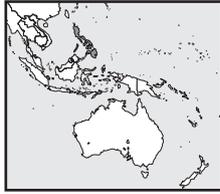


PHILIPPINES

In fear and want



Economic growth in the Philippines is sustained in large part by remittances from overseas workers, mostly women, who have migrated in large numbers. This arrangement is compromising the security of current and future generations and discounting their social and environmental rights. Currently a large part of the national budget goes to debt repayment, leaving little for poverty reduction, education, health or environmental protection. Ultimately, only regime change and policy reform can restore people's trust.

Social Watch Philippines
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To be seen as more corrupt than a predecessor who was ousted because of corruption is bad enough. But to be considered no different from, or even worse than, former dictator Ferdinand Marcos should be particularly disturbing, and that is how many Filipinos are beginning to see President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

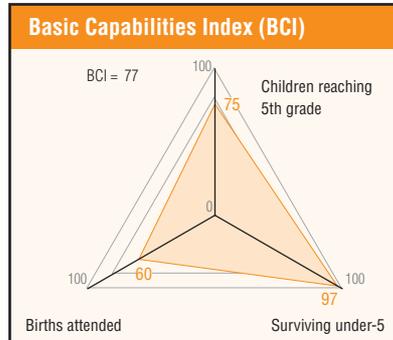
People call her 'corrupt', 'evil', 'thief', 'bitch', but they do not go to prison for it. Under the new anti-terrorism law, or Human Security Act of 2007, the president can pursue these 'name callers' and brand them as terrorists seeking to destabilize the government. Macapagal-Arroyo will not do so however, since she is under pressure from a broad range of opponents questioning her integrity and legitimacy and asking for her resignation.

Human rights on the line

Human rights in the Philippines have been steadily deteriorating since 2001, when Macapagal-Arroyo became president. The extra-judicial killings of hundreds of journalists and activists and the arrest and disappearance of Jonas Burgos, son of a journalism icon, attests to that. However, the 2003, 2005 and 2007 Philippine progress reports on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have all been silent on this issue.

Following a number of fact-finding missions, both local and international, the Government set up the Melo Commission in 2006, but failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for the killings. In 2007 Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato Puno organized a human rights summit focusing on extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances. He said, "If there are compelling reasons for this summit, one of them is to prevent losing eye contact with these killings and disappearances, revive our righteous indignation and spur our united search for the elusive solution to this pestering problem."

In response to the growing clamour for an independent investigation, Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions and Special Adviser to the UN High Com-

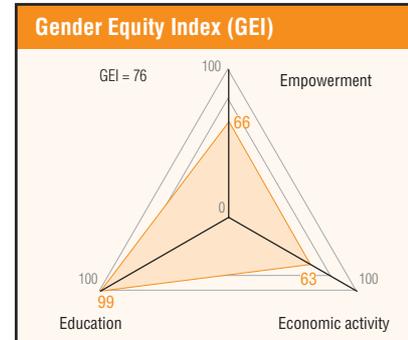


missioner for Human Rights on the MDGs, visited the country in February 2007. The Alston Report stated: "Since 2001 the number of politically motivated killings in the Philippines has been high and the death toll has mounted steadily. These killings have eliminated civil society leaders, including human rights defenders, trade unionists, and land reform advocates, as well as many others on the left of the political spectrum. Of particular concern is the fact that those killed appear to have been carefully selected and intentionally targeted. The aim has been to intimidate a much larger number of civil society actors".

Statistical accounts of human rights violations vary widely, depending on who is doing the count. The Alston Report considered all available reports from the military, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP), human rights NGOs such as the Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights or Karapatan, Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), and media organizations including the Centre for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP), and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

Chart 1 shows a median position between that of Karapatan which put the numbers on the high side and that of the government which downplayed them.

Few countries surpass the Philippines in the ratification of UN treaties, conventions, or agreements, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and including almost all later human rights agreements, such as



the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Rights of the Child Convention.

Human rights are enshrined in the 1987 Constitution, which guarantees full respect for civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, and gives special attention to the rights of women, children and the aged and the rights of workers as stipulated in 33 international labour conventions. Human rights education is conducted in schools as well as among the military and police. Although the Human Rights Commission has a mandate to investigate human rights violations, provide protection and legal assistance to victims and monitor government compliance with treaty obligations, the agency is badly underfunded.

To enjoy human rights and basic freedoms consistent with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 2000 Millennium Declaration, Filipinos must have secure food, jobs and livelihoods, health, education and shelter; the rights and well-being of women and children, the young and the old, indigenous peoples and minority populations must be protected and people must live in a safe and clean environment.

The attainment of all the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – a relatively low bar for a middle-income country like the Philippines – simply sets a basic minimum for the enjoyment of basic rights so that citizens can begin to aspire for a higher level of well-being. But even on this minimum the country might fail to deliver.

Impoverishing growth

Spending for health care, education, water and sanitation, poverty-reducing infrastructure, and environmental restoration has not paralleled economic

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growth. Instead of helping to close the gap between rich and poor, this growth has excluded many segments of the population, exacerbating regional, class, gender, and generational disparities. It has failed to deliver security in the present and compromises security for future generations.

