

## **A statement of concern on the deteriorating human rights situation**

As December 10, International Human Rights Day nears, we decry the continuing deterioration of human rights in the Philippines.

The recent killings of Catholic priest Fr. Marcelito Paez in Nueva Ecija, Pastor Lovelito Quinoñes in Mindoro Oriental, and human rights activist Elisa Badayos in Negros Oriental seem to signal a new and wider wave of killings and human rights violations in the country.

Such incidents come at the heels of Pres. Duterte's closing the door on the peace talks with the NDFP and admonition to state security forces to shoot and kill suspected armed rebels. We are alarmed that just as Oplan Tokhang saw thousands of alleged drug users or peddlers mowed down based on mere suspicion and spurious claims of "nanlaban," the President's order can also give license to state forces to kill unarmed civilians labelled as "rebels".

We are likewise alarmed at the President's threat to crack down on activists, critics and all those whom he imagines are conspiring to topple his government. This sends a chilling effect on the public and impinges on our people's exercise of their political rights and civil liberties.

The continuing efforts to undermine the system of checks and balances in government, as manifested in the impeachment proceedings against Chief Justice Ma. Lourdes Sereno, the threat to impeach Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales, the bullying of the Commission on Human Rights and the continued detention of Sen. Leila de Lima, is equally worrisome. More so, efforts of the President and his supporters to threaten and intimidate the critical press.

And yet the greatest threat to human rights today is Pres. Duterte's unmistakable drift towards authoritarian rule whether through charter change ostensibly to shift to a federal system of government or an outright power grab through a so-called "revolutionary government".

We call on our people to be critical and ever vigilant. Let us resist the erosion of our basic human and democratic rights. Let us unite in fighting tyranny and dictatorship.