

Open Letter

Ms. Gloria M. Arroyo
President of the Republic of the Philippines

Paris - Quezon City : September 30th, 2009

Re : Signing the Freedom from Torture Law

Your Excellency,

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) are writing to urge you to sign the Anti-Torture Act of Philippines.

FIDH and PAHRA wish to convey to you their concern regarding the delay of the signing of the new law despite the fact that it has been adopted by both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Our organisations are convinced that the bill will constitute a crucial and fundamental step for human rights protection in the Philippines after decades of civil society's efforts to have domestic legislation on the criminalization of torture. We consider this law as an important opportunity for your administration to effectively protect the fundamental human right to be free from torture and put an end to impunity by facilitating the possibility for victims to seek legal redress.

Furthermore, the signing of the bill will be a significantly positive step towards the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations Committee against Torture and of the UN Universal Periodic Review process calling upon the Philippines' authorities to elaborate specific domestic law criminalizing torture as stated in the Philippines Constitution under Section 12 of the Bill of Rights, as well as in the article 4 of the United Nations Convention against Torture (CAT) of which the Republic of the Philippines is a State party.

In addition, FIDH and PAHRA consider that, taking into account the Philippines' role in the region and being member of the UN Human Rights Council, the signing of the Anti-Torture Act may influence other States in the ASEAN community and generally in Asia, to take similar positive steps, as domestic legislation criminalizing torture is generally absent.

Therefore, FIDH and PAHRA urge you to uphold in the Philippines this basic human right of being free from torture by signing and enacting the Anti-Torture legislation.

We thank you in advance for taking the present call into consideration and hope that the you will adopt a strong stance in this regard.

Respectfully,

Souhayr Belhassen
FIDH President

Copy to :

- Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines in France and delegations to the European Union and the United Nations (Geneva and New York)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs