

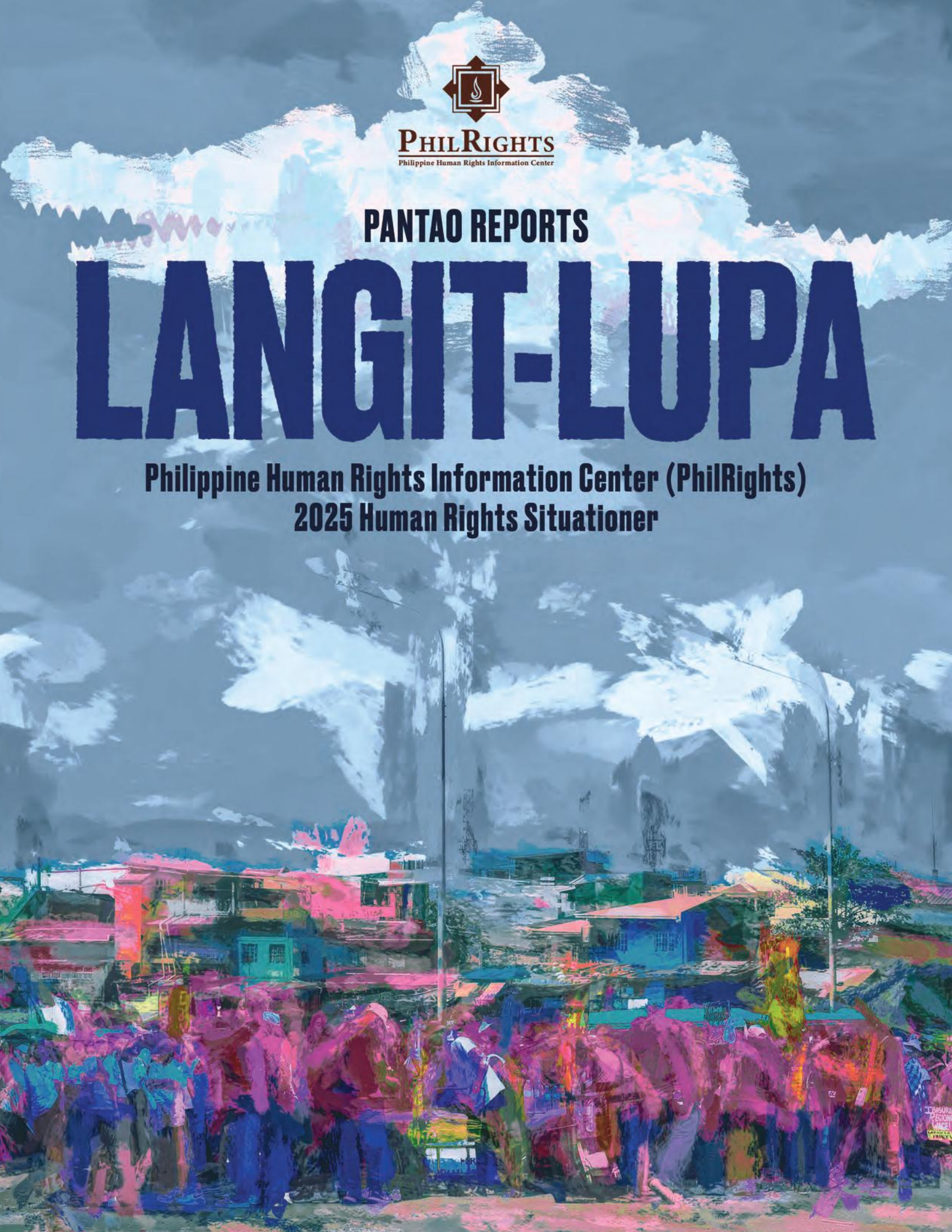


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Philippine Human Rights Information Center

PANTAO REPORTS

LANGIT-LUPA

**Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights)
2025 Human Rights Situationer**



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We thank our partner communities in Antipolo (Rizal), Bagong Silang (Caloocan), Navotas, and Bocaue and San Jose del Monte (Bulacan) for their invaluable insights during our focus group discussions. We also extend our thanks to the partner organizations of the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates for their participation in key-informant interviews. All of these contributions have been central to the production of this report, which aims to bring the genuine conditions of the marginalized to the forefront of national discourse.

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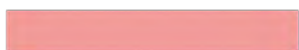
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KUNG
WALANG
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FOREWORD

Prof. Nymia Pimentel-Simbulan, DrPH (ret.)
Executive Director

The year 2025 has been marked by tribulations that have tested not only the resilience of Filipinos in the face of disasters but also their tolerance for an inept and corrupt government. Despite the hardships brought by these crises, the people continue to endure, organize, and demand accountability from those responsible for the worsening conditions that shape their daily lives.

Filipinos are steadily rising to confront corruption and abuses of power both within and beyond government institutions. Public vigilance has sharpened, extending to the broader patterns of government inaction, misuse of public funds, and the entrenchment of privilege. Since the eruption of impeachment proceedings against Vice President Sara Duterte—grounded on allegations of betrayal of public trust and misappropriation of funds—until the present revelations by former Congressman Zaldy Co alleging President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. as the primary beneficiary of corruption in the government, Filipinos have sustained political actions, campaigns, and mass mobilizations, embodying a collective insistence on truth, accountability, and good governance.

In this context, the role of the human rights movement becomes even more urgent: to remain vigilant in exposing corruption, amplifying the voices of affected communities, and standing with the people in advancing meaningful reforms in governance. It is long overdue that public officials be held to their duties, and that economic decline, social injustices, and human rights violations be confronted with principled, people-centered leadership. Strengthening a culture of human

rights and enabling citizens to fully exercise their democratic freedoms, far beyond the confines of election season, is essential to this collective task.

This 2025 Human Rights Situation Report lays bare the realities that Filipinos continue to endure, framed through the theme *langit-lupa* (heaven-earth)—a street game where the taya (it) can only tag those standing on the ground, while anyone on a higher surface is safe. In much the same way, many communities caught “on the ground,” are dragged deeper into hardship with every recurring failure of governance. Meanwhile, corrupt officials and powerful elites—shielded by privilege, wealth, and impunity—occupy a “heaven-like” space, untouched by the crises that plague ordinary people and even flaunting lifestyles built on public coffers. This stark divide between those who suffer and those who insulate themselves from accountability only strengthens the people’s demand to confront corruption and hold abusive officials to account. The stories in this report reveal the people’s determination to forge, through collective action, a more just and humane society; gawing langit ang lupa. It is in the people’s solidarity, courage, and resistance that the foundations of a better future are being built.

***“Lahat ng mga
kurakot at sangkot,
dapat managot!”***



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This 2025 human rights situationer gives a thorough assessment on key human rights issues in the third year of the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Despite the pronouncements of Marcos Jr. that his administration would be different from his predecessor's, the data and insights gathered reveal that the deterioration of the people's economic, social, and cultural rights and attacks on their civil and political rights have continued well into his government and have worsened in many cases.

This situationer focuses on the lives of marginalized groups of women, LGBTQI+, children, and urban poor at the crossroads of State abuse and neglect. Women and LGBTQI+ continue to suffer from gendered violence through abuse and discrimination. Children are increasingly criminalized while being left at the perils of sexual abuse and exploitation. Urban poor communities reel from development aggressions and lack of access to government services. As one of our informants said, the people should not be left to beg for government services, for they deserve the access to these services as mandated by the law.

The year-long neglect of human rights culminated in corruption exposés involving infrastructure projects and government services. The massive revelations in the hearings on corruption have shown the weakness of the State from multiple fronts. First, the administration of Marcos Jr. has yet to hold any implicated government official accountable. Second, there seems to be politicking during the hearings as different camps accuse each other of engaging in graft and corruption. Third, there is lack of transparency and willingness to engage the people as the executive department's commission on infrastructure does not publish any result of its investigations and its law enforcers arrest dissenters.

To enrich the data and analyses in this situationer, PhilRights sought inputs from civil society organizations and grassroots communities. PhilRights conducted key informant interviews with members of the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) and other partner organizations from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, recognizing the expertise and diligent work of these organizations in their respective geographies and sectors. PhilRights also conducted focus group discussion with its partner communities in Rizal, Bulacan, and Metro Manila.

This situationer is structured into four parts that aim to help readers understand the breadth of our human rights situation in various aspects:

- **Part 1 highlights the neglect of the people's economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR).** This is further subdivided into sections on the right to livelihood, work, and trade unions, right to food, housing rights, right to health, right to social protection, right to education, and environmental and Indigenous People's rights. In a nutshell, the people continue to live in poor living conditions as a result of the State's incapacity and unwillingness to address the issues surrounding people's socioeconomic needs.

- **Part 2 features the acts of omission and attacks of the State against the civil and political rights (CPR) of the people and human rights defenders.** The first section talks about the government's deliberate neglect and attacks against the people's rights as evidenced by the continuing perpetuation of impunity, persistent efforts to revise historical records, attempts to prioritize punitive policies, degrading democratic participation, brazen corruption, and partiality in regional conflicts. The second section mainly outlines the attacks against human rights defenders through red-tagging, unlawful arrests and detention, enforced disappearances, intimidations, threats, and

worse, killings. In the global scale, human rights defenders face constrictions in funding and freedoms, largely contributing to the shrinking of civic space here and around the globe.

- **Part 3 tells the lived experiences of the children, women, LGBTQI+, and urban poor communities in facing risks and sexual exploitation to discrimination and abuses,** in deliberate deprivation of their right to livelihood to inadequate provision of government services. This part highlights the marginalization of groups as a culmination of interrelated ESCR and CPR violations, intersected by their identity markers of age, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and social classes that are often used by the State for othering and alienation.

- **Part 4 presents the collective demands and response of the people to fight the worsening human rights situation in the country.** This part is a stark reminder that the persistent human rights violations of the State should not be left unaddressed; that people must work together to hold the State actors accountable to their obligations to the people and to instigate systemic changes in the society against efforts to undermine the people's initiative to build a human rights culture founded on democratic and rule-based principles and people's participation.

The general assessment of the human rights situation in the country this year is crystal clear: Marcos Jr. has failed in his promises to uplift the lives of the people from poverty and to promote people's participation in his government. Our call to the people:

"Ang karapatang pantao ay para sa lahat ng tao at ang bawat hakbang pasulong ay hakbang patungo sa isang mas makatao at mas makatarungang kinabukasan.

The background of the entire page is a photograph of dark, murky water heavily littered with various pieces of trash. Visible items include plastic bottles, food wrappers, small pieces of wood, and other debris. The water's surface is dark and reflective, with the trash scattered across it. A solid yellow vertical bar is positioned to the left of the text.

Part 1

Bulaga, Taya!

Caught in the Undertow of Declining Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

Living a life of dignity requires access to the benefits of economic prosperity and social development.

A high-angle photograph of a green boat on dark, rippling water. The boat has a white outboard motor at the stern and a yellow license plate with the number '0600'. A metal pole is mounted inside the boat. To the left of the boat, a red and black buoy floats in the water. The background shows more water and some distant land.

The entitlement to economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) is enshrined in international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which guarantee rights to livelihood and work, food, education, health, social protection, a healthy environment, and self-determination. The Philippines, as a party to these instruments, reflects these commitments in its Constitution and domestic laws. Despite these obligations, the Marcos Jr. administration has failed to uphold and protect ESCR, as evidenced by stagnant rights-based development, widespread corruption, and persistent inequality, leaving many Filipinos trapped in poor living conditions. This chapter highlights the ongoing deterioration of ESCR enjoyment, which compels the population to focus on mere survival despite the State's duty to ensure their well-being and socio-economic rights.

A person wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt is shown from the chest down, focused on mending a fishing net. The net is made of fine white mesh and is strung with numerous orange and green floats. The person's hands are visible, with one hand holding a section of the net and the other using a small tool to work on it. The background is slightly blurred, showing a wooden structure and some equipment, suggesting a workshop or a boat deck. The overall lighting is natural, highlighting the textures of the net and the person's clothing.

Labor Rights and Right to Livelihood

At a Glance: Walang pinag-iba!

The country's labor and livelihood prospects remain bleak well into Marcos Jr.'s midterm as the hallmark of Marcosian neoliberal development continues to plague the Filipino people.

The perpetuation of this age-old problem from Marcos Sr. to Marcos Jr.¹ has now culminated in inhumane labor conditions which render the common Filipino worker disposable and undeserving of the basic necessities to sustain life. As such, in 2025, jobs in the Philippines are hard to come by, temporary, and pay inhumanely low.



The Workers for People's Liberation (WPL), the trade union center of the Kilusan Para sa Pambansang Demokrasya (KPD) sums up the state of workers' rights in the country as a set of mere formalities from which workers are effectively disenfranchised.² The WPL attributes the dire labor situation to the state's perpetuation of neoliberal economic policies,³ citing the free movement of capital as a key issue. Compounded with the lack of strong local industries to absorb workers, the nature of the country's economy remains that of peddling the Filipino people's labor internationally in exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) centers.

This is especially highlighted in the growing outsourcing industry which makes up about 8% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and employs approximately 2 million people.⁴ The WPL notes that the outsourcing industry thrives in the country due to its untetheredness to the local economy. That is, the industry is primarily built up by what the WPL calls 'trading companies,' or companies which have their base industries abroad—practically having no stakes in the Philippines and merely providing capital to back-end operations in countries where labor is cheap. Due to the free movement of capital, the

economy is dictated by these companies' need to maximize profit, freely relocating to other parts of the country where labor is cheaper, and fully taking advantage of unjust regional wage boards.

This untetheredness, enabled by the free movement of capital and the resulting displacement of workers, underscores the economy's import-dependent and export-oriented nature.⁵ In the absence of strong local industries from which stable employment can take root, existing opportunities benefit not the Filipino people, but those who leech off our labor and extract our resources. The Workers for People's Liberation laments this reality, asserting that our country serves not the needs of its citizens, but the interests of foreign companies that exploit cheap labor, and large traders who profit from importing even our most basic necessities.

An overview of the Philippine labor and livelihood situation in 2025 tells of an economy overburdened by foreign dependency. Lived in the life of the common Filipino worker, however, this foreign dependency translates to depressed wages, informality, and the perpetuation of the sinister practice of ENDO.⁶

¹IBON Foundation, "Marcos Jr Carries on Neoliberal Arc Started by His Dictator Father," IBON Foundation, September 20, 2023, <https://www.ibon.org/marcos-sr-jr-neoliberalism/>.

²Interview with Workers for People's Liberation. Partner organizations of the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) cited in this report participated in key informant interviews throughout the year to inform the findings of the 2025 iteration of PhilRights' Human Rights Situation Report.

³ Neoliberal economic policies are defined by market-oriented reforms in the economy which shifts economic control from the government to the private sector. From the 1970s, it set the Philippine economy on the path of trade liberalization, privatization, and deregulation (IBON 2021).

⁴ Business Mirror, "IBPAP: Revenue from GCCs May Grow by 10% This Year," Business Mirror, September 24, 2025, <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/09/24/ibpap-revenue-from-gccs-may-grow-by-10-this-year/?utm>.

⁵IBON Foundation, "PH Economy Deteriorating," IBON Foundation, August 29, 2018, <https://www.ibon.org/ph-economy-deteriorating/>.

⁶ "ENDO," the colloquial term for end-of-contract, is a practice where employers use short-term contracts, usually under six months, to avoid providing permanent status and benefits to workers.



Lived in the life of the common Filipino worker, however, this foreign dependency translates to depressed wages, informality, and the perpetuation of the sinister practice of ENDO.

Markers of Job (In)equality - Depressed Wages, Informality, Contractualization

In 2025, the average minimum wage earner takes home about Php 481 for 8 hours of work—Php 737 short of the Php 1,218 family living wage needed to support a family of five.⁷ As such, the average Filipino is burdened with taking on additional jobs—odd, informal, and seasonal—just to bridge this gap. The Labor Force Survey (2025) affirms this bleak outlook, revealing that 5.38 million⁸ workers are underemployed⁹ and wish to remedy their falling income by taking on additional jobs. This translates to part-time work increasing by 787,000 over the past year, affecting about 15.8 million Filipinos who hold more than one job.¹⁰

This increase in part-time work reflects how job security, decent wages and benefits, and labor

rights remain out of reach for the common Filipino worker.¹¹ Ultimately, this signals the continuous deterioration of job quality in the country, as other key markers confirm—openly informal workers rose by 748,000 and full-time workers declined by 637,000.¹² As workers are pushed into part-time work, even more are pushed outside the formal economy altogether.¹³ Informality, primarily through platform work, is fueled by the continuous deterioration of job quality, and therefore continues to balloon. This undermines workers' stability and well-being, as many are left without consistent income, social protections, and representation in trade unions. The latest figures reveal that 9.9 million Filipino workers, or 22% of the total employed population, engage

⁷ IBON Foundation, "Minimum Wage and Family Living Wage per Region, as of July 2025," IBON Foundation, August 9, 2025, <https://www.ibon.org/flw-regl-2507>.

⁸ Philippine Statistics Authority, "Participation in the Labor Force in August 2025 Increase to 52.13 Million Filipinos Aged 15 Years and Over," Labor Force Survey, October 8, 2025, <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/labor-force-survey>.

⁹ Underemployment refers to a condition in which workers possess higher qualifications, skills, or education than those required by the jobs they hold. It may also describe situations where individuals are engaged in part-time or insecure employment despite their capacity and willingness to work full-time. From a policy perspective, underemployment signals inefficiencies in the labor market—reflecting a mismatch between human capital and available job opportunities—and underscores the need for strategies that promote quality, secure, and productive employment aligned with workers' skills and aspirations.

¹⁰ IBON Foundation. "Gov't Claims of Quality Job Expansion Misleading amid Worsening Informality and Rise in Part-Timers - Ibon." IBON Foundation, August 14, 2025. <https://www.ibon.org/govt-claims-of-quality-job-expansion-misleading/>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The formal economy encompasses activities regulated by the government and conducted within a country's legal framework. Workers in this sector typically enjoy job security, fixed wages, and access to social protections. In contrast, the informal economy operates outside government regulation, leaving workers without legal protections or employment benefits.

in platform work,¹⁴ or the provision of services on demand through digital applications or websites. From this number, an estimated 856,500 engage in ride-hailing and delivery platforms.¹⁵

The Kapatiran sa Dalawang Gulong (Kagulong) contextualizes this increase as a result of workers' displacement from their jobs during the COVID-19 Pandemic and estimates that about 90% of riders in the ride-hailing and delivery platforms are former workers in the formal economy. The attractiveness of flexible working hours and self-employment has caught on. However, it has failed to deliver real and palpable relief in the lives of platform workers, particularly for riders. For 10 to 12 hours of continuous work, Kagulong estimates that riders earn an average of ₱1,500. This may seem decent, but once expenses such as fuel, vehicle maintenance, and platform fees are deducted, their take-home pay falls to only around ₱400.

In effect, riders earn less than the average minimum wage earner, highlighting how rising costs and platform deductions have eroded their real income.

Apart from dismal income, Kagulong is also dismayed by the inequities faced by riders as workers in the platform economy. First, the 20% across-the-board commission to platforms is excessive and predatory. Kagulong claims that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has no knowledge of this practice and provides no guidelines for the commission companies take from riders' earnings, which have been arbitrarily set at 20% of the fare per ride. Second, fares are unjustly adjusted. Kagulong claims that the absence of a fare matrix makes it common

practice for companies to arbitrarily lower fares to keep up with competition, disproportionately affecting the already unstable income of riders. Third, riders have no social protection. Basic entitlements like social security, health benefits, and insurance are not afforded to riders and are commonly awarded by companies in piecemeal fashion through incentives—where coverage is given or expanded by reaching certain milestones through mileage.

Highlighted by the case of riders, it is clear that contractualization has merely been given a platform under the premise of work flexibility and the freedom of self-employment. In reality, platform work is an extension of contractual work relations in the formal economy where job security is nil, incomes are unstable and barely livable, and social protection is treated as a privilege. The Partido Manggagawa (PM) sees contractualization as an affront to workers' rights, affecting 290,006 Contract of Service workers and 629,862 Job Order workers in the government¹⁶ and upwards of 30% of workers in the private sector.¹⁷

The University of the Philippines Law Center Workers and Employees Program (WEP) calls for an end to contractualization, arguing that profit maximization lies at the heart of the practice and only reinforces the inequality between workers and corporations.¹⁸ Through this system, workers are stripped of their fundamental labor rights—including security of tenure, a living wage, humane working conditions, self-organization, and collective bargaining—by such means as providing five-month contracts and designating even non-agricultural work as “seasonal” to avoid regularization.¹⁹ This practice has been legitimized and is primarily reinforced through manpower agencies—intermediaries

¹⁴ Tabile, Justine Irish, “More Filipinos Engage in Gig Work for Additional Revenue,” BusinessWorld Online, September 15 2025, <https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/09/12/698107/more-filipinos-engage-in-gig-work-for-additional-revenue/>.

¹⁵ Fairwork, “Labour on The Edge: Riding Through Extreme Weather and Precarious Labour,” Fairwork Philippines Ratings 2025, September 9, 2025, <https://fair.work/wp-content/uploads/sites/17/2025/09/Fairwork-Philippines-Report-2025-V4.pdf>.

¹⁶ Civil Service Commission, “Inventory of Government Human Resource as of June 30, 2025,” <https://csc.gov.ph/phocadownload/userupload/irmo/ighr/2025/IGHR%20REPORT%20AS%20OF%20JUNE%2030%202025.pdf>.

¹⁷ Mayen Jaymalin, “Pass Anti-Contractualization Bill, 20th Congress Urged,” Philippine Star, June 29, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/06/30/2454293/pass-anti-contractualization-bill-20th-congress-urged>.

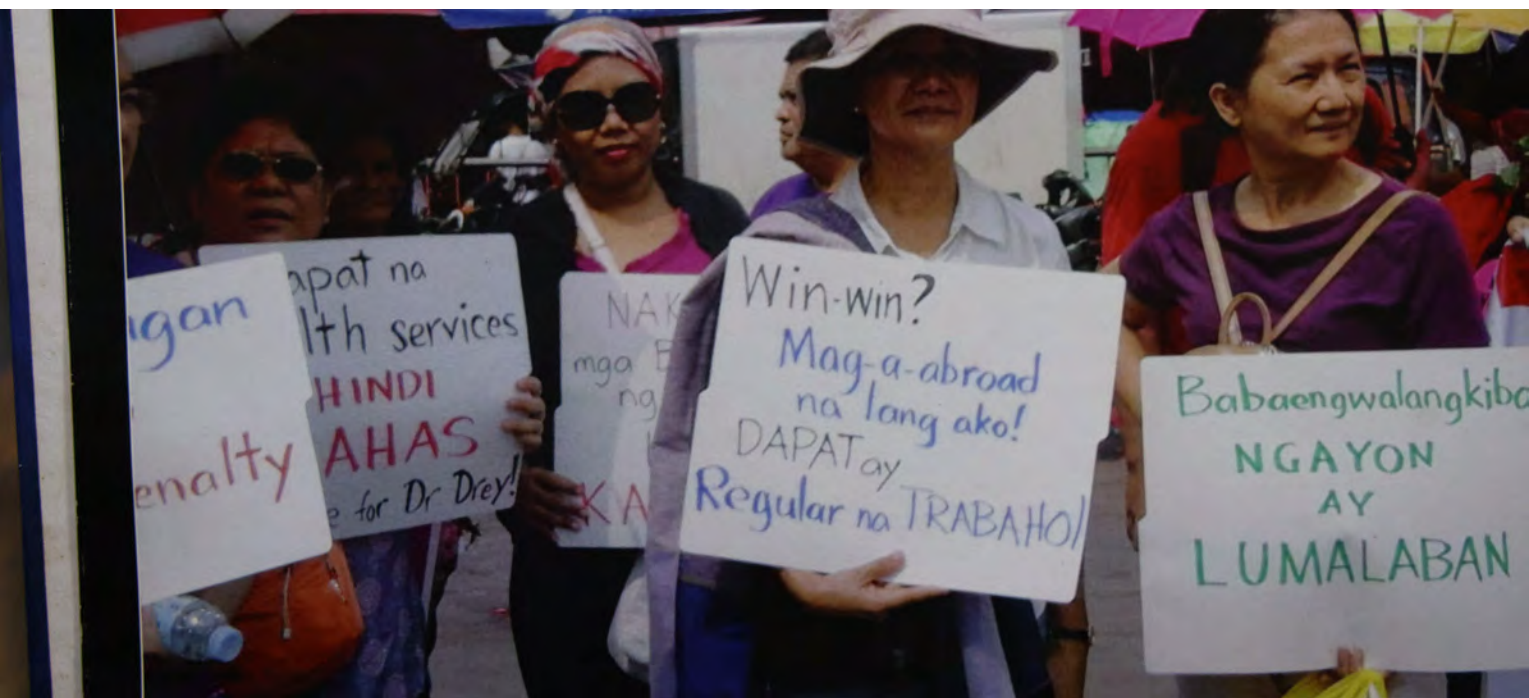
¹⁸ Raffy Ayeng, “Contractualization Still Hounds Workforce,” Daily Tribune, May 1, 2025, <https://tribune.net.ph/2025/04/30/contractualization-still-hounds-workforce>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

which deploy workers to companies under an outsourcing agreement to weaken or avoid the direct employee-employer relationship that would otherwise exist for directly-hired workers.²⁰

Regularization under this direct employee-employer relationship is vital for workers to be entitled to statutory protections such as overtime pay, social security, and government mandated contributions.²¹ Furthermore, the non-passage of the 200-peso wage hike bill this year²² adds salt to injury as workers are denied even the most basic relief given their contractual status. Instead, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), through a wage order, increased the minimum wage in Metro Manila by Php 50.²³ The Partido Manggagawa (PM) rejects this and calls for an across-the-board legislated wage increase not lower than Php 175, recognizing that even this increase would merely amount to a wage recovery given that the real value of worker's wages has effectively shrunk by Php 100 due to inflation.

Beyond depressed wages and non-existent benefits, contractualization also disproportionately disadvantages women in the workplace. PM laments this harsh reality for the vast majority of contractual women workers whose working conditions are worsened by contractualization. PM reports cases of women who face sexual harassment at work and who are unwilling to lodge complaints, fearing reprisal and discrimination. These fears are compounded by the fact that they, as contractuales, lack unions to represent them. Their status as contractual employees also makes it difficult to access and enforce other rights—flexible work hours and breastfeeding stations in the workplace being prime examples. Ultimately, contractualization reinforces the cycle of violence against women in the workplace, as they are in no position to assert what is rightfully theirs, lest they do and be punished by termination. This burden is far too great to bear for women whose families depend on them as breadwinners.



²⁰ Labor Law PH, "Job Contracting and Subcontracting," Labor Law PH, May 29, 2022, <https://laborlaw.ph/job-contracting-and-subcontracting/>.

²¹ Respicio & Co, "Agency versus Direct Employment Rights Philippines," Respicio & Co, April 23, 2025, <https://www.lawyer-philippines.com/articles/agency-versus-direct-employment-rights-philippines>.

²² Krixia Subingsubing, "House: Senate Killed P200 Wage Hike Bill," Philippine Daily Inquirer, June 13, 2025. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2070293/house-senate-killed-p200-wage-hike-bill>.

²³ Cabalza, Dexter, and Dianne Sampang, "Dole: Wage Board Approves P50 Pay Hike in NCR," Inquirer.net, 30AD. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2076662/dole-wage-board-approves-p50-pay-hike-in-ncr>.



Union Rights in Chains

The Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP) affirms this difficulty in forming unions, especially in recent years, due to contractualization. In Pasig, where BMP once had over 40 active unions, organizing has become increasingly difficult due to repressive management practices. Contractual workers who attempt to join or form unions are often threatened with termination. The BMP continues to see a steady decline in union membership and participation. As of 2025, the BMP's presence has been reduced to five active unions in the Pasig area.

The Partido Manggagawa (PM) also notes this difficulty in forming unions, especially in Export Processing Zones (EPZs). Dominated by foreign companies, workers are denied their constitutional right to form unions and to have collective bargaining agreements. Workers who form unions are terminated and blacklisted by these foreign companies, all under the purview of the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) and the DOLE, who sit idly amidst these violations. As such, EPZs continue to be a safe haven for foreign companies to have free rein on labor violations, leaving workers in dire disenfranchisement. PM reports that workers

who have been contractual employees for decades not only have difficulty asserting regularization and higher wages but are also unable to hold accountable erring employers who refuse to give government-mandated benefits, such as those under the Social Security System (SSS), Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), Pag-IBIG Fund, and the expanded maternity leave for women.

In cases where unions are formed, issues on legitimization and enforcement of rights still abound. The WPL reports a case of a newly-formed union in an industrial park where the management participated in the collective bargaining agreement process only to deny workers the agreed-upon terms in the CBA, citing the company's non-profitability as a reason. Union members who continued to assert their rights were put on forced leave for months, effectively terminating them. This parallels WPL's analysis above, where the untetheredness of foreign companies in the Philippine economy emboldens them to maximize profit at the expense of the workers' welfare and cunningly uses their position as a capital provider as an excuse to evade accountability.

The WPL also notes the increasing surveillance against union organizers and the suppression of union formation, especially in industrial parks or EPZs. The WPL cites the involvement of the Joint Industrial Peace and Concern Office (JIPCO) as a critical development in union suppression. What is supposedly a government-private sector mechanism for promoting industrial peace²⁴ is but a part of the government's anti-insurgency machinery, being a PNP-led watchdog. The WPL reports cases where two separate unions were prevented from organizing due to JIPCO's involvement—tagging those involved as radical infiltrators and discouraging them from continuing with the formation of the union.

These incidents highlight the need to enforce the International Labor Organization high-level mission's recommendations for stronger safeguards, faster investigation of attacks against labor activists and the creation of systematic monitoring mechanisms given the continuous red-tagging and violence against union leaders in the country.²⁵ As a response,

Marcos Jr. promulgated Executive Order (E.O.) 97, “strengthening protections for workers’ rights to unionize and assemble.”²⁶ Strengthening protection for workers’ rights, however, demands the accountability of perpetrators of state-sanctioned violence against workers. As such, it is counterintuitive that the implementing agencies of the executive order include agencies at the forefront of these violations—the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police (PNP), and the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC).

It is in this context that the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) still designates the Philippines as one of the ten worst countries for working people in its 2025 Global Rights Index.²⁷ With a rating of “5”, indicating that workers in the Philippines have “no guarantee of rights,” the ITUC has correctly determined that Filipino workers “exist in a daily struggle to exercise even the most basic rights in a venomous environment of endemic harassment, violence, and death.”



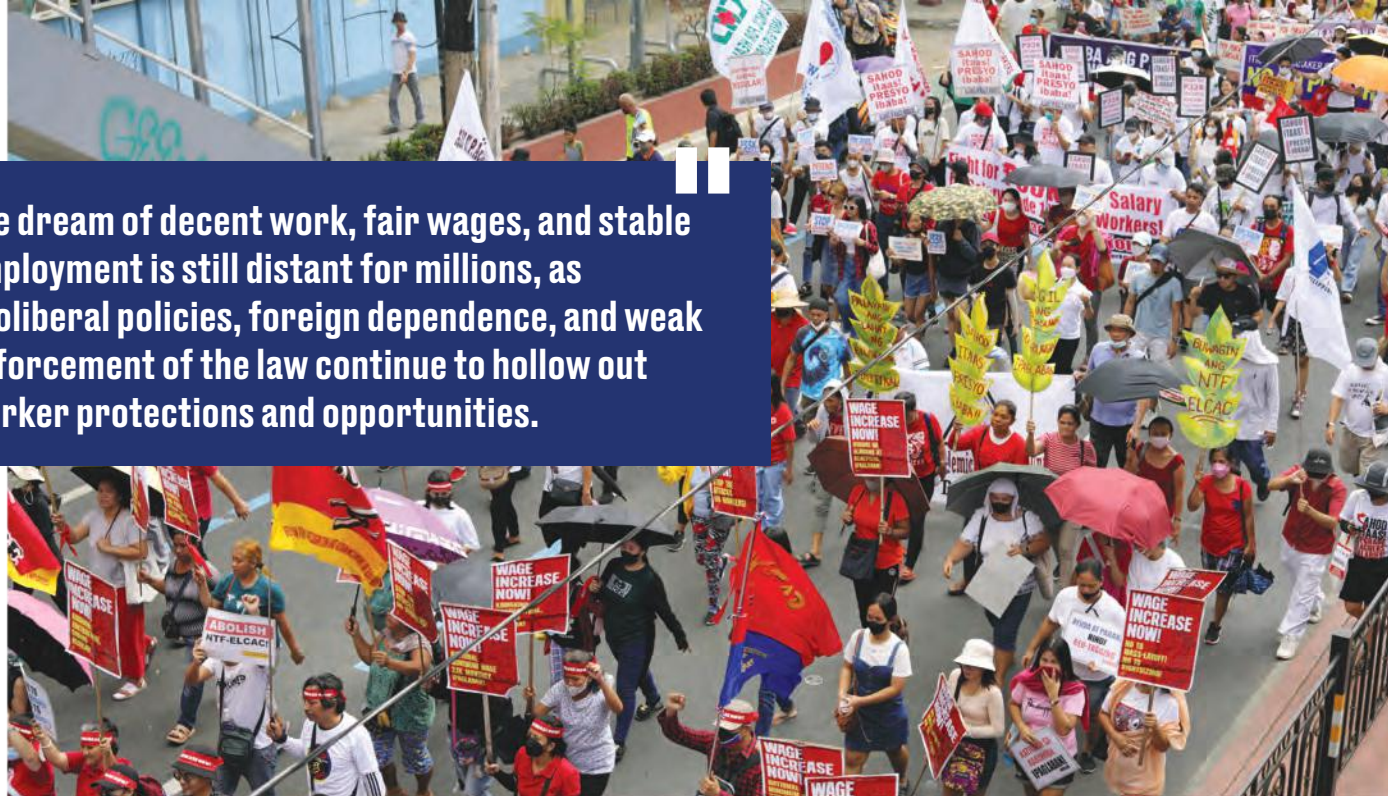
²⁴ Commission on Human Rights, “Statement of CHR Spokesperson, Atty. Jacqueline Ann De Guia, on the Creation of the Joint Industrial Peace and Concern Office in Central Luzon Industrial Zones,” Commission on Human Rights, January 27, 2020. <https://chr.gov.ph/2020/statements/statement-of-chr-spokesperson-atty-jacqueline-ann-de-guia-on-the-creation-of-the-joint-industrial-peace-and-concern-office-in-central-luzon-industrial-zones/>.

²⁵ Chloe Mari Hufana, “Marcos Signs Eo Boosting Union Rights as Ilo Warns of Surge in Informal Jobs,” BusinessWorld Online, September 23, 2025. <https://www.bworldonline.com/the-nation/2025/09/23/700436/marcos-signs-eo-boosting-union-rights-as-ilo-warns-of-surge-in-informal-jobs/>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ International Trade Union Confederation, “2025 ITUC Global Rights Index | The World’s Worst Countries for Workers,” International Trade Union Confederation, May 27, 2025. https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/en_global_right_index_2025_final_web.pdf?42561%2F2dad6a0c1eacc71d32d3f2f6ef8702cb163d152bd2dc8e5cc9ae3e96e031476=.

The dream of decent work, fair wages, and stable employment is still distant for millions, as neoliberal policies, foreign dependence, and weak enforcement of the law continue to hollow out worker protections and opportunities.



Entrenchment of Labor Exportation

The situation of Filipino workers in 2025 is a harrowing reminder of the domestic conditions from which mass migration abroad arose and continues to thrive. The Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA) notes that administrations past and present have generally been “friendly” to Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs),²⁸ especially at the present, where OFW welfare is placed high on Marcos Jr.’s policy agenda. However, this still does not translate to better conditions for OFWs as the root of labor migration from Marcos Sr. to Marcos Jr. still persists. According to the CMA, Marcos Jr. himself acknowledges that Filipinos migrate out of necessity,²⁹ a telling sign of the unchanging face of labor migration in the country—one that fills the gap created by the shortage of domestic jobs, the country’s export-oriented economy, and the subservience of the country’s economy to the dictates of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

As such, Filipino expatriates are growing desperate for relief—willing to face precarity abroad so long as they are not taken home in a casket. The CMA laments OFWs’s growing devaluation of their own rights, citing how hopeless domestic conditions fuel desperation. Even when job offers seem too good to be true, many OFWs still pursue them, driven by limited domestic employment opportunities and the persistent hope of improving their families’ livelihoods abroad. Instead, they fall victim to human trafficking and face even more dreadful conditions abroad. This is clearly contrary to the Department of Migrant Workers’ claim that OFWs have become “willing victims” of human trafficking.³⁰

According to the CMA, human trafficking, through the rampant growth of cyberscams, exploits a growing number of OFWs, victimizing 1,434 Filipinos in Southeast Asia alone in 2025.³¹

²⁸ Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are Filipino citizens employed abroad under a state-managed labor export policy introduced during the regime of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. in the 1970s. This policy sought to alleviate domestic unemployment and boost foreign exchange earnings through remittances, thereby institutionalizing the large-scale deployment of Filipino workers overseas. Although originally framed as a temporary response to economic challenges, it has since made labor migration a permanent and defining feature of the Philippine economy.

²⁹ Luisa Cabato, “Marcos Vows to Make Overseas Work a Choice, Not a Necessity,” *Inquirer.net*, December 11, 2024, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/257989/marcos-vows-to-make-overseas-work-a-choice-not-a-necessity>.

³⁰ Joseph Pedrajas, “Filipinos ‘Willing Victims’ of Scam Hubs in Southeast Asia — DMW,” *Manila Bulletin*, September 12, 2025, <https://mb.com.ph/2025/09/12/filipinos-willing-victims-of-scam-hubs-in-southeast-asia-dmw>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Utilizing digital technologies, these scams use job advertisements on social media to reel their victims. These scams typically target young, English-proficient workers in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector by promising lucrative job offers—guaranteed placements, a speedy all-expenses-paid process, and entry-level salaries as high as Php 50,000. Instead, OFWs are subjected to abusive conditions, being forced to work in cryptocurrency and love scam operations and having their passports confiscated.³² Because of this, the CMA further notes a shift in preference toward recruiting women to entrap more Caucasian men in these scams. Victims of this modus operandi are forced into criminality and face severe psychological distress as they are threatened with death should they fail to meet certain quotas.

The CMA also notes the disproportionate effect that current labor conditions have on women. Deprived of employment and opportunities in the Philippines, women resort to working abroad to support their families. The latest estimates from the Philippine Statistics Authority reveal that around 1.20 million or 55.6% of all OFWs are female, 64.1% of whom are engaged in elementary occupations such as domestic work. It is in this context that the CMA criticizes the discriminatory provisions of Republic Act 11862 or the Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2022. In the context of domestic work, the act

arbitrarily defines a “child” as a person below 24 years old. This further strips women of opportunities and wrongly equates their vulnerability with age, when in fact their vulnerability stems from the nature of domestic work—confined to private households, isolated from oversight, and thereby difficult to monitor and regulate. The CMA firmly recognizes that abuses related to domestic work will not be solved by arbitrary age restrictions. Systemic solutions are needed to curb violations, primarily of which is viable domestic employment.

In conclusion, the labor landscape of the Philippines in 2025 remains rigged against the very people whose sweat sustains the nation. The dream of decent work, fair wages, and stable employment is still distant for millions, as neoliberal policies, foreign dependence, and weak enforcement of the law continue to hollow out worker protections and opportunities. Unless systemic reforms are enacted — from legislated nationwide living wages to stronger protections against contractualization, union-busting, and exploitation—the current trajectory will only further entrench inequality, dispossession, and desperation for both those who stay and those forced to seek better opportunities abroad. The promise of “growth” cannot be allowed to mask the workers’ own oppression.

³² Roderica Madera, “39 OFWs Repatriated from Nigeria,” *Inquirer.net*, August 18, 2025, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/288489/39-ofws-repatriated-from-nigeria>.





Right to Food

False Solutions, Real Hunger

In 2025, the Philippines faces a worsening food security crisis. The government's systemic neglect of agriculture has now resulted in record-high hunger rates and soaring food prices.³³

Policies such as the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) have further deepened the crisis by flooding the market with cheap rice imports, undermining local farmers' livelihoods and weakening domestic food production, which in turn made food accessibility even more difficult for many Filipinos. Given the dire state of agriculture, government response is still narrowly directed at palliative measures such as a misguided declaration of a food security crisis and the Benteng Bigas Meron Na (BBM) program—both of which have done little to consistently provide affordable and healthy food to the tables of millions of Filipinos.

³³Ian Laqui, "PSA: Inflation up to 1.7% in September on Pricier Transport, Food," Philstar.com, October 7, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/10/07/2478186/psa-inflation-17-september-pricier-transport-food>.

The Rise of Food Security Anomalies in the Shadow of "Bente Rice"

In a bid to curb the “extraordinary rise in the local price of rice,” the Department of Agriculture (DA) implemented a food security emergency in February. To stabilize prices, the declaration allowed the National Food Authority (NFA) to release its buffer stocks³⁴ in an attempt to flood the market and put downward pressure on the price of rice—expecting prices to be as low as Php 35 per kilogram.³⁵ However, this declaration is deceitful as the DA cited outdated statistics in justifying its decision. What the DA cited as tremendously high rice prices has been true for 1.5 years for 2022-2023. However, at the time of declaration, rice prices have already been on a steady decline globally.³⁶

As such, the DA's food security emergency seems to bolster Marcos Jr.'s political spectacle as the NFA can only sell its buffer stock to local government units (LGUs) and Marcos Jr.'s KADIWA stores through the Benteng Bigas Meron Na (BBM) program. The BBM program is a step closer to Marcos Jr.'s Php 20-per-kilo rice campaign promise but it comes at the expense of both the government and consumers. First, the government is set to lose Php 2.25 billion by selling its buffer stock at a lower price than what it was bought for. Second, the NFA's buffer stock of 300,000 metric tons will only last nine days if distributed nationwide.³⁷ Consequently, the BBM program is only made available in limited

locations with access being restricted to certain beneficiaries and not the general public. Some stores report the cheapest rice being Php 29 per kilo, but often comes at poor quality.³⁸ In other areas where P20-per-kilo rice is available, distribution is especially limited—usually just once a month or every three months.³⁹

Evidently, the declaration of a food security emergency did little to alleviate rising food prices.⁴⁰ The DA recommended the suspension of all rice imports to protect farmers from declining palay prices caused by imports during the harvest season.⁴¹ This indicates that Marcos Jr. is acutely aware of the true cause of the crisis: the liberalization of the rice market through the Rice Tariffication Law—even calling on Congress to revisit the law and strengthen the NFA's regulatory powers to enable it to intervene in the rice market by selling stocks purchased directly from local rice farmers.⁴² The DA also recommended the reinstatement of the 35% tariff on rice imports and the reversal of the current 15%, effectively nullifying Marcos Jr.'s Executive Order 62 from 2024. Marcos Jr., however, disapproved of it saying that the move may be premature given how lower tariffs tempered the price of rice in 2024.⁴³ This continued policy inconsistency leaves farmers vulnerable to unstable market prices while offering consumers only temporary relief.

³⁴Jordeene B. Lagare, “DA Declares Food Security Emergency amid Rising Price of Rice,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 2025, <https://business.inquirer.net/504666/da-declares-food-security-emergency-amid-rising-price-of-rice>.

³⁵Punongbayan, JC. “[In This Economy] The Manufactured Crisis That Is Marcos’ Food Security Emergency,” *RAPPLER*, February 7, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/in-this-economy-manufactured-crisis-marcos-food-security-emergency/>. 36Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ice Matienzo, “Cheap Rice Reaches Pasig City: Locals Reflect on Marcos Promise,” *RAPPLER*, August 5, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/moveph/cheap-rice-pasig-city-locals-response/>.

³⁹Joan Alindogan, “Beyond Benteng Bigas: Advocates Slam Marcos’ Weak Agri Efforts ahead of SONA 2025,” *RAPPLER*, July 25, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/moveph/advocates-slam-marcos-weak-agriculture-efforts-sona-2025/>.

⁴⁰Jordeene B. Lagare, “Philippines to Extend Rice Import Moratorium, Hike Tariff,” *INQUIRER.net*, September 2025, <https://business.inquirer.net/549160/philippines-to-extend-rice-import-moratorium-hike-tariff>.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Iya Gozum, “Palace, DA Push Congress to Revisit Rice Tariffication Law,” *RAPPLER*, March 27, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/palace-department-agriculture-push-congress-revisit-rice-tariffication-law/>.

⁴³Tatiana Maligro, “Marcos Orders 60-Day Suspension on Rice Imports,” *RAPPLER*, August 6, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/business/marcos-jr-rice-import-suspension-september-2025/>.

Netting Fisherfolk on the Brink of Poverty

The food security crisis threatens both the supply of food and the livelihood of those who toil for its production. In this regard, fisherfolk are just as imperiled as farmers, especially with the Supreme Court upholding a Regional Trial Court's decision to allow commercial fishing in municipal waters, a delimited area extending 15 kilometers from the shore which grants preferential access to small-scale fishers.⁴⁴ The Pagkakaisa ng mga Samahan ng Mangingisda (Pangisda) calls on the government to declare this decision unconstitutional as it puts fishing communities at heightened risk and goes against the fisheries code which declared small-scale fishers' preferential access to municipal waters. This endangers the food security of 80% of the 1.4 million Filipino fishers who belong to small-scale fisheries—those who toil for half of the country's 1.8 million-ton annual marine fish harvest.⁴⁵ Philippine waters have been overfished since 1990 and annual catch has only declined since. The intrusion of commercial fishing in municipal waters further strains our resources and further entrenches Filipino fishers, the country's poorest sector, in crippling poverty.⁴⁶

The net effect of Marcos Jr.'s neglectful response to the country's food security woes is the widespread descent of millions into poverty. In March of this year alone, a staggering 27.2% of Filipino families reported involuntary hunger, the highest since the peak of the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020.⁴⁷ Hunger increased in all regions except the National Capital Region with Visayas seeing the biggest increase from 20.0% to 33.7%, followed by Luzon from 19.1% to 24.0%, and Mindanao from 23.3% to 27.3%.⁴⁸ In Southeast Asia, the Philippines ranks second with the largest population unable to afford a healthy diet at 51 million or 44% of the country's population.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Reniel B. Cabral, Richard N. Muallil, Samuel S. Mamauag, and Michael P. Atrigenio. "Philippine Fisheries Put Food Security at Risk," *Science* 388 (6750): 922–22, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adv7145>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ James Patrick Cruz, "Hunger among Filipinos Rises to 27.2%, Highest since Pandemic – Survey," *RAPPLER*, March 29, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/hunger-highest-level-since-september-2020-pandemic-sws-survey-march-2025/>.

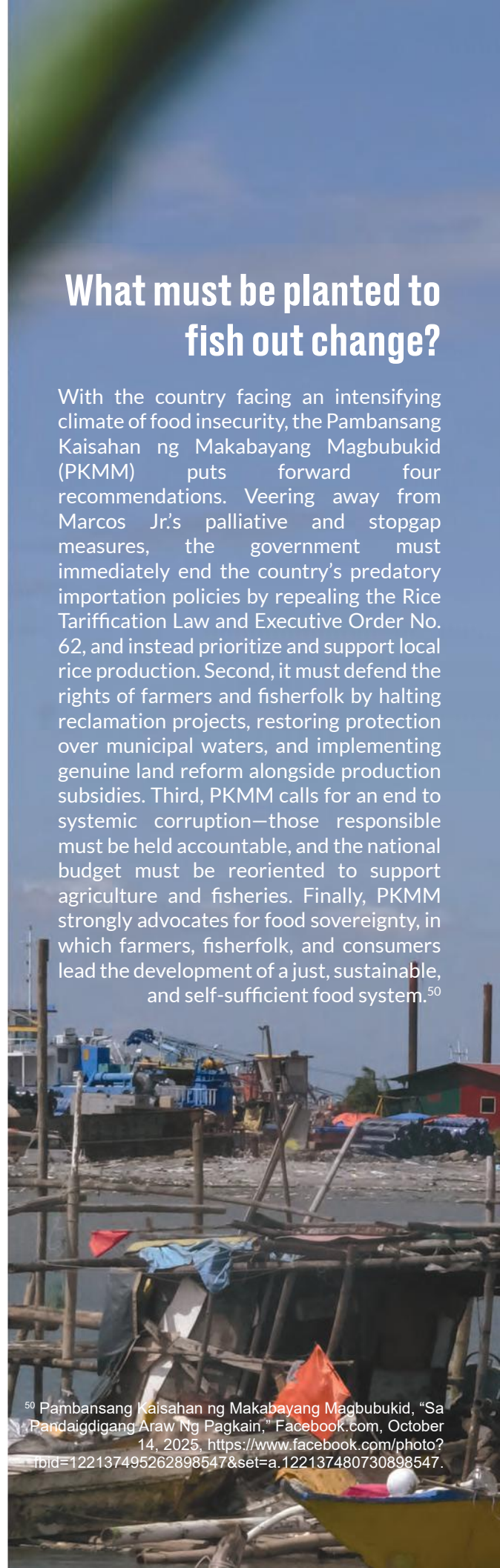
⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ IBON Foundation, "Population Unable to Afford a Healthy Diet," IBON Foundation, October 16, 2025, https://www.ibon.org/population-unable-to-afford-a-healthy-diet/?fbclid=IwY2xjawNd1qhleHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETFuOUNpYm8wRUlmZVBpMU5yAR6luZrw0B2UrbFOIX7bvl2JVrq9csxXwKv8aMWYJpSd-xJscdqkvfLgA0ePrQ_aem_nMTEjSmNFoB6oKHqWYW4eA.

What must be planted to fish out change?

With the country facing an intensifying climate of food insecurity, the Pambansang Kaisahan ng Makabayang Magbubukid (PKMM) puts forward four recommendations. Veering away from Marcos Jr.'s palliative and stopgap measures, the government must immediately end the country's predatory importation policies by repealing the Rice Tariffication Law and Executive Order No. 62, and instead prioritize and support local rice production. Second, it must defend the rights of farmers and fisherfolk by halting reclamation projects, restoring protection over municipal waters, and implementing genuine land reform alongside production subsidies. Third, PKMM calls for an end to systemic corruption—those responsible must be held accountable, and the national budget must be reoriented to support agriculture and fisheries. Finally, PKMM strongly advocates for food sovereignty, in which farmers, fisherfolk, and consumers lead the development of a just, sustainable, and self-sufficient food system.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Pambansang Kaisahan ng Makabayang Magbubukid, "Sa Pandaigdigang Araw Ng Pagkain," Facebook.com, October 14, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=122137495262898547&set=a.122137480730898547>.



Housing Rights

Housing for whom?

The country's urban poor continue to be entrenched in homelessness as Marcos Jr.'s anti-poor policies exacerbate the housing crisis.

Facing a two-pronged problem, the urban poor is made more vulnerable by an increasingly privatized public housing program and a renewed charter for the National Housing Authority (NHA) which expedites and legitimizes their forced displacement.



Marcos Jr.'s Flagship Housing Programs Fail to Deliver

Upon assuming office in 2022, Marcos Jr. set a goal of having zero informal settlers by 2028 through the Pambansang Pabahay Para Sa Pilipino (4PH) Program, his government's flagship housing initiative. The program aims to achieve this by building one million housing units per year until 2028, in order to address the country's estimated 6.5 million-unit housing backlog.⁵¹ However, three years in, Marcos Jr.'s promise has fallen short—only 259,365 housing units have been completed since 2022,⁵² with only 63,000 units constructed under the 4PH program itself.⁵³ Attributing the problem to “certain obstacles related to construction and contracting,”⁵⁴ Housing Secretary Jose Ramon Aliling now projects a more modest total of 300,000 units to be built by 2028.⁵⁵ However, even this is jeopardized by budget cuts: only Php 5.56 billion out of the proposed Php 225.8 billion has been allocated in the 2026 National Expenditure Program (NEP) for the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) and other housing agencies.⁵⁶

As such, the Samahan ng Mamamayan – Zone One Tondo Organization (SM-ZOTO) asserts that no meaningful change has occurred under Marcos Jr.'s housing policy, and that the Expanded Community Mortgage Program (ECMP), and rental housing. However, these expanded modalities do little to uplift the urban poor, as the problems of affordability and accessibility remain unresolved. Moreover,

beneath the guise of these expanded options lies the increasingly private-led nature of the 4PH program.⁵⁷ As such, the 4PH has failed year after year, and its “expanded” version does little to close the housing gap.

“...The increasing privatization of the 4PH shifts public housing away from public service and toward corporate profit.”

SM-ZOTO notes that the increasing privatization of the 4PH shifts public housing away from public service and toward corporate profit. While the private sector already held significant power in the original 4PH—implemented through the Public-Private Partnership framework—the expanded program veers away from joint implementation, shifting the provision of public housing largely to the private sector. Consequently, the Home Development Mutual Fund (HDMF) merely facilitates beneficiaries in securing long-term loans for housing units constructed by private developers. This model places both the government and the people at a disadvantage, as unpaid loans will be absorbed by the HDMF and will ultimately render the poor homeless once again.⁵⁸ As such, SM-ZOTO maintains that the country's 6.5-million housing backlog will not be solved by privatization but through programmed appropriations for housing from the government itself.

⁵¹ Danilo Doguiles, “Marcos Jr. Admin, DHSUD to Close Housing Gap by 2028,” Philippine Information Agency, October 24, 2022, <https://mirror.pia.gov.ph/news/2022/10/24/marcos-jr-admin-dhsud-to-close-housing-gap-by-2028>.

⁵² Zacarian Sarao, “Palace Admits Failure to Reach 1 Million Target Housing Units per Year,” Inquirer.net, March 31, 2025, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2048591/palace-admits-failure-to-reach-1-million-target-housing-units-per-year>.

⁵³ Bless Aubrey Ogerio, “4Ps Program Still Far from 300K-Unit Goal by 2028,” Business Mirror, October 13, 2025, <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/10/13/4ps-program-still-far-from-300k-unit-goal-by-2028/>.

⁵⁴ Sarao, “Palace Admits Failure.”

⁵⁵ “Marcos Vows Full Communities in Housing Push,” BusinessWorld Online, September 15, 2025, <https://www.bworldonline.com/the-nation/2025/09/15/698592/marcos-vows-full-communities-in-housing-push/>.

⁵⁶ James Patrick Cruz, “Housing Agencies Seek P5.56-Billion Budget for 2026,” Rappler, September 15, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/dhsud-housing-agencies-budget-2026/>.

⁵⁷ Rafael Vicente Dimalanta, Vincent Eugenio, Abigail Roa, and Jay-R Panagsagan, More Modalities, Still Limited Reach for the Poorest? A Preliminary Assessment of the Expanded 4PH Social Housing Program. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies, 2025.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

No Such Thing as ‘Free’ Homes

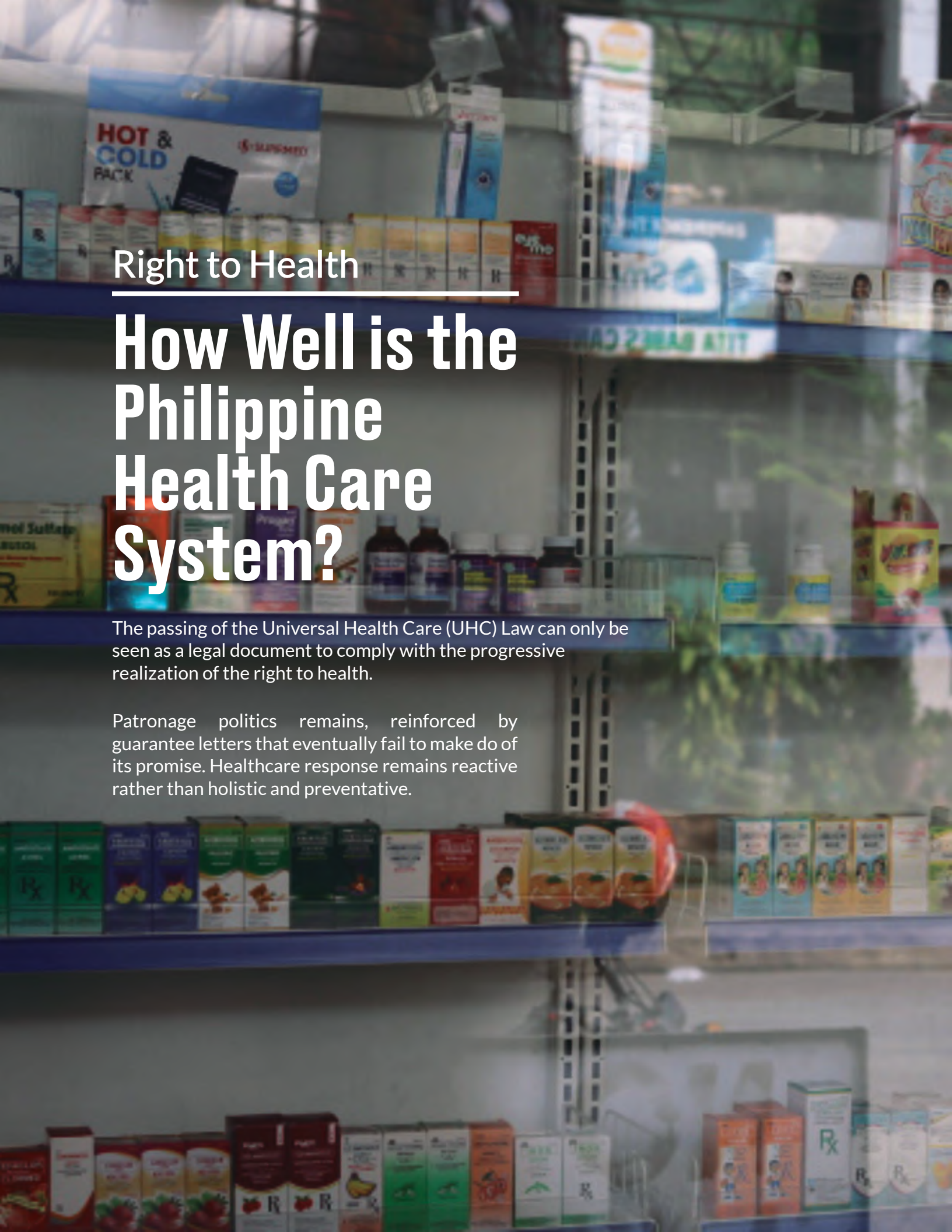
The Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng Maralitang Lungsod (KPML) also criticizes the 4PH, arguing that the program primarily caters to those with fixed incomes, rather than the urban poor. It is in this context that the supposed affordability and accessibility of public housing continue to pose the greatest challenge to both prospective and current beneficiaries. Worsening the problem of affordability for current beneficiaries is Republic Act 9507, or the Socialized and Low-Cost Housing Loan Restructuring Act of 2008. Contrary to its declared objective of making public housing more affordable through a loan restructuring and condonation program, the law ultimately penalizes those unable to pay and further entrenches them in debt. SM-ZOTO reports that those who were originally awarded plots of land in Bagong Silang, Caloocan City paid only a total of Php 15,000 for 90 square meters. Under the restructured terms of RA 9507, beneficiaries are now required to pay Php 200,000 to 300,000, effectively raising the price of the 90-square-meter lot to its current market value. In the same vein, beneficiaries from Towerville Subdivision, a National Housing Authority relocation site in San Jose del Monte, Bulacan, now pay an average of Php 1,700 for their monthly mortgage. The effect of this act has been nothing but detrimental to the urban poor as their inability to pay debt remains while their vulnerability to evictions have just been heightened.

On top of ballooning monthly mortgage payments, the urban poor are made more vulnerable to forced evictions, especially with the enactment of Republic Act 12216, or the National Housing Authority Act of 2025.

The KPML has raised alarm over certain provisions in the law and is calling for its abolition. Among the most contested provisions is Article IV, Letter D, which grants the NHA police powers to demolish, summarily eject, and dismantle informal settler families without the need for a judicial order. Additionally, the notice period for ejectment has been reduced to 10 days, down from the previous 30 days before the scheduled eviction. Meanwhile, Section 6, Article II (d) of RA 9507 mandates the NHA to establish a loan restructuring and condonation program. These provisions, KPML argues, contradict the NHA's core mandate of providing and ensuring access to public housing, and instead risk further displacing the very communities it is meant to serve.

