

Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen

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Cologne, 27.09.2023 | AMP – Statement

On the Subpoena of CERNET Staff and Board Members

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte Philippinen (AMP) strongly condemns the baseless accusations lodged against members of CERNET's staff, board, and council. These accusations, initiated by Col. Joey Escanillas of the Philippine Army, have resulted in the subpoena of 28 individuals from CERNET, alleging breaches of the "Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act" (R.A. No. 1016) from 2012. We find these charges to be unsubstantiated, seemingly designed to tarnish CERNET's reputation and to hinder its operations.

Founded in 2001, CERNET has consistently worked alongside grassroots organizations to improve poverty conditions in their communities with provable impact on the lives' served. While receiving recognition for its work, CERNET for years has been the target of unfounded accusations of supporting the communist insurgency in the Philippines. This practice, referred to as "red-tagging," is a common strategy employed by Philippine security forces to threaten progressive organisations and their staff. The repercussions of this tactic are severe, ranging from arbitrary arrests to public defamation and surveillance. In graver instances, this strategy has culminated in extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. Earlier this year, Dyan Gumanao, a CERNET staff member, was abducted by alleged Philippine security forces and interrogated at an undisclosed location for several days.

AMP records indicate a significant increase in the number of human rights defenders who have been killed in recent years under the guise of so-called counter-insurgency measures. International bodies, such as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, have criticized the recurrent practice of "red-tagging." Such actions erode the bedrock of community-led development and poverty reduction.

Given this deteriorating human rights landscape, AMP is also deeply troubled by the potential weaponization of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism laws against NGOs and activists. After being repeatedly grey-listed by the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), the Philippine government is apparently under pressure to show there has been an increase in the prosecution of money laundering and terrorism financing cases. In a recent study, the UN Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism has highlighted the global trend of governments abusing international counter-terrorism financing standards against civil society, citing the Philippines as an example.

We therefore urgently call on the Philippine government to retract all unfounded accusations against CERNET. Furthermore, we urge the Philippine government to conduct thorough investigations and hold those responsible for "red-tagging" accountable.

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, Brot für die Welt, 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.

