philippines as a state party to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and cooperate fully with the ICC's investigation, including if further arrest warrants are issued against other former and current Philippine government officials.
- Review and amend Republic Act 9165 or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002, with particular focus on ensuring that the law respects and upholds the right of everyone to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health.
- Empower an independent body to conduct prompt, impartial, and effective investigations into all law enforcement officials suspected of involvement in crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, and links to unknown armed persons committing them.
- Establish a national preventative mechanism on torture, in line with the Philippines' obligations under the Anti-Torture Act of 2009, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.

RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THEIR RIGHT TO LAND AND CULTURE

Over the past six years, killings and other violent attacks have escalated against leaders and members of Indigenous communities who have been red-tagged by government security forces. Others who are members of or supporting Indigenous communities in the country have been subject to killings, violent attacks and intimidation.

Corruption, bureaucracy, and the domineering presence of corporations, including the mining industry spurred by height-

ened global demand for transition minerals, have made the ancestral domain claiming process even more complex, tedious, and life-threatening. The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) has hundreds of pending claims on their plate, as many communities wait for decades with no resolution in sight.

The situation of Indigenous peoples remains concerning, despite the Philippine government voting to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 and the Duterte administration reaffirming in 2017 its commitment to implement the Declaration. With the NCIP now under the Office of the President, the Legislative must fully exercise its mandate in ensuring that indigenous peoples rights are protected and upheld.

Our recommendations to the legislative include, but are not limited to:

- Review and amend accordingly the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) and, in full consultation with affected communities, investigate and address the existing challenges preventing the proper functioning of the law.
- Review the mechanisms on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) under IPRA and their operationalization to ensure compliance with both the legislative intent of protecting Indigenous Peoples' rights over their ancestral domains, and international law.

WOMEN AND LGBTI COMMUNITIES AGAINST DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

The Philippine National Police recorded a total of 11,585 VAW-related cases in its Crime Information Reporting and Analysis System (CIRAS) for 2023. This has slightly increased to 11,636 cases in 2024. As alarming as these numbers are, they are also underreported.

With shifting technological landscapes, there has also been a rise in online gender-based violence (OGBV). According to the Foundation for Media Alternatives 2023 report, OGBV commonly takes the form of non-consensual production and/or dissemination of intimate images or videos; threats of violence and/or blackmail; and cyber pornography or prostitution among others. The House of Representatives passed House Bill 8009 which expands the scope of the Anti-Violence against Women and Children Act to include technology-based and facilitated abuse and harassment. The bill is still pending senate approval as of March 2025.

LGBTI people continue to face discrimination and live in constant fear of harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, and remain vulnerable to violence and persecution based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. LGBTI people still face disproportionately high levels of inequality when accessing healthcare, education, housing, and employment.

President Marcos created a Special Committee on LGBTQIA+ Affairs in December 2023 to strengthen mechanisms addressing discrimination against the community. However, the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression (SOGIE) Equality Bill, as well as the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Bill, remain excluded from the President's list of priority bills for passage in Congress.

Our recommendations to the legislative include, but are not limited to:

- Pass the Expanded Anti-Violence against Women and their Children Act which seeks to amend the existing Anti-Violence against Women and Children Act to include information, communication, and technology-facilitated violence and abuse.
- Pass the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Bill and the SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression) Equality Bill—legislations that provide LGBTI people and different marginalized and vulnerable groups protection against violence, harassment, discrimination and other forms of attacks.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE FACE OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Climate change threatens the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of present and future generations of Filipinos. The Philippines is already witnessing the devastating impact of

climate change, such as severe heatwaves and typhoons of high intensity. These events, together with the onset of other impacts of climate change such as sea-level rise, severely threaten the enjoyment of human rights, including the rights to life, water, food, housing, health, sanitation, adequate standard of living, and work in the country.

Our recommendations to the legislative include, but are not limited to:

- Adopt and implement human rights-consistent adaptation measures that adequately protect people from the foreseeable and unavoidable impacts of the climate crisis while taking into account the needs and requirements of different groups in the design and implementation of climate change adaptation and disaster-risk reduction strategies
- Adopt the Alternative Minerals Management Bill to establish accountability mechanisms that cover mining companies and other enterprises across the value chain, including mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence regulation.
- Pass the Climate Accountability Bill—a legislation that aims to set up a framework for accountability, support, and reparation for climate change-induced losses, damages, and human rights harms. It will also serve as a rights-based standard for corporations, aligning businesses with the Paris Agreement.

LABOR RIGHTS AND ENSURE EXISTING LEGISLATIONS ARE RESPONSIVE TO NEEDS OF ALL WORKERS

The Philippines was among the ten worst countries for working people according to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in June 2023. This is the Philippines’ eighth consecutive year on the ITUC’s list. The ITUC cited red-tagging, abductions and arbitrary arrests, and labor-related killings as government-fostered hurdles to the formation of trade unions.

