

COUNCIL OF GLOBAL UNIONS STATEMENT

November 30, 2020

Red-tagging, unsolved killings in PH's trade unions need national and global action

The intensifying red-tagging activities by security forces against activist organizations, including trade union and labor organizations, is not helping the Duterte administration repudiate the country's shameful designation as one the most dangerous places for workers. For the nth year now, the Philippines has been consistently on the list of ITUC's Top Ten countries that are dangerous for workers. As a matter of fact, the unsolved killings of some 50 trade union organizers, the none to very slow progress in the conduct of their investigations, and the government's obstinate denial of entry to ILO's High Level Mission to inquire into this matter, further bolster the presumption that all of the above fall under a state-sanctioned policy of repression and executions.

For what makes official government action truthful and sincere against trade union repression is to see tangible resolution of those cases rather than a mounting body count of victims and the intensifying vilification of human rights which include among others, the freedom to organize, express dissent and even conduct legitimate concerted actions. Hence, we, the Philippine affiliates of the Council of Global Unions, find it as utterly abhorrent seeing the country's policy environment getting harsher rather than improving.

It is for this reason why trade unions and labor organizations, together with many other civil society and human rights organizations, are fighting tooth and nail for the scrapping of the anti-terrorism law (ATL) and its IRR as it endangers civil liberties. While many sectors say the ATL as a misplaced priority amid the pandemic, we in trade unions see it less as a distraction but more as a systematic way of installing authoritarianism at a time democracy is weak and economic crisis is deepening. We further believe that the unabated killings, the establishments of JIPCOs in ecozones, and the enactment of the ATL as interlocking instruments of repression.

Furthermore, this depressing policy environment also occurs along with the growing influence of new powers like China over the country's economic affairs. National sovereignty is now a challenged territory, while workers in contending countries are made to suffer under the same repressive and unprotected environment. New trade agreements skewed in favor of TNCs and new regional powers are being rolled out, thus, attempts at overhauling the Philippine constitution and relaxing domestic rules on labor and the economy never stop.

The pandemic has only worsened old problems while creating new mountain of crisis. But these are challenges that we insist must be addressed in a manner that is humane and democratic, not in the obtrusive way it is being handled today. We are facing the worst unemployment and underemployment problem in recent history; thus, it is jobs, guaranteed income, universal healthcare, and trade union and human rights that should occupy policy spaces and crises responses of the government. Killings, red-tagging, and enlarging repressive powers will never be the antidote to these crises. As draconian policies, they will rather divide, destroy, and prevent the healing of this nation.

On November 30, under the theme “Trabaho, Karapatan, Kaligtasan, Pananagutan” (Jobs, Rights, Safety, Accountability), the global unions will be coming together for a Global Day of Action in solidarity with Filipino workers who face intensifying attacks against their rights to freely associate, collectively bargain, express themselves and seek redress to their grievances, and, most importantly, to their right to life.

In particular, the global unions demand the Philippine government to carry out the following actions:

1. Stop the red-tagging activities against trade unions and other legitimate organizations and to hold accountable those responsible for it, especially those involved in extrajudicial killings.
2. Scrap the Anti-terrorism Act and its IRR.
3. Ensure the health security and safety at work of all workers.
4. Protect the jobs and income of the Filipino workers and embark on massive public employment programs.

Likewise, the CGU is demanding attention from international bodies like the UN/ILO to come to the defence of the Filipino workers and all the suppressed workers of the world. The ILO Convention 190 which seeks to eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work is an important instrument that should be adopted and put into practice by the Philippine government. The ILO’s High Level Missions must be pressed to proceed alongside investigations into the country’s compliance to the GSP Plus trade arrangements, among others. ###