The accessibility of public housing goes beyond the provision of affordable housing. The urban poor are disproportionately affected by the worsening labor situation and ongoing economic downturn. As evidenced by the results of the 4PH and the aforementioned policies, the unchanging situation of the urban poor is caused by continuous government neglect. Solving the housing crisis demands the fulfillment of the people's interdependent economic, social, and cultural rights with the provision of viable jobs and livelihood as a critical starting point. This highlights the importance of a living wage in systemically uplifting the urban poor as it is through decent work and wages that the urban poor can access food, healthcare, have the means to send children to school, and be able to pay for monthly utility bills, among other basic needs on top of housing.





Right to Health

How Well is the Philippine Health Care System?

The passing of the Universal Health Care (UHC) Law can only be seen as a legal document to comply with the progressive realization of the right to health.

Patronage politics remains, reinforced by guarantee letters that eventually fail to make do of its promise. Healthcare response remains reactive rather than holistic and preventative.

In the 2025 State of the Nation Address (SONA) last July, President Bongbong Marcos announced the continuation of the Zero Balance Billing (ZBB) or the “Bayad na Bill Mo” (BBM) program. The program promises absolutely zero out-of-pocket expense for patients admitted in the basic or ward accommodation in 87 Department of Health (DOH) hospitals nationwide.⁵⁹ It includes medical procedures, operations, and medicines for patients in basic or ward accommodations, DOH spokesperson Albert Domingo emphasized.⁶⁰ According to the DOH, as of September 6, 2025, the program has catered to about 298,221 patients that is equivalent to Php 26.4 billion. A milestone, according to DOH Secretary Teodoro Herbosa, and that since it was announced, there had been an increase in the daily average admissions in DOH hospitals from 3,297 to 4,067.⁶¹

But the success of this program should not be measured by an increase in patient admissions alone. Doing so fails to account for the other crucial aspects of making the public healthcare system truly accessible to all.

Six months before this “milestone,” an influx of patients at the University of the Philippines’ Philippine General Hospital (UP-PGH), the country’s national referral center for tertiary care, led the hospital to receive three times the ideal capacity of its emergency room.

Already, many patients were left to sit on chairs or on the floor, with the hospital not having enough beds to provide them, and not enough personnel to attend to them immediately and sufficiently.⁶²

Secretary Herbosa also acknowledged the insufficient beds and the lack of DOH-run hospitals—making the program, though available, still inaccessible to many Filipinos. About 40 provinces in the country or half of the total provinces do not have a DOH-run hospital,⁶³ a wide and financially burdensome gap to many Filipinos who would benefit greatly from the ZBB program.

⁵⁹ Presidential Communications Office, “Bayad na Bill Mo program benefits 14k patients in 2 hospitals alone,” August 19, 2025, https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/bayad-na-bill-mo-program-benefits-14k-patients-in-2-hospitals-alone/.

⁶⁰ Dominique Nicole Flores, “Confused About the Zero-balance Billing Policy? Here’s an Explainer,” Philstar.com, August 2, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/08/02/2462356/confused-about-zero-balance-billing-policy-heres-explainer>.

⁶¹ “DOH: Zero-balance Bill Policy Helped 298K Patients so Far,” Philippine News Agency, n.d., <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1258168>.

⁶² Dominique Nicole Flores, “Critical Overcapacity: UP-PGH Overwhelmed as Patient Load Doubles in ER,” Philstar.Com, March 28, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/03/28/2448168/critical-overcapacity-up-pgh-overwhelmed-as-patient-load-doubles-in-er>.



When Policies Fail our People

To increase accessibility, 51 Bagong Urgent Care and Ambulatory Service (BUCAS) centers were opened. These centers aim to provide immediate and accessible medical and laboratory services in the community free of charge,⁶⁴ a welcome intervention in bridging the health services accessibility gap. But, as much as it is a positive development, healthcare is a complex and multifaceted system that cannot be resolved with mere band-aid solutions. Many shortages and insufficiencies in the existing healthcare system need to be addressed urgently.

The Medical Action Group, Inc. (MAG), a health and human rights non-profit organization, recognizes that one of the great challenges in the health sector is the Congress-approved zero government subsidy to PhilHealth for the year 2025, which received much criticism as it was seen to likely cause higher premium contributions while reducing benefits.⁶⁵ One day ahead of the scheduled mass protests on September 21 against government corruption, Bongbong Marcos made a surprise announcement that a Php 60 billion PhilHealth fund, which was previously categorized as idle and therefore reverted to the national treasury in 2024, is to be restored to the PhilHealth, mainly through savings from the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), the agency at the center of the corruption scandal.⁶⁶

MAG also cited the matter of guarantee letters, whereby the Private Hospital Association of the Philippines, Inc. (PHAPI) announced that it is seriously considering the slowdown or even suspension of accepting guarantee letters.⁶⁷

The issuance of guarantee letters is a payment mechanism facilitated through the DOH's Medical Assistance to Indigent and Financially Incapacitated Patients (MAIFIP) program, which patients use to guarantee that the medical fees that they incurred in private hospitals will be covered. According to the PHAPI, there are 43 hospitals in Batangas province that have not yet received about Php 480 million worth of medical services provided through guarantee letters. Although payments are being made, the process has been too slow, subjecting them to the risk of running out of funds.⁶⁸ If this slow release of payments continues to happen at the same time that the Zero Balance Billing program is restricted by the lack of hospital beds, lack of health care personnel, and poor facilities—the people are left to question, where do the funds go? How can people afford quality medical attention?

Despite being in its sixth year, the implementation of the UHC law is, at best, still in its infancy. A study released by the Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) on the UHC highlighted that the implementation of the law has been greatly hindered by the lack of workforce readiness and issues on coordination between the national and local health systems. According to the study, the country's physician-to-patient ratio is below the international minimum standard of 10 per 10,000 as it currently stands at 7.92 per 10,000 combined with the country's shortage of at least 127,000 nurses.⁶⁹

⁶³ "Challenges for 'zero balance billing,'" Philippine Daily Inquirer, September 14, 2025, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/186076/challenges-for-zero-balance-billing>.

⁶⁴ Philippine News Agency, "Public Urged: Avail Free Health Services in BUCAS Centers," n.d., <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1250052>.

⁶⁵ KII Interview with Medical Action Group Services Program Officer, July 17, 2025; Dominique Nicole Flores, "PhilHealth to Run on P284 Billion Budget in 2025, Even Without Gov't Subsidy," Philstar.Com, December 17, 2024, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/12/17/2408003/philhealth-run-p284-billion-budget-2025-even-without-govt-subsidy>.

⁶⁶ Dexter Cabalza, "Marcos orders return of P60-B excess funds to PhilHealth," INQUIRER.net, September 20, 2025, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2112070/marcos-orders-return-of-p60-billion-excess-funds-to-philhealth>

⁶⁷ KII Interview with Medical Action Group Services Program Officer, July 17, 2025

⁶⁸ GMA Integrated News, "PHAPI: Some Hospitals Mulling Suspension in Accepting Gov't Guarantees Over Payment Issues," GMA News Online, July 7, 2025, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/951806/phapi-hospitals-slowdown-suspension-guarantee-letters-maifip/story/>.

⁶⁹ "Ateneo Study Highlights Workforce Hurdles to Universal Health Care in the Philippines," Ateneo De Manila University, May 22, 2025, <https://www.ateneo.edu/news/2025/05/22/ateneo-study-highlights-workforce-hurdles-universal-health-care-philippines#:~:text=Recommendations%20for%20health%20workforce%20recruitment,than%20just%20a%20legal%20aspiration.>



Stigma as a Barrier to Health Justice

The Philippines currently has the fastest-growing number of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) cases in the Asia-Pacific Region, with the number of cases having jumped up by 550% between 2010 and 2024. In June 2025, the estimated number of Filipinos living with HIV was at 252,800. In the first quarter of the year, it was estimated that a third of the newly diagnosed individuals are between the ages 15 to 24.⁷⁰

In a focus group discussion conducted in Navotas City, members of an LGBTQIA+ youth group expressed frustration over the prevalence of the notion that the LGBTQIA+ community is at fault for the rising number of HIV cases. One of the members stressed, “So, porket trans, bakla, ang kakabit ay may HIV? (So, just because they are trans or gay, they automatically have HIV?)” This stigma against members of the LGBTQIA+ community not only perpetuates discrimination and bigotry, but also hinders the promotion of accurate information that could help prevent and address the needs of individuals vulnerable to and affected by HIV. The youth group acknowledged the high rate of HIV cases in their city and expressed concern for those who engage in unsafe sex. According to them, community members, including young

girls, engage in sex work to send themselves to school and support their parents’ income. The group said that while those who engage in sex work prefer to be safe, they are nevertheless exposed to patrons who do not disclose of their HIV status.⁷¹

The rapid increase of HIV cases in the Philippines persists especially with large gaps in funding for preventive efforts. At the same time, the current working system gives excessive focus on the registration and tracking of people living with HIV, possibly discouraging individuals to seek the appropriate help they need, as registration and tracking further facilitate stigma and discrimination.⁷²

As early as January of this year, the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) called for an immediate and comprehensive response to the alarming rate of adolescent pregnancies, particularly for girls aged 15 years and below, citing the 2023 Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) report which tallied 3,343 live births among girls aged 10 to 14 years, a 6.6% increase from the 2019 tally of 2,411.⁷³ In a report published by Save the Children, the rise in the number of child pregnancies should fast-track the passing of legislation to ensure that

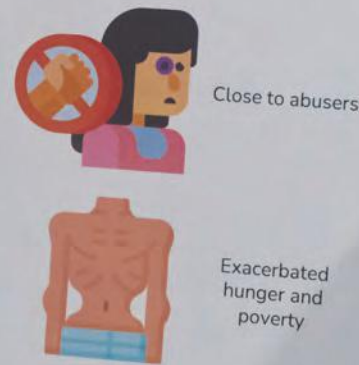
⁷⁰UNAIDS, WHO Support DOH's call for urgent action as the Philippines faces the fastest-growing HIV surge in the Asia-Pacific region," World Health Organization, June 11, 2025, <https://www.who.int/philippines/news/detail/11-06-2025-unaid-who-support-doh-s-call-for-urgent-action-as-the-philippines-faces-the-fastest-growing-hiv-surge-in-the-asia-pacific-region>.

⁷¹ LGBTQIA Youth Group Focus Group Discussion, September 27, 2025.

⁷² Carlo Emmanuel L. Yao and EpiMetrics, "Keeping up With HIV in 2025: Philippines Must Improve Access to PrEP, ART, Self-testing," RAPPLER, January 5, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/explainers/philippines-must-improve-access-hiv-treatment-testing-2025/>.

⁷³CPD Flags Rising Pregnancy Among Young Girls; Demands Urgent Action," Philippine News Agency, n.d., <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1241871#:~:text=YOUNG%20MOM,,birth%20five%20or%20more%20times>.

A common health problem in our area is teenage pregnancy... They need proper knowledge and support, and we also need to conduct seminars to raise awareness and knowledge on reproductive health.



teenagers have access to reproductive health services and education. The lack of access to such programs facilitates the increase in child pregnancies, especially when sexual violence, coercion, and a lack of access to reproductive health services are some of the factors to child pregnancy in the country. This eventually affects the positive growth and development of the girl child into adulthood.

Earlier this year, advocates pushed for the passage of the Anti-Teenage Pregnancy Bill to combat the rapid rise in pregnancy among young adolescents (10–14) in the country.⁷⁴ Despite this concerning trend, the public still views the bill with skepticism. Legislators even withdrew their support for the bill due to the proposed institutionalization of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in schools⁷⁵—viewing the provision as an affront to parental and religious rights, and an inappropriate promotion of sex among the youth.⁷⁶

Similarly, the implementation of the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law (RH Law) remains inadequate as reflected in the figures of early teenage pregnancies and other reproductive health problems that continue to plague the country. Despite being in effect for

13 years, the supposed benefits of the law are still not maximized.

In an article of *The LaSallian*, advocates and organizations have reported the wide gap in the application of the law on the national scale and that despite being more than a decade old, implementers still lack training, and awareness in the communities remain deficient.⁷⁷ Efforts of private organizations such as *Likhaan*⁷⁸ cannot solely address the complexity of the need of many Filipinos for accessible reproductive health services.

A *Sangguniang Kabataan* (SK) Chairman in Antipolo City reflects on the crisis of early pregnancies among the youth in their barangay, with at least 17 new cases recorded from January to July of 2025. The SK Chairman said, “*Yung kadalasang problema sa health dito ‘yung about teenage pregnancy... So, ayun po, kailangan nila ng tamang knowledge and syempre ng suporta din, and kailangan lang din po talaga mag-conduct ng mga seminars para at least aware and meron silang knowledge about reproductive [health]. (A common health problem in our area is teenage pregnancy... They need proper knowledge and support, and we also need to conduct seminars to raise awareness and knowledge on reproductive health).*”⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Save the Children. 2025. “PHILIPPINES – Spike of 58% in Child Pregnancies Should Be a ‘Wakeup Call’ for Better Education and Health Services.” Save the Children International. 2025. <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/philippines-spike-58-child-pregnancies-should-be-wakeup-call-better-education-and-health>.

⁷⁵ Gonzalez, Mia. 2025. “After Backlash, at Least 7 Senators Withdraw Support for Anti-Teenage Pregnancy Bill.” *RAPPLER*. January 22, 2025. <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/senators-withdraw-support-anti-teenage-pregnancy-bill/>.

⁷⁶ Edjen Oliquino. 2025. “House, Senate Told: Revise ‘Anti-Teen Pregnancy Bill’ or Send to ‘Graveyard.’” *Daily Tribune*. January 21, 2025. <https://tribune.net.ph/2025/01/21/house-senate-told-revise-anti-teen-pregnancy-bill-or-send-to-graveyard>.

⁷⁷ “Reproductive matters: Ten years later, RH Law info gap still prevails: Better conversations on the RH Law help the youth better understand the need for safe and consensual sex.” *The LaSallian*, March 22, 2022, <https://thelasallian.com/2022/03/22/reproductive-matters-ten-years-later-rh-law-info-gap-still-prevails/#:~:text=Better%20conversations%20on%20the%20RH,for%20safe%20and%20consensual%20sex.&text=In%202012%2C%20the%20late%20former,still%20be%20a%20far%20reach>.

⁷⁸ *Likhaan* Center for Women’s Health is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that integrates provision of health services, education, and policy actions to improve sexual and reproductive health.

⁷⁹ *Sangguniang Kabataan* of Barangay San Luis, Antipolo City Focus Group Discussion, August 7, 2025.



Mind the Gap: Silent Struggles in Mental Health

Likewise, the council shared that mental health is one of their leading concerns in their barangay. A member of the council shared that the lack of availability of mental health consultations with professionals is not only a problem in their barangay but is also observed in other barangays within their LGU as well. As council members, they make do and try to provide support to their constituents through awareness raising activities, but the lack of services is still evident.⁸⁰

On a national scale, despite the passing of the Mental Health Act in 2018, mental health issues constitute a prevalent form of morbidity in the country.⁸¹ As per a Philippine National Police report, 2,000 people died by suicide just from January to June of 2025.⁸² There are also an estimated 7 million to 12.5 million Filipinos who have been diagnosed with one form of mental

health condition or another, with a majority of newly reported cases coming from the youth sector, aged 15 to 19 years old.⁸³

Despite mainstreaming efforts regarding mental health, cultural norms and societal views on mental health are difficult to combat leading to the shame of reaching out for professional help and when people are willing and able to, services are expensive, and free and public services are still very limited. In the perspective of MAG, equal importance should be given to both our physical and mental health. Given the passage of the law, there should be an increase in the provision of services, accessibility of services, and awareness raising, where mental health should be accepted as a vital aspect of the well-being of every person.⁸⁴ Healthcare should be holistic, with mental health being given as much importance as physical health.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Zypher Jude G Regencia, Vergel T Marteja Jr, and Emmanuel S Baja, "Levels of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Among Emerging Adults in the Philippines: An Exploratory Spatial Analysis," *Journal of Public Health*, March 1, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdaf024>.

⁸² "Gatchalian seeks urgent action vs. 'mental health crisis,'" Press release, July 29, 2025, https://web.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2025/0729_gatchalian4.asp#:~:text=Press%20Release%20%2D%20Gatchalian%20seeks%20urgent,mental%20health%20crisis%20&text=%22The%20Philippine%20National%20Police's%20report,every%20Filipino%20who%20needs%20help.%22.

⁸³ "Mental Health and 'Project Stigma,'" Philippine News Agency, n.d., <https://www.pna.gov.ph/opinion/pieces/1072-mental-health-and-project-stigma#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20recent%20study,is%20one%20of%20urgent%20importance>.

⁸⁴ KII Interview with Medical Action Group Services Program Officer, July 17, 2025.



Right to Education

Running at Tortoise Speed to Fix Decades of Damage

Some of this year's highlights from the education sector comprises problems rooted from years and decades of mismanagement.

Government updates on the current shortage of classrooms and teachers show that the gap in fulfilling students' needs is still growing. But deeply-rooted inefficiencies leading to billion-peso wastages make bridging these gaps a herculean task, more so at a time when an influx of climate-related hazards reveal the actual vulnerabilities of our schools and students.

A report showing that millions of Filipino high school graduates are not functionally literate captures the dismal quality of the education that generations of students have passed through. Meanwhile, a sudden rise in reported incidents of violence and data pinning the Philippines as one of the top bullying hotspots in the world have signalled the insidious presence of a sociocultural phenomenon that must be addressed urgently and systematically, along with the implementation of urgently needed improvements to the working conditions of education sector workers in order to address systemic issues that compromise the wellbeing of both students and teachers. And finally, delays in the passage of a bill that seeks to prevent adolescent pregnancies put more and more youths at risk, with the bill having gotten the thumbs down from gravely disinformed public officials.

Unconstitutional Appropriations

The General Appropriations Act (GAA) of 2025 goes against Section 5(5), Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution, which requires the State to “assign the highest budgetary priority to education”. As pointed out in a petition for certiorari filed by the Teachers’ Dignity Coalition (TDC), the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), and the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) to the Supreme Court in April, the education budget under the 2025 GAA, combining the allocations for the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education

(CHED), and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), amounts to only Php 913.3 billion. This falls second to and is far lower than the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) allocation of Php 1.05 trillion.⁸⁵

This outright failure to prioritize the education sector was underscored later in the year as corruption allegations surrounding the DPWH’s flood control projects were linked to the worsening of the country’s classroom backlog.

Worsening Classroom and Teacher Shortages

At the start of the 2025-2026 school year, DepEd Secretary Juan Edgardo “Sonny” Angara reportedly said it will take a whopping 55 years⁸⁶ to fully address the current shortage of 165,000 classrooms, a figure which the ACT-NCR Union has pointed out is nearly three times the shortage reported twelve years ago.⁸⁷ This figure was updated in October, with the DepEd citing that 22,092 classrooms were completed from July 2022 to July 2025. This brought the previous classroom backlog down from 165,443 to 146,708.⁸⁸

However, the DPWH, which previously had the sole responsibility of building public school classrooms in the country, disclosed in late October that it has managed to build only 22 out of the 1,700 classrooms targeted for completion in 2025. Angara attributed this to the DPWH’s prioritization of flood control projects over educational facilities.⁸⁹ These are the same anomalous projects that have allegedly funneled trillions of pesos into the pockets of a handful of private contractors and their legislative allies.

⁸⁵ “Groups question constitutionality of 2025 GAA over education budget,” Business World Online, March 31, 2025, <https://www.bworldonline.com/the-nation/2025/03/31/663035/groups-question-constitutionality-of-2025-gaa-over-education-budget/>.

⁸⁶ “EDITORIAL – Investing in teachers,” Philippine Star, June 16, 2025, https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2025/06/16/2450793/editorial-investing-teachers?fbclid=IwY2xjawK8pA1leHRuA2FibQixMQA_BHvpwlfHe8pGzcNM1kGuysLhP2jtkN2x-uGq8Hgg0vyQXE-jo3mwqBw9WwLUL_aem_rhc3msDm2D-GihdiT9R2wg.

⁸⁷ Anne Marxze Umil, “165,000 classroom shortage exposes years of government neglect,” Bulatlat, June 5, 2025, https://www.bulatlat.com/2025/06/05/165000-classroom-shortage-exposes-years-of-government-neglect/?fbclid=IwY2xjawKwtnVleHRuA2FibQixMQABHuEERkWAMKomGm8ua4GUXWU1Wj_DKkAQ44Ue7qmY6p8LhPgGi2vRva-Mk_K1_aem_1uzKCKhYrn-K_QedqdiRpRQ.

⁸⁸ Giselle Ombay, “DPWH: Only 22 PH classrooms finished so far in 2025,” GMA Integrated News, October 21, 2025, https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/963146/dpwh-only-22-ph-classrooms-finished-so-far-in-2025/story/#google_vignette.

⁸⁹ Ibid.



There is also an enormous gap in teachers, which is currently at 30,000. Angara said this is due to thousands of teachers leaving the public school system every year to look for better opportunities abroad, having been hampered by slow promotions and low salaries. Most teachers are also overburdened by non-teaching tasks, including administrative and counseling work.⁹⁰

As echoed by PhilRights' partner communities, who have noticed a significant increase in the number of students without the necessary addition of classrooms, the combination of shortages between classrooms and teachers creates an environment that is non-conducive, to say the least. The Year Two Report of the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II), a national commission

tasked with conducting a comprehensive assessment and evaluation of the Philippine education system, shows that as of 2024, 5.1 million students in the public school system are "aisle learners", or those who sit along classroom aisles for lack of classroom space and furniture. The lack of classrooms also forces schools to create double or triple shifts per day to accommodate the number of students.⁹¹

Meanwhile, the EDCOM II has also revealed that out of approximately 9,000 remote schools, 1,500 remain unelectrified, and many lack adequate sanitation. Difficulty in reaching schools due to terrain as well as a lack of teachers prevent thousands of students in rural areas from completing the basic education program.⁹²

⁹⁰ "EDITORIAL – Investing in teachers".

⁹¹ Second Congressional Commission on Education, Fixing the Foundations: A matter of national survival, EDCOM II Year Two Report (Congress of the Philippines, 2025), 126-8, <https://edcom2.gov.ph/media/2025/01/EDCOM-2-Year-2-Report-Fixing-the-Foundations-2025.pdf>.

⁹² EDCOM II Communications, "Legarda files 'Last Mile Schools Act' to strengthen access to education in the country's most underserved areas," EDCOM 2, October 14, 2025, <https://edcom2.gov.ph/legarda-files-last-mile-schools-act-to-strengthen-access-to-education-in-the-countrys-most-underserved-areas/>.

Failed, Unfinished, and Substandard Classrooms

The EDCOM II report explains that persistent bottlenecks in the project cycle have led to the underutilization of DepEd funds for classroom construction. Because of planning and procurement delays, design modifications, failed biddings, and contract cancellations, multiple classroom construction projects amounting to billions of pesos have failed, with their budgets getting marked as unused.⁹³ These unused allocations impact the department's budget in the next fiscal year, in that underutilized budgets get slashed. The reduced allocations have since created a cycle of underspending and underfunding, highlighting deep systemic inefficiencies that deprives millions of students and teachers of even the bare minimum in quality education. Even worse, some school buildings constructed by the DPWH in partnership with private contractors (the same notorious contractors of several “ghost” and substandard flood control projects) have been left unfinished and unusable despite millions of pesos already spent on the initial phases of their construction. In at least one case, teachers have been compelled to hold classes in stuffy rooms with no paint and limited electricity, surrounded by rusting steel rods poking out of unfinished posts and covered by leaking roofs.⁹⁴

Additionally, the EDCOM II reported that delays in classroom construction are compounded by site ownership disputes, the lack of buildable spaces, and logistical errors, among others.⁹⁵ Contrasting this with observations of high-rise condominiums, malls, and entertainment centers multiplying with ease across the landscapes of urban cities each year, it becomes apparent that private enterprises that benefit only the well-off are assigned greater importance than schools and other basic social services.

⁹³ Second Congressional Commission, *Fixing the Foundations*, 130.

⁹⁴ “Katakot-takot na Kurakot - Part 4 (KMJS Special Report),” GMA Public Affairs, September 14, 2025, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goUwPB6DQc>.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 130-1.



Multiplying Hazards and Class Suspensions

Frequent class and work suspensions caused by typhoons, flood warnings, earthquakes, dangerous heat indexes, and rising flu cases reveal the high vulnerabilities of the country's urban populations amid changes in the environment. The deplorable conditions in public school buildings is a major factor in this vulnerability. Further, according to the EDCOM II, these frequent and prolonged class disruptions have led to decreased student interest, significant learning losses, and poorer academic performance, compounding the already dismal state of literacy in the country.⁹⁶

Beyond ensuring that students are safe by keeping them at home during natural disasters and flu outbreaks, it is incumbent upon local

governments, the education sector, and all concerned agencies to immediately come up with innovations and strategies to allow students an undisrupted and uncompromised education. Equally as important, these strategies must ensure that no student is left behind. For instance, online and asynchronous activities should not hinder students from low-income families from being able to fully participate in class. Such modes of learning today still pose a challenge to some, including PhilRights' partner families in San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan, who have noted financial difficulties in securing cellphones for their children to access updates and assignments provided by their teachers online.

6.45 Million High School Graduates “Not Functionally Literate”

During the second quarter of 2025, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) released the results of the 2024 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), which revealed that an estimated 6.45 million Filipino high school graduates (including junior high school graduates) aged 10 to 64 are not functionally literate. This category includes persons who are basically literate, or those who can read, write, and compute but have a lack of comprehension skill; low literate, or those who can read and write only; and illiterate, or those who cannot read nor write. Meanwhile, the number of Filipinos aged 10 to 64 who are not functionally literate, regardless of highest grade completed, is estimated at a staggering 24.83 million.⁹⁷ This evidences the catastrophic effects of an education system that has been failing students for decades, with long-term impacts on quality of life and national development.

⁹⁶ Bella Cariaso, “Class suspensions: Grades of Math, Science learners drop,” Philippine Star, October 16, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/10/16/2480147/class-suspensions-grades-math-science-learners-drop>; Bonz Magsambol, “How face-to-face class suspensions impact students' learning,” Rappler, October 17, 2025, https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/how-on-site-class-suspensions-impact-students-learning/?fbclid=IwY2xjawNrvaRleHRuA2FibQlxMQABHiZUHVsyGsDUBpZp-PRMXtjxHWZLZ8T53AqbRmkGbt0IPd5askjx4YuQ46nL_aem_BYEAwXQwHRdc3MYBudYztA.

⁹⁷ Philippine Statistics Authority, “Clarification on the Alleged 19 Million Functionally Illiterate High School Graduates and Junior High School Completers,” May 19, 2025, <https://psa.gov.ph/content/clarification-alleged-19-million-functionally-illiterate-high-school-graduates-and-junior>



Mental Health in Schools

A string of reports in 2025 showed an alarming rise in cases of violence at the grade school and high school levels. In one instance, a Grade 11 student shot his teacher dead after the latter had given him a failing grade. In another, an 18-year old student shot his alleged girlfriend inside a classroom, then also shot himself after. At least three incidents involved students getting stabbed around school premises as a result of altercations between them.⁹⁸

The number of bullying cases has also been alarmingly high, with the Philippines recording one of the highest school bullying rates globally. Research from the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) and the Longitudinal Cohort Study on the Filipino Child (LCSFC) shows that bullying not only affects students' mental health and learning, but also reduces future employment opportunities and earning potential.⁹⁹

This concerning situation has revived the call of mental health advocates to ramp up preventive measures and strengthen schools' capacities in

meeting the complex psychosocial needs of all students. The Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), for example, has urged for purposive investments in students' mental health, reiterating the glaring resource gaps that undermine the full implementation of the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013.¹⁰⁰ The current national average of guidance counselors to students is one guidance counselor to 14,000 students, a far cry from the international recommendation of one guidance counselor for every 250 students, and severely insufficient in meeting students' psychological and emotional support needs.¹⁰¹

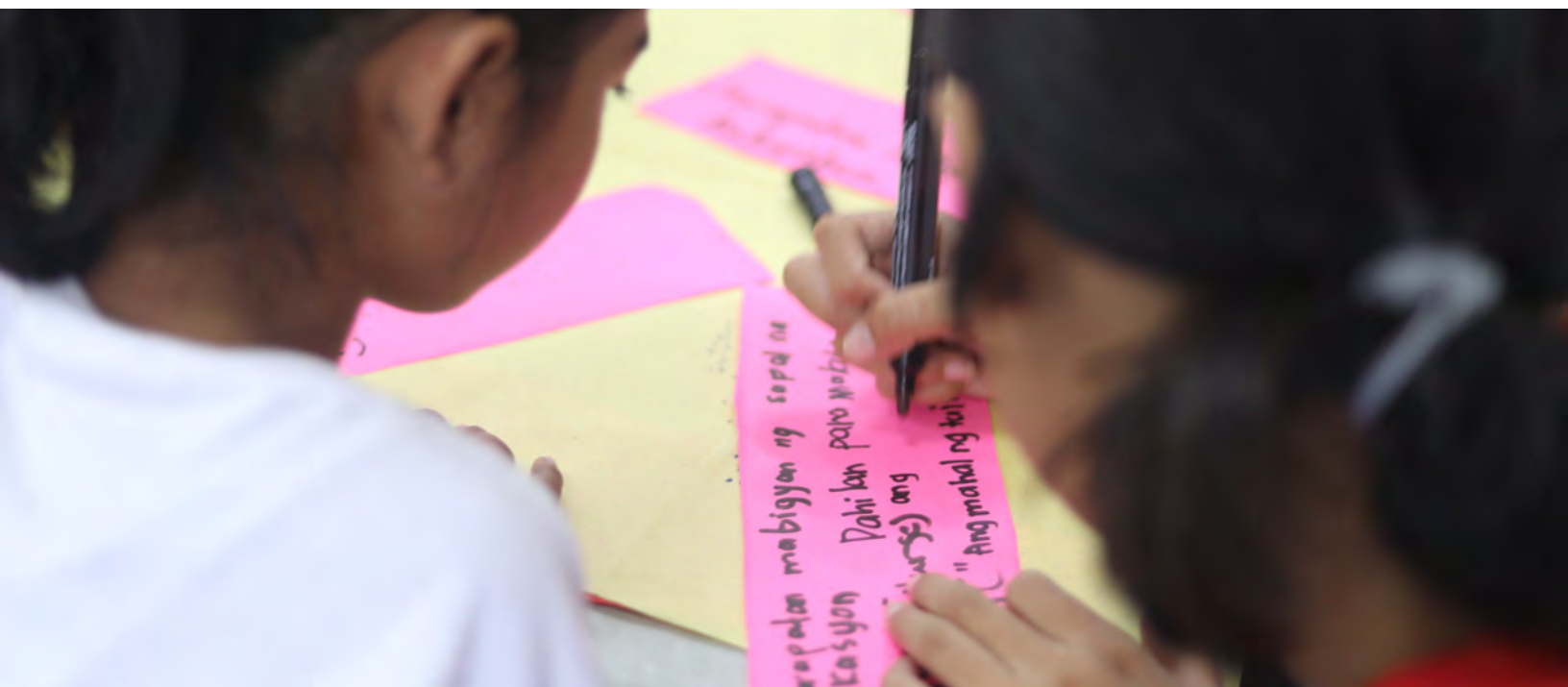
Further, the aforementioned conditions that teachers have to regularly contend with—overcrowded classrooms, multiple shifts, low salaries, slow promotions, and workloads exceeding their individual capacities—should not be overlooked any longer. Existing bills that prioritize the just compensation, physical and mental health, and occupational wellbeing of education sector workers are seen to address several systemic problems and must therefore be swiftly and efficiently implemented.

