



26 July 2017

The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
c/o Kimberly Stanton, Staff, Senator McGovern's Office
c/o Jaime Staley, Staff, Senator Randy Hultgren's Office

The Philippine Solidarity Task Force (PSTF) of the California-Nevada Annual Conference United Methodist Church offers its most profound gratitude to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for the recent hearing on "Human Rights Consequence of the War on Drugs". As members of The United Methodist Church, we give thanks whenever our elected officials take note of the abuse of human rights around the world. We are grateful for your addition to the national situation in the Philippines.

The PSTF was founded more than 10 years ago in response to the extra-judicial killings that were being then committed under the regime of President Macapagal-Arroyo. For the past decade, we have continued to work for justice alongside the people of the Philippines. Through conferences and lobbying efforts, we have sought to raise awareness within the United States of the Philippine national situation. We have also sent annual pastoral and solidarity visits to the Philippines, with regular episcopal accompaniment.

We are grieved to find that even as elected leadership has changed, extra-judicial killings have been a mainstay in the Philippines. While President Duterte campaigned with a promise to eradicate the national drug problem, his violent and inhumane policies are simply an amplification of the ongoing political repression of his predecessors. The 'war on drugs' is little more than a front for ongoing fear mongering among community organizers and activists. Indeed, impunity continues to be readily available for those most responsible for the drug networks.

We of the PSTF know that the recent hearing is a first and important step. In order to work for real change, we must first address root causes. Drug dealing and its use is most rampant in communities in which there is little opportunity for economic development. Thus, we condemn the nationwide War on Drugs which has translated to a war on the poor, particularly the urban poor, while allowing for the protection of drug lords and their protectors in the Philippine government to go on without punishment. The drug problem in the Philippines cannot be separated from the greater national situation. It is only when the Filipino people have control over their nation's natural resources, as well as access to

lucrative livelihood, that the work of eradicating drug use and ending corruption can begin. We encourage the US Congress, under the leadership of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, to hold the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) accountable for the monies it receives from the United States and to be more accountable to its citizenry. We urge the GRP to be more diligent in its work to resume formal peace talks with the National Democratic Front, and to be more sincere in its work to address the root causes of the armed conflict in the Philippines, starting with fulfillment of past agreements such as the release of political prisoners, and fulfilling the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms, which includes the agreement for free land distribution.

We at the PSTF are committed to being in partnership in your work. Please feel free to contact us at krabut.az@gmail.com if we be of any assistance.

In solidarity,

Kira Salde-Azzam