

Amnesty International Philippines

PRESS RELEASE

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Amnesty to Aquino: commit to a clear roadmap towards human rights protection for SONA

Amnesty International Philippines appeals to President Benigno 'Noynoy' Aquino to announce an action plan for human rights protection for his State of the Nation address on 25 July. The organization reiterates that torture, political killings and enforced disappearances continue even under his watch one year after his inauguration.

"Respect and protection of human rights is at the very foundation of Aquino's promise of 'transformational change'. This change will not happen unless he repairs expanding cracks in his administration. Again, Amnesty International calls on President Aquino to establish a Presidential Accountability Commission to ensure justice for political killings, enforced disappearances and torture," said Aurora Parong, Director of Amnesty International Philippines.

Amnesty International Philippines maintains that Aquino needs to upgrade the Justice Department's Special Task Force on Extrajudicial Killings by bolstering its ability to file criminal charges against suspected perpetrators.

"While we welcome the creation of a DOJ special task force to address the prosecution for cases of political killings, resolution to these human rights violations, including enforced disappearances and torture, needs impartial and effective forensic investigations by the police. Breaking the chains of impunity for these violations cannot be accomplished by the DOJ alone. It is imperative for the President to devote more resources and ensure concerted effort from government agencies under the auspices Presidential Accountability Commission," said Dr. Parong.

Amnesty International Philippines highlights enforced disappearances as on-going crimes and that there are no statute of limitations for crimes such as torture. The organization recommends for the Presidential Accountability Commission to investigate recent and unresolved cases even from martial law era.

"If Aquino is serious about combating abuse of power, he needs to make sure that the perpetrators of atrocious human rights violations are made accountable. Moreover, impunity for human rights abuses compromises the integrity of the military and the police and ultimately, his government," added Parong.

Amnesty International also appealed to Aquino to empower the Commission on Human Rights' (CHR) protection program for witnesses and families of victims.

"In cases where the perpetrator is a government official or a member of the state security forces, a neutral and safe sanctuary is essential as witness testimony is crucial in moving cases forward. The victims of human rights violations and their families have gone through trauma at the hands of people who were sworn to serve and protect them. It is the duty of the government to provide them with a refuge while their case is being investigated and prosecuted," Parong added.

Currently, the protection program under CHR exists but had not been allocated resources in the 2011 budget.

Amnesty International also endorsed the enactment of a Reproductive Health (RH) law.

"Aquino's strong support for the RH Bill would help protect the right to life by stopping preventable maternal deaths which claim the lives of thousands of mothers every year. Ensuring the right to

reproductive health would help Filipinos to realize other basic human rights, including rights to work and education,” explained Parong, who is also a medical doctor.

In June, one year after Aquino’s inauguration, Amnesty International published a briefing on his administration’s human rights record. The organization reported that the Aquino administration has made little progress on the human rights front.

“If you buy a house with a leaking roof, and it’s still leaking a year later, you can’t keep blaming the previous owner. President Aquino needs to start taking responsibility in tackling serious human abuses instead of constantly blaming the Arroyo administration,” concluded Parong.