

UN Fails to Respond to Human Rights Violations in the Philippines

After offering technical assistance to Duterte, the United Nations risks being complicit in the human rights crisis in the Philippines

Today, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted by consensus a resolution that encourages technical assistance on human rights matters to the government of the Philippines, while ignoring calls for an international investigation into the nation's 'war on drugs'. The resolution also fails to recognise the extent of the human rights violations in the Philippines, adding insult to injury for thousands of victims as well as human rights defenders who risk their lives daily to seek accountability for the Government's abuses.

In spite of the [repeated calls](#) by UN human rights experts, human rights defenders, and local and international civil society to establish an international investigative mechanism on the situation in the Philippines, and a recent UN [report](#) exposing at least 8,663 killings due to the so-called 'anti-drugs' campaign, today the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution that merely encourages the UN system to provide technical assistance and capacity-building to the Philippines. Pursuant to the resolution, cooperation would cover various human rights issues, including drug policies, domestic accountability, engagement with civil society, and counter-terrorism.

The Human Rights Council assumes that technical cooperation will be enough to end widespread human rights violations in the Philippines, despite the progressive deterioration of the situation on the ground, and the demonstrated defiance and hostility of the Government towards UN human rights bodies. People who use or are engaged with drugs continue to be [killed](#), while President Duterte [incites violence](#) and calls for the [death penalty for drug offences](#). The Philippines recently adopted a highly contested [Anti-Terror Law](#) that could be used to silence government critics, while civil society continues to be targeted and [killed](#). The internal [review panel](#) recently announced by the Government to investigate the deaths caused by the 'anti-drugs' campaign is neither impartial nor independent by any standard, as it is headed by the same government agencies that are to be investigated.

In engaging in technical cooperation with the Philippines, the United Nations must be mindful of its own human rights obligations, ensure that its assistance is not used to cover up these failings, and that survivors, families, and witnesses are not put at danger by domestic processes. Civil society organizations must be actively and meaningfully engaged by both the United Nations and government agencies, and their safety equally ensured.

The resolution adopted today also mandates UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet to report back to the Council within a year. We urge the High Commissioner to seize this crucial responsibility to document the ongoing violations in their full extent, to assess domestic accountability mechanisms, and to evaluate the impact of UN assistance.



The UN Human Rights Council and its Member States are now responsible for the effectiveness of technical assistance and cooperation in ending the human rights crisis in the Philippines, ensuring that violations and abuses are independently and effectively investigated, and that those responsible are brought to justice. When it comes to drug control alone, cooperation should lead to an immediate end to the killings associated to the ‘anti-drugs’ campaign, the reform of drug policies to bolster evidence-based harm reduction, the end of compulsory detention for drug use, and rights-based drug treatment – among others.

As civil society organisations and the community of people who use drugs, we will continue to follow the cooperation closely to see if these outcomes are delivered. If this effort at technical assistance do not deliver a clear and significant improvement of the human rights situation soon, the Human Rights Council will need to follow up with the establishment of an international, impartial, and credible investigation on the human rights violations.

International Drug Policy Consortium

Harm Reduction International

International Network of People who Use Drugs

NoBox Transitions Foundation