

Philippines: Expert urges Congress to enact human rights defenders law

GENEVA (18 March 2021) – A UN expert today called on the Philippine Congress to prioritise the passage of legislation for the protection of human rights defenders.

“Enacting legislation at the national level is an important means by which States can recognise the work of human rights defenders and create robust mechanisms for their protection, and I urge all members of the Congress to get behind this praiseworthy initiative,” said Mary Lawlor, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

Bills for the protection of human rights defenders, developed in consultation with civil society, have been filed in both chambers of Congress, with the Bill passing its third and final reading in the House of Representatives in June 2019. Corresponding bills have since been filed in the current session of Congress. Once approved by both chambers of Congress, any legislation would then be sent to the President for final approval.

“In my recent report to the Human Rights Council I highlighted the extremely serious risks faced by those peacefully defending human rights around the world, including in the Philippines, and documented the legislative efforts already made by some States to protect them,” said Lawlor. “By prioritising legislation to protect human rights defenders, the Philippines would join that group and send a clear message about their willingness to uphold their human rights obligations.”

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Ms Mary Lawlor, (Ireland) is the [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#). She is currently an Adjunct Professor of Business and Human Rights in Trinity College Dublin. She was the founder of Front Line Defenders - the International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. As Executive Director from 2001-2016, she represented Front Line Defenders and had a key role in its development. Ms. Lawlor was the Director of the Irish Section of Amnesty International from 1988 to 2000, became a Board member in 1975 and was elected Chair from 1983 to 1987. Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

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