

The Business Committee of the Thirty-Fifth General Synod recommends this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

A DECLARATION OF SUPPORT FOR PHILIPPINE HUMAN RIGHTS

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the Central Pacific Conference

SUMMARY

This resolution calls upon the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ to declare our support of the United States House of Representatives bill, HR1433, The Philippines Human Rights Act, PHRA introduced to the 118th Congress and referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs of March 7, 2023. This bill states that no federal funds may be used to assist the police or the military of the Philippines until the Philippines government has taken certain actions insuring standards of human rights are upheld. We must stand in solidarity with our siblings in Christ in the Philippines moved by their faithfulness and in our responsibility as citizens of The United States of America.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

With this resolution we, in the United Church of Christ, are called to stand in the prophetic heritage of our faith for justice and reaffirm our historic relationships and support for the people of the Philippines, especially the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, Rural Missionaries of the Philippines and the Philippine Independent Church.

We lift a voice that was raised by the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as voices in the Christian Scriptures. It was a repeated voice against the unjust system of governments and the powerful amassing huge land ownership stolen from the common people. This process, known as latifundialization, or the practice of accumulating land as a statement of power, has a long history including the peoples of the Hebrew scriptures who lost their sustainable lands to the production of wine and other profitable crops in the times of the Kings. It continued with the common people in times of the Roman Empire, throughout history in every colonized country and still, today, in the Philippines. The people lose their lands through forced expulsions, unjust arrests and extrajudicial murders and thus, fall into poverty.

The Human Rights situation in the Philippines is deeply rooted in the Filipino people's long history of colonial and elitist rule. This has resulted in the Philippine state's systematic repression of the Filipino people's collective struggles for their legitimate economic, social and civil-political rights, and rampant gross violations of their human rights.¹

From the US initial colonization in 1902 to the current form of neo-colonization today, the United States has a decades-long history of dominating and exploiting the Philippines. While oppression and exploitation in the Philippines remain severe today, the United States maintains economic and political domination of Philippine military, economy, politics and culture, and

39 foreign powers continue to plunder the country for labor and natural resources, including
40 agricultural, maritime and mineral wealth.²

41
42 In the context of widespread poverty, inflation, lack of jobs, uneven distribution of farmland,
43 destructive foreign mining practices, and countless other injustices, the people of the Philippines
44 have participated for decades in various forms of political struggle against the ruling elites and
45 foreign control. The struggle against this system has taken many forms, including a popular legal
46 democratic movement demanding basic rights for various sectors, participation in national and
47 local elections by progressive parties, and an underground communist-led revolutionary
48 movement which engages in armed struggle against the existing state.³

49
50 The current government of the Philippines has responded with a process of ‘red tagging’. Red-
51 tagging means that legal democratic activists who have no connection to the communist
52 movement are publicly accused of being armed fighters, terrorists, and a threat to the safety of
53 others. Various individuals of faith organizations and their denominations have been red-tagged,
54 including the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, the National Council of Churches in the
55 Philippines, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, and the Philippine Independent
56 Church. Activists and faith leaders who have been red-tagged are often the victims of subsequent
57 crimes against humanity, such as arbitrary arrest and detention, forced surrender, forced
58 disappearance, and killings.⁴

59
60 For the faith sector, red tagging violates the very foundations of freedom of religion. It attacks
61 the mission of the church and its core work of standing in solidarity with the oppressed. In
62 labeling activists in the context of the civil war, the counter insurgency strategy violates the rules
63 of armed conflict as stipulated in International Humanitarian Law by treating civilians and non-
64 combatants as combatants.⁵

65
66 As people of faith in the US, we see our interest and solidarity is with those poor and oppressed
67 sectors of Philippine society who are confronting oppression and exploitation and assuring their
68 safety and wellbeing.

69
70 We have common goals with the Filipino people for a peaceful and just society, and will not
71 loiter along while lives are at stake in the Philippines. We recognize the complicity of our
72 country in upholding oppression and exploitation in the Philippines and we have a responsibility
73 to hold the U.S. accountable. We are hopeful that the proposed HR 1433 is a stated attempt to do
74 so and to set the correctives.

75
76 We join the voices of old saying “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the
77 rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and
78 needy.” (Proverbs 31:8-9) Let us join our voices in solidarity with the Filipino people.

79
80 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

81
82 **WHEREAS** On July 3, 2020 the Anti-Terrorism Act of the Philippines was passed into law by
83 then President Rodrigo Duterte.⁶ While purporting to counter terrorism, the bill rolls back civil
84 liberties by lessening requirements for judicial warrants, allows for extended pre-trial detention,

85 and allows for the prosecution of conduct that is considered protected political speech. The
86 Anti-Terrorism Act is viewed by many as a threat to Freedom of Speech in the Philippines and
87 yet another tool the administration will use to silence critics and political rivals.⁷ Representative
88 Jan Schakowsky, along with 49 other members of the U.S. Congress urged the government of
89 the Philippines to repeal “this repressive legislation.”⁸ Rep. Susan Wild authored the bill
90 HR1433, known as the Philippines Human Rights Act PHRA as our responsibility to hold the
91 Philippine Government to accountability for upholding human rights.⁹

