



Human Rights in the Philippines: What is going on?

The Philippines is one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a trade union activist. There have been over 1,000 politically motivated killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, detentions and other human rights violations in the last eight years. Labour organizers, human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, church workers, and peasant leaders are the targets. Over 100 of these victims are trade unionists.

The human rights situation in the Philippines has deteriorated since the current president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, came to power in 2001. Labour activists who face the most danger are those who publicly oppose the neo-liberal policies of the government, the privatization of public services, the mining practices of foreign owned mining companies, and the substandard working conditions in foreign owned multinational corporations.

There are on-going opposition campaigns against government plans to privatize the National Power Corporation, the National Food Authority, the National Housing Authority, water districts, university campuses and other public offices. Workers and trade union activists who engage in the fight to defend their jobs against the privatization of vital services are systematically and violently targeted by the government of the Philippines, through the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

In 2006, at the peak of political repression in the Philippines, Filipino activists, progressive parliamentarians and victims' family members began to appeal to the international community for support and solidarity in an effort to stop the killings and expose the human and labour rights violations. Amnesty International and the UN special rapporteur on extra-judicial, arbitrary and summary killings, Philip Alson, conducted independent investigations in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Both concluded that the AFP is linked to, and in many cases directly responsible for, the escalation of political killings and other human rights violations. In light of the urgency of the situation, in March 2007 the Philippines became one of the only countries in the world to have a Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT) convened for a second session in The Hague, Netherlands.

Despite international pressure, labour repression and killings with impunity in the Philippines continue. To date, not a single perpetrator has been charged with a crime. On April 1, 2009, thirty-three trade unionists in the province of Cavite were ordered arrested on trumped up charges stemming from their involvement in strike actions in Export Processing Zones in 2006. The Philippine government continues to deny workers their freedom of association and the right to collectively bargain.

Why should Canada respond?

Under the current political and economic circumstances, more than 3,000 Filipinos are forced to leave the Philippines every day in search of work abroad. Filipinos have now become the largest source of migrants to Canada of whom 45% are temporary workers. There are roughly 400,000 Filipinos living in Canada.

The Canadian government has a great deal of influence on the Government of the Philippines.

- Bilateral trade between Canada and the Philippines is worth approximately C\$1.5 billion.
- CIDA provides approximately \$25 million in aid and development funding.
- Canadian mining companies are very active in the mining industry in the Philippines.
- The Canadian army and the RCMP provide training to Filipino military and police personnel through the Canadian Military Training and Assistance Program (MTAP) and the Police Training and Assistance Program (PTAP).
- Economic Development Canada (EDC) has loaned approximately C\$120 million to Canadian companies for their activities in the Philippines.
- Canada is involved in the counter terrorism capacity building (CBRN) of the government of the Philippines.

What CUPE can do?

Join growing international pressure on the Philippine government to end extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances and political persecution of human rights and trade union activists in the Philippines.

Pressure the Philippine Government to support the request of the International Labour Organization Committee on Applications of Standards for a high level mission investigating the human rights violations.

Call on the Canadian Government to investigate how their relations with the Philippines contribute to the repression of workers.