



philippinenbüro e.V.
im Asienhaus

Hohenzollernring 52
D-50672 Köln

Tel.: (+49) 0221 71 61 21 21
Fax : (+49) 0221 71 61 21 10

philippinenbuero@asienhaus.de
www.philippinenbuero.de

Press Release

Cologne, 9 December 2020

International Human Rights Day

Protests in Germany against systematic human rights abuses in the Philippines

On the eve of December 10, the International Human Rights Day, about 50 Filipino/a and German civil rights activists and human rights defenders gathered in front of the world-famous gothic cathedral in Cologne, Germany. They strongly denounced the terrifying human rights situation in the Philippines under the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte, pointing to numerous extrajudicial killings of political activists, lawyers, journalists, environmentalists, drug users and those suspected of involvement in the drug trade. They also condemned the campaign against independent and critical media organizations through threats, lawsuits and shutdown and highlighted the dreadful implications of the recently passed *Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020*.

The activity was organized by **philippinenbüro**, a Cologne based German information and documentation center on the Philippines. It was part of a larger coordinated action, with groups in Berlin and Hamburg participating.

Some of the protesters at the said gathering had personally known Zara Alvarez, 39, a health worker and paralegal in Negros who was killed in Bacolod City on August 17, 2020 by still unidentified gunmen. Alvarez had been to Germany in 2019 and had shared her view of the situation in the Philippines, particularly in the island of Negros, during several public events.

“When I learned of Zara’s murder, my first reaction was denial”, said Kathrin, 26, one of the activists who asked not to reveal her full name. “I could not accept the terrible truth that this kind and caring woman who had devoted her whole life to working for poor and oppressed people had been mercilessly ambushed and killed. What a cowardly act!”

Almost all the participants in the Cologne gathering have strong links to the Philippines and have been to the country frequently, either as journalists, volunteers, development workers, expats, and professionals who are involved in research. Some are descendants of mixed marriages.

“We are very much concerned about what is happening over there. Unlike our friends and relatives in the Philippines, we can afford to express ourselves freely, without being afraid of becoming victims of state-incited and state-sponsored repression or worse”, said Bernhard, 64, who has worked in the Philippines as development expert for about ten years.

After more than four years into the Duterte administration, most participants agree that any new appeal to the Philippine government to immediately halt vast human rights abuses will once again prove futile. They would rather pin their hopes on more effective responses, like the one launched by the German government and the EU just a few days ago. On December 07, the EU Council adopted a

mechanism [“that will allow it to target individuals, entities and bodies – including state and non-state actors – responsible for, involved in or associated with serious human rights violations and abuses worldwide, no matter where they occurred”.](#)

Crimes against humanity and other serious human rights violations or abuses (e. g. torture, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests or detentions) are part and parcel of a framework for restrictive measures such as a travel ban applying to individuals, and the freezing of funds applying to both individuals and entities.

The Cologne gathering highly welcomed the news. “It is high time for a strong signal those Philippine government officials who are responsible for waging war on their own people,” said Bernhard, who is also a board member of **philippinenbüro**.

Parallel to the Cologne human rights event, members of the Philippine Diaspora in Berlin organized a vigil at Rizal House. People from the Philippines living in Hamburg will hold an online memorial service on December 10 to remember the human rights victims in their country.

Press contact

Mirjam Overhoff
Executive Director

Phone: (+49) 0221 71 61 21 21
mirjam.overhoff@philippinenbuero.de

The [philippinenbüro e.V.](#) (Philippine Office) is an independent, socio-economic and political information center based in Germany. Our mission is to inform and raise awareness of the German public on current socio-political and development issues concerning the Philippines. In addition to our informational and political educational work, we function as a documentation center and serve as contact point between Civil Society groups in Germany and those in the Philippines. **philippinenbüro** was founded in 1987 and currently has 180 members.