Despite President Marcos’s electoral promises to end endo and hence encourage Filipinos to work in the country instead of finding jobs abroad, the Philippines has not yet passed a security of tenure bill to end contractualization; neither have this administration listened to the calls of the labour sector for a nationwide wage increase.

Our recommendations to the legislative include, but are not limited to:

- Strengthen government institutions responsible for enforcing labour standards (including the Department of Labor and Employment, and the National Labor Relations Commission) so they are better resourced and have greater capacity to, among other things, monitor and inspect business activities, ensure the fair and timely resolution of worker disputes with their employers, and more effectively collaborate and coordinate with other parts of government.
- Increase minimum wage, and legislate measures to ensure fair wages for all, which reflect the impact of their work on their health, safety and personal life, as well as the specific hardships related to their work, in line with international human rights law and standards.

JOIN AMNESTY PH’S
POLICY ADVOCACY
TEAM AND HELP US
IN CAMPAIGNING FOR
THESE LEGISLATIVE
PRIORITIES.

APPLICATION OPEN
UNTIL 20 JULY 2025

What do we get in return?... Cont’d from p. 15

The research focused on the coastal region of Santa Cruz in Zambales, where four large-scale companies are currently extracting nickel, and Brooke’s Point, ancestral home to the Pala’wan Indigenous People in the island of Palawan, where one company, Ipilan Nickel Corporation (INC), is active and two others have plans to extract nickel.

Community members said deforestation and environmental damage linked to nickel mining is causing them harm. In Santa Cruz, studies suggest that communities are being exposed to heavy metal contamination linked to nickel mining from the air, water and food chain.

In both regions, interviewees reported an increase in health issues since the mines opened, including asthma, coughs, breathing difficulties and other respiratory issues, in addition to skin diseases and eye, throat and skin irritation. They also reported how declining water quality – with several freshwater sources described as having turned a “reddish-brown” – has impacted the livelihoods of fisher people and reduced crop yields.

The report shows how Indigenous and rural communities were denied adequate explanations about the human rights and environmental risks of nickel mining, and [were denied] proper consultations on the mining projects, despite protections in both domestic and international law.

Such protections require states to ensure that communities are meaningfully consulted on extractive projects, and in the case of projects that impact Indigenous Peoples, obtain FPIC. In both Santa Cruz and Brooke’s Point, people who rely on their natural environment to sustain their livelihoods reported being unable to access information crucial to understanding the impact of nickel mining on their communities. In many cases, project documents, such as environmental impact assessments, were not provided.

Amnesty International was only able to locate online relevant environmental impact studies for three of the seven nickel mining projects featured in the report. The organization requested copies of the environmental impact studies from the other companies and the Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources. However, this information was not provided. In some cases, project documents were denied to community members, even after they had specifically requested them, preventing them from making an informed decision. In Brooke’s Point, members of the Pala’wan Indigenous People said that INC failed to provide copies of the environmental impact statement and a map of the company’s operations and boundary upon request.

In both areas, interviewees said community members known to be opposed to nickel mining were deliberately excluded from consultations. Those who attended consultations said they were either dismissed or ignored when they raised concerns about the potential risks of the mining projects.

Companies have a responsibility to conduct due diligence to identify and prevent human rights abuses linked to their operations or business relationships and address negative impacts when they are found to occur. In situations where FPIC is not possible, companies should responsibly disengage in consultation with affected Indigenous People.

It is time to stop sacrificing the human rights, health and environment of Indigenous Peoples and rural communities for the benefit of extractive companies, multinational car companies and consumers in industrialized countries. There must be greater accountability across the EV and battery supply chain for the potential harms that mining operations cause.

Full report available for download at www.amnesty.org.ph.



10 million
strong

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF MORE THAN 10 MILLION PEOPLE WHO TAKE INJUSTICE PERSONALLY. WE ARE CAMPAIGNING FOR A WORLD WHERE HUMAN RIGHTS ARE ENJOYED BY ALL.

In 1961, British lawyer Peter Benenson was outraged when two Portuguese students were jailed just for raising a toast to freedom. He wrote an article in The Observer newspaper and launched a campaign that provoked an incredible response. Reprinted in newspapers across the world, his call to action sparked the idea that people everywhere can unite in solidarity for justice and freedom.

This inspiring moment didn’t just give birth to an extraordinary movement, it was the start of extraordinary social change.

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ONLY WHEN THE LAST PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE HAS BEEN FREED, WHEN THE LAST TORTURE CHAMBER HAS BEEN CLOSED, WHEN THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IS A REALITY FOR THE WORLD’S PEOPLE, WILL OUR WORK BE DONE.

Peter Benenson, Amnesty International founder



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