⁹⁸“Keep schools as a safe space,” Philippine Daily Inquirer, August 17, 2025, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/185425/keep-schools-as-a-safe-space>.

⁹⁹ Francis Allan L. Angelo, "Bullying Crisis in PH Schools Threatens Education, Economy, Philippine Institute for Development Studies, May 1, 2025, <https://www.pids.gov.ph/details/news/in-the-news/bullying-crisis-in-ph-schools-threatens-education-economy>.

¹⁰⁰ Bella Cariaso, "Stricter preventive measures sought against school violence," *Philippine Star*, August 10, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/08/10/2464415/stricter-preventive-measures-sought-against-school-violence>.

¹⁰¹ Merlina Hernando-Malipot, "Smaller classes, more support staff needed for effective anti-bullying policy – group," Manila Bulletin, August 6, 2025. <https://mb.com.ph/2025/08/06/smaller-classes-more-support-staff-needed-for-effective-anti-bullying-policy-group>.





Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act, Now in Limbo

Senate Bill 1979 (SB 1979), or the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023, gained the spotlight in January when Project Dalisay, an initiative of the National Coalition for the Family and the Constitution (NCFC), launched an oppositional campaign that got even President Bongbong Marcos Jr. to peddle the same false claims that the group had made. Their video, “Unmasking the Perils of CSE,” propagated the falsehood that S.B. 1979 will institutionalize the teaching of early childhood masturbation to children aged 0 to 4 years old.¹⁰² Amid this campaign, seven senators withdrew their signatures from the bill.

Reportedly among the most common causes of adolescent pregnancy in the Philippines are the lack of guidance on birth control and navigating romantic relationships, as well as the prevalence of child sexual exploitation. The Comprehensive

Sexuality Education (CSE) program, which S.B. 1979 aims to institutionalize, will seek to prevent these causes by guiding children and their parents about sex and informing children about predatory behavior. If implemented successfully, this will have life-saving impacts on thousands of youths and prevent widespread recurrences of adolescent mothers dropping out of school to raise their own children, such as is the case among PhilRights’ partner communities.

S.B. 1979 was already up for second reading at the Senate after having undisputedly passed the House of Representatives. However, after the eruption of the Project Dalisay-led campaign, the bill has since been stalled, with several lawmakers filing new versions of it in the 20th Congress.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ailla Dela Cruz, “LIST: Project Dalisay’s out-of-context claims vs anti-teen pregnancy bill, CSE,” Rappler, February 7, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/project-dalisay-claims-anti-adolescent-pregnancy-bill-comprehensive-sexuality-education/>.

¹⁰³ Michelle Abad, “Majority of Filipinos support sex education tailored to age, culture – Pulse,” Rappler, August 7, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/comprehensive-sexuality-education-survey-results-pulse-asia-march-2025/>.

Right to Social Protection

Government Disservice

The provision of decent and pro-people government services remains elusive for the vast majority of Filipinos.

Marcos Jr. has implemented no meaningful measures to ease the daily hardships faced by the people—queues for increasingly costly public transportation remain long, traffic congestion continues to worsen, and people's vulnerability to disasters such as flash floods, landslides, and earthquakes is exacerbated by anomalous infrastructure projects plagued by corruption. As a result, Filipinos' quality of life has seen little improvement since the start of the Marcos Jr. administration, despite his lofty promises. In 2025, social protection programs or ayuda remain politicized, and government services largely serve to line the pockets of politicians.



Palliative Measures as Social Service

*Ayuda*¹⁰⁴ remains a lifeline for many Filipinos, particularly those in the most disadvantaged sectors—minimum wage earners, tricycle drivers, laundry women, fisherfolk, farmers, and others entrenched in poverty. Working long hours for a meager and often irregular income of Php 50-300 a day, these individuals rely heavily on essential government services to make ends meet.

But the government's response to this crisis remains palliative. Marcos Jr.'s flagship poverty alleviation programs like the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations (AICs), *Ayuda sa Kapos ang Kita* Program (AKAP), and *Walang Gutom* do little to systemically uplift the poor from poverty. The government's preference to residual social welfare actions provides an illusion that the poor are being provided with an array of support when in fact these temporary and stopgap-types of responses do not even address the root causes of systematic poverty. They are reactive measures that perpetuate corrupt practices and are motivated by political gain.

Introduced in 2023, the government launched AKAP, which provides aid to minimum wage earners and near-poor Filipinos, as categorized by the government, amidst the rising cost of basic goods.¹⁰⁵ AKAP provides food, medical, funeral, and cash relief assistance to qualified beneficiaries.¹⁰⁶ In January 2025, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rex Gatchalian assured the public that the funds were disbursed accordingly through assessment and that five million near-poor

Filipinos were served with 99.3% of the Php 26.7 billion fund utilized.¹⁰⁷ He also assured that AKAP and the department's services would not be used for politicking.¹⁰⁸ Per DSWD Memorandum Circular No. 04 Series of 2024, AKAP can be implemented directly by the department and through partner Local Government Units (LGUs).

This, however, did not prevent Congressman Martin Romualdez, in coordination with Tingog Partylist, represented by his wife, Yedda Romualdez, and their son, Andrew Julian Romualdez, from spearheading the facilitation of the program to 36 congressional districts in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Crising and the intensified southwest monsoon in July, doling out Php 360 million,¹⁰⁹ whereas, months before this, DSWD had repeatedly announced the restriction of the presence of politicians on any disbursement and offsite implementation of AKAP.¹¹⁰ As stated in the press release of the Office of the Speaker, the move of the Romualdezes is a proactive measure and the result of lessons learned from past calamities, where there had been delays in response.¹¹¹

But these "proactive" measures were taken only when the typhoon had passed and much had already been lost to the flooding and landslides. Actual, proactive measures that truly serve the people would have taken the form of prevention and mitigation measures, so that no one would need to rely on the assistance in the first place. Social welfare and social services are far more than mere dole outs; rather than delegating citizens to the passive and helpless role of beneficiaries, they should address the root causes of poverty instead.

¹⁰⁴"Ayuda" refers to financial aid commonly provided by the government

¹⁰⁵"Funding for Cash Aid for 'Near Poor' Families to Continue in 2025," Philippine News Agency, n.d., <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1215736#:~:text=Romualdez%20made%20the%20statement%20as,start%20of%20the%20new%20year>

¹⁰⁶"Guidelines in the Implementation of the *Ayuda sa Kapos ang Kita* Program (AKAP)," Department of Social Welfare and Development, <https://aics.dswd.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/MC-No.-04-S-2024.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷Gabriel Pabico Lalu, "DSWD: Nearly 5M Filipinos got help thru Akap; 99% of funds used," *Inquirer.net*, January 2, 2025, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2020803/dswd-nearly-5m-filipinos-got-help-thru-akap-99-of-funds-used>.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹Office of the Speaker, "P360-M AKAP aid, relief goods, earmarked for flood victims in 36 congressional districts," Press release, July 22, 2025, <https://congress.gov.ph/media/press-releases/view/?content=9404&title=P360-M+AKAP+aid%2C+relief+goods+earmarked+for+flood+victims+in+36+congressional+districts>.

¹¹⁰Delon Porcalla, "No Politics in Cash Aid Distribution – DSWD," *Philstar.com*, June 29, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/06/30/2454342/no-politics-cash-aid-distribution-dswd>.

¹¹¹Office of the Speaker, "P360-M AKAP Aid, Relief Goods, Earmarked for Flood Victims in 36 Congressional Districts," <https://congress.gov.ph/media/press-releases/view/?content=9404&title=P360-M+AKAP+aid%2C+relief+goods+earmarked+for+flood+victims+in+36+congressional+districts>.



Substandard Utilities and Mismanaged Infrastructure

The 2024 TomTom Traffic Index report ranked Davao as 8th, Manila as 14th, and Caloocan as 26th out of 500 cities in 62 countries worldwide with the worst traffic in terms of travel time and congestion. The report reveals that commuters spend about 107 to 136 hours in traffic, wasting an equivalent of five days and 16 hours every year.¹¹²

Mobility in the major cities of the Philippines is not only an economic concern—where the country could potentially lose Php 5.4 billion daily.¹¹³ It also causes a host of other problems, primarily health problems, which affect commuters' quality of life. Losing sleep from waking up early, waiting in line for long periods to get a seat, and sitting stagnant in slow traffic and thick pollution increase commuters' vulnerability to physical ailments. Further, people who spend about two to three hours traveling to and from work lose time that they could otherwise spend with their families and pursuing other personal endeavors.

In July 2025, the country experienced three succeeding tropical storms followed by *habagat* (southwest monsoon). These caused the rapid rise of water levels and landslides affecting a total of 8,641,010 people or 2,379,904 households, while leaving 40 dead, 8 missing, and 33 injured, partially damaging 64,593 houses, and totally destroying 8,466 others.¹¹⁴ Flood control structures collapsed during the storms, proving to be ineptly-designed to perform the very functions they were made for. Several anomalous flood control projects were exposed thereafter, with the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee calling officials from the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and high-profile private contractors Curlee and Sarah Discaya to testify in hearings. The floodgates then opened on several ghost projects, substandard structures, and the lavish lifestyles of the families of officials allegedly involved in these projects.¹¹⁵ The Discayas named 17 House Representatives and seven DPWH officials that are responsible for answering to the multi-million flood control project scam.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Kaycee Valmonte, "Philippine Cities With Worst Traffic Congestion in 2024," Rappler, February 18, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/business/philippine-cities-worst-traffic-congestion-in-2024/#:~:text=Slow%20travel%20time,minutes%20to%20travel%20the%20distance>.

¹¹³ Valmonte, "Philippine Cities With Worst Traffic Congestion in 2024."

¹¹⁴ Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC), n.d., https://www.adrc.asia/view_disaster_en.php?Lang=en&Key=2765#~:text=The%20Philippines%20has%20been%20affected,missing%20people%2C%20and%208%20injured.

¹¹⁵ Senate Probe on Flood Control Bares Ghost Projects, Favoritism," Philippine News Agency, n.d., <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1256868>; Asian Journal News, "'Flooded Gates of Corruption': Senate, COA, BIR Probe 'Ghost Projects' in Flood-control Funds," August 27, 2025, <https://asianjournal.com/philippines/flooded-gates-of-corruption-senate-coa-bir-probe-ghost-projects-in-flood-control-funds/>; Prage Bnc and Prage Bnc, "Flood of Riches: Netizens Blast 'Nepo Babies' for Flaunting Wealth," BNC - Bilyonaryo News Channel - Always on Top (blog), August 29, 2025, <https://bnc.ph/flood-of-riches-netizens-blast-nepo-babies-for-flaunting-wealth/news/>.

¹¹⁶ Giselle Ombay, "Discaya Couple Names Gov't Execs Allegedly Linked to Flood Control Projects," GMA News Online, September 9, 2025, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/958379/discaya-names-govt-execs-flood-control-projects/story/>.

The flood control scandal outraged the people, propelling the Baha sa Luneta and the Trillion Peso March in EDSA on September 21, 2025, which was intended to coincide with the anniversary of Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s declaration of martial law in 1972—a symbolic act of honoring the Filipinos' tradition of resistance to corruption and repression.

The Discayas admitted to have transacted with the government as far back as the Aquino administration, but only disclosed the names of officials from 2022 onwards. The omission of their transactions before 2022 became a point of query during the Blue Ribbon Committee hearings especially when they became the top contractors during that particular period—during the Duterte administration, with incumbent Senator Mark Villar as Secretary of the DPWH until 2021 before he ran for the Senate.¹¹⁷

Just before the 2025 Midterm elections, the Villar-owned PrimeWater Infrastructure Corp. garnered headlines, as multiple complaints from consumers surfaced on the news and social

media. Criticisms against PrimeWater goes way back since the signed joint venture agreements (JVA) in 2020 with the local water districts of over 100 areas including, Bacolod, Cavite, Bulacan, and Metro Manila. The Villar's involvement in water supply was enabled by the public-private partnership (PPPs) policy of 2013.¹¹⁸ For years, in over 100 areas, water supply has been scarce, yet expensive. PrimeWater continues to earn from a service that they controlled, but neglected to provide.

One of PhilRights' partner communities, San Jose del Monte City in Bulacan is one of these 100 areas now serviced by PrimeWater. In a focus group discussion conducted in San Jose del Monte, community members shared that back when the San Jose Water District was their main water provider, they would pay a minimum of Php 200 per 10 cubic meters of water. Now, they pay a minimum of Php 800 to Php 1,300 per 10 cubic meters despite the poorer service, with frequent water interruptions severely affecting their daily life.¹¹⁹ It is alarming that companies like PrimeWater, which have taken over the provision of basic services, simply do not

¹¹⁷ "Discayas quizzed: Why no data on alleged payoffs before 2022?," Inquirer.net, September 9, 2025, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2106802/discayas-quizzed-why-no-data-on-alleged-payoffs-before-2022>.

¹¹⁸ Mariejo Ramos, "Down the Drain - Philippines Water Joint Ventures Stir Anger," Context by TRF, August 7, 2023, <https://www.context.news/money-power-people/down-the-drain-philippines-water-joint-ventures-stir-anger>; Harlene Delgado, "PrimeWater Issue Affects 16 Million Consumers, Palace Says," ABS-CBN News, May 9, 2025, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/business/2025/5/9/primewater-issue-affects-16-million-consumers-palace-says-1756>; Ej Macababba, "Manny Villar to 'Dispose of' PrimeWater - Cynthia," Philstar.com, August 1, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/08/02/2462454/manny-villar-dispose-of-primewater-cynthia>.

¹¹⁹ Focus Group Discussion with San Jose del Monte City Community Partners



It is alarming that companies [...] which have taken over the provision of basic services, simply do not mobilize their abundant resources to provide even the bare minimum, nor to resolve such issues in an industry that they willingly ventured into and have greatly benefited in.

mobilize their abundant resources to provide even the bare minimum, nor to resolve such issues in an industry that they willingly ventured into and have greatly benefited in. Taking advantage of this basic need and monopolizing an industry for personal interests is a gross violation against the people.

Likewise, many Filipinos carry the burden of high costs in electricity, the second highest rate in Southeast Asia, next to Singapore, which, despite its limited natural resources, ensures a stable power supply with minimal outages. In the Philippines, average households experience at least 28 power interruptions yearly due to forced outages.¹²⁰ In some areas, power outages have become a routine. Siquijor, since September of 2024, has had power outages that would last up to more than 10 hours. These would then further lead to water interruptions. The power provider, Province of Siquijor Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Prosielco) cites the breakdown of generators or operational maintenance activities as the reasons for the outages.¹²¹ The province's power supplier, Siquijor Island Power Corp (Sipcor), is a subsidiary of the Villar Group's Prime Asset Ventures. The province was put under a state of

calamity in June due to the frequent blackouts.¹²²

Several islands north of Siquijor, Mindoro has been suffering from frequent power outages since as far back as 50 years ago. In the '60s, as the country pushed for nationwide electrification, Mindoro was left behind due to isolation from the main grids. In the 2000s, as the government pushed for the privatization of the power sector, Mindoro was put on a lower priority for government investment. Today, frequent outages remain a problem for the residents of Oriental and Occidental Mindoro.¹²³

By systematically limiting or withholding access to basic needs, these blatant acts of neglect and corruption deprive millions of Filipinos of their right to live in dignity, as they struggle every day to make ends meet. This unfortunate heritage of mismanagement makes clear the notion that the state cannot be relied upon to cleanse and repair itself inwardly. Progressive changes towards the realization of all human rights for all lies in the hands of the people, working in concert to claim their rights and transforming the structures that govern them.

¹²⁰ Rhick Lars Albay, "High Electricity Prices, Frequent Outages Underscore Need for Rooftop Solar in the Philippines," *Eco-Business*, May 23, 2025, <https://www.eco-business.com/news/high-electricity-prices-frequent-outages-underscore-need-for-rooftop-solar-in-the-philippines/#:~:text=In%20contrast%2C%20Filipinos%20face%20frequent,despite%20its%20clean%20energy%20potential>.

¹²¹ "Power Crisis Places Siquijor Province Under State of Calamity," *Philippine News Agency*, n.d., <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1251660>.

¹²² Alexis Romero Brix Lelis, "Power Firm Commits to Address Blackouts in Siquijor," *Philstar.com*, June 10, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/06/11/2449633/power-firm-commits-address-blackouts-siquijor>.

¹²³ "Lights Out in Paradise: Mindoro's Half-Century Struggle for Stable Power," *Mindoro Today*, June 30, 2024, <https://mindorotoday.tv/2024/06/30/lights-out-in-paradise-mindoros-half-century-struggle-for-power/>.

Endangering the Environment and Indigenous Peoples

The environmental and indigenous peoples' situation in the Philippines under the Marcos Jr. administration continues to deteriorate, revealing a pattern of prioritizing profits over people, weakened safeguards, and the systematic neglect of the rights of indigenous peoples.

The government's policy direction is clear: to further liberalize the mining and energy sectors in the name of economic growth, attracting investments at the cost of environmental protection and human rights. The administration's emphasis on easing restrictions, fast-tracking approvals, and granting incentives to private businesses prioritizes profits over the welfare of affected communities and the protection of ancestral lands.



The Marcos government's approach to environmental management mirrors that of its predecessors. It continues to pursue extractive and energy projects that contribute to the climate crisis and environmental destruction. Mining and energy developments, such as coal and hydropower plants, not only emit greenhouse gases but also destroy forests that serve as carbon sinks and natural protection against floods and typhoons. As forests are cleared and mountains leveled to make way for large-scale projects, communities face increased vulnerability to climate-induced disasters, resulting in more frequent and severe flooding, landslides, and loss of life and livelihood. These projects, often justified as "development," deepen the suffering of marginalized groups, particularly indigenous peoples whose territories hold the minerals and resources targeted by corporate extraction.

Continuing Liberalization of Mining

Indigenous communities continue to bear the brunt of the Marcos administration's policies. Beneath their ancestral lands¹²⁴ lie critical minerals¹²⁵ such as nickel, copper, and cobalt—resources that have become central to the government's drive for investment and economic growth. The administration has pushed measures such as the Maharlika Investment Fund's involvement in mining in Kalinga, new department orders on critical minerals, and proposals to amend the guidelines for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).¹²⁶

These initiatives, framed as drivers of economic growth and modernization, effectively weaken protection of indigenous rights and fast-track the entry of corporations into ancestral territories. At least 1.7 million hectares of ancestral lands are now under threat from large-scale mining, forest tenements, and energy projects.¹²⁷ Data show that more than half of

approved mining tenements, forest concessions, and renewable energy zones overlap with ancestral domains. Yet, the Marcos administration has remained silent on these violations, perpetuating a system that treats indigenous territories as expendable zones of extraction rather than sacred lands and sources of life.

In September 2025, President Marcos Jr. signed Republic Act 12253, the Enhanced Fiscal Regime for Large-Scale Metallic Mining Act. The law incentivizes mining investments¹²⁸ but allocates only a paltry one-percent royalty to indigenous peoples¹²⁹ and disregards the social and environmental impacts of mining.¹³⁰ By advancing a market-driven model of environmental governance, the Marcos Jr. administration continues to sideline the enduring call of indigenous communities for land sovereignty. Further, it erodes the country's

¹²⁴ The Section III, Definition of Terms of the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 provides that "ancestral lands refers to all lands exclusively and actually possessed, occupied, or utilized by indigenous cultural communities by themselves or through their ancestors in accordance with their customs and traditions since time immemorial, and as may be defined and delineated by law." Republic Act No. 7942, "An Act Instituting a New System of Mineral Resources Exploration, Development, Utilization, and Conservation," March 3, 1995. https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra1995/ra_7942_1995.html

¹²⁵ In the Philippines, critical minerals refer to strategically important materials such as nickel, cobalt, and copper that are essential to modern technologies, clean energy systems, and advanced manufacturing. While there is no single official definition, the term is used in policy and industry to describe minerals crucial to economic development and the global energy transition, whose supply chains are vulnerable to disruption due to limited processing capacity, export dependence, and geopolitical risks.

¹²⁶ Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center, "Statement on the passage of the Enhanced Fiscal Regime for Large-Scale Metallic Mining Act," September 8, 2025. <https://www.lrcksk.org/post/statement-on-the-passage-of-the-enhanced-fiscal-regime-for-large-scale-metallic-mining-act>

¹²⁷ Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center, "Indigenous territories under siege everywhere, but nowhere in sight in Marcos' SONA," August 8, 2025. <https://www.lrcksk.org/post/indigenous-territories-under-siege-everywhere-but-nowhere-in-sight-in-marcos-sona>

¹²⁸ Presidential Legislative Liaison Office, "President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. signed into law Republic Act No. 12253, also known as the Enhanced Fiscal Regime for Large-Scale Metallic Mining Act," September 9, 2025. <https://www.pllo.gov.ph/index.php/gallery/gallery-2025/2025-09-04-president-ferdinand-r-marcos-jr-signed-into-law-republic-act-no-12253-also-known-as-the-enhanced-fiscal-regime-for-large-scale-metallic-mining-act>

¹²⁹ Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center, "Statement on the passage of the Enhanced Fiscal Regime for Large-Scale Metallic Mining Act," September 8, 2025. <https://www.lrcksk.org/post/statement-on-the-passage-of-the-enhanced-fiscal-regime-for-large-scale-metallic-mining-act>

¹³⁰ Erika Mae P. Sinaking, "New fiscal regime for mining industry signed into law," Wealth Insights, September 5, 2025. <https://wealthinsights.metrobank.com.ph/bworldonline/new-fiscal-regime-for-mining-industry-signed-into-law/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThis%20new%20regime%20will%20bring,mining%20revenues%20with%20actual%20profits>

ability to address the worsening climate crisis, which necessitates the integrity of natural ecosystems.

In the energy sector, the Department of Energy (DOE) has allowed the continuation and expansion of coal and hydropower projects despite previous moratoriums. Among these are the 1,200-megawatt Atimonan One Energy coal-fired power plant in Quezon, owned by Meralco PowerGen, which was granted “committed capacity” status, exempting it from the 2020 Coal Moratorium Policy.¹³¹ The 1,500-megawatt coal plant in Narra, Palawan, owned by DMCI Power Corp., continues construction in a protected area.¹³² Similarly, the 1,400-megawatt Ahunan Dam in Pakil, Laguna was classified as an “energy project of national significance,” allowing developers to bypass normal permitting processes.¹³³ These projects, initiated under previous administrations, are being continued and endorsed by Marcos Jr.,

signaling a consistent disregard for affected communities who have been raising concerns over the projects’ adverse environmental, social, and economic impacts.¹³⁴

In Mindanao, the situation of both Moro and non-Moro Indigenous Peoples is largely similar, characterized by persistent rights violations related to land and resource rights. According to Timuay Justice and Governance (TJG) reports, there are “continuing land conflicts and land grabbing issues everywhere, be it for government or private use,” as large-scale development projects enter the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). These ongoing disputes highlight that indigenous peoples’ rights in the region continue to be violated by both public and private actors, despite existing legal frameworks intended to safeguard ancestral domains and promote self-determination.

¹³¹ Myrna M. Velasco, “It’s on! MGen’s Atimonan coal plant back in business after DOE nod,” Manila Bulletin, July 26, 2025. <https://mb.com.ph/2025/07/26/mgens-atimonan-coal-plant-officially-back-on-track-with-doe-reinstatement>

¹³² Alexa Garcia, “Palawan coal plant project exempted from moratorium,” Palawan News, July 12, 2024. <https://palawan-news.com/palawan-coal-plant-project-exempted-from-moratorium/>

¹³³ Sheldeen Joy Talavera, “Prime Infra Laguna pumped storage hydro project on track for completion by 2030,” Business World, August 13, 2025. <https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/08/13/691420/prime-infra-laguna-pumped-storage-hydro-project-on-track-for-completion-by-2030/>

¹³⁴ Iya Gozum, “For years, residents opposed the Atimonan coal plant. It’s greenlit anyway,” Rappler, November 4, 2025. <https://www.rappler.com/environment/climate-change/atimonan-coal-plant-quezon-construction-protests-impact/>





Government and Business Collusion

Government institutions tasked with upholding environmental standards have also been complicit in violations of due process. Both the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) have failed to enforce essential safeguards, according to ground reports gathered by the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ), a national coalition of environmental groups and defenders. In the case of the Ahunan Dam in Laguna, developers began cutting trees despite lacking a valid tree-cutting permit. The EMB, meanwhile, skipped required public consultations and information campaigns during the project's scoping stage, depriving communities of their right to participate in decisions affecting their environment and livelihoods. Such procedural violations have become routine, with corporations taking

shortcuts and agencies either turning a blind eye or actively facilitating these irregularities.

The cumulative impact of these actions is felt most acutely by rural and indigenous communities. Based on PMCJ's ground reports, fisherfolk near coal and gas facilities report dwindling catches as pollution contaminates marine ecosystems and access to fishing grounds becomes restricted. Many are forced to travel farther into dangerous waters to find fish, risking their safety and livelihoods. Coal plants release toxic emissions that endanger public health, compounding the vulnerabilities of communities already affected by climate change and poverty. These environmental burdens reinforce structural inequalities, where the poorest Filipinos pay the highest price for policies designed to benefit powerful corporations.

Continuing Attacks on Rights Defenders

Meanwhile, environmental and human rights defenders continue to face harassment, red-tagging, and violence for opposing destructive projects. Activists who stand against mining, reclamation, and energy projects in indigenous territories are routinely vilified and threatened, according to the PMCJ. Under the Marcos Jr. administration, the state has remained silent in the face of these attacks, offering no meaningful protection to those who risk their lives defending the environment. The absence of official condemnation and accountability fosters a climate of fear and impunity, discouraging public participation and dissent.

Despite public statements on climate action and sustainability, the Marcos administration's actions reveal a contradictory and dangerous path. Coal mining remains permitted, undermining the country's transition to renewable energy and threatening community-led renewable initiatives such as micro-grid solar projects in indigenous villages.¹³⁵ The lifting of bans on land reclamation and the continued expansion of extractive industries demonstrate a market-driven approach that subordinates human rights and environmental protection to corporate profit. While the government boasts of economic progress, it is the environment, the poor, and indigenous peoples who bear its cost.

¹³⁵ Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center, "Coal mines threaten to eclipse indigenous solar villages in South Cotabato," September 19, 2025. <https://www.lrcksk.org/post/coal-mines-threaten-to-eclipse-indigenous-solar-villages-in-south-cotabato>



A line of police officers in riot gear, including helmets and shields with the word 'PULIS' on them, stands in front of a street. In the background, there are green trees and traffic lights. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting daytime.

Part 2

Mahuli, Taya!

Caught in the Erosion of Civil and Political Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), along with corresponding domestic laws, guarantee the State's obligation to protect and respect the civil and political rights of the people.



These include the freedom of expression, freedom from torture and inhumane treatment, protection against enforced disappearance, the right to due process, the right to suffrage and participation in governance, and the right to organize and engage in peaceful assembly, among others. Civil society organizations and the public play a crucial role in strengthening the pillars of democracy, including people's participation, transparency,

good governance, the rule of law, accountability, and justice. Yet despite these international and domestic safeguards, the State under Marcos Jr. continues to perpetuate violations of civil and political rights, both through action and omission. This chapter documents the systematic attempts by the State to undermine fundamental rights and freedoms, contributing to impunity and the shrinking of civic space.



Civil and Political Rights

Commission and Omission: Direct Attacks and Neglect of the People's Civil and Political Rights

The year 2025 has been a rollercoaster of events in terms of people's civil and political rights.

The continuous omission of the State of its obligations to protect and respect our civil and political rights has deteriorated our general human rights situation, impinging on the participation of the people in the democratic processes, weakening safeguards to the accountability of public officials and the transparency of processes involving public funds, and undermining our independence from foreign influences. The government has also been culpable of committing violations—direct attacks against the very people it is mandated to serve and protect.

Continuing Attacks on Rights Defenders

Despite Marcos Jr.'s claims that his administration's approach to drugs in the country would be humane and rights-based, monitoring and documenting bodies have revealed otherwise. Duterte's merciless legacy has worsened the entrenchment of violence and impunity in law enforcement, and Marcos Jr. has made no substantial effort to address or reverse it.

Dahas, a monitoring project led by the Third World Studies Center of the University of the Philippines Diliman, recorded that as of August 31, 2025, 1,059 have been killed during anti-drug operations at the national level during the Marcos Jr. administration.¹³⁶ Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City, the three biggest metropolises of the country, remained the hotspots of the killings during Marcos Jr.'s first three years in office.¹³⁷

There appears to be a lack of reporting on the violations in the news, which obscures the actual number of victims under the current administration. The Children's Legal Rights and Development Center (CLRDC) has observed that news on extrajudicial killings rarely reaches the public, so they would usually rely on word-of-mouth reports from the communities. In the same vein, the Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights) encounters a growing challenge in locating victims of incidents under the Marcos Jr. administration due to the absence of publicly available information. Publicly available information, such as news, is crucial in determining and assessing cases of human rights violations, especially since the police authorities rarely publicize their own reports of the drug war cases in the current administration.

