

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
Second Regular Session)



SENATE

P.S. Res. No. 548

Introduced by **SENATOR LEILA M. DE LIMA**

RESOLUTION
DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT
AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE INCREASING
NUMBER OF KILLINGS OF FARMER-LEADERS AND POLITICAL
ACTIVISTS IN RELATION TO THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT’S ANTI-
INSURGENCY CAMPAIGN WHICH HAVE INTENSIFIED IN THE WAKE
OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1 WHEREAS, Article II, Section 4 of the Constitution states in part that “[t]he
2 prime duty of the Government is to serve and protect the people”;

3 WHEREAS, Article II, Section 11 of the same declares that “[t]he State values
4 the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights”;

5 WHEREAS, Article III, Section 1 of the same states that “[n]o person shall be
6 deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor shall any person
7 be denied the equal protection of the laws”;

8 WHEREAS, the human rights situation of the country has been the subject of
9 much debate and investigation from human rights defenders here and abroad as
10 allegations of rampant human rights abuses and violations have surrounded the
11 Duterte administration since assuming power in 2016;

12 WHEREAS, one of the Duterte administration’s most pronounced campaigns
13 is the fight to end the communist insurgency in the Philippines. In December 2018,
14 President Duterte created the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed
15 Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) by way of Executive Order (E.O.) 70, which essentially
16 mobilized the entire bureaucracy against the decades-old communist rebellion. The
17 strategy comprises of multiple approaches, such as: unrelenting battlefield

1 operations, red-tagging of perceived and known communist supporters and
2 sympathizers, massive propaganda war, legal offensives here and abroad, localized
3 peace talks, development and livelihood projects, and money for rebel returnees;¹

4 WHEREAS, Philippine jurisprudence defines ‘red-tagging’ or ‘red-baiting’ as
5 “the act of labelling, branding, naming and accusing individuals and/or organizations
6 of being left-leaning, subversives, communists or terrorists” and “is a strategy used
7 by State agents, particularly law enforcement agencies and the military, against those
8 perceived to be ‘threats’ or ‘enemies of the State’”;²

9 WHEREAS, while the rest of the country is dealing with the debilitating effects
10 of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdowns, the government’s anti-
11 insurgency campaign has not only persisted, but rather escalated;

12 WHEREAS, a July report by farmers’ groups Kilusang Magbubukid ng
13 Pilipinas (KMP) and Tanggol Magsasaka noted that 190 farmers and peasant leaders
14 had been killed since March when the first lockdowns were imposed. This figure
15 represented over two-thirds of the total farmers and peasant leaders killed since
16 President Duterte assumed power in 2016;³

17 WHEREAS, the most recent publicized killings occurred in the span of a week
18 in mid-August when unidentified assailants killed peasant leader Randall Echanis,
19 inside his home in Quezon City. A week later in the central Philippine island of
20 Negros, unidentified gunmen fatally shot Zara Alvarez, a legal worker for the human
21 rights group Karapatan. Both had worked in leftist, grassroots organizations that
22 authorities allege are linked to the communist insurgency and had also been
23 subjected to ‘red-tagging’ by the government;⁴

24 WHEREAS, the escalation in killings and other human rights violations
25 coincides with a “toxic lockdown culture”⁵ characterized by a “heavy-handed” or

¹ Gotinga, J. (14 May 2020). *Duterte's final gambit to end insurgency: task force vs communists*. Retrieved October 12, 2020, from <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/duterte-final-gambit-task-force-against-communists>

² VERA Files. *VERA FILES FACT SHEET: Why ‘red-tagging’ is dangerous*. (11 October 2018). Retrieved October 12, 2020, from <https://verafiles.org/articles/vera-files-fact-sheet-why-red-tagging-dangerous>.

³ Ocampo, K. R. (01 July 2020). *190 farmer-leaders killed in last 5 months*. Retrieved October 12, 2020, from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1299885/190-farmer-leaders-killed-in-last-5-months>

⁴ Robertson, P. (18 August 2020). *Two More Philippine Activists Murdered*. Retrieved October 12, 2020, from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/18/two-more-philippine-activists-murdered>

⁵ UN News. (27 April 2020). *‘Toxic lockdown culture’ of repressive coronavirus measures hits most vulnerable*. Retrieved October 12, 2020, from

1 “highly-militarized” security response to the COVID-19 virus which the Duterte
2 administration has enforced since the very beginning of its pandemic response;

3 WHEREAS, an increased focus in the government’s now-institutionalized
4 propaganda and red-tagging campaign to address the communist insurgency has also
5 exacerbated the situation. For instance, in a recently held budget hearing at the
6 House of Representatives, National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) chief
7 Alex Monteagudo was grilled over alleged posts that he made on his Facebook
8 account which tagged lawmakers of the Makabayan bloc as “communist terrorists”
9 among other false, fabricated, and baseless claims;⁶

10 WHEREAS, the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) has repeatedly
11 cautioned the government on the dangers of carelessly ‘red-tagging’ persons and
12 groups as these may “trigger a number of human rights violations, including
13 harassment, unlawful arrests, torture, and threats to life”;⁷

14 WHEREAS, the State should not condone the illegal activities of the NPA and
15 should exert all efforts to neutralize any threats to destabilize government in order to
16 maintain peace and order within the country’s borders. However, the State should
17 also condemn red-tagging campaigns, especially from within the government, as
18 these can have a legitimizing effect on these unverified claims and pose immediate
19 dangers and consequences for the individuals and groups who become targets of
20 such labels;

21 WHEREAS, State agents’ blatant red-tagging of its perceived enemies is an
22 attack on the very foundations of our democracy and constitutes a grave abuse of
23 authority and a gross misappropriation of public funds which can be utilized for
24 more constructive purposes, such as augmenting the government’s pandemic
25 response;

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1062632?fbclid=IwAR3XIWVpwLY9c5ZWZRjSuo5s6IHKiHpG32W-brlSScOrXdKvowRFu0K1YZ0>

⁶ Talabong, R. (30 September 2020). *PH intel chief shares fake information on Facebook*. Retrieved October 12, 2020, from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/philippines-intelligence-chief-monteagudo-regular-sharer-fake-information-facebook>

⁷ Lalu, G. P. *CHR reminds gov’t: Dissent protected by law, stop red-tagging activists, jourmos*. (22 May 2020). Retrieved October 12, 2020, from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1279480/chr-reminds-govt-dissent-protected-by-law-stop-red-tagging-activists-jourmos>

1 WHEREAS, there can be no shortcuts taken in the government’s anti-
2 insurgency campaign as these can lead to the unnecessary targeting of progressive
3 groups and organizations and the unjust killing of innocent individuals;

4 WHEREAS, a thorough investigation into these reported killings and other
5 human rights violations against farmer-leaders and political activists is warranted in
6 order to ensure transparency in the government’s anti-insurgency operations by
7 determining the veracity of these accounts and exacting accountability from the
8 parties involved;

9 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE, to direct the
10 appropriate Senate Committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the
11 increasing number of killings of farmer-leaders and political activists in relation to
12 the national government’s anti-insurgency campaign which have intensified in the
13 wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Adopted,


LEILA M. DE LIMA