

30 States call on the Philippines to end extrajudicial killings

(Bangkok/Geneva, 9 May 2017) – Out of the 95 States that reviewed the Philippines' human rights record at the UN yesterday, a large majority drew attention to recent deaths resulting from the country's 'war on drugs' and called on the Philippines to respect international human rights law. The third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Philippines that took place at the UN Human Rights Council, saw calls for investigations on and accountability for extrajudicial killings as part of the Government's so-called 'war on drugs'. Recommendations were also made to end government efforts to reintroduce the death penalty and reduce the minimum age of criminal responsibility. Other concerns raised included: enforced disappearances; torture; threats to human rights defenders; shrinking space for freedom of expression; reproductive health; and economic, social, and cultural rights.

Half of the States that spoke expressed concerns about the 'war on drugs', particularly condemning extrajudicial killings.ⁱ Calls were also made to grant unhindered access for UN experts, such as the UN Special Rapporteurs on extrajudicial executions and on health. At least 20 States called on the Philippines to halt efforts to reintroduce the death penalty and cited the country's commitments under the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.ⁱⁱ Nine States recommended that the Philippines should not lower its minimum age of criminal responsibility, and nine other recommendations were made on providing a safe and enabling environment for the work of human rights defenders.^{iii and iv}

During the review, the Philippines continued to defend its 'war on drugs' and denied the prevalence of extrajudicial killings, based on a narrow definition found in national legislation. It claimed that a large number of deaths was due to people violently resisting arrest during legitimate police operations. The Philippines questioned the fairness and impartiality of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions. However, no commitments were made to stop the killings, nor to conduct independent investigations to hold perpetrators to account. The country remained hesitant to ratify the Convention on Enforced Disappearances citing that domestic mechanisms were sufficient.

In accordance with the procedures of the review, the Philippines is expected to announce whether or not it accepts recommendations made before the 36th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council in September this year.

'While the Government's responses during the review have been discouraging, we call on the Philippines to accept the large number of UPR recommendations it received, among others, on extrajudicial killings, the death penalty and human rights defenders', says John Samuel, Executive Director of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), 'If the Government does not take immediate steps to address these concerns, the UN Human Rights Council should reinforce these calls from the UPR by proposing an international investigation into the killings in Philippines during its 35th session in June. The Philippines is an elected member of the Council and is expected to uphold its highest standards. Any

failure to do so should be a matter of grave concern for the Council as it puts the credibility of the body at stake’.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

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ⁱ Australia, Austria, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Estonia, France, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Timor-Leste, UK, Uruguay, U.S., Zambia.

ⁱⁱ Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Haiti, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mozambique, Norway, Portugal, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, Switzerland, Ukraine, Uruguay.

ⁱⁱⁱ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Kenya, Sweden

^{iv} Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, UK