92
93 **WHEREAS** In a 2007 Preliminary note on the visit to the Philippines, the UN Special
94 Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Philip Alston defined red-
95 tagging as “labeling’, or guilt by association [involving] the characteristics of most groups on
96 the left of the political spectrum as ‘front organizations’ for armed groups whose aim is to
97 destroy democracy.” This practice of red tagging, wherein the government labels critics as
98 terrorists to isolate individuals and organizations and mark them for harassment or
99 assassination by state security forces, the development of the Anti-Terror Act (ATA) and the
100 work of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) are
101 the results of the Philippine government’s counter-insurgency programs that broadly become
102 attacks against civilians and human rights defenders.¹⁰

103
104 **WHEREAS** The United States continues to arm state security forces of the Philippines.
105 Despite clear documentation of abuses and international condemnation, in April 2020, the
106 United States announced a pair of arms sales to the Philippines government totaling
107 \$2,000,000,000 for items including hellfire missiles and attack helicopters. In July 2020, the
108 United States announced an additional sale of \$126,000,000 worth of assault boats and
109 armaments. In 2021 money given for arms sales was \$348,000,000 and in 2022 it was
110 \$338,000,000.¹¹

111
112 **WHEREAS** The National Council of Churches and the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform
113 renewed its call for the resumption of the peace talks between the Government of the
114 Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NCCP). According to the
115 National of Council of Churches in the Philippines, counter-insurgency programs of the
116 Philippine government (designed after US counterinsurgency tactics) to the rebellion in the
117 Philippines has only created further human rights violations and displacement of peoples.
118 Thus, the NCCP insists, “Calling for the ways of peace through principled negotiations is to
119 reject a militarist solution.”¹²

120
121 **WHEREAS** The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-
122 ELCAC) maintains a campaign against the ongoing communist rebellion in the Philippines, as
123 well as against groups that it claims to be front organizations of the communist group. It
124 maintains that it has the duty to warn the public against “dubious groups with links to
125 communist terrorist organizations” They regularly charge any humanitarian group as being a
126 front organization and have brought about stepped-up political repression against the political
127 opposition, trade unionists, community organizers, journalists, artists and writers, peace and
128 human rights advocates and ordinary people. This includes red-tagging of social activists
129 including church people and churches; attacks on indigenous communities and their schools;
130 and harassment of humanitarian aid groups and their workers.¹³

131
132 **WHEREAS** Per the US State Department’s 2023 country report on human rights practices for
133 the Philippines, “There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in the
134 Philippines during the year (2023), although the number of incidents of arbitrary and
135 extrajudicial killings and of some other abuses by government agents decreased. Significant
136 human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including
137 extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearance; torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment
138 or punishment by and on behalf of the government, and other physical abuses by nonstate
139 actors.”¹⁴

140
141 **WHEREAS** It is against the Leahy Law of the United States to arm a country that turns lethal
142 force on its own citizens.¹⁵

143
144 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United
145 Church of Christ declares its support of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines
146 (NCCP) and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) in their advocacy for the
147 peace process between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the
148 National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

149
150 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of
151 Christ condemns the violent acts and unjust actions against all people who are standing with
152 and caring for all the people in the Philippines who are experiencing social or political
153 injustices and violations of their basic human rights.¹⁶

154
155 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of
156 Christ calls on all settings of the Church to advocate for legislation supporting Philippine
157 human rights.¹⁷

158
159 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church
160 of Christ calls upon local churches and conferences to host educational gatherings to learn
161 about the situation in the Philippines and how we can stand in solidarity with our siblings in
162 Christ there.

163
164 **FUNDING:** The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in
165 accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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167 **IMPLEMENTATION:** The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries
168 or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

¹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/philippines/>

² <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-us-philippines-alliance-and-the-2024-us-elections/>

³ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/338-calming-long-war-philippine-countryside>

⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/26/philippines-officials-red-tagging-indigenous-leaders-activists>

⁵ https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/en_-_handbook_humanitarian_law_-_web.pdf, page 24

⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/philippines-dangerous-antiterror-law-yet-another-setback-for-human-rights/>

⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/05/philippines-new-anti-terrorism-act-endangers-rights>

⁸ <https://humanrightsp.org/statements/us-congresswoman-jan-schakowsky-and-49-other-us-legislators-call-on->

[philippine-government-to-rescind-anti-terror-law](#)

⁹ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/1433/text>

¹⁰ <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/publications/red-tagging-in-the-philippines-the-modern-mccarthyism-threatening-freedom-of-expression/>

¹¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/810259/philippines-arms-imports/>

¹² <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/ecumenical-backing-for-philippines-peace-talks>

¹³ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/26/philippines-officials-red-tagging-indigenous-leaders-activists>

¹⁴ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/philippines/>

¹⁵ <https://www.state.gov/key-topics-bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/human-rights/leahy-law-fact-sheet/>

¹⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/philippines>

¹⁷ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/1433>