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## **One year Rodrigo Duterte: A dark chapter for human rights?**

Manila, June 30, 2017

A year has passed since Rodrigo Duterte was elected as the president of the Philippines and sworn into office. Considering the 12 months following Duterte's election, it has not been a good year for human rights in the Philippines.

What hopes remained that the rhetoric of Duterte's election campaign scorning human rights would be nothing more than idle talk were not fulfilled. His politics resulted in dozens of deaths every day while philippine media eventually stopped counting the victims entirely as their high numbers became a normality in the Philippines.

Duterte promised a bloody "war on drugs" and he held up this promise - with over 6,000 killings by the end of 2016. During the first 168 days of his presidency, an average of 36 people was killed daily including those allegedly involved with drug trafficking as well as innocent bystanders and even children. Only about 1/3 of these were killed during police operations, 2/3 became victims of his politics towards assassinations by unknown perpetrators. In 2017 the numbers continued to rise, lying now between 7.000 and 8.000. These "deaths under investigation" are, in principle, nothing more than plain executions which led to a death rate that is now already higher than in the nine years of "Martial Law" during the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos.

While Human Rights Networks like the "Network Against Killings in the Philippines" strongly criticize these killings and demand their complete investigation, it is President Duterte who promised total impunity to all state servants involved in the killings of suspected drug addicts and traffickers. It is certain that only in a handful of cases investigations were undertaken and up until today there has not been a single conviction of those accused, which can only be described as impunity. Duterte himself shows little interest in further investigations into these extrajudicial killings. Additionally, the implementation of so-called "Barangay-lists" and the public reading of these lists through Duterte increased the number of executions even further. A report by Amnesty International stated that members of the Philippine National Police received financial bonuses for the killings of drug addicts. Even more, the report states that at least some of the "deaths under investigation" have been committed by masked police officers.

IPON observes this general disregard for human rights since the first days of Duterte's presidency. The risk that the killings could be extended on other areas of society troubles us greatly. In correspondence with our work as human rights observers we as IPON are especially concerned with statements made by president Duterte to include human rights defenders (HRD) in the "war on drugs". Fabricated charges against as well as defamation as violent

actors and killings of human rights activists have been recorded throughout all administrations so far. However, Duterte's deeply rooted aversion to human rights as a concept, in particular the right to life and an independent, quick judiciary, is an indication for a new level of threat faced by HRD.

Additionally, Duterte and his administration have undertaken further steps to limit human rights and democratic institutions. Besides a bill to reduce the age of criminal responsibility to nine years, another bill that would reinstate the death penalty is subject of discussion - this step has only been taken by three other states worldwide so far and would violate the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on civil and political rights signed in 2006.

Unfortunately, these are not the only changes that the new Duterte administration seeks to realize. Critics warn against numerous changes to laws that would slowly but steadily undermine democratic standards. Recent statements by president Duterte, showing his will to extend the Martial Law declared in Mindanao after clashes in Marawi with the radical-Islamist Maute-Group to the entire Philippines, give new, disturbing justification for these warnings.

Special attention should be drawn to the planned constitutional change to extend the legislative period of presidents, threats to limit the right to personal freedom and the intention to close government-critical institutions (for example the Commission on Human Rights). All these steps worsen the already precarious situation of human rights activists and criminalize them even further. Finally, announcements by Duterte to leave the International Criminal Court can be seen as indicators for the establishment of an autocratic regime which places no value on the protection of human rights and human dignity.

A rise in the number of human rights violations could be recorded after the failure of peace talks with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP). The suspension of the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) and the issue of warrants against representatives of the NDFP during the peace talks triggered a new "all-out war" against the leftist movement in the Philippines. IPON already registered new cases of "Red Baiting", the defamation and charges against HRDs as violent leftists, that appear to be a direct result of the failed peace talks.

IPON condemns this current culture of vigilante justice and impunity which scorn the value of human lives every day. We call on the universal and inalienable character of human rights as well as their accessibility to every human being regardless of race, language or way of living.

Therefore, we appeal to the Philippine government to investigate the over 7,000 registered killings and to take action to stop them. Additionally, the Philippine government should protect human rights defenders as specified in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

We call on the international community to be firm in its stance against human rights violations and to adamantly promote their demands made during the universal periodic review in 2017. We hereby repeat our call on the German government to vehemently enforce its demands voiced during the periodic review for impartial criminal investigations, the fight

against extrajudicial killings and the prevention of the reduction of the age for criminal responsibility.

**About IPON:**

The International Peace Observers Network (IPON) is an independent, non-intervening and non-profit organization which accompanies human rights defenders (HRD) and monitors and informs about their situation in regards to human rights. The overall objective of IPON is to ensure that HRDs who are subjected to intimidations, threats, violence, and other forms of harassments can undertake their work free from harm and repression.