

Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen

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## Arbitrary arrest of Aldeem Yañez

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP, German Action Network Human Rights) is deeply concerned about the arrest of Aldeem Yañez, a dedicated volunteer at the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI).

On April 10, 2022, Yañez was arrested at his house in Barangay Iponan, Cagayan de Oro. According to the Philippine police and military, a gun, grenades, and subversive documents were allegedly seized from Yañez during the raid. The arrest was based on an April 6 warrant for violation of the Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act. Since the start of President Rodrigo Duterte’s war on drugs in 2016, planting weapons and explosives as evidence on a suspect during a search operation has been a common practice by the Philippine police and military to fabricate charges for an arrest against human rights defenders (HRDs).

Yañez has served as a volunteer at the IFI’s Visayas-Mindanao Regional Office for Development (VIMROD), and the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform, a network that has been advocating the resumption of the peace talks between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front (NDF). IFI members reported that Yañez has been part of a continuing red-tagging of government critics and church workers who were volunteering for community services. “Red-tagging” has long been a method by the Philippine Government to discredit HRDs by accusing them of being supporters of the communist insurgency of the New People’s Army (NPA). In 2018 and 2020, Yañez and other human rights activists already became victims of arbitrary detention and were falsely accused by the Philippine military to be members of the NPA. The courts have quashed the cases twice.

The deteriorating human rights situation in the Philippines is highly concerning. The AMP has repeatedly highlighted the Philippine government’s crackdown on HRDs, civilians, journalists, and church workers under the guise of fighting terrorist groups. By doing so, the government hampers and delegitimizes the commitment of HRDs to call on the Philippine Government to carry out its duty to protect, fulfil and realize human rights.

The AMP has documented 279 cases of extrajudicial killings of HRDs and journalists since Duterte took office in June 2016. The widely criticized 2020 Anti-Terrorism Act as well as the 2018 Memorandum Order No. 32 and Executive Order No. 70 - both aiming to increase and mobilize national forces and authorities to combat the communist insurgency - have been systematically abused by the government to harass, intimidate, and legitimize repression against HRDs, journalists, and church workers, leading to vilification, death threats, immense psycho-social stress and substantial legal uncertainty for individuals and institutions.



The AMP strongly condemns the arrest of Aldeem Yañez and calls upon the Government of the Philippines to:

- Immediately release Aldeem Yañez and to drop all unfounded charges against him,
- Impartially investigate the circumstances that led to his arrest and prosecute the perpetrators and all parties involved in the false accusation and arbitrary arrest of Aldeem Yañez,
- Immediately stop all intimidation, threats, and violence against HRDs by state security forces, civil servants, and government officials in the Philippines,
- Amend the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 to bring Philippine counter-terrorism legislation in compliance with international human rights standards,
- Order the Philippines National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines to cease filing trumped-up charges against HRDs and to restrain from making statements that stigmatize HRDs, especially those suggesting that defenders are members of the NPA,
- Ensure that prosecutors and judges do not open trial proceedings in cases of manifestly fabricated charges against human rights defenders,

We call upon the European Union and its member states to:

- Immediately and publicly condemn the arbitrary arrest of Aldeem Yañez and request an immediate investigation into the circumstances leading to it,
- Support the creation of an international investigation mechanism into human rights violations in the Philippines by the UN Human Rights Council.

*The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP – Action Network Human Rights - Philippines) is an initiative of seven major German church-based agencies and human rights organizations to promote advocacy and information work in Germany and the EU regarding the human rights situation in the Philippines. Member Organizations of the AMP are Amnesty International Germany, Bread for the World, International Peace Observers Network (IPON), MISEREOR, Missio Munich, philippinenbüro e.V., and the United Evangelical Mission (UEM). The main focus of the network lies on the core human rights issues of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and fabricated charges against political activists.*