PhilRights has documented 12 cases of drug-related extrajudicial killings in its partner communities in Metro Manila, Bulacan, and Rizal during the Marcos Jr. administration. While there has been a significant drop in the number of such cases as compared to the previous administration, the current share of illegal arrests among alleged drug users is 56% percent higher than in the first three years of Duterte's presidency, based on PhilRights' documentation work. Hence, law enforcers appear to be shifting towards using illegal arrest as a primary means to address the drug problem.¹³⁸

In June 2025, former Philippine National Police (PNP) chief General Nicolas Torre III hinted at ramping up the use of arrest and detention as the PNP's main anti-illegal drugs strategy.

“The number of arrests is part of our metric. Ramp up arrests, go ahead, ramp it up,” said Torre during his first day as PNP chief.¹³⁹

However, aside from being ineffective in curbing drug use, detaining drug suspects only exacerbates jail congestion, which in May 2025 has reportedly averaged at 296% among the 426 jails managed by the Bureau of Jail and Management and Penology (BJMP). Arrest and detention also expose the drug offender to a string of other rights violations, which in no way help them address the root causes of their drug abuse.¹⁴⁰

The Medical Action Group (MAG) reported cases of torture and deprivation of medical attention inside congested cells, many of which have led to deaths under police custody. They

¹³⁶ University of the Philippines Third World Studies Center, “The Latest Numbers,” accessed October 3, 2025, <https://dahas.upd.edu.ph/sources/>.

¹³⁷ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, “Philippines: Drug War killings continue in the Philippines as former president Rodrigo Duterte faces ICC warrant over anti-drugs crackdown,” May 21, 2025, <https://acleddata.com/expert-comment/philippines-drug-war-killings-continue-philippines-former-president-rodrigo-duterte/>.

¹³⁸ Philippine Human Rights Information Center, “Mula Hinagpis Hanggang Paglilitis: 2025 Monitoring and Documentation Report

¹³⁹ Philippine Daily Inquirer, PNP chief Torre's anti-drug strategy: Ramp up “legal” arrests, accessed October 7, 2025, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2065900/pnp-chief-torres-anti-drug-strategy-ramp-up-legal-arrests>.

¹⁴⁰ International Committee of the Red Cross, Philippines: Understanding challenges in detention through Health Information System, July 14, 2025, <https://www.icrc.org/en/article/philippines-understanding-challenges-in-detention-through-health-information-system#:~:text=In%20the%20426%20jails%20managed,improvement%2C%20jails%20are%20still%20overpopulated>.

advocate for the decongestion of prisons through the compassionate release of elderly and terminally ill persons deprived of liberty (PDLs). But the government has been lethargic in granting clemencies and has been relying instead on plea bargaining, where PDLs are made to admit to the alleged crimes for early release under probation despite their innocence. PDLs are not usually informed of the negative consequences of pleading guilty. Many PDLs who pleaded guilty have said that despite their freedom, they find it difficult to get hired due to the hits in their National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) clearances.¹⁴¹

In contrast to hastened efforts against alleged small-time offenders, the claw of justice continues to be sluggish against state perpetrators.¹⁴² Police Colonel Dante Lubos is the latest police perpetrator who has been convicted of homicide for killing a victim in a 2016 buy-bust operation in Manila. The Marcos Jr. administration, therefore, failed to deliver its promise¹⁴³ to facilitate the speedy serving of justice for the victims of the drug war. The culture of impunity thrives in the third year of Marcos Jr.'s administration, with no silver lining in sight at the domestic level.

No Conviction, No Reconciliation

The return of the Marcoses to national governance is a mockery of the essence of the 1986 People Power Uprising and an insult to the 1987 Constitution, which was written as a safeguard to the same freedoms and democratic institutions that the Marcos Sr. regime trampled upon. After decades of consistently and successfully renovating their public image, it is clear that the Marcoses will not apologize for, let alone acknowledge, the grave crimes that they and their cronies committed on the people, whether it be the hoarding of billions from the country's coffers amidst an economic crisis, or the direct atrocities committed through massacres, killings, displacements, enforced disappearances, torture, and other gross human rights violations. This sets a terrible precedent for plunderers and tyrants, who now know that historical amnesia is a powerful tool in the systematic exploitation of a people.

It has long been feared that the presidency of another Marcos would result in the dismissal of the several corruption charges filed against them and their accomplices in the country's anti-graft court. In February, the Sandiganbayan dismissed the civil forfeiture case filed in 1987 by the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) to reclaim luxury vehicles from Marcos Sr., Imelda Marcos, and government photographer Fernando Timbol. This is reportedly the ninth dismissal of a case against the Marcoses ever since Ferdinand Marcos Jr. became President in 2022.¹⁴⁴ This was added yet again on July 29, when the Sandiganbayan dismissed another wealth forfeiture case by PCGG against 20 of Marcos' "dummies" who were minor shareholders of Eastern Telecommunications Philippines Incorporated (ETPI) for the alleged lack of evidence.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Based on interviews of PhilRights with PDLs.

¹⁴² As of November 2025, only five convictions against drug war perpetrators have been made, a meager increase of one from last year. (See: Jairo Bolledo, "Only 5th Drug War Conviction: Cop Found Guilty of Homicide in 'nanlaban' Case," Rappler, September 2, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/court-convicts-police-colonel-dante-lubos-drug-war-killing/>.)

¹⁴³ Jean Mangaluz, "As DOJ Admits Failures, Marcos Admin Vows Justice for EJK Victims," Philstar.com, March 21, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/03/21/2430062/doj-admits-failures-marcos-admin-vows-justice-ejk-victims>.

¹⁴⁴ Gillian Villanueva, "Carmma hits 'pattern of exoneration' of Marcoses," Philippine Daily Inquirer, February 25, 2025, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2037715/carmma-hits-pattern-of-exoneration-of-marcoses>.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Marcelo, "Wealth forfeiture case vs 20 Marcos 'dummies' junked," The Philippine Star, August 21, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/08/21/2466963/wealth-forfeiture-case-vs-20-marcos-dummies-junked>.

In recent months, amidst the eruption of the flood control scandal, Bongbong Marcos Jr. claimed solidarity with the protesters and paraded himself as a champion against corruption in government. Many citizens have been convinced of this image, proving that the Marcoses are still carefully curating a history that will ultimately heroize them and erase their victims from the narrative. However, the messages, statements, and calls to action from the protesters have proven that the truth is far from lost—that the memory of the victims of the dictatorship remains in the hearts and minds of the youth, and that the struggle for justice and accountability will be carried on until fruition.

Duterte's Case Remains under the Jurisdiction of the ICC

The International Police (Interpol), on behalf of the International Criminal Court (ICC), served a warrant of arrest against Rodrigo Duterte on March 11, 2025, when he arrived at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) from a political gathering in Hong Kong. The warrant of arrest explicitly states that the Pre-Trial Chamber (PTC) of the Court found reasonable grounds to believe that Duterte had committed the crimes against humanity of murder, torture, and rape when the Philippines was a member of the Rome Statute. This significant development was a product of years of engagement and participation at the ICC by the victims, their families, and civil society organizations to push for justice and accountability.

While regarded as a huge victory for the victims and their families, arresting Duterte is only the start of a much longer process to convict him. Starting from his arrest, the process proceeded to his first court appearance on March 14, 2025 via a video link. The judges set the confirmation of charges on September 23, 2025, but postponed it due to Duterte's health concerns,



to the dismay of the families of victims and civil society organizations.

Civil society organizations have observed that Marcos Jr. kept his safe positioning on the arrest of Duterte amidst his eroding public trust ratings. Instead of invoking the rights of the victims to justice and accountability, Marcos Jr. defended the permission to arrest Duterte as a mere commitment to Interpol's request, which attests to the lack of a genuine attempt of the current government to confront the culture of impunity that his predecessor left behind.¹⁴⁶ It was also evident among civil society organizations that Marcos Jr. only weaponized the arrest of Duterte as part of his growing political rift with Vice President Sara Duterte.

Duterte and his accomplices and supporters reacted fiercely, capitalizing on mis- and disinformation campaigns. They called the arrest "kidnapping" despite the presence and reading of an arrest warrant, the publicly available information on Duterte's situation and whereabouts, and the legitimacy of the ICC's

¹⁴⁶ Presidential Communications Office, "PBBM: Duterte's arrest PH commitment to Interpol," accessed October 7, 2025, https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/pbbm-dutertes-arrest-ph-commitment-to-interpol/.



jurisdiction in the Philippines.¹⁴⁷ They also accused ICC of trampling on the sovereignty of the country despite the presence of a Supreme Court ruling that the government must cooperate with the ICC and its decision to retain jurisdiction over the crimes against humanity that happened in the country prior to the Philippines' withdrawal.¹⁴⁸ The same camp unleashed a barrage of social media posts that made famous celebrities and world leaders appear to publicly denounce the arrest. Amidst these attempts to lure the people into believing lies, civil society organizations stood their ground by fact-checking and demystifying misconceptions with the families of victims and their community partners.

The ICC prevails as a beacon of hope for the victims and their families. There is also a favorable trust in this alternative mechanism among the public, with 57% of Filipinos in favor of rejoining the ICC as of July 2025, according to the results of an OCTA Research survey.¹⁴⁹ As Dr. Aurora Parong, chairperson of the Philippine Coalition for the International Criminal Court (PCICC), said in 2024, "People's calls for accountability of those responsible for serious crimes are louder and increasing. More and more victims are supporting the International Criminal Court."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ South China Morning Post, "Duterte's lawyer says ICC case 'a kidnapping', has grounds to throw out case, March 31, 2025, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3304576/dutertes-lawyer-says-icc-case-kidnapping-has-compelling-grounds-thr-ow-out-case>.

¹⁴⁸ Zhou Xin, "Arrest of Duterte: Sovereignty and Selective Justice in Philippine Politics," accessed October 7, 2025, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202503/12/WS67d0f73ba310c240449da5f5.html>.

¹⁴⁹ Philippine News Agency, "Most Filipinos back PH's return to ICC – survey," accessed October 7, 2025, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1253280>.

¹⁵⁰ Aurora Corazon Parong and Ray Paolo Santiago, "Slow justice, impunity reigns in the country," <https://www.amnesty.org.ph/2024/07/slow-justice-impunity-reigns-in-the-country/>

Death Penalty: Bringing Back the Ghost of the Past

The thirst for blood remains among government officials, who have invoked several crimes to push forward the death penalty's comeback. In January 2025, Zamboanga del Norte Representative Khymer Adan Olosa introduced the Death Penalty for Corruption Act, which proposes a firing squad for public officials convicted of graft, malversation of public funds, and plunder.¹⁵¹ Senator Ronald "Bato" dela Rosa also refiled the death penalty bill in July against large-scale illegal drug traffickers.¹⁵²

PhilRights has been staunch in its argument that the death penalty should never be reinstated for the following reasons:¹⁵³

1. No State shall possess the power to take a human life.
2. The death penalty is inherently irrevocable: once it is executed erroneously against an innocent person, it will never be rectified.
3. It is unjust, discriminatory, and has been disproportionately used against marginalized people.
4. It is inhuman, cruel, and degrading, inflicting extreme physical and mental assault against the sentenced.
5. Contrary to the goal of our justice system to reform criminals so they can be productive again in their communities, the death penalty removes any possibility of rehabilitation.
6. The death penalty contradicts international standards. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that everyone has the right to life, and that the death penalty, therefore, should not exist. The country is also a signatory to the 2nd Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which encourages the abolition of the death penalty.
7. It wreaks transgenerational pain, especially to the relatives of both victims and people sentenced to death.
8. The death penalty only endorses killing or murder as a solution to the crimes in society, but does not address their root causes.
9. There is no evidence to show that the death penalty has been more successful in deterring crimes than life imprisonment.
10. The victims of crimes themselves do not want the death penalty against their perpetrators, as it violates their ethical and/or religious beliefs.

¹⁵¹ Philippine News Agency, House bill seeks death by firing squad for corrupt officials, accessed October 7, 2025, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1242345>.

¹⁵² Dhel Nazario, Bato refiles death penalty bill for large-scale illegal drug traffickers, accessed October 7, 2025, Manila Bulletin, <https://mb.com.ph/2025/07/03/bato-refiles-death-penalty-bill-for-large-scale-illegal-drug-traffickers>.

¹⁵³ Philippine Human Rights Information Center post published on their Facebook page, October 10, 2024.





Dirty Elections

Fast approaching the day of the third year of Marcos Jr.'s presidency, the country's electorate exercised their right to suffrage during the 2025 Midterm Elections. 82.20% of more than 69 million voters, the highest voter turnout in the history of Philippine midterm elections, voted to fill the 12 senate seats and 317 congressional seats.¹⁵⁴ But the important day did not go as well as it was hoped to.

China has a massive claim in the West Philippine Sea that violates the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and the Philippine government saw this as a cause for the Chinese government to meddle with the midterm elections in the country.¹⁵⁵ In April 2025, less than a month before the elections, the National Security Council reported interference of the Chinese government, citing indications that they were targeting candidates expressing opposition to Chinese hegemony.¹⁵⁶ A Senate hearing also exposed that the Chinese government sowed political division among the populace using troll farms.¹⁵⁷ The Chinese government allegedly contracted several firms to influence the votes of the electorate, as evidenced by the surge in

Chinese firm-linked fake social media accounts that attacked politicians and candidates in the months leading up to the elections.¹⁵⁸

Vote-buying was still a pervasive practice to lure voters, denying them their right to choose the right candidate based on records and merit. The Commission on Elections (COMELEC) issued show cause orders to 74 candidates and non-candidates in April for alleged vote-buying and abuse of resources.¹⁵⁹ The Legal Network for Truthful Elections (LENTE) recorded almost 100 vote-buying cases from barangay halls to last-minute assemblies.¹⁶⁰

The campaign expenditures of candidates skyrocketed even before the official campaign period. The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) reported that Camille Villar ranked first for spending almost Php 180 million, followed by Lito Lapid and Pia Cayetano.¹⁶¹ The high campaign spending boosted the country's gross domestic product (GDP) to reach an increase of 5.5% in the second quarter of 2025,¹⁶² but these were wasted funds that could have been channeled to more productive

¹⁵⁴ Commission on Elections data published on their Facebook page, May 16, 2025.

¹⁵⁵ Venzon, Cliff Harvey, and Neil Jerome Morales, "Philippine Official Says China Trying to Influence Its Elections," Bloomberg, April 28, 2025, <https://www.btsnews.net/worldbiz/asia/philippine-official-says-china-trying-influence-its-elections-1128121>.

¹⁵⁶ Charie Abarcar, "China interfering with PH's May 2025 polls, says NSC's Malaya," Inquirer.net, April 24, 2025, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/274143/china-interfering-with-phs-may-2025-polls>.

¹⁵⁷ Philippine Daily Inquirer, "Tolentino bares evidence of China Troll Farm to discredit ph gov't," accessed October 7, 2025, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/274167/tolentino-bares-evidence-china-paying-farm-troll-to-discredit-ph-govt>.

¹⁵⁸ Reuters, "Inside the Troll Farm: China's Secret Campaign to Sway Philippine Opinion and Undermine Marcos," The Manila Times, October 7, 2025, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/10/08/news/national/inside-the-troll-farm-chinas-secret-campaign-to-sway-philippine-opinion-and-undermine-marcos/2196262>.

¹⁵⁹ Dianne Sampang, "74 show cause orders issued for alleged vote-buying, abuse of resources," Inquirer.net, April 25, 2025, <https://www.inquirer.net/438310/comelec-issues-74-show-cause-orders-for-vote-buying-abuse-of-resources/>.

¹⁶⁰ Mariel Celine Serquiña, "Lente Logs Almost 100 Vote-Buying Cases for Eleksyon 2025," GMA News Online, May 11, 2025, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/945759/lente-logs-almost-100-vote-buying-cases-for-eleksyon-2025/story/>.

¹⁶¹ Carmela S. Fonbuena, "Top Spender Camille Villar Reports P179.6-M Spending in 2025 Campaign," Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, July 8, 2025, <https://pcij.org/2025/07/03/top-spender-camille-villar-lito-lapid-pia-cayetano-2025-senate-race/>.

programs that directly benefit the people. High spending could also lead to high inflation rates during this period, as seen in the forecast of a 3.1% average inflation rate by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

Some independent observers, international or otherwise, were denied permission to conduct their observations. The COMELEC rejected the request of the European Union (EU), stating that it only exercised its obligation to control who could observe, despite the outstanding invitation of the Philippine government.¹⁶³ Without the help of independent observers, it would be difficult to provide an objective assessment regarding the fairness of the elections, especially in a country where cheating in any form has been a recurring issue.

On the day of the Midterm Elections, May 12, several election-related violations were reported across the archipelago. Davao City polling sites barred volunteers of the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) from entering several precincts, which provoked the COMELEC to issue a memorandum to grant them entry.¹⁶⁴ There were also reports of malfunctioning voting machines in many polling precincts, some of which produced names of candidates in the receipt that the voters did not select and caused overvoting.¹⁶⁵ Riots erupted in Marawi City between supporters of rival candidates.¹⁶⁶ Shooting incidents and clashes occurred in Negros Occidental, Abra,¹⁶⁷ Zamboanga del

Sur,¹⁶⁸ Lanao del Sur,¹⁶⁹ and Basilan.¹⁷⁰ These violent incidents caused fear among voters, dissuading them from practicing their right to suffrage.

The results of the elections turned out to be a symptom of a defective democracy. PCIJ recorded that at least 18 “obese” dynasties¹⁷¹ successfully grabbed five to 19 seats.¹⁷² Political dynasties pose a direct threat to democracy by restricting electoral choices to a handful of interconnected families, thereby stunting the political development of entire communities.

Entrenched in power, these families often engage in rent-seeking behavior, using their influence to capture state resources and direct public funds toward their private or political gain.

Their control over local institutions also weakens systems of accountability, allowing corruption and patronage to persist unchallenged—both within their jurisdictions and beyond, as will be discussed in the next section. And most important of all, the presence of political dynasties is highly unconstitutional. Section 26, Article 2 of the 1986 Philippine constitution states that: *The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law.* Several bills against them have already been filed but were unsuccessful, as a large percentage of congresspersons and senators also belong to political dynasties.

¹⁶² Ramon Royandoyan, “Philippine Midterms, Trade Front-Loading Help 2nd-Quarter GDP Expand 5.5%,” Nikkei Asia, August 7, 2025, <https://asia.nikkei.com/economy/philippine-midterms-trade-front-loading-help-2nd-quarter-gdp-expand-5.5>.

¹⁶³ Llanesca T. Panti, “Comelec Denies EU Observers’ Plea to Enter Polling Places on Eleksyon 2025,” GMA News Online, May 8, 2025, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/945422/comelec-denies-european-union-observers-plea-polling-places-eleksyon-2025/story/>.

¹⁶⁴ Ian Laqui, “Davao City Polling Sites Deny Entry to PPCRV Volunteers; Comelec Intervenes,” Philstar.com, May 12, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/05/12/2442559/davao-city-polling-sites-deny-entry-ppcrv-volunteers-comelec-intervenes>.

¹⁶⁵ Dexter Cabalza, “ACM glitches, ‘overvoting’ top election day woes,” Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 13, 2025, <https://www.inquirer.net/442615/acm-glitches-overvoting-top-election-day-woes/>.

¹⁶⁶ Raphael Bosano, “Riot Sumiklab Sa Araw Ng #halalan2025 Sa Marawi City,” ABS-CBN News, May 12, 2025, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/regions/2025/5/12/riot-sumiklab-sa-araw-ng-halalan2025-sa-marawi-city-1017>.

¹⁶⁷ Rowegie Abanto, “2 Injured after Gunshots Heard near Polling Center in Abra Town: Police,” ABS-CBN News, May 12, 2025, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/regions/2025/5/12/2-injured-after-gunshots-heard-near-polling-center-in-abra-town-police-1415>.

¹⁶⁸ Jewel Reyes, “One killed, 1 injured in suspected poll-related violence in Zamboanga del Sur,” May 12, 2025, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/regions/2025/5/12/one-killed-1-injured-in-suspected-poll-related-violence-in-zamboanga-del-sur-1342>.

¹⁶⁹ John Unson, “Candidate, Brother Killed in Lanao Del Sur Ambush,” Philstar.com, May 12, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/05/12/2442577/candidate-brother-killed-lanao-del-sur-ambush>.

¹⁷⁰ Reyes, “One killed, 1 injured.”

¹⁷¹ Obese dynasties are political clans with at least five family members who are politically active.

¹⁷² Carmela S. Fonbuena, “The ‘obese’ Dynasties of the Philippines Are Crowned Again, but Reform Hopes Rise for 2028,” Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, May 28, 2025, <https://pcij.org/2025/05/20/obese-dynasties-of-the-philippines-results-crowned-again-but-reform-hopes-rise-2028-polls/>



This is Where Our Taxes Go

The Philippines ranks as the 66th most corrupt country in the world in 2025, according to Transparency International.¹⁷³ Political dynasties, government officials, and their contractors paved not roads and bridges, but elaborate ways to legitimize stealing in all branches of the government. While thousands of Filipinos are suffering from perennial floods, despite billions of pesos spent on flood control projects, greed for money abounds. Corrupt practices prospered amidst the worsening civil-political and socioeconomic human rights situation halfway into the Marcos administration.

The Senate initiated its *motu proprio* investigation on the alleged anomalies in flood control projects in August. This came after Marcos Jr. claimed that despite the huge infrastructure spending in many flood-prone provinces and regions to mitigate flooding, they remain prone to flooding. Inspections later revealed that many of these flood control projects are substandard, unfinished, or entirely non-existent (dubbed as “ghost” projects) despite declaring completion.

Several members of Congress and the Senate were implicated in covert dealings with questionable contractors, some of whom had

contributed millions of pesos to their electoral campaigns. These revelations destabilized the Senate’s leadership, resulting in the replacement of the Senate President. In the House of Representatives, the fallout was equally contentious, yet many of those implicated have retained their positions and remain largely unaccountable. Heralded as biased, the hearings were tainted with motives to destroy and save personalities, prompting the executive department to form an independent flood probe body.¹⁷⁴

Mass protests soon followed the exposés to condemn the systematic corruption in the government’s infrastructure projects. Tens of thousands of people, mostly coming from the youth sector, joined mobilizations across the country during the commemoration of the 1972 Martial Law declaration on September 21, such as the Trillion Peso March held mainly along Epifanio delos Santos Avenue (EDSA) and the Baha sa Luneta (Flood in Luneta) held at Rizal Park in the city of Manila.

The Filipino people were once again united to hold the duty-bearers accountable by chanting “*Ikulong na ‘yan, mga kurakot!* (Jail the corrupt!).”

¹⁷³ Dianne Sampang, “PH is 114th among 180 countries ranked from least to most corrupt,” *Inquirer.net*, September 3, 2025, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2103494/ph-is-114-among-180-countries-ranked-from-least-to-most-corrupt>.

¹⁷⁴ Ian Laqui, “Who’s Who: Members of Marcos’ Independent Flood Probe Body,” *Philstar.com*, September 15, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/09/15/2472763/whos-who-members-marcos-independent-flood-probe-body>.

In the face of the leaks and chaos, the process to exact accountability and retrieve the looted taxpayers' money has been extremely feeble, even for previous exposés. Vice President Sara Duterte has not been charged for her misuse of confidential funds. Other absurd names, in addition to the infamous "Mary Grace Piattos," were flagged as supposed beneficiaries of the confidential funds from the Office of the Vice President.¹⁷⁵

The fourth impeachment complaint by the Congress against Sara Duterte, citing corruption arising from confidential funds, among others, was signed by more than the minimum requirement of 102 House representatives.

Threats to Sovereignty

China's continued presence and territorial claims in the West Philippine Sea, inside our exclusive economic zone (EEZ), remain a threat to the country's security and to the protection of the region's resources. This year's standoffs between China and the Philippines involved the use of water cannons and harassment of Filipino fisherfolk by the Chinese Coast Guard or the People's Liberation Army and sea collisions. In one of its recent violations of the laws of the seas, China declared the Scarborough Shoal a nature reserve.¹⁷⁷ The Philippine government continues to file diplomatic protests to international bodies and has long resorted to allowing the US presence in the country to deter China's claims in the West Philippine Sea. The current administration allowed the US military forces to establish more bases in the country and stage military drills in the volatile region.

The articles of impeachment were then forwarded to the Senate. However, the Senate's response under the leadership of Senator Francis Escudero prevented the impeachment complaints from being heard in the upper house. The Supreme Court then decided to nullify the impeachment complaint, ruling that the prior three impeachment complaints were already covered by the one-year-bar rule.¹⁷⁶ But it does not mean that Sara Duterte has been absolved of her crimes: the impeachment proceedings can restart in February 2026, and only then can we see if the Senate has remained loyal to its constitutional mandate to unseat erring government officials.

The United States, with its continuing ambitions to maintain its hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region against emerging China, ramped up its military projects in the country. The armed forces of both the US and the Philippines repeatedly conducted joint exercises under the guise that the US would come to aid the Philippines in case of Chinese attacks. On the 127th anniversary of the Philippine Navy in May, Marcos Jr. announced new US bases in Subic Bay and Misamis Oriental.¹⁷⁸

The Philippines' involvement in the impending Chinese occupation of Taiwan has increased. In his official visit to India, Marcos Jr. said that the Philippines would inevitably be drawn into conflict should tension between China and Taiwan escalate. The statement caused China to accuse the president of "playing with fire".¹⁷⁹ Prior, in April, a new base in Batanes that could also be used by the US forces in view of the Taiwan conflict was inaugurated.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Paige Javier, "House Leader Flags More Names in Confidential Funds Recipient List," ABS-CBN News, March 30, 2025, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/nation/2025/3/30/house-leader-flags-more-names-in-confidential-funds-recipient-list-1506>.

¹⁷⁶ Jairo Bolledo, "Supreme Court Bars Sara Impeachment, Can Be Refiled next Year," Rappler, July 26, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/supreme-court-decision-blocks-sara-duterte-impeachment-trial-july-2025/>.

¹⁷⁷ Nectar Gan and Kathleen Magramo, "Why Is China Setting up a Nature Reserve in One of the World's Most Contested Waterways?" CNN, September 11, 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/09/11/asia/china-nature-reserve-south-china-sea-intl-hnk>.

¹⁷⁸ Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, "New Philippine naval bases Mark Strategic Pivot," Forum, July 24, 2025, <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2025/07/new-philippine-naval-bases-mark-strategic-pivot/>.

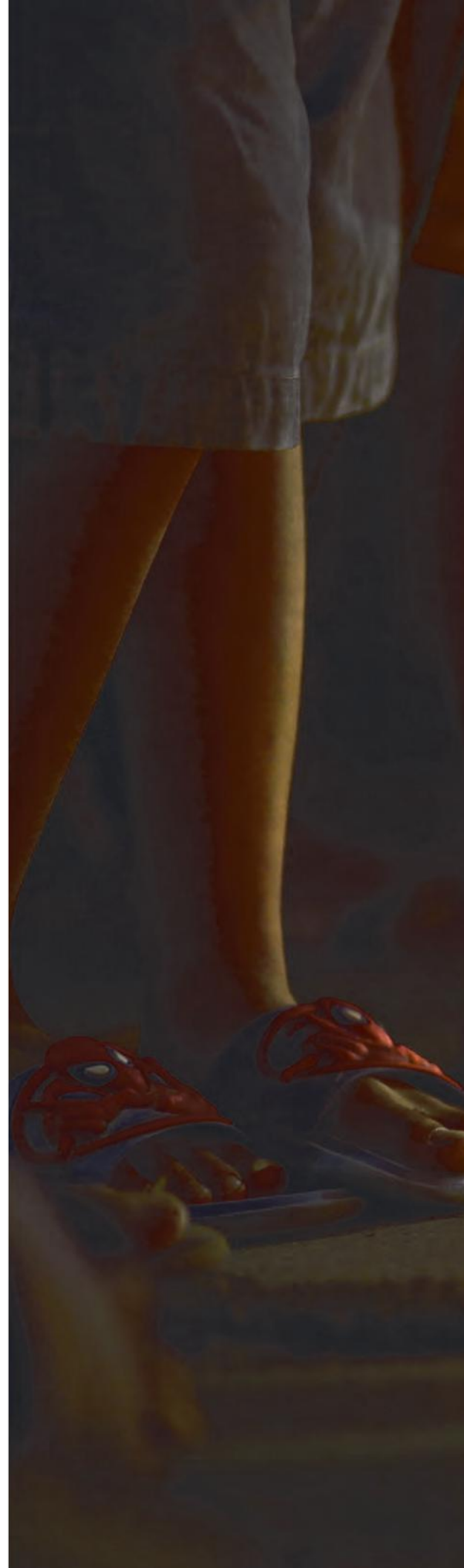
¹⁷⁹ Reuters, "Philippines' Marcos says China 'misinterpreted' his comments on Taiwan," August 11, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/philippines-marcos-says-china-misinterpreted-his-comments-taiwan-2025-08-11/>.

¹⁸⁰ Micah McCartney, "US Ally Opens New Base at China Choke Point," Newsweek, September 1, 2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/philippines-opens-new-base-luzon-strait-near-taiwan-2122529>.

Marcos Jr.'s geopolitical strategies seem to be protective of our national territorial interests, but could only jeopardize the country's precarious position in the region. The US military's presence in the Indo-Pacific crisis only exacerbates the issue, pitting the Philippines deeper into the intensifying competition between the US and China for global hegemony. The Philippines shall not fall into this trap; it must maintain a policy that is genuinely independent from foreign interests.

A Sigh of Optimism

The civil and political rights violations under the Marcos Jr. administration continue to erode our constitutional liberties. Yet, despite these subtle and persistent assaults on democratic freedoms, the people have mounted significant pushbacks against oppression and impunity. From the arrest of Duterte to high voter turnout and large-scale mobilizations against government corruption, these actions demonstrate that impunity and the lack of transparency cannot endure indefinitely when met with the determination and collective power of the citizenry.





Attacks Against Human Rights Defenders

Under Siege: Targeting Human Rights Defenders

Human rights defenders continue to face relentless attacks under the Marcos Jr. administration and beyond Philippine borders.

Repressive state mechanisms such as the Anti-Terrorism Law (Republic Act No. 11479) and the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) remain firmly entrenched, institutionalizing a culture of fear and impunity that undermines legitimate human rights work. These state instruments enable systematic red-tagging, surveillance, and judicial harassment—tactics that silence dissent and criminalize activism. At the global level, the shrinking civic space is further aggravated by the resurgence of populism and right-wing authoritarianism, which normalize repression under the guise of national security and order. Together, these dynamics push human rights advocacy into an ever-narrowing space, where the struggle for accountability and freedom grows increasingly perilous.



