



philippinenbüro e.V.
im Asienhaus

Statement on the 1st Anniversary of the murder of Zara Alvarez

*(Cologne, 16th August 2021) On the first anniversary of the murder of human rights defender Zara Alvarez the **philippinenbüro** remembers her life and expresses its concern about the continuously worsening human rights situation in the Philippines.*

On August 17, 2020 the Philippine human rights defender, activist and single mother, Zara Alvarez, was killed by yet unidentified perpetrators near her apartment in Bacolod City, Negros Island, Philippines. For years Zara had been threatened, harassed, and tagged as terrorist. In 2012 she has been imprisoned on false and fabricated charges for almost two years. She was acquitted for lack of evidence only in March 2020. Government forces continuously attempted to stop her human rights work and to silence her. With a staunch belief in the righteousness and necessity of her work, she continued and did not allow herself to be intimidated.

One year after her brutal death, nobody has been held accountable. Instead, many more human rights defenders and activists were harassed, threatened, and killed.

Under President Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines has become one of the deadliest countries for human rights defenders worldwide. At least 242 killings of human rights defenders and journalists have been documented since Duterte took office in June 2016. The numbers of these killings are rising, and we fear that they will still continue to rise. Each killing is one too many!

Under the guise of counter insurgency and through the omnipresent political vilification of critical voices, the Philippine government and its security forces brutally crack down on human rights defenders, civil society members, lawyers, journalists, environmental advocates, indigenous people, church and social workers.

The Anti-Terrorism Law (ATL), enacted in July 2020 is yet another means of this crackdown. The ATL is based on a far too broad definition of terrorism. As a result, it dismantles legal proceedings for the protection of defendants and serves to legitimize repression, violence, and even extra judicial killings against civil society members and human rights defenders.

The **philippinenbüro** stands with the family, friends, and colleagues of Zara Alvarez, and those of all other victims of political killings. We are alarmed by the worsening human rights situation in the country that has caused so many losses, nurtured impunity and a climate of fear. We express our solidarity with those who continue working for human rights and join in the demand for justice!

The **philippinenbüro** strongly condemns the murder of Zara Alvarez and calls upon the **Government of the Philippines** to:

- Step up and intensify thorough investigation into the murder of Zara Alvarez and other extrajudicial killings,
- Hold the perpetrators and all parties involved in the crimes accountable without delay and favour,
- Publicly condemn and end intimidation, criminalization, threats, and violence against human rights defenders and civil society by state security forces, civil servants, and government officials in the Philippines,
- Withdraw the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2020.

We call upon the German Government and the European Union to

- Publicly condemn human rights violations in the Philippines, especially those connected to the government's counterinsurgency campaign along with the application of the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2020 against human rights defenders and civil society members,
- Demand the end of impunity for severe human rights violations in the Philippines within the framework of diplomatic relations,
- Call for the establishment of an independent international investigation into human rights violations in the Philippines within the framework of the UN Human Rights Council,
- Immediately commence the withdrawal procedure of the trade preferences granted to the Philippines under the GSP+ mechanism and set clear human rights-based criteria the Philippines has to fulfil to avoid the withdrawal,
- Support Philippine civil society organizations and their advocacies on EU and UN level for respect and protection of human rights in the Philippines.