



**45th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 2: General Debate on the oral update by the High Commissioner**

**Oral Statement Delivered by Dhwani Nagpal
On behalf of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**

Monday, 14 September 2020

Madam President, FORUM-ASIA welcomes the High Commissioner's update and echoes her concerns about the human rights situation in the Philippines including the ongoing killings in the government's 'war on drugs' and lack of accountability. The Philippine Government has shown no genuine commitment towards addressing the systematic violations and persistent impunity identified in her report.

The President has continued to instigate violence, recently instructing a government agency to kill drug smugglers, and promising them protection from jail. The Anti-Terrorism Law signed in July 2020 contains provisions that could criminalise legitimate human rights advocacy under a vague notion of terrorism. It adds to a range of laws and policies weaponised to perpetuate crackdowns on civic space, and further reinforce the culture of impunity.

The Congress's denial of ABS-CBN's franchise, and the subsequent closure of 53 regional TV and radio stations, after consistent attacks by the President, demonstrates the continued erosion of fundamental freedoms and democratic institutions.

Human rights defenders and activists face an ever-heightened risk. Recent killings of Zara Alvarez and Randall Echanis are stark reminders of risks human rights defenders (HRDs) and activists face in the Philippines. Instead of condemning such attacks, State officials have openly defended the culture of vilification, terrorist-tagging and violence.

In this context, the Philippine Government's inter-agency panel appears to be nothing more than another effort to evade international accountability. We urge your office to continue to monitor and report on the situation in the Philippines and ensure that any technical assistance to the government is based on international human rights standards. We call on the Council to mandate an independent international investigative mechanism on the Philippines.

Thank you.