Red-tagging Threatens the Lives and Work of Human Rights Defenders

Red-tagging has been a focal weapon of state repression, routinely deployed by government actors, including the NTF-ELCAC, to curtail freedoms of speech, association, and assembly. The Marcos Jr. administration's complacency toward these abuses is crystal clear. In the Congress and the Senate, legislative measures such as the proposed Anti-Red Tagging Bill is one policy that could have curbed the practice of red-tagging. However, the bill faced outright hostility from the NTF-ELCAC, which dismissed it as a "dangerous shield for those who enable terrorism under the guise of legality".¹⁸¹ Meanwhile, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) defended the increase in the proposed budget of NTF-ELCAC, claiming it would benefit barangays declared free of communist influence, a rationale that only deepens the institutionalization of red-tagging within governance.¹⁸²

The consequences of this campaign of vilification are severe and far-reaching. The Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP) reported that a student leader, who is also a daughter of a human rights organization head, was approached by the

military forces in April after being accused of association with a so-called communist insurgent group. Her name was cleared only after the barangay officials intervened, highlighting how easily individuals can be placed on red-tagging lists based on fabricated intelligence.

The country remains a dangerous place for environmental defenders as well. In Atimonan, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) condemned the harassment of young environmental defenders who criticized coal mining operations. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) allegedly branded them as members of armed insurgent groups, stifling their right to protest and to defend the environment.

Red-tagging also infiltrated the 2025 Midterm Elections, where it became a key tool for silencing progressive voices. The International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP) identified red-tagging as the most rampant campaign violation during the election period.¹⁸³ The NTF-ELCAC accused Raoul

¹⁸¹ NTF-ELCAC Media Bureau, "ELCAC Raises Alarm Bells: Anti-Red-Tagging Bill a Dangerous Shield for Terror Enablers," NTF, July 2, 2025. <https://www.ntfelcac.gov.ph/post/ntf-eltac-raises-alarm-bells-anti-red-tagging-bill-a-dangerous-shield-for-terror-enablers>.

¹⁸² Rainier Allan Ronda, "Proposed Jump in NTF-ELCAC Budget Defended," Philstar.com, September 10, 2025. <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/09/11/2471949/proposed-jump-ntf-eltac-budget-defended>.

¹⁸³ ICHRP Secretariat, "ICHRP Secretariat," International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, May 8, 2025. <https://ichrp.net/zero-in-red-tagging-emerging-as-top-campaign-violation-in-2025-midterm-elections/>.

Manuel, a representative of the Kabataan Partylist, of recruiting for the New People's Army (NPA),¹⁸⁴ while the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) itself was red-tagged by a government agency for releasing guidelines against such practices.¹⁸⁵

The persistent red-tagging by state forces has created a decrepit and perilous environment for

human rights defenders, journalists, students, and activists. Beyond reputational harm, these attacks have led to concrete violations—harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and even killings—underscoring how the rhetoric of “national security” continues to serve as a cover for systematic repression under the Marcos Jr. administration.

Arrested, Detained, Disappeared

The Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) documented 14 cases of harassment of human rights defenders this year. Two cases involved illegal demolition of their homes, and one case of harassment involved arbitrary arrest and detention from January to June 2025. TFDP's documentation also included reports of harassment during human rights education sessions with community partners. In June, TFDP's two staff abruptly ended their human rights training session with 60 members of a lumad¹⁸⁶ community in Misamis Occidental after local police officers entered the venue, inspected their identity cards, and told them that they had no permit. The incident violated the Lumad's right to assembly, organize, and discuss their human rights.

Prior to the 2025 Midterm elections, Magsasaka Party List's nominee Lejun dela Cruz was reported missing after gunmen riding a car and two motorcycles open-fired at his vehicle in early February. He was later found to have been arrested by the Pasig police for a 1998 murder charge despite having previously been granted amnesty.

The government has also used arrest and illegal detention to stifle freedom of expression, as we saw in the protests following massive corruption scandals in flood control projects. On September 21, 2025, throngs of protesters once again filled the streets, converging at the Mendiola Peace Arch to denounce systemic corruption. What began as a powerful display of collective dissent

¹⁸⁴ Philippine Daily Inquirer. Party list rep tagged as NPA recruiter in NTF-ELCAC Video. Accessed October 7, 2025. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2035524/party-list-rep-tagged-as-npa-recruiter-in-ntf-elcac-video>. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2035524/party-list-rep-tagged-as-npa-recruiter-in-ntf-elcac-video>.

¹⁸⁵ Naval, Gerard. “COMELEC Being Red-Tagged by Fellow Govt Agency.” Malaya Business Insight, February 19, 2025. <https://malaya.com.ph/news/national-news/comelec-being-red-tagged-by-fellow-govt-agency/>.

¹⁸⁶ Non-Moro and non-Christian Indigenous Peoples of Mindanao.



ended in violence, as a police battalion confronted the crowd with brute force—leaving Mendiola’s concrete once more stained with the blood of its own people.¹⁸⁷ Witnesses in the area heard gunshots and saw some policemen beating child protesters. 91 minors were arrested and detained, and a total of 192 protesters were charged with complaints on September 23—more than the maximum 36 hours allowed by the law.¹⁸⁸ On top of illegal detention, the actions of the Philippine National Police (PNP) involving its excessive use of water cannons, tear gas, and “alleged use of firearms against peaceful protesters”¹⁸⁹—constitute clear violations of the policing principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality, as well as of the people’s fundamental rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

Under the current administration, the country maintains a poor record of fast-tracking the release of long-time political prisoners. TFDP has documented a total of 89 political prisoners, 5 of whom are female, and 126 political

detainees, 18 of whom are female, that have not yet been released. Some of them have been detained since the presidency of former President Fidel Ramos.¹⁹⁰ The continued unjust imprisonment of victims of political persecution violates Section 18 of the Bill of Rights, stating that “No person shall be detained solely by the reason of his political beliefs and aspirations.”

The Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance Act has been in effect for 13 years, yet reports of disappearances continue to surface, and no convictions of perpetrators have been made. As of June, the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND) documented 15 cases of enforced disappearance out of 54 cases reported to them. Among these 15 victims, six remain missing. Most of the victims are environmental activists from the rural areas in Mindanao. Those who have reappeared were publicly presented by the AFP as alleged “surrenderees” of the NPA in Northern Luzon, Southern Tagalog, and Northern Mindanao.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Kenneth Roland Guda, “Mendiola, September 21, 2025”, *Altermidya* and Elijah Pareno, “Exclusive: Rage From the Mendiola Protests, According to Photojournalists,” *Rolling Stone Philippines*.

¹⁸⁸ Kaxandra Salonga, “Church Leaders Call for Progress in Gov’t and NDFP Peace Talks” *ABS-CBN News*, September 29, 2025. <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/nation/2025/9/29/church-leaders-call-for-progress-in-gov-t-and-ndfp-peace-talks-1747>.

¹⁸⁹ Amnesty International Philippines, “Unnecessary and excessive use of force by PNP against protesters must be investigated,” September 23, 2025.

¹⁹⁰ Political prisoners have already been convicted of politically motivated charges, while political detainees are still awaiting for judgment of their cases.

¹⁹¹ Interview notes with an organizational representative of FIND.





Intimidated and Killed

A documenting member of FIND experienced surveillance and received messages of intimidation and threats from suspected military members. For many human rights defenders, uprooting and relocation are the only ways to evade surveillance and continue doing their work, often at great personal costs and disruption to their lives. These acts constitute clear violations of the rights to privacy, security, and freedom of association of human rights defenders.

Partido Manggagawa (PM) reported rampant harassment among their members, with some being monitored and tracked. Smear campaigns have also persisted as the government brands PM as a “communist front” on social media due to its active engagement in the labor sector.

“Lagi nilang sinasabi na we’re a communist front na ginagamit lang. Tinatakot yung mga manggagawa and discrediting us, (They always say that we’re a communist front that’s only being used. The workers are threatened, and they’re discrediting us.)” their representative lamented.

The Marcos Jr. administration has also intensified the use of technology to facilitate surveillance, monitoring, and disinformation campaigns against human rights defenders. According to the Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA), government agencies are employing intercepting devices and CCTV cameras under the guise of national security, while also weaponizing digital technologies and Artificial Intelligence to spread fake news, disinformation, and propaganda. Such digital repression undermines the right to privacy and access to information, further shrinking civic space in the country.

Some human rights defenders have also been killed. TFDP documented four cases of extrajudicial killings involving five human rights defenders from January to June 2025, indicating that the pattern of violence against human rights defenders continues unabated.

Among the victims reported in the news was a transgender woman activist and former broadcaster, Ali Macalintal, who was shot dead by an unidentified assailant in General Santos City in June.¹⁹² These killings represent grave violations of the right to life and highlight the continuing climate of impunity surrounding attacks on human rights defenders.

¹⁹² Jairo Bolledo, “Former Journalist and Rights Advocate Ali Macalintal Shot Dead in General Santos City,” RAPPLER, June 25, 2025. <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/mindanao/former-journalist-human-rights-worker-ali-macalintal-killed/>.

Global Constricting of Civic Space

Developments at the international level have deeply affected human rights defenders, particularly in terms of funding opportunities and sustainability. The global shift toward right-wing and populist governments, many of which are reluctant to support aid to developing countries, has created existential threats to many civil society organizations. Without adequate funding, civil society organizations face serious challenges in continuing their operations, to the detriment of the vulnerable and marginalized communities they serve. Human rights defenders, many of whom depend on these resources for their livelihood, now face growing uncertainty and precarity. These trends undermine the rights to development, association, and participation, as well as the capacity of civil society to hold governments accountable.

A major blow to international aid came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which significantly reduced or terminated several grant programs. The resurgence of populist politics under Donald Trump redirected US priorities inward—tightening tariffs, scaling back global aid, and deprioritizing multilateral commitments. As a result, several civil society organizations and government projects were abruptly discontinued, especially those working for environmental protection and health programs.¹⁹³ The withdrawal of international

support weakened transnational solidarity efforts for human rights.

Notable policy shifts have also occurred in Europe. The European Union (EU) has imposed more stringent regulations on NGOs engaged in advocacy, raising concerns over reduced opportunities for civil society participation in policy dialogues with key stakeholders.¹⁹⁴ Environmental organizations, in particular, have been informed that the funds they receive from EU environment and climate change programs can no longer be used for advocacy and lobbying activities.¹⁹⁵

The constriction of civic space at the international level compounds the already precarious situation for human rights defenders in the Philippines. As global funding streams diminish and restrictive policies abroad limit transnational solidarity, local organizations are left more vulnerable to state repression and resource insecurity. Under the Marcos Jr. administration, where red-tagging, surveillance, and judicial harassment persist, this international withdrawal of support further isolates defenders and weakens the broader human rights movement. Together, these domestic and global pressures reinforce a cycle of shrinking civic space—one that systematically undermines the ability of civil society to advocate for accountability, social justice, and the protection of human rights.

¹⁹³ Cristina Chi, "America First? Trump Aid Freeze Threatens Critical Programs in Philippines," Philstar.com, February 4, 2025. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/02/04/2418950/trumps-aid-freeze-suspends-least-p4b-philippines-programs>.

¹⁹⁴ Philea, "Democracy Network and European Foundations for sustainable agriculture and Food Network - restricting advocacy: The shifting landscape of NGO funding," February 27, 2025. <https://philea.eu/events/democracy-network-and-european-foundations-for-sustainable-agriculture-and-food-network-restricting-advocacy-the-shifting-landscape-of-ngo-funding/>.

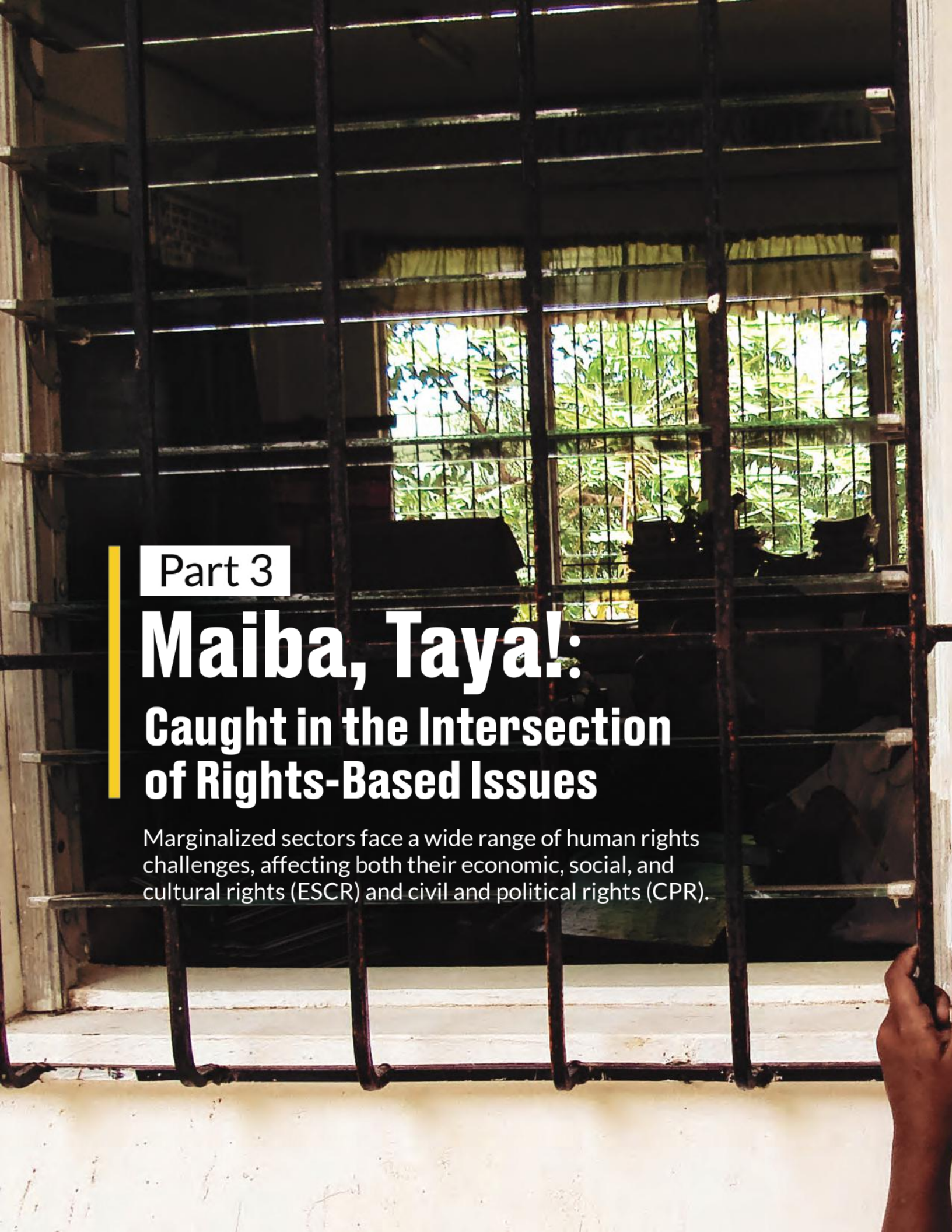
¹⁹⁵ The Good Lobby, "New EU funding restrictions threaten environmental ngos," Accessed October 7, 2025. <https://thegoodlobby.eu/the-end-of-ngo-advocacy-in-europe-new-eu-funding-restrictions-threaten-environmental-ngos/>.

Despite the Grim Realities

As shown by the preceding accounts of attacks against human rights defenders, promoting human rights entails security risks, even despite the benign pronouncement of Marcos Jr. The persistence of repressive policies and institutions, along with both covert and overt attacks, reveals the administration's true intent.

The situation of human rights defenders has yet to recover and remains highly vulnerable to further setbacks in the remaining years of the current administration. Despite these grim realities, human rights defenders persist with resolve by facing the risks and challenges head-on, both domestically and internationally, while striving to protect and strengthen the modest gains achieved thus far.





Part 3

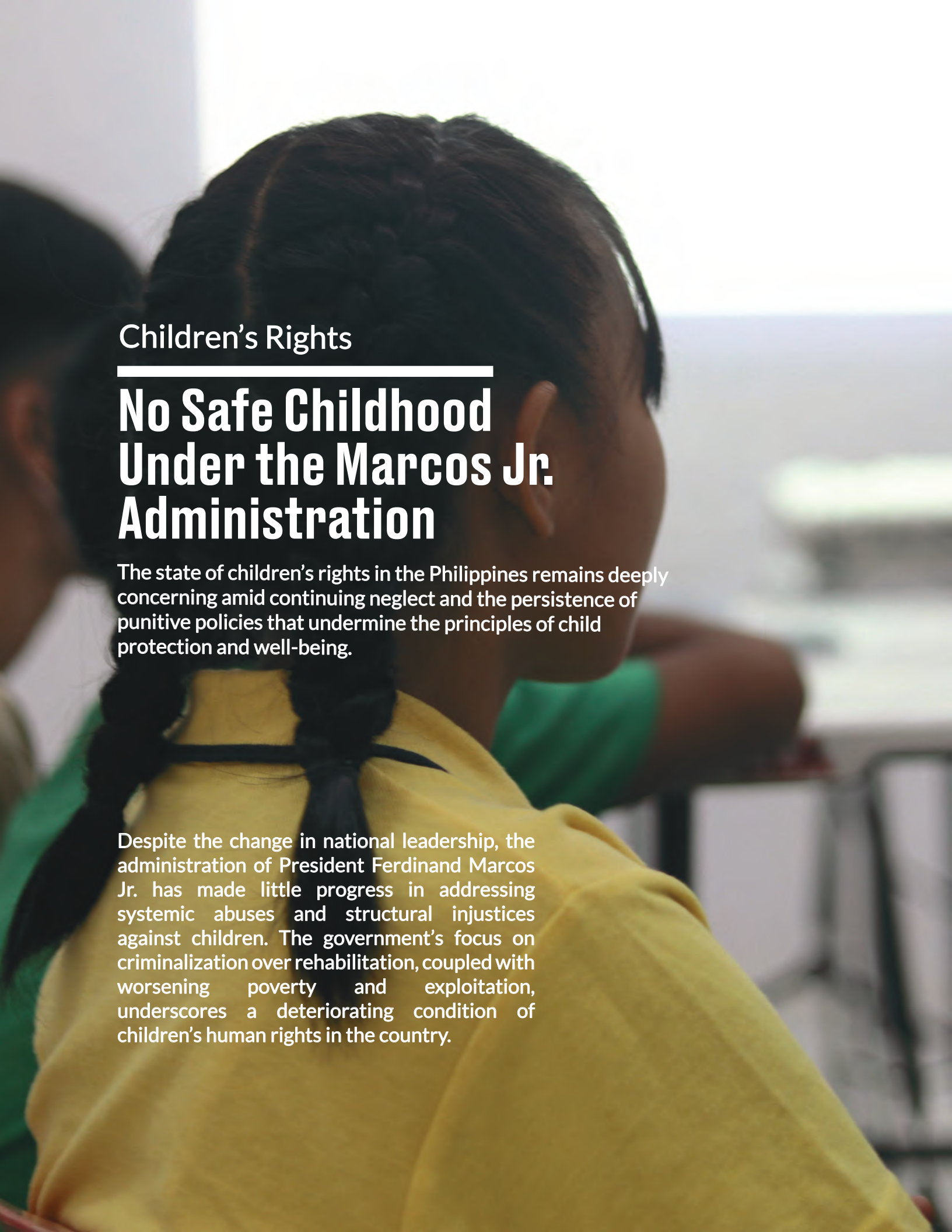
Maiba, Taya!

Caught in the Intersection of Rights-Based Issues

Marginalized sectors face a wide range of human rights challenges, affecting both their economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) and civil and political rights (CPR).

A photograph showing the back of a person's head and shoulders. They have long dark hair tied in a ponytail with a small pink hair tie. They are looking out a window that has dark metal bars across it. The window is divided into several panes, and bright green foliage is visible outside. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from the window.

They confront persistent barriers to being heard, recognized, and included, shaped by factors such as age, gender, and social class. In particular, women, LGBTQI+ individuals, children, and the urban poor remain especially vulnerable to State abuse and neglect. This chapter examines how the intersectionality of age, gender, and social class amplifies the human rights violations experienced by marginalized groups. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of ESCR and CPR violations and highlights the State's role in perpetuating these abuses, whether through action or omission.



Children's Rights

No Safe Childhood Under the Marcos Jr. Administration

The state of children's rights in the Philippines remains deeply concerning amid continuing neglect and the persistence of punitive policies that undermine the principles of child protection and well-being.

Despite the change in national leadership, the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has made little progress in addressing systemic abuses and structural injustices against children. The government's focus on criminalization over rehabilitation, coupled with worsening poverty and exploitation, underscores a deteriorating condition of children's human rights in the country.

From Children at Risk to Children as Risks

In July 2025, Senator Robin Padilla filed a bill proposing to lower the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR)—the lowest age a child can be prosecuted in criminal court—from 15 years old to 10 years old.¹⁹⁶ The proposed measure will cover children accused of committing heinous crimes such as parricide, murder, rape, kidnapping with killing or rape, robbery with homicide or rape, destructive arson, and serious offenses under anti-illegal drugs laws. It aims to amend the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006 (Republic Act No. 9344), which currently provides that children under 15 years old cannot be held criminally liable, and that those aged 15 to 17 are exempt if found without discernment. The proposed lowering of the MACR has raised concern from child rights advocates, who warn that it would expose children to punitive institutions rather than rehabilitative care.¹⁹⁷

The Philippine National Police (PNP), then headed by PNP Chief Nicolas Torres III, expressed support for Padilla's proposal, citing that children today have greater awareness due to access to information.¹⁹⁸ However, this argument disregards the developmental and psychological realities of children, whose moral and cognitive capacities are still in formation. The Child Rights Network (CRN) maintains that the problem lies not in the minimum age of criminal responsibility but in the poor implementation of RA 9344. Senator Padilla's bill

echoes the position of former President Rodrigo Duterte, who repeatedly blamed the existing juvenile justice law for what he claimed to be the rise in juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior.¹⁹⁹ These recurring efforts to criminalize children reflect a punitive, anti-child stance within state institutions that contradicts international standards on juvenile justice²⁰⁰, including the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which the Philippines is a state party.

The continuing criminalization and abuse of children in conflict with the law (CICL)²⁰¹ remains among the most serious human rights concerns. Under the Marcos administration, the number of children deprived of liberty (CDL)²⁰² in detention facilities may appear to have remained largely unchanged from the Duterte era, but in fact, it has increased. As of December 2023, at least 2,359 children were placed in Bahay Pag-asa centers nationwide, according to a post by the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council (JJWC) on its Facebook page in May 2024.²⁰³ In comparison, there were 1,395 children in December 2018, as reported in the JJWC's 2020 Report.²⁰⁴

According to the Children's Legal Rights and Development Center, Inc. (CLRDC), reports persist of children being arbitrarily arrested, detained, and tortured to confess to crimes they did not commit. Children accused of drug-

¹⁹⁶ Dhel Nazario, "Padilla bill seeks to lower criminal liability of minors to age 10," Manila Bulletin, July 18, 2025. <https://mb.com.ph/2025/07/18/padilla-bill-seeks-to-lower-criminal-liability-of-minors-to-age-10>

¹⁹⁷ Sherwin de Vera, "Cordillera IP women join child rights groups vs Padilla criminal age bill," Rappler, August 6, 2025. <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/luzon/cordillera-indigenous-people-women-innabuyog-vs-robin-padilla-criminal-age-bill/>

¹⁹⁸ Third Anne Peralta-Malonzo, "PNP supports lowering age of criminal liability," Sun Star, August 24, 2025. <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/manila/pnp-supports-lowering-age-of-criminal-liability>

¹⁹⁹ Dharel Placido, "Duterte says PH producing a generation of criminals," ABS-CBN News, December 12, 2016. <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/12/12/16/duterte-says-ph-producing-a-generation-of-criminals>

²⁰⁰ The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, through General Comment No. 10 (2007), paragraph 16, stated that a minimum age of criminal responsibility below 12 years is not "internationally acceptable," and recommended that States Parties set 12 years as the absolute minimum age and "continue to increase it to a higher age level".

²⁰¹ R.A. 9344 or the Juvenile Justice Welfare Act of 2006 defines CICL as "a child who is alleged as, accused of, or adjudged as, having committed an offense under Philippine laws."

²⁰² Children deprived of liberty are individuals under the age of 18 who are placed in a public or private custodial setting from which they are not permitted to leave at will by order of a judicial, administrative, or other public authority.

²⁰³ Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council. Facebook, May 22, 2024. <https://www.facebook.com/JJWCOfficial/videos/1481011566178759/>

²⁰⁴ Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council. Situational Analysis on Children in Detention Facilities in the Philippines. 2020.



related offenses are particularly vulnerable to torture and ill-treatment, often coerced into signing false confessions. These abuses occur within a climate of impunity, as parents and guardians remain afraid to take action due to fear of retaliation from police authorities. CLRDC stresses that the Marcos Jr. administration's failure to repeal Philippine National Police Memorandum Circular 16,²⁰⁵ which institutionalized Duterte's anti-drug campaign, effectively legitimizes police abuses and reinforces a climate of fear and mistrust.

The justice system's failure to uphold due process for children exposes the government's disregard for rehabilitation and reintegration. Instead of providing psychosocial support, education, and community-based interventions, state institutions subject children to detention and violence. This state-sponsored harm deepens the cycle of trauma, marginalization, and reoffending, and constitutes a direct violation of children's rights to protection, development, and dignity.

Children as Casualties of State Neglect

The persistence of child labor underscores the severe economic vulnerability faced by Filipino families. According to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), there were 513,000 child laborers in 2024²⁰⁶ and 1.09 million working children in 2023.²⁰⁷ These figures reveal how poverty continues to push children into exploitative and hazardous forms of labor, depriving them of education, safety, and a nurturing environment essential to their development.

CLRDC's ground experience further confirms this reality. Many children in conflict with the law, upon release from detention, choose to

work instead of returning to school to support their families. This pattern is especially evident among children whose parents or breadwinners were killed during the previous administration's "war on drugs." Deprived of their primary source of income and care, these children are forced into adult responsibilities prematurely, often in unsafe and exploitative work that endangers both their health and their future.

Despite the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups to facilitate children's return to school, many still prioritize earning income over education. This reflects not only economic desperation but also

²⁰⁵ The Philippine National Police Memorandum Circular No. 16-2016 was institutionalized during the Duterte administration in 2016. It is also known as "PNP Anti-Illegal Drugs Campaign Plan Project: Double Barrel". (Read more: PNP Memorandum Circular No. 2016-078. "Handling of PNP Personnel Involved in Illegal Drug Activities," <https://dprm.pnp.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/PNP-MC-No.-2016-078-1.pdf>.)

²⁰⁶ Adrian H. Halili, "Child labor in the Philippines dropped 24% in 2024 — DOLE," *Business World Online*, June 13, 2025. <https://www.bworldonline.com/labor-and-management/2025/06/13/678884/child-labor-in-the-philippines-dropped-24-in-2024-dole/>

²⁰⁷ Kathlyleen Honculada, "The fight to eliminate child labor," *The Philippine Star*, June 19, 2025. <https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2025/06/19/2451561/fight-eliminate-child-labor>

the absence of a comprehensive state support system for families affected by poverty and the war on drugs. The government's social protection measures remain inadequate to address the needs of children forced into labor, perpetuating a cycle of deprivation and lost opportunities.

The crisis of online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) has also reached unprecedented levels. According to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) Child Rights Center Report 2025, reported OSAEC cases have risen to 2.7 million, marking a sixfold increase since 2019.²⁰⁸ The CHR attributes this alarming surge to economic hardship and the persistence of poverty, particularly in marginalized communities.

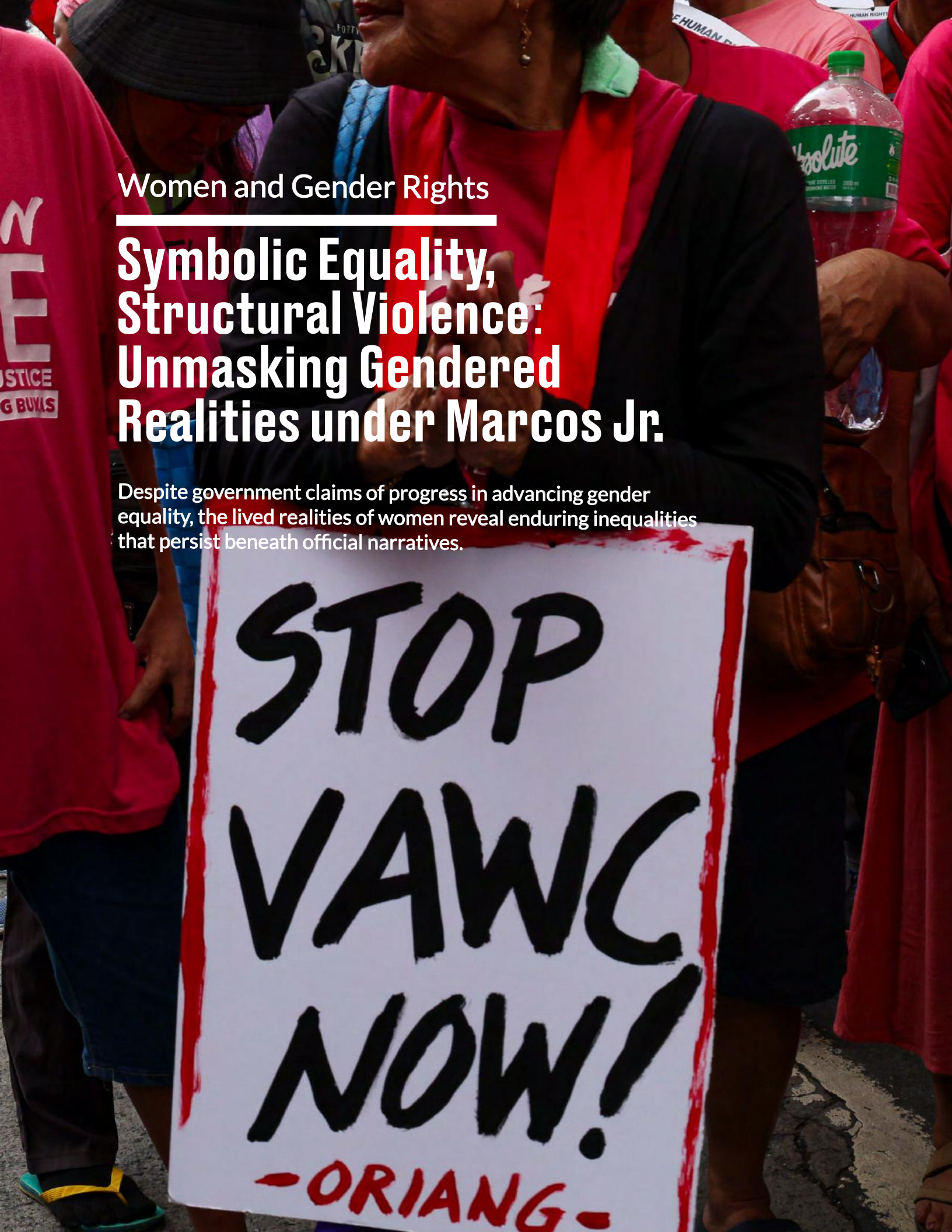
CLRDC reported that many victims of OSAEC are children from impoverished households who

are lured or coerced into sending private photos or videos in exchange for money. These children experience profound trauma and exploitation, often without adequate support systems to recover and reintegrate into society.

