President Rodrigo Duterte

President of the Republic of the Philippines

Malacanang Palace

Manila, Philippines

Via email: op@president.gov.ph; http://op-proper.gov.ph/

Dear President Duterte,

**Re: Call to release all political prisoners**

I am joining the call by human rights defenders, internationally and in the Philippines, for the release of political prisoners. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the congested jails in the Philippines, I support their call to the Government for the immediate release of political prisoners who are elderly, ill, or pregnant.

The United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, has raised concerns regarding political prisoners in her report on the human rights situation in the Philippines. The report highlights intimidation of civil society groups by police and military through charges of illegal possession of firearms, or charges of perjury when they seek temporary protection orders against government agencies or officials. She has called on governments to “release every person detained without sufficient legal basis, including political prisoners and others detained simply for expressing critical or dissenting views.”

The vast majority of political prisoners in the Philippines have yet to undergo trial, which according both to the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, as well as international law, makes them innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, in a court of law.

Prisoners from social organizations, who have been arrested on trumped-up charges, should be released. This should also apply to Peace Consultants who have been arrested in violation of the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees. These arrests jeopardize the peace talks and harm efforts to find lasting solutions to the ongoing conflict. In the short-term, to ensure the safety, security and welfare of the political detainees during the time of the pandemic, we ask that the government allow online meetings between political prisoners and their families, and to allow their families to send food food to political prisoners.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

cc. Mr. Diosdado M. Peralta, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines

E-mail address: pio@sc.judiciary.gov.ph

Mr. Menardo Guevarra, Secretary of the Department of Justice

Email: osecmig@gmail.com, osec@doj.gov.ph, communications@doj.gov.ph

Mr. Jose Luis Martin Gascon, Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights

Email: chairgascon.chr@gmail.com

His Excellency, Rodolfo D. Robles, Philippine Ambassador to Canada, 30 Murray St. Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 5M4 embassyofphilippines@rogers.com