Remittances by overseas Filipino workers have grown, and with them super shopping malls and other icons of false prosperity. Taxes have increased, but while ordinary citizens continue to pay them, a select group of wealthy Filipinos not only get tax breaks, but avoid paying even their reduced tax assessments in ever-changing ways.

In 2008 the Government allocated USD 6.57 billion for interest payment and USD 7.28 billion for principal amortization, for a total of USD 13.86 billion in debt repayment compared to USD 8.08 billion for social services. Debt servicing amounts to nearly half of the record-breaking 2008 budget of PHP 1.23 trillion or USD 30.68 billion.

The percentage of people in poverty increased between 2003 and 2006, from 24.4% to 26.9%. Out of 100 Filipinos, 33 were poor in 2006 compared to 30 in 2003. Estimated at close to 90 million, the population is projected to reach 102 million by 2015. In October 2007, the estimated unemployment rate was 6.3% and underemployment 8.1%. In a country with 56.86 million people aged 15 or older, even single-digit unemployment is significant.

People of working age, mostly women, leave en masse to seek work abroad—primarily as nurses, caregivers or housemaids. The Philippine Overseas Employment Agency documented 1,221,417 migrant worker departures in 2006, an exodus of over 3,300 each day. According to the Centre for Migrant Advocacy, between 8 and 10 million people work outside the country, supporting about one-fourth of its 14 million families. Called the new heroes, their money may be the only thing that keeps the economy going.

Indigenous peoples are continually threatened by failure to respect their right to their homelands, despite assurances under the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997. The aggressive promotion of mining and other extractive activities has put their security on the line. Many are being forcibly displaced to make way for invasive mega projects. Many migrate to the cities, where they swell the ranks of the urban poor. Those who find decent livelihoods or acquire some assets are in the minority. A similar threat faces Muslims, who have historically been marginalized and displaced by counterinsurgency operations.

Governance matters

At the heart of the human rights problem is the failure of governance. Mistrust of government is such that probably nothing short of a regime change and thoroughgoing reform in policies and institutions could restore people's trust.

CHART 1. Human Rights Violations – 23 January 2001- 11 December 2007

Type of violation	# of cases	# of victims
Arrest and detention	412	1,463
Torture	125	267
Harassment	107	5,008 individuals +3,482 families+10 barangays (villages)
Extra-judicial execution (EJE)	121	131 individuals
Frustrated extra-judicial execution	6	8 individuals
Massacre	14	111 individuals
Frustrated massacre	10	46 individuals
Casualties due to crossfire	8	15 individuals
Disappearance	26	59 individuals
Violent dispersal of protest	19	1,958 individuals
Forced/faked surrender	2	28 individuals ; 1 community
Destruction of property	5	691 individuals; 168 families
Forced evacuation	26	10,561 individuals ; 19, 026 families
Illegal demolition	62	34,048 individuals + 6,684 families
Violation of right to housing	2	269 families

Source: Task Force Detainees Philippines (TFDP).

The Philippines has gone from democracy to dictatorship and back. Since the 1986 people's revolution that ended the Fernando Marcos dictatorship, four regimes have come and gone. Yet the same set of problems – government corruption, poverty, inequality, social conflicts, and environmental decay – continue to fester. The country is ranked among the most corrupt in the world by the Transparency International index.

Since entering the WTO in 1995 the Philippines has become one of the most open economies in the world, unilaterally dismantling protective mechanisms beyond what is required for all members. The 2007 MDG Midterm Report considered this a big achievement for Goal 8 (Develop a global partnership for development). But if one asks the workers, urban poor, landless and small farmers, small and medium entrepreneurs and some big industry people, they will tell a different story, one of lost jobs and livelihoods, falling incomes and bankruptcies.

In a World Bank study of governance in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore, the Philippines ranked worst in political stability and second worst in government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption. Its second best performance in voice and accountability may have been due to its free media and active civil society.

The Government is courting disaster by relaxing social and environmental safeguards in the name of growth. Poor urban communities are displaced by big infrastructure projects, land speculation and real estate development. Rural villages and watersheds are ravaged by mining and power projects. On paper, laws and policies are in place, covering protected areas, solid waste management, clean air and water. But Philippine Agenda 21 has not changed national

and local development planning. Most local governments have yet to comply with environmental legislation, even as deforestation, collapsing fisheries, falling water tables and rising temperatures threaten already insecure food production. Many health problems are linked to environmental degradation, not to mention climate change.

Alternative budget initiative

The alternative budget initiative is an example of how policymakers could make the national budget MDG-sensitive. Led by Social Watch Philippines, this has drawn the support of NGOs and legislators to advocate for an increase in MDG spending, specifically in education, health, agriculture and the environment. This sort of partnership between government and civil society needs to be replicated at all levels, national and local.

To deliver 'public goods' (e.g., education and clean air), and to eliminate 'public bads' (e.g., corruption, pollution, diseases, brain drain or trafficking) the Government requires much more than a mere subscription to sustainable development. People want action and meaningful changes in their lives. They want to see that services are made to work for them. And they want to have a real say in how that is going to be done. For this to happen, the Government must undergo a profound renewal in order to provide the kind of governance needed to safeguard human rights and create conditions for greater freedoms. ■