While the enactment of the Anti-OSAEC and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Law (Republic Act No. 11930) represents a step forward in upholding children's rights, the implementation of the Anti-OSAEC and Anti-CSAEM Laws remains weak and fragmented. Law enforcement agencies lack training and resources to pursue perpetrators effectively, and coordination among national, local, and international bodies remains inconsistent. Rehabilitation services for survivors are scarce, leaving many children without the necessary psychosocial support to heal from exploitation.

²⁰⁸ Llanesca T. Panti, "Online sexual abuse of children increased to 2.7M —CHR report," GMA Integrated News, April 22, 2025. <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/943495/online-sexual-abuse-of-children-increased-to-2-7m-report/story/>



A woman in a red shirt and black jacket is holding a large white protest sign with red borders. The sign reads "STOP VAWC NOW!" in large black letters, and "-ORIAN-" in red letters at the bottom. She is surrounded by other people, some wearing red shirts. A plastic bottle of Absolute water is visible in the background.

Women and Gender Rights

Symbolic Equality, Structural Violence: Unmasking Gendered Realities under Marcos Jr.

Despite government claims of progress in advancing gender equality, the **lived realities** of women reveal enduring inequalities that persist beneath official narratives.

STOP
VAWC
NOW!
-ORIAN-

Under the Marcos Jr. administration, structural barriers—economic insecurity, political exclusion, and moral policing—continue to limit women’s rights and participation. While the state celebrates its ranking in global indices, conditions on the ground show that gender equality remains largely symbolic, as women still struggle for access to basic services, decent work, and protection from violence in both public and private spheres.

For LGBTQI+ individuals, these gaps are even more pronounced. The absence of comprehensive legislation, such as the SOGIE Equality Bill, and the continued neglect of institutional mechanisms have left queer Filipinos exposed to everyday discrimination and systemic violence. Limited policy gains remain fragmented and poorly implemented, offering inconsistent protection. These conditions underscore the urgent need for structural reform to guarantee the right to self-expression, equality, and protection from discrimination for all genders.

In 2023, President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. emphasized the Philippines’ “good job” in advancing gender equality. This statement followed the country’s placement at 16th out of 146 countries in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index.²⁰⁹ While this ranking signaled progress in the status of women, President Marcos himself acknowledged that significant efforts remained necessary to “create a conducive and nurturing environment for women and girls to participate freely and equally in our political, social, and economic spheres.”²¹⁰

However, the country’s subsequent performance reflected a decline in gender parity, falling to 25th place in 2024 and improving only slightly to 20th in 2025. According to Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) Chairperson Ermelita V. Valdeavilla, persistent disparities in education, health and survival, and political empowerment continue to hinder the realization of full gender equality in the country.²¹¹

Symbolic Equality, Material Injustice

Despite government claims of progressiveness, conditions on the ground reveal a starkly different reality. Communities—particularly those in marginalized sectors—continue to endure the compounded effects of systemic inequality, including inadequate housing, limited access to employment and livelihood opportunities, rising living costs, and unaffordable healthcare. These socioeconomic conditions reinforce gendered vulnerabilities and constrain the capacity of women and girls to exercise their rights fully.

In San Jose del Monte, women community members²¹² experience intersecting forms of economic and social hardship that reveal how inequality operates as a form of structural violence. They face high water and electricity costs despite poor service quality and struggle to access healthcare due to stringent requirements for medicines. Housing insecurity persists, with unclear amortization rates and unsecured land titles, while social protection programs such as *ayuda* (financial assistance) remain difficult to access and are often distributed based on political patronage.

²⁰⁹ The Global Gender Gap Index measures the economic participation, education, health, and political representation of women. The higher the average of the country, the better is the women’s standing in the country in terms of gender parity.

²¹⁰ Philippine Commission on Women, “PBBM highlights the role of women in nation-building, calls for an environment enabling their equal participation in all spheres,” December 15, 2023.

²¹¹ Philippine Commission on Women, “PH Reclaims Spot in Global Top 20, Remains Asia’s Leader in Gender Equality,” June 19, 2025. <https://pcw.gov.ph/ph-reclaims-spot-in-global-top-20-remains-asias-leader-in-gender-equality/>

²¹² Focus group discussion notes with community members of San Jose del Monte in Bulacan, August 20, 2025.

Employment opportunities are likewise constrained. Some women report discrimination linked to local political tensions, while many rely on informal and irregular work—such as repacking condiments, sewing, or street vending—earning as little as ₱10 to ₱20 per day, and sometimes nothing at all. These conditions expose how economic insecurity, political dependency, and gendered labor precarity intersect to undermine women’s rights and well-being. The gap between official narratives of gender equality and the lived realities of women in marginalized sectors remains wide and persistent.

Oriang, a multi-sectoral women’s organization, situates these everyday struggles within the broader context of women’s oppression—marked by exploitation, discrimination, and violence that persist in both public and private life.

For Oriang, these are not isolated “women’s issues” but manifestations of deeper structural injustices that demand systemic change.

Beyond material deprivation, women also experience exclusion in the digital sphere. Limited digital literacy, lack of resources, and the gendered division of care work restrict women’s ability to access and use digital technologies. In many communities, particularly among homemakers, the high cost of internet access and limited familiarity with smartphones further reduce participation in online spaces. This digital divide not only curtails women’s access to information and opportunities but also heightens their vulnerability to disinformation and manipulation.

The Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA) highlighted that age and education level compound these digital inequalities. Older women and those with lower educational attainment are more susceptible to fake news and online disinformation, often lacking the skills to navigate or verify digital content critically. These intersecting barriers—economic precarity, digital exclusion, and gendered labor constraints—reflect the persistent structures that limit women’s full participation in both material and digital economies.





The Expanding Frontiers of Gendered Violence

Oriang describes the situation of women under the current administration as increasingly bleak. The rise in violence against women is closely linked to deepening poverty and systemic corruption under Marcos Jr., as public funds are diverted from essential services to private interests and corruption. This has exposed women to direct physical abuse and structural forms of violence that erode their security, dignity, and access to justice.

Domestic violence remains widespread. Cases of molestation and intimate partner abuse—committed by both male and female partners—continue to surface. At the same time, reports of missing persons, many of them women, circulate regularly on social media. While some disappearances are politically motivated, many are not, underscoring a pervasive climate of fear and insecurity that transcends political boundaries.²¹³

Sarilaya, a women's organization grounded in an ecological and socialist feminist framework, reported an increasing trend of gender-based violence in the communities they work with, particularly cases of rape, incest, and teenage pregnancy. The group also expressed alarm over the worsening misogynistic culture in these communities, which further entrenches women's subordination to men.²¹⁴

These narratives from different women's organizations coincide with the statistics on violence against women from the 2022 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS). Based on the statistical data, violence against women remains a persistent concern among those aged 15–49 who have ever had a husband or intimate partner. Emotional violence is the most commonly reported form, affecting about 13% to 16% of women, followed by physical violence (2.8%–7%) and sexual violence (1.6%–2.7%). The data also indicate that the incidence of violence tends to increase with age, possibly reflecting longer exposure to intimate relationships. Overall, about one in six women (15%–19%) have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence from a partner, underscoring the continuing need for stronger protection, support systems, and accountability mechanisms to address violence within intimate relationships.²¹⁵

Women's rights to public spaces are also under threat. Local ordinances often prohibit street vending, disproportionately affecting women. Vendors are harassed, forcibly evicted, or have their goods confiscated, depriving them of vital livelihoods. These restrictions reveal how economic exclusion functions as a form of structural violence, punishing women's efforts to survive and silencing dissent through everyday acts of control.²¹⁶

²¹³ Interview notes with two representatives from Oriang, July 18, 2025.

²¹⁴ Interview notes with a representative from Sarilaya, March 19, 2025.

²¹⁵ Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey, p. 51, 2022.

²¹⁶ Interview notes with Oriang, July 18, 2025.



In parallel, violence has expanded into digital spaces, where women and LGBTQI+ persons face coordinated campaigns of harassment and disinformation. According to the FMA, gendered disinformation operates as a powerful tool of political violence—reinforcing misogyny and queerphobia while discrediting women and queer leaders. Such campaigns aim not only to humiliate but to discourage their participation in public life.

FMA's monitoring²¹⁷ found that these attacks often take the form of sexist remarks and sexualized ridicule that question women's capability to lead. During the recent elections, a female candidate in Caloocan²¹⁸ and Malabon was mocked online for “just dancing on TikTok and shaking her breasts”—a narrative that reduces her to her body rather than her political qualifications. These forms of gendered disinformation reinforce patriarchal norms that delegitimize women's capability to lead and exclude them from governance.

Under the Marcos Jr. administration, FMA further noted that LGBTQI+ individuals face even more severe and identity-based attacks. Queer leaders are often portrayed as immoral or incompetent—for instance, dismissed with remarks like, “As a gay person, you're incapable; you'll just spread promiscuity in governance.” Such narratives weaponize identity to sustain systems of exclusion and moral policing, silencing dissent and discouraging queer visibility in political spaces.

Despite these constraints, organizations like Oriang continue to assert women's right to full participation in decision-making. They advocate for inclusion in all stages of policymaking—from livelihood programs and legislative agenda-setting to public hearings and the amendment of local ordinances. Their struggle underscores a fundamental principle: genuine gender equality cannot exist without dismantling the intersecting forms of violence that silence women and LGBTQI+ communities—in their homes, on the streets, and online.

²¹⁷Interview notes with FMA representative, June 27, 2025.

²¹⁸ In March 2025, Rep. Mitch Cajayon-Uy filed a complaint against former Caloocan 2nd District representative Egay Erice for allegedly violating the Safe Spaces Act (“Bawal Bastos” Law). The case stemmed from a viral video in which Erice publicly demeaned Cajayon-Uy during a campaign event, making sexist and objectifying remarks about her physical appearance and conduct in office. His comments exemplify the gendered nature of political attacks that women in public service continue to face. (See: EJ Macababad, “Caloocan lawmaker sues Erice for slander,” The Philippine Star, March 28, 2025. <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/03/28/2431565/calocan-lawmaker-sues-erice-slander>)

State-sanctioned Queer Politics of (in)Visibility

The persistence of violence across domestic, public, and digital spaces underscores how gender equality in the Philippines remains more symbolic than substantive. Despite official rhetoric, women and LGBTQI+ persons continue to face systemic barriers to safety, dignity, and participation. Against this backdrop, the struggle for gender rights and recognition becomes not just a matter of protection from harm, but a broader fight for equality, representation, and freedom of expression.

Gender rights remain unevenly recognized, leaving LGBTQ+ persons vulnerable to stigma and discrimination that gravely affect their mental health and well-being. The FMA observes that, unlike previous administrations where violence was overt and easily documented, Marcos Jr.'s governance employs more covert and indirect tactics—masking violence and impunity while evading accountability.

The 2024 Philippines National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People reveals alarming findings: 75% of LGBTQ+ youth have seriously considered suicide, 46% have attempted it, and 34% did so in the past year. The lack of comprehensive anti-discrimination laws worsens these risks—63% view their identity as a burden, and 58% feel unsafe expressing themselves, correlating with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and self-harm.²¹⁹

These data expose the state's continuing failure to protect marginalized genders and identities, showing that violence—economic, physical, and psychological—remains entrenched in institutions that claim to uphold equality. Across schools, workplaces, and homes, queer people endure exclusion, homophobia, and discrimination. In Navotas and Malabon, community testimonies reveal how youth are ridiculed or punished for expressing their gender through clothing or behavior.²²⁰ Trans students²²¹ face harassment and barriers to safe facilities, with teachers and school administrators often becoming sources of bullying rather than protection. In workplaces, LGBTQ+ people are stereotyped as weak or unfit, leading to exclusion and unequal opportunities. Persistent homophobic beliefs that equate queerness with immorality or disease deepen HIV stigma and institutional bias. At home, rejection from family members frequently silences and demoralizes queer youth.

The ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC) stresses that this institutional neglect persists despite limited policy gains—such as the Anti-Bullying Law, Safe Spaces Law, and localized anti-discrimination ordinances. The absence of a national framework like the SOGIE Equality Bill or a Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Law continues to leave many without consistent protection. Even the Marcos Jr. administration's Executive Order 51 (EO 51),²²² which purportedly promotes LGBT welfare, remains largely symbolic, with no functional committee or clear budget.²²³

²¹⁹ Philippines National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People, 2024. https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-international/assets/static/2024_Philippines_National_Survey_EN.pdf

²²⁰ Focus group discussion notes with LGBTQ+ youth community members of Navotas and Malabon, September 27, 2025.

²²¹ Trans students are those whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This includes, but is not limited to, transgender men and women, non-binary, and gender-diverse students.

²²² Marcos Jr. administration's EO 51 is a reinforcement of the EO 100, Diversity and Inclusion Program, from the administration of former President Duterte. (See more here: Office of the President, Presidential Communications Office, "PBBM issues EO creating special LGBTQIA+ Committee; reinforcing diversity, inclusion program; reconstituting inter-agency committee on diversity and inclusion," https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/pbbm-issues-eo-creating-special-lgbtqia-committee-reinforcing-diversity-inclusion-program-reconstituting-inter-agency-committee-on-diversity-and-inclusion/.)

²²³ Interview notes with a representative from ASC, July 1, 2025.





Featured Stories from the Communities

Unchanging Conditions, Unbroken Voices

A critical realization in the course of our work has been the need to vividly describe the human rights situation, given the unchanging conditions of oppression in the country. Through countless conversations with families scarred by the drug war, and during long days spent in their communities, we began to see a deeper truth—that those who had lost the most were the same ones who had long been made to bear the weight of systemic injustice. This iteration of our human rights situation report is a testament to this realization—this report is anything but novel, but it attempts to refine, humanize, and nuance the storytelling of age-old issues long faced by Filipinos. With this in mind, it is imperative to situate the facts, figures, and case studies written in this report with the lives of those most disadvantaged by these unchanging yet worsening conditions.

Figures can only do so much to capture the lived realities communities face as nationwide issues such as contractualization, poverty, and homelessness affect communities unevenly. As such, we stake our claims not solely on the rigidity of numbers, but also on the humanity given by narratives from communities as a critical adjunct. This part will weave together stories from our partner communities in Metro Manila, Bulacan, and Rizal. Primarily informed by women in urban poor communities and government relocation sites, these stories will situate the current human rights situation in the context of the everyday lived realities of those whose collective struggles and resistance serve as cornerstones of these communities' survival.

Through focus group discussions, which have earnestly evolved into kumustahan gatherings, our inquiry revolves around the conduct of their everyday lives amidst the backdrop of inhumane conditions caused by consistent government neglect.

A key starting point across all communities is livelihood. Especially for women—who typically take on the role of budgeting the family's collective income—discussions about their livelihoods and meager earnings from odd jobs reveal a host of interdependent, unmet needs grounded in the flow of resources, or the lack thereof. These discussions are long, arduous, and filled with tensions, yet community partners still come together to address both difficult and tender issues—from livelihood springs issues on housing, healthcare, and ayuda. The stories featured in this part zoom in on these issues.



To Whom Does the Sea Belong?

Among our partner communities, Tanza in Navotas offers a stark introduction. Here, the complex interplay of climate change, development aggression, and systemic neglect paints a portrait of economic displacement. The stories from Tanza's fisherfolk reveal how livelihoods are lost not only to natural forces but also to deliberate policy decisions and unregulated corporate power.

In Tanza, a fishing community in Navotas, fisheries are threatened to extinction by multiple intersecting forces, with community partners critically identifying climate change, development aggression, and abusive authorities as primary culprits. As such, fisherfolk lament the increasing difficulty with which they are able to secure a decent catch—fish they can sell in the market to put food on the table and keep their households afloat. Due to the changing weather patterns brought about by climate change, a noticeable decline in the productivity of fishing grounds is apparent:

"Tsaka sa klima ng panahon nagbabago-bago na-nung nakaraan-dati, konting ano mo lang nandyan na ang pera, ang mga hakot ng isda nandyan na. Sa lamig at init ng panahon natin ngayon, halos hindi mo na makita ang mga isda e. Nagbabago sila ng destinasyon. Dati paglabas mo lang, andiyan ang isda, pagtawid mo lang ano, andiyan ang mga kakaning dagat. Pero ngayon, paglabas mo dyan, salubungin ka ng panahon, wala kang makikita. (And even the climate has become unpredictable—back in the past, before, as soon as you went there, the money was already there, and the fish being brought in were already available. With the cold and heat of today's weather, you can hardly see the fish anymore. They change their destinations. Before, just going out, the fish were there; just crossing over, and the seafood was already there. But now, when you go out, the weather greets you, and you won't see anything.)"

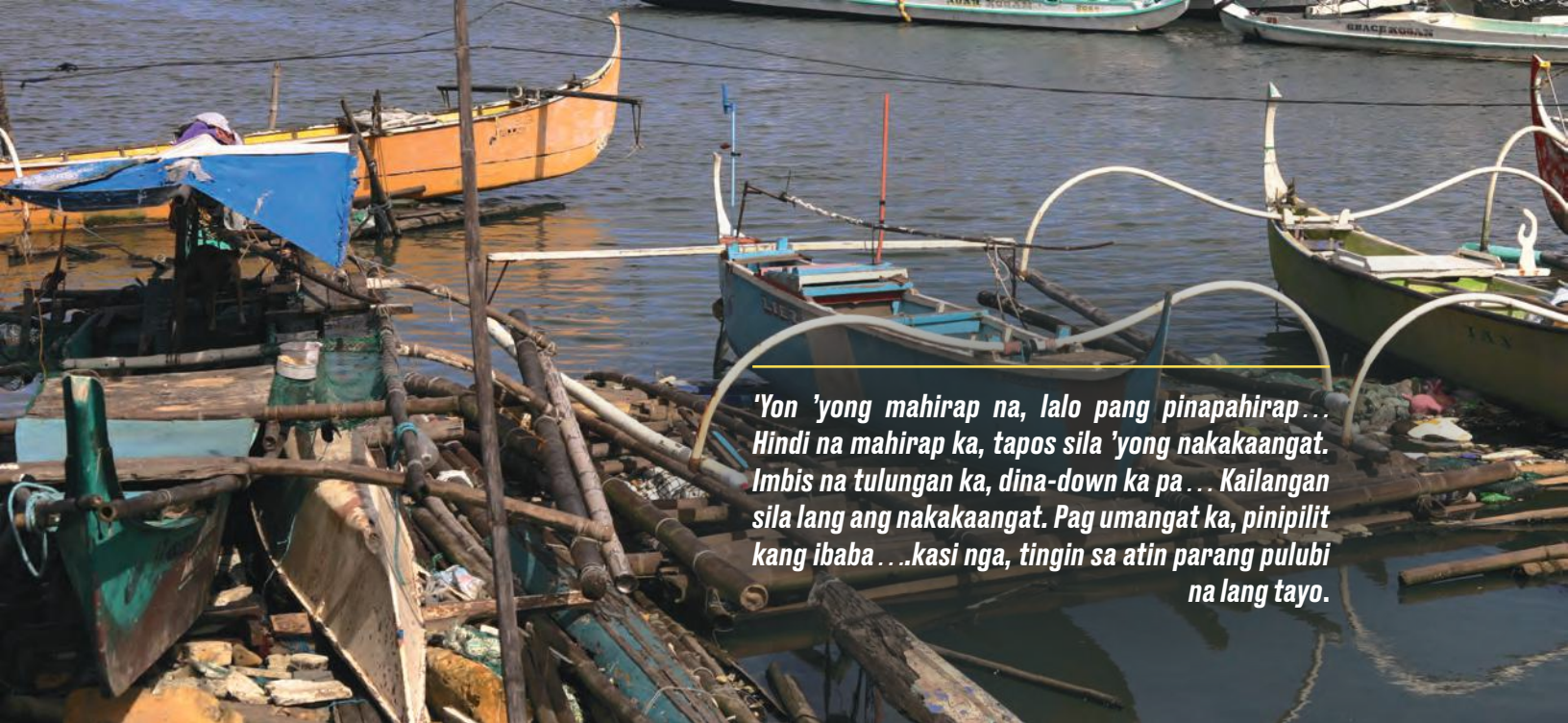
As land is stolen from peasants, so too is the sea reclaimed from fisherfolk. San Miguel's massive reclamation project has redrawn the coastline, narrowing the waters where they once cast nets. What used to be a communal resource, an open sea, has turned into restricted territory. The sea that once provided food and meaning has been claimed by private hands, leaving fisherfolk struggling to hold on to both their livelihood and their way of life.

Reclamation and climate change have caused irreversible damage to the fisherfolk's income. This year alone, operations at sea have consistently been imperiled by rapid changes in the environment. At the time of the discussion in August, the fisherfolk were alarmed by their lack of income, citing how they had caught nothing in the past two months. This has resulted in the sharp decline of their income in recent years. When the weather permits, they still try their luck at fishing, but this, they note, is increasingly becoming unsustainable given the rising cost of operating a vessel, commonly taking home a measly Php 150 pesos for a day's catch:

"Bale yung nakikita, kumikita kami ng bente mil (Php 20,000), napupunta lang po dun sa talagang baon namin... nagbabawas po kami ng pang kurudo, pagkain po namin... Ififix po natin siya ng kinse mil (Php 15,000) [ang expenses]. E paano yung 5,000? Yung 5,000 na yun, na hahatiin mo yun sa tao. Kung paano hahatiin yun-siyempre, magkano na lang mapupunta sa'yo nun...(Basically, we earn twenty thousand pesos (Php 20,000), but it mostly goes to cover the boat's operating expenses... we have to cover fuel, our food... If we set aside fifteen thousand pesos (Php 15,000) for expenses, what about the remaining five thousand? That five thousand has to be divided among the people. And depending on how it's split—of course, only a small portion will actually reach you...)"

As if securing a sufficient catch is not difficult enough, the fisherfolk also face intensifying harassment from authorities. Extortion is a widespread problem fisherfolk have to face on top of declining catch and shrinking fishing grounds:





'Yon 'yong mahirap na, lalo pang pinapahirap... Hindi na mahirap ka, tapos sila 'yong nakakaangat. Imbis na tulungan ka, dina-down ka pa... Kailangan sila lang ang nakakaangat. Pag umangat ka, pinipilit kang ibaba...kasi nga, tingin sa atin parang pulubi na lang tayo.

"Kapag lumaot kami sir, lalaot ka palang, nasa laot ka naghahanapbuhay, may lalapit na coast guard na kahit kumpleto papel mo huhulihin ka. Makaligtas ka man sa mga coast guard, sa mga maritime [police] hindi ka makakaligtas. Makaligtas ka sa dalawang iyon, sa mga bantay dagat, huhulihin ka rin. (When we go out to sea, sir, even if you're just trying to make a living, the coast guard will approach you—even if your papers are complete, they will still detain you. Even if you manage to avoid the coast guard, you can't escape the maritime police. And if you somehow get past both, the sea wardens will still catch you.)"

All these drive them further away from fishing, their only source of income, and only push them deeper into poverty. Partners in the community are jarred by their own position—systemically excluded from taking part in the economy, and rendered unable to contribute productively to society by the government's own doing.

"'Yon 'yong mahirap na, lalo pang pinapahirap... Hindi na mahirap ka, tapos sila 'yong nakakaangat. Imbis na tulungan ka, dina-down ka pa... Kailangan sila lang ang nakakaangat. Pag umangat ka, pinipilit kang ibaba....kasi nga, tingin sa atin parang pulubi na lang tayo. (We're already impoverished, and we're made to suffer more... You're already struggling, and yet they're the ones who get ahead. Instead of helping you, they drag you down... They want only themselves to rise. If you manage to improve your situation, they try to bring you down... because, in their eyes, we're seen as nothing more than beggars.)"

Poverty among fisherfolk is not an accident of circumstance, but the direct result of state policies that privilege profit and large-scale development over people's welfare and participation. What unfolds in Tanza lays bare how the sea itself—once a shared commons—has been seized from those who depend on it most, enclosed by corporate power and legitimized by the state.



Housing Without Homes

Just as fisherfolk in Navotas face deepening hardship from dispossession and environmental degradation, urban poor families in government relocation sites grapple with a different, yet parallel struggle: the loss of livelihood and access to opportunity. The absence of decent work and nearby employment in these areas reveals the state's continued failure to uphold the right to adequate housing—not just in structure, but in the life it is meant to sustain.

In Towerville Subdivision, a National Housing Authority relocation site in San Jose del Monte, Bulacan, breadwinners are commonly employed as construction workers in Metro Manila. Employed on a fixed contractual basis with terms only lasting two weeks to a month at most, these construction workers take home around Php 600-700 a day—technically meeting the minimum wage but still falling short of sustaining their families, given the burden of travel costs and daily living expenses. Commonly taken on by males in the family, they usually brave the one-month contract away from their families and community to save as much money from their daily wages, skimping on food and anything less than essential for survival to take home as much money as they can. While San Jose del Monte lies just outside Metro Manila, commuting is not an option for them due to ballooning fares in public transportation.

Nearby opportunities and livelihood are critical for relocatees. In St. Martha Subdivision, another relocation site in Bocaue, Bulacan, residents are especially burdened by the poorly planned transfer of their homes. Located in the outskirts of the municipality, kilometers away from sources of employment and services, where a single trip to the local palengke (market) alone costs Php 150. Just as in Towerville, breadwinners are forced to leave their families temporarily to work as construction laborers elsewhere. Earning an average of Php 550 per day and supporting an average of five to six family members, relocatees bear the brunt of a failed one-dimensional housing program, blind to the actual needs of the urban poor. Stripped from long-established networks and employment, relocatees of public housing are merely thrust into their new houses without means to rebuild their lives:

"Sa pinanggalingan kasi namin... mayroon akong pinapasukan na bahay, naghuhugas ako ng plato. Tapos pagdating [ng] Sabado, naglalaba ako. Binabayaran ako ng 500 [pesos] sa laba. Sa hugas ng plato, 200 [pesos] araw-araw. Tatlong beses ako pupunta. Pupunta ako sa umaga, sa tanghali, tsaka sa gabi maghuhugas ako ng plato. Tapos 'yung kapitbahay namin, nilalabhan ko rin iyon, saglit lang naman kasi hindi naman marumi ang damit. E mula nang malipat kami rito, syempre malayo na siya. 'Di ko na siya mapuntahan kaya dito, kung ano na lang naging hanapbuhay namin dito, 'yun na lang tinutukan namin. (Back where we came from... I had a job at someone's house, washing dishes. Then on Saturdays, I would do the laundry. I was paid 500 pesos for the laundry and 200 pesos daily for washing dishes. I would go three times a day—morning, noon, and night to wash dishes. I also did laundry for our neighbor, just a little since the clothes weren't that soiled. But ever since we moved here, of course it's far, and I can no longer go there. So now, whatever work we can find here is what we focus on.)"



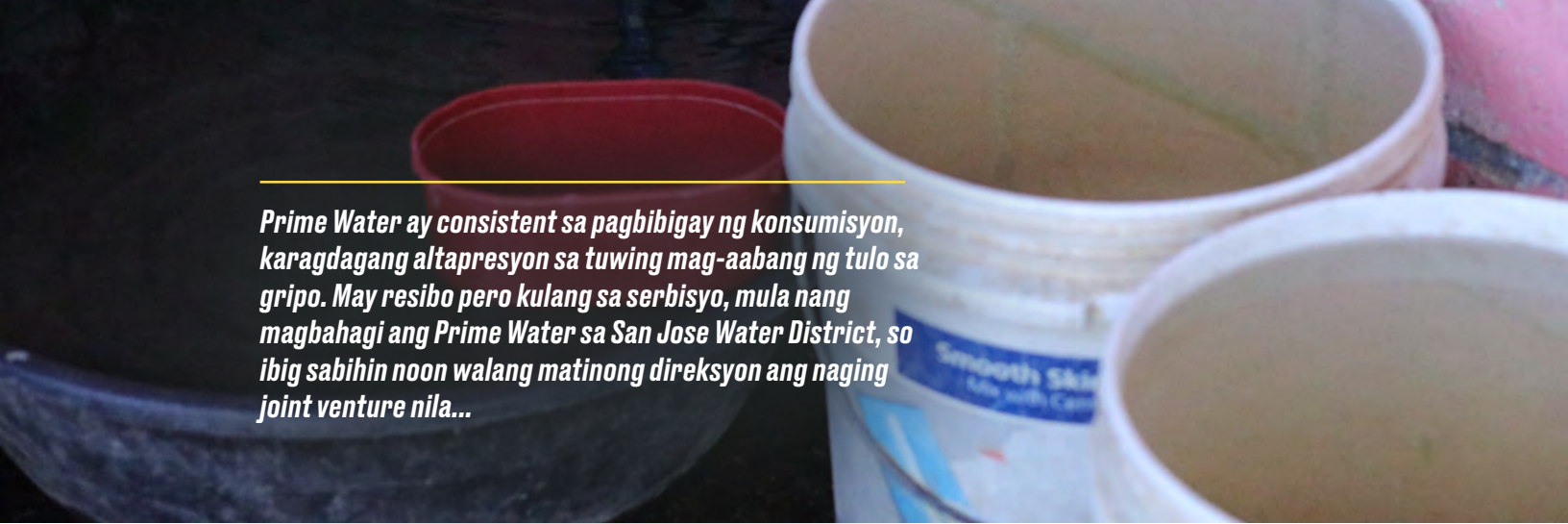
Their houses may have been relocated, but their lives remain tethered to the city. Uprooted from their sources of livelihood and community support, families face a growing risk of deeper poverty as access to jobs, transportation, and basic services becomes an afterthought. The failure of relocation sites to become self-sustaining in their own right is but a reflection of the government's failure to stimulate economic growth.

