

# ICTUR

International Centre for Trade Union Rights  
Centro Internacional para los Derechos Sindicales  
Centre International pour les Droits Syndicaux

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Rodrigo Roa Duterte  
President of the Republic of the Philippines  
Presidential Communications Operations Office  
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Cc.: Secretary Silvestre Bello III  
Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)  
DOLE Building,  
Muralla Wing cor. General Luna St.,  
Intramuros, Manila, 1002,  
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Dear President Duterte,

The International Centre for Trade Union Rights wishes to express the gravest concerns about the safety and security of trade unionists in the Philippines, following the recent reported murders of union members and leaders.

ICTUR understands that on 17 September, Orlando Abangan (Ka Lando), a trade union and community organizer was shot dead outside his home in Cebu. According to reports from the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF) and the national trade union centre SENTRO, Ka Lando had assisted SENTRO in organizing a union of power industry workers in Cebu, was active in organizing informal workers and persons with disabilities, and had been an outspoken critic of the extrajudicial killings which have accompanied the government's 'war on drugs'. ICTUR further understands that on September 23, Edilberto Miralles, former president of the R&E Taxi trade union, was gunned down in front of the National Labor Relations Commission.

According to SENTRO, these incidents have occurred in a culture of increasing violence and extrajudicial killings in the Philippines. SENTRO report that at the beginning of September, four farmers were shot dead by unidentified men in a farm located inside Fort Magsaysay in Laur, Nueva Ecija. The farmers - Emerenciana Mercado-de la Cruz, Violeta Mercado-de Leon, Eligio Barbado and Gaudencio Bagalay - were members of the association Alyansa ng mga Mamamayang Nagkakaisa. It is further reported that a farmworker organiser - Ariel Diaz - was shot dead by three men in his Villa Pereda farm in Delfin Albano town, Isabela, on 7 September.

ICTUR notes with concern that previous killings of the labour activists Rolando Pango, on 29 November 2014, and Florencio Romano, on 8 March 2015, are apparently still yet to be properly investigated by the Philippines authorities, despite pressure from national trade unions and the international labour movement.

ICTUR wishes to remind the Philippines of its obligations under international law to

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take prompt and effective action to address these incidents. The murder of trade unionists constitutes an egregious violation of trade union and of human rights. The right to life is a fundamental prerequisite for the exercise of the rights contained in the ILO Fundamental Conventions, all eight of which the Philippines has ratified.

According to the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association the rights of workers can only be "exercised in a climate that is free from violence... and it is for governments to ensure that this principle is respected." The killing of trade unionists requires the "institution of independent judicial inquiries in order to shed full light, at the earliest date, on the facts and the circumstances in which such actions occurred and in this way, to the extent possible, determine where responsibilities lie, punish the guilty parties and prevent the repetition of similar events." Failure to hold guilty parties to account creates a culture of impunity, "which reinforces the climate of violence and insecurity, and which is extremely damaging to the exercise of trade union rights" (*Digest of decisions and principles of the Freedom of Association Committee of the Governing Body of the ILO*, Fifth Edition, 2006, paras. 42, 43, 44, 46, 48 and 52).

ICTUR calls on the government to investigate the circumstances around the murders of Orlando Abangan, Edilberto Miralles, Ariel Diaz, Emerenciana Mercado-de la Cruz, Violeta Mercado-de Leon, Eligio Barbado, Gaudencio Bagalay, and of Rolando Pango and Florencio Romano. The Philippines government must further undertake all necessary measures to guarantee workers' safety and security in order that they are able to exercise their fundamental freedoms to join and form unions and take action in defence of their interests.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Blackburn  
Director

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