"Kasi wala man lang pabrika dito sa SJDM. Walang industriya... May mga kumpanya, private companies na 'ayan magandang opportunity na magtayo ng ganitong pabrika,' pero bakit laging discussion lang? Laging deliberation, laging on-site, wala naman. Wala namang natutuloy. Andami na n'yan. Andami na nami-site, parang tripping lang na iikot, titignan 'yong lugar, kakausapin yung mga tao, tapos ang eng nababalitaan na magtatayo raw ng ganito sa loob ng Towerville. Magkaroon daw ng pabrika dito sa Minuyan Proper. At least hindi na daw lalabas ang tao para maghanap buhay, kundi nandito na. (There's not even a factory here in SJDM. There's no industry... There are private companies that say, 'This is a good opportunity to set up a factory like this,' but why is it always just discussion? Always deliberation, always on-site visits, like just going around to look at the place, talk to people, and in the end... nothing happens. Nothing ever pushes through. There have been so many of these. We've heard so many reports that they will supposedly build something like this inside Towerville. They say there will be a factory here in Minuyan Proper. At least then, people wouldn't have to go elsewhere to earn a living, but could work right here.)"

Moreover, adequate housing entails not only the provision of housing units but also the assurance of social services and other essential facilities to ensure the functionality of the community. When they were asked to relocate, authorities merely alluded to the possibility of opportunities and nothing else apart from the house, that is, the structure, to be present.

"Kumbaga dapat lahat accessible, kumbaga malapit sa palengke. May eskwelahan, may simbahan, may transportasyon, at mayroong pagkakakitaan. 'Di naman literal na sinabi [ng NHA] pero 'pwedeng may pagkakakitaan sa paglilipatan. (Basically, everything should be accessible, like close to the market. There should be schools, a church, transportation, and opportunities to earn a living. The NHA didn't say it literally, but it's implied that 'there could be ways to earn a living in the relocation site.)"

While the promise of relocation often centers on providing housing, the absence of essential services—such as a reliable water supply—further exacerbates the insecurity faced by residents. In Towerville, the privatization of the local water district has intensified these challenges, leaving community members grappling with inadequate and costly water access.



Prime Water ay consistent sa pagbibigay ng konsumisyon, karagdagang altapresyon sa tuwing mag-aabang ng tulo sa gripo. May resibo pero kulang sa serbisyo, mula nang magbahagi ang Prime Water sa San Jose Water District, so ibig sabihin noon walang matinong direksyon ang naging joint venture nila...

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The privatization of a vital social service continues to imperil the entire community's survival. Community partners denounce Prime Water and the government's role in perpetuating a system of deception—insisting that water provision be restored to public management, where the taps once flowed reliably and without problem.

"Yong panawagan namin maibalik talaga sa ano, maibalik sa dating water district 'yung San Jose, 'yung ano ng tubig ngayon kasi walang mangyayari, sakal na sakal na 'yung mga mamamayan dito, buong San Jose yan nakakaranas, sakal na sakal na 'yung mga tao dahil sa tubig na 'yan. (Our call is to really return San Jose's water services to the former water district. With the way water is now, nothing is getting done. The residents here are already suffering—everyone in San Jose is experiencing it, and people are really suffering because of this water situation.)"

Housing cannot be reduced to the mere building of walls and roofs; it must uphold the right of every person to live with dignity, security, and access to opportunity. When relocation programs are implemented without regard for the economic and social realities of the poor, they cease to be solutions and instead become instruments of further exclusion. The state's failure to ensure that relocation sites are livable—equipped with basic utilities, accessible services, and viable livelihood—reflects a deeper neglect of its obligation to realize the people's right to adequate housing and a life of dignity.



Odd Jobs

Because relocation sites offer a house but not a life, women are compelled to reconstitute life out of nothing—taking on odd jobs just to survive the void left by a bankrupt housing program. Bearing the full weight of responsibility for the whole household in between earnings, women in the community strategize (*diskarte*) to make ends meet. They divide their time between household work and piecework²²⁴, providing immediate relief to their families. In Towerville and St. Martha, women engage in various informal labor activities such as assembling clothespins, producing doormats, trimming rubber from slippers, and peeling garlic. These tasks, though labor-intensive, offer meager compensation, highlighting the systemic neglect of public housing programs that fail to address the broader needs of the urban poor.

“Kaya iyong naiiwang nanay at kababaihan dito gaya ‘yung pwedeng pagkakitaan, yung condiments sa paglalako, pagrerepack, pagtatahi ng basahan at tabi-tabi ng tindahan sa kalsada lahat ng sari-saring pwedeng itinda. Kung ano mayroon sa kapitbahay gagayahin ko para kumita rin ako. Hindi naman natin sila pwedeng pagbawalan maghanapbuhay kaya hangga’t maaari, gagawa ng diskarte para magkapera at makatulong doon sa asawa. (So the mothers and women left behind here find ways to earn a living, like selling condiments, repacking goods, sewing rags, or running small street-side stalls with various items. Whatever their neighbors are doing, they imitate so they can earn too. We can’t stop them from making a living too, so they do whatever they can to make money and help support their husbands.)”

²²⁴ Piecework is a type of contract-based agreement wherein wages are paid according to the amount of goods produced.

In both Towerville and St. Martha, a range of menial yet physically demanding tasks are outsourced to women. In St. Martha, for instance, women are paid just Php 3 per kilogram for assembling clothespins, which comes at around Php 40–50 per sack. Others produce doormats for Php 20 each, managing to finish only about five in a day. Trimming excess rubber from slippers pays Php 90 per sack, while peeling garlic earns just Php 100.

In Antipolo, Rizal, a similar practice exists in ceramic production. A small shop employs women to perform the three-step process of casting, cleaning, and painting religious figurines for local sale. For each finished piece, workers are paid Php 5 for a large figurine, Php 3 for a medium, and Php 2 for a small. Regardless of size, each figurine takes roughly an hour to complete. After a week of work, women estimate they earn only around Php 500.

In Navotas, a common source of supplementary income is mending damaged fishing nets, a task locally known as paghahayuma. For about six hours of work, women earn just Php 90 per net. Women take on these labor-intensive, low-paying jobs to supplement their household's unstable income—fully aware that this work competes with their responsibilities at home, yet compelled by economic insecurity to treat it as a full-time job, often on top of other livelihood efforts like street food vending, nail cleaning, and even scrap trading (pangangalakal).

“Nakakadalawang lambat lang po ako kasi may baby rin po ako. 'Yun lang po. Hindi po sapat 'yung 90 pesos sa isang araw, lalo na ngayon sa sobrang [taas ng] bilihin ngayon. (I can only mend two nets [per day] because I also have a baby. That's it. Ninety pesos a day isn't enough, especially now with the cost of goods being so high.)”

In these odd jobs, women are not just severely underpaid, they are also disproportionately exposed to health hazards. Women in St. Martha are increasingly wary of their health, citing the unbearably strong fumelike smell of freshly-pressed rubber. Ceramics workers in Rizal face a similar hazard—women are directly exposed to paint fumes and dust during the whole production process, as no personal protective equipment is provided by their employer. This systemic neglect underscores the urgent need for accessible, quality healthcare services that cater to the unique challenges faced by these communities.



Hindi po sapat 'yung 90 pesos sa isang araw, lalo na ngayon sa sobrang [taas ng] bilihin ngayon.



The Poor Shouldn't Have to Beg for Healthcare

Conversations with community partners are commonly steered towards health, recognizing the grueling conditions their bodies endure just to put food on the table—conditions that leave them vulnerable to both infectious and degenerative illnesses from work, yet still unable to afford care for themselves. As such, discussions about the country's healthcare system—particularly the promises of universal healthcare and the supposed strengthening of the referral system beginning at the barangay level—remain a sensitive topic for community partners. Across communities, problems of understaffed hospitals, medicine shortages, and complicated bureaucracy, even for emergency cases, are as pronounced as ever. For partner communities, healthcare in the Philippines is anything but universal.

A community partner in Navotas captures the general healthcare scenario:

“Sa community po namin, meron kaming barangay [health] center. Pero mas madalas po 'yung walang doktor... Tapos meron namang mga karatig na mga malalapit na mga emergency hospital. Pero marami pong hinahanap na requirements. Patay ka na bago ka ma-assist o mabigyan lunas, 'di ba? Tapos po... kapag mag-a-ask ka ng financial assistance or medical assistance, marami po silang kinukuhang mga papeles. Merong abstract, merong medical, merong ID... 'Yon, kailangan po i-provide. Tapos ang pila hanggang malayo. So doon ka, doon ka palang sa pila mamamatay ka na bago ka makakuha ng ano. Ngayon, pag nakakuha ka ng form, maghihintay ka pa [ng] ilang araw. Maswerte ka kung matatawag ka within one week. (In our community, we have a barangay health center. But most of the time, there's no doctor... There are nearby emergency hospitals, but they require many documents. You could die before you get assistance or treatment, right? Also, if you request financial or medical assistance, they ask for many papers—like an abstract, medical records, ID... all of these need to be provided. Then the line is very long. You could die just standing in line before you get anything. And even when you get the form, you still have to wait several days. You're lucky if they call you within a week.)”

A similar story rings true for a community partner in San Jose del Monte, Bulacan. Community partners are deeply disappointed by the continuous deterioration of public hospitals' quality of service—seemingly forcing patients to seek patient care in private facilities, which according to them, the city is in no shortage of.

“Kung ospital gusto mo, gusto mo mabigyan ka agad ng lunas mag-private hospital ka andiyan ang Skyline andiyan ang Grace pero ‘wag na ‘wag kang pupunta sa emergency ng public hospital, nasa emergency ka na ita-transfer ka pa ng Tala which is pagbiyahe pa lang kahit alam mong kinokombulsyon ka lang o nagtatae ka lang, baka mauubusan ka na ng — papunta ng Tala eh. ‘Di naman agad sa Tala i-aadmit tayo, interview, ang haba pa ng pila. Na-experience ko rin ‘yan sa nanay ko, tumaas ang dugo, nagpacheckup sa BUCAS, matic Tala agad dala. (If you want immediate treatment at a hospital, go to a private hospital like Skyline or Grace. But never go to the emergency room of a public hospital. If you’re in the ER, they’ll transfer you to Tala, which is already a long trip, even if you just have convulsions or diarrhea—you might run out of time on the way to Tala. They don’t admit you immediately; there’s an interview, and the line is long. I experienced this with my mother—her blood pressure went up, she went for a checkup at BUCAS, and they immediately sent her to Tala.)”

Access to medicine is another chief complaint among community partners, as they have limited means to obtain lifesaving drugs—especially maintenance medications for chronic illnesses such as hypertension and kidney failure. As such, community partners turn to the DSWD for help in financing their medicine. However, the DSWD’s assistance is limited, doling out help only once every three months. Assistance is also limited to just one kind per person—availing one forfeits your chance to avail of other programs.



Tapos meron namang mga karatig na mga malalapit na mga emergency hospital. Pero marami pong hinahanap na requirements. Patay ka na bago ka ma-assist o mabigyan lunas, 'di ba? [...]Tapos ang pila hanggang malayo. So doon ka, doon ka palang sa pila mamamatay ka na bago ka makakuha.



"Minsan doon sa apat na reseta ko, dalawang gamot lang 'yung nabibili doon. 'Paano 'yung dalawa? Yung mas importante, 'yun 'yung naiiwan... 'Pag after every after 3 months, saka ka palang pwedeng lumapit ulit. What if doon sa 3 months na 'yun, may mangyari sayo ulit na komplikasyon sa sakit mo, hindi ka pwedeng lumapit, 'di ba? Kasi ano eh, limitado, limitado hanggang tatlong buwan... 'Pag ikaw nakatanggap ka ng ayudang TUPAD, AICS, AKAP, hindi ka pwede kahit sabihin mong hindi ka pa nagpapa-check up for another 3 months, hindi ka na makaka-avail. Kasi ang katwiran nila, 'Ay, nakalapit ka na eh'. Under kasi ng DSWD yan. 'Yun parang merong limit sa categories, 'di ba? 'Uy, nakalapit ka na pala dito ah.' Lumapit po kayo noong nakaraang linggo? Tatlong buwan lang po kasi, ganon. Balik na lang po kayo. (Sometimes, out of the four prescriptions I have, I can only buy two of the medicines. What about the other two—the more important ones? Those are left out... After that, you can only go back every three months. What if, during those three months, you have another complication with your illness? You can't go back, right? Because it's limited—only every three months. If you receive assistance through TUPAD, AICS, or AKAP, you can't even say you haven't had a check-up for another three months—you can't avail of it again. Their reasoning is, 'You already went before.' These programs are under DSWD, and it feels like there's a limit to the categories, right? 'Oh, you already went here last week? It's only every three months. Please come back later.')"

In these cases, community partners often resort to seeking help from politicians, enduring long lines just to secure whatever amount they can for their medicine.

"Kaya minsan, nagtatanong-tanong ako sa mga kilala ko. Kahit minsan mga malalayo, nakikipila din ako. Tapos doon mo maririnig 'yung mga hinaing ng mga tao. 'Ang hirap maging mahirap, no?' sabi niyang gano'n. Tingnan mo, biruin mo, Php 5,000, makikipila ka doon sa isang libong mga mamamayan na 'yon. Kasi nga gusto nilang mai-survive 'yong sa panggamot. 'Yong iba dialysis. Doon mo makikita na talaga 'yong pangangailangan ng mga Pilipino sobra-sobra 'di ba? Doon mo makikita 'yong pagdating sa, 'yon nga, sa kalusugan, kulang pa talaga. Mas kailangan pa talagang mas maabot 'yon nga 'yong sa maintenance... 'Lapit ka kay ganyan, lapit ka kay ganyan.' Talagang sakripisyo ka. Babyahe ka ng malayo kasi sa QC, 'sa QC pa 'yung opisina ni ganyan, ni ganun. (So sometimes, I ask around among people I know. Even if it's far, I line up too. That's where you hear people's complaints. 'It's hard to be poor, isn't it?' someone would say. Imagine this—you'd line up with a thousand other people just for Php 5,000. They want to survive, especially for medical needs. Some need dialysis. That's when you really see how overwhelming the needs of Filipinos are. You realize that when it comes to healthcare, it's still lacking. Maintenance and regular care need to be more accessible... You have to go from one person to another. It's truly a sacrifice. You have to travel far because, in QC, that's where the offices of this person or that person are.)"

In this system, people are kept dependent on politicians' 'benevolence'—reinforcing patronage politics by keeping wages depressed, hospitals decrepit and understaffed, and medicines out of reach. This ensures that survival is attained only through the favors doled out by politicians, thereby strengthening their hold on power.



**KABUHAYAN
HINDI
PATAHAN!
PARTIDO
"MANGGAGAWA"**

Everyday Struggles, Collective Resistance

These stories offer mere glimpses into the everyday lives of people in the communities. While our discussions revealed a host of other issues people face daily, the accounts above most vividly capture their struggles—and, by extension, the current human rights situation. In the communities that have welcomed us, it is clear to the people that genuine development—one that places their welfare at its core—remains elusive. What remains constant, however, is the certainty of worsening conditions and their continued descent into material deprivation.

Beyond understanding the conditions in these communities, these conversations have also become spaces for processing collective grief—grief born of decades of systemic government neglect. Towards the end of these discussions, what begins as an exposition of everyday hardship often transforms into moments of reflection. Community partners find themselves rendered speechless, confronted by the sheer magnitude of their own oppression. This, however, does not mean their passive acceptance of unjust and inhumane conditions, as it is clear to our community partners that grief reflects their commitment to be emancipated from oppression through their own collective power. With this, our initial documentation efforts of drug war victims with community partners starting from 2017 have now come into fruition—those who had lost the most now bear the community's welfare at heart. Years of monitoring the human rights situation in their own communities have instilled a strong sense of responsibility in our community partners. What began as a loose formation constituted to monitor drug-related human rights violations has now evolved. Our community partners have formed collectives of human rights defenders, taking the lead as grassroots watchdogs within their communities.

Compelled by necessity and the desire to govern themselves as a collective, these groups lead empowerment initiatives within their communities—popularizing human rights as a source of practical skills and strength from which their unwavering hope for a better life may emerge. For these groups, human rights work has become an extension of their daily lives. Grounded by their extensive experience in community monitoring, our community partners are now armed with keen eyes to identify violations as they happen—leading appropriate rights claiming actions as first responders within the community as a result. These include referral to government services, conducting human rights education sessions themselves, holding dialogues with local government units and directly influencing local legislation, and participating in mass mobilizations to collectively assert their rights.



Part 4

Sa Atin Nakataya!

Forging Heaven on Earth

The worsening human rights situation under the Marcos Jr. administration demands collective action from the very people the State is meant to serve and protect

Through organized resistance, communities continue to challenge a system, marked by State failure and repression, that perpetuates injustice and corruption. They call for truth, justice, accountability, and an end to impunity across all human rights issues: from deepening economic inequality and social injustice affecting marginalized groups, to the protection of human rights defenders, and the dismantling of corruption and political dynasties. Ultimately, the people aspire to build a society grounded in a genuine human rights culture—one where principles are upheld, participation is meaningful, and dignity is not merely promised but lived.



A large crowd of people is gathered for a protest in an urban setting. Many individuals are wearing red t-shirts, some with slogans like "LAND & FOOD FOR PEOPLE NOT PROFIT!". Several people are holding umbrellas, suggesting it might be raining or sunny. In the background, there are tall buildings and trees. The text "People's Response" is overlaid on the image.

People's Response

Collective Action Amid Worsening Human Rights Conditions

Across sectors and regions, communities have continued to assert their rights and resist policies that deepen inequality, poverty, and repression. In the face of shrinking civic space, they have mobilized to expose the structural causes of their deteriorating living conditions, demand accountability from those in power, and advance rights-based alternatives grounded in human dignity and social justice.

Collective Resistance

Throughout the year, the Filipino people have mounted major demonstrations to challenge rights violations and demand systemic change. Thousands of workers from labor and progressive organizations marched to Mendiola and other sites nationwide on Labor Day to demand a ₱1,200 national daily minimum wage and a ₱200 legislated wage increase,²²⁵ amid the Marcos Jr. administration's inaction on legislated wage hikes²²⁶ and rising cost of living.

Just days earlier, labor groups, including senatorial candidates, launched a Unified Labor Agenda calling for reforms in wage systems, job regularization, and workers' protection,²²⁷ challenging Marcos Jr.'s neoliberal economic policies, which have long undermined fair wages, job security, and decent working conditions. Then, during Peasant Month in October, around 1,000 farmers and peasant rights advocates gathered in Mendiola to condemn corruption in flood control projects and to press for genuine agrarian reform, increased agricultural subsidies, and adequate funding for disaster-affected farming communities.²²⁸

During the State of the Nation Address (SONA) in July 2025, approximately 4,000 protesters²²⁹ marched along Commonwealth Avenue in

Quezon City for the People's SONA, asserting the real state of the nation and voicing long-standing grievances on poverty, inequality, and political repression. In response to one of the biggest corruption scandals in recent years, tens of thousands of Filipinos gathered on September 21 for the "Trillion Peso March" and "Baha sa Luneta", both nationwide anti-corruption protests, with the largest gathering at Luneta and along EDSA, and held in commemoration of the anniversary of Martial Law. Protesters demanded transparency and accountability in flood control projects worth billions of pesos after successive typhoons led to devastating floods, disproportionately affecting low-income communities.²³⁰ Protest organizers are set to hold further mobilizations in October 2025²³¹ and November 2025.²³²

These mass actions embody the Filipino people's unwavering determination to defend their rights and demand systemic change. Despite escalating state repression and surveillance, Filipinos continue to organize, mobilize, and push forward policy agendas that uphold social justice and human dignity. Their persistence reflects an enduring will to fight for their rights and to build a society founded on democracy and human rights.

²²⁵ Joviland Rita, "Labor Day protest: Groups reiterate call for wage hike," GMA News Online, May 1, 2025. <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/944595/labor-day-protest-groups-reiterate-call-for-wage-hike/story/>

²²⁶ Jean Mangaluz, "What Marcos didn't say in SONA 2025," Philippine Star, July 29, 2025. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/07/29/2461620/what-marcos-didnt-say-sona-2025#:~:text=The%2019th%20Congress%20failed%20to,International%20Criminal%20Court>

²²⁷ Faith Argosino, "Groups march for wage hike on Labor Day," Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 1, 2025. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2057206/fwd-look-on-labor-day-protest>

²²⁸ Keith Clores, "Farmers, multisectoral groups hold protest in Manila vs corruption," Philippine Daily Inquirer, October 21, 2025. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2128005/farmers-multisectoral-groups-hold-protest-in-manila-vs-corruption>

²²⁹ Dianne Sampang, "4,000 protesters take to the streets as Marcos delivers SONA," Philippine Daily Inquirer, July 28, 2025. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2088606/4000-protesters-take-to-the-streets-as-marcos-delivers-sona>

²³⁰ Kurt Dela Pena, "Protests vs corruption continue to grow after September 21," Philippine Daily Inquirer, September 25, 2025. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2114987/protests-vs-corruption-continue-to-grow-after-september-21>

²³¹ Keith Clores, "More anti-corruption rallies set on Oct. 17, 21, in Manila," Philippine Daily Inquirer, October 14, 2025. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2124461/more-anticorruption-rallies-set-on-oct-17-21-in-manila>

²³² EJ Macababdad, "Trillion Peso March organizers staging protest on Nov. 30," Philippine Star, October 3, 2025. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/10/03/2477199/trillion-peso-march-organizers-staging-protest-nov-30>

State Failure and Repression

As seen throughout this report, the state of human rights in the Philippines continues to deteriorate under the Marcos Jr. administration. This decline is driven primarily by the administration's unwavering adherence to a neoliberal economic framework that prioritizes corporate profit over public welfare. By allowing multinational corporations and private entities to dominate key sectors, exploit natural and human resources, and take over essential public services, the government has effectively abdicated its duty as the primary duty-bearer for the realization of human rights. This policy orientation undermines the Filipino people's economic, social, and cultural rights, deepening inequality and pushing millions further into poverty.

Instead of addressing the systemic roots of poverty and inequality, the administration has relied on short-term social assistance measures such as the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) and Ayuda para sa Kapos ang Kita Program (AKAP). While presented as social protection, these programs function at best as temporary relief rather than genuine tools for empowerment, and at worst, as instruments of patronage politics. Their implementation reinforces dependence on government largesse and loyalty to politicians rather than advancing the people's social and economic rights. This reflects a broader pattern of state abdication, where the government's policies fail to realize fundamental rights and instead entrench a cycle of dependency and disempowerment.

As the state withdraws from its obligations to uphold the rights of its people, it simultaneously tightens control through repression and militarization. The continued enforcement of the Anti-Terrorism Act, widespread red-tagging of activists and human rights defenders, the

ongoing drug war targeting marginalized communities, and the militarization of rural areas and indigenous communities illustrate the current administration's mounting violations against the people. This dual process, economic neglect coupled with intensified repression, has led to a systemic regression in both civil-political and socio-economic rights, effectively shrinking civic space and instilling fear among those who seek justice and genuine pro-people development.

The administration's policies reveal a troubling pattern of state failure on multiple fronts. First, there is a systemic erosion of human rights protection, as economic and security policies jointly undermine workers', farmers', and ordinary citizens' rights. Second, there is state abdication of its obligations, where the government transfers public accountability to profit-oriented private actors. Third, the ongoing repression of civic space demonstrates how the state weaponizes laws and security institutions to suppress dissent and silence critics. Despite these attacks, the sustained resistance of the Filipino people shows that public mobilization remains a vital defense of democracy and human rights. Across cities and rural communities, the collective action of ordinary Filipinos stands as a counterforce to human rights decline and state repression.

In sum, while the Marcos Jr. administration has failed to address the deep-seated economic and political inequalities driving the country's human rights crisis, the Filipino people continue to assert their rights through organized resistance. Their actions affirm that the struggle for justice, dignity, and accountability endures, even under conditions of state repression and systemic neglect.

People's Demands



Amid the continuing human rights deterioration and the persistence of social injustices, civil society organizations and sectoral groups have articulated clear and urgent demands for government action. These recommendations reflect the collective aspirations of communities, victims, and human rights advocates for justice, accountability, and the realization of rights.

Ensure Justice for Victims of the War on Drugs. The State must acknowledge the grave human rights violations committed during Duterte's so-called war on drugs and take concrete steps to deliver justice and reparation to the victims and their families. The Marcos Jr. administration should fully cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation and initiate the process for the Philippines to rejoin the ICC. The government should establish national mechanisms for reparations and support services for victims' families, while officially recognizing the widespread nature of abuses committed under the previous administration.

Rejoin the ICC and End Impunity. The State must uphold its international obligations and ensure that those in power are held fully accountable under the law. The call to rejoin the ICC represents the Filipino people's demand for accountability at all levels of power. To end the entrenched culture of impunity, the government must urgently strengthen the Witness Protection Program, restore independent monitoring of torture, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances, and pursue justice system reforms to guarantee efficiency and due process. It must also adopt a genuine transitional justice program rooted in truth, accountability, and reparation to deliver justice for victims and restore public confidence in the rule of law.

Uphold Truth, Accountability, and Historical Integrity. The government must confront and correct historical distortions and disinformation campaigns that whitewash past abuses or undermine human rights accountability. Public education and memorialization programs should be strengthened to ensure that lessons from the Marcos dictatorship and other periods of state repression are neither forgotten nor repeated. Supporting truth-telling initiatives and the preservation of historical records must form part of a comprehensive effort toward truth and justice.

Address Worsening Economic Inequality and Social Injustice. The State must fulfill its obligations to protect and promote the economic, social, and cultural rights of its people. The Marcos Jr. administration should integrate international human rights standards into its economic agenda to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth. This includes adopting policies that guarantee decent work, living wages, and job security in accordance with International Labor Organization (ILO) standards, specifically by promoting jobs, guaranteeing rights at work, expanding social protection, and fostering social dialogue. Contractualization and labor-only contracting should be abolished. The government must also ensure universal access to quality education and healthcare through the efficient utilization of public funds, just compensation for education and healthcare workers, strict implementation of existing laws, and equitable delivery of social services, particularly for marginalized sectors.

Uphold the Rights of Women, the LGBTQI+, the Children, and the Youth. The government must guarantee the protection of women, LGBTQI+ persons, and children from all forms of violence, discrimination, and exploitation. The Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act must be fully implemented and adequately funded, while the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children (VAWC) Act should be strictly enforced, with Women's Desks across all levels of government made fully functional, resourced, and accessible. The minimum age of criminal responsibility must remain at 15 years old, and the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act

should be fully implemented to uphold the rights of children in conflict with the law (CICL) and children at risk (CAR). The state must also address all forms of abuse and exploitation, including online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) and the recruitment of children in armed conflict. Furthermore, the government must prioritize the passage of the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics Equality (SOGIE) Bill and the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Bill, address hate crimes and discrimination, ensure equal access to education, employment, and public services, and expand comprehensive, inclusive, and stigma-free HIV services.

Protect Civic Space and the Right to Dissent. The Marcos administration should end the harassment, surveillance, and vilification of human rights defenders, journalists, and activists. The Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill should be prioritized to institutionalize safeguards and bring national policy in line with international standards for protecting human rights defenders. The government must also repeal provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Act that undermine due process, criminalize dissent, and enable arbitrary arrests. Furthermore, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) should be abolished, helping ensure a free and safe civic space that is fundamental to democratic governance and human rights protection.

Combat Corruption and End Political Dynasties. To restore democratic accountability, the government must take decisive action against systemic corruption and the concentration of political power in a few families. The immediate passage of an Anti-Political Dynasty Bill, as mandated by the 1987 Constitution, is essential to dismantle entrenched patronage systems and ensure democratic political representation.

Protect the Environment and Uphold Indigenous Peoples' Rights. The government should halt environmentally destructive projects and ensure full compliance with environmental and human rights standards. The rights of indigenous peoples, including the Moro and non-Moro communities, must be respected and protected in line with the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act and international norms. The principle of free, prior, and informed consent must be strictly observed before any development project is implemented on ancestral domains. The State must strengthen policy mechanisms to protect indigenous lands, cultures, and livelihoods, while holding corporations and state actors accountable for environmental degradation and attacks on indigenous communities.

People's Response

The persistence of human rights violations and the continuing impunity for past and present human rights abuses demand urgent and concrete action to ensure justice, accountability, and the realization of human rights in the country.

Building on the insights from the communities, fisherfolk in Tanza, Navotas, continue to demand action with regard to the substantial decline in their catch caused by the land reclamation project of San Miguel Corporation. Such development programs have exacerbated the marginalization of those already living below the poverty line. Similar patterns exist for the people in San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan, who were subjected to multiple obstacles upon relocation, restricting their access to both resources and opportunities. Families were compelled to engage in informal strategies and precarious work to ensure survival. Taken together, their health is bound to suffer, aggravating their conditions, as state responses to address healthcare persistently remain inadequate. This goes to show that the government's assistance contradicts its intended purpose; instead perpetuating conditions that exposes communities to greater vulnerability within and beyond Metro Manila.

Human rights belong to the people, to the masses, long before they became weapons used to silence dissent. They serve as the everyday defense for families denied justice, workers denied fair compensation, farmers in threat of being displaced, and students silenced for expressing the truth. In a political climate where fear is used to make us forget our dignity, we must reclaim what is inherently ours. We call on every Filipino to know and assert your rights, and defend the rights of others. Human rights defense is not an act of rebellion; it is a responsibility. It is an act that strengthens the communities and uplifts the marginalized. To stand for human rights is to stand for life, freedom, and justice. And so, echoing the voices of the Filipino people:

Ang karapatang pantao ay para sa lahat ng tao at ang bawat hakbang pasulong sa pagkamit nito ay hakbang patungo sa isang mas makatao at mas makatarungang kinabukasan.

Long and arduous as it may be, the path towards the collective assertion of rights stands as a critical call to action within the community. Resistance stands as the community's enduring response in the face of mounting oppression and the deepening divide between the powerful and the powerless.



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