



Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights 77th Session, 2025 Philippines

SHADOW REPORT

ACCOUNTABILITY
SOCIAL JUSTICE
RIGHTS-BASED GOVERNANCE

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on Economic, Social, and
Cultural Rights 77th Session,
2025 Philippines**

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I. INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL CONTEXT

(1) **In Defense of Human Rights and Dignity Movement (iDEFEND)**, a coalition of over 66 grassroots organizations and advocates from across the Philippines and abroad, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (the Committee) as it reviews the Philippines' Seventh Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

(2) This submission draws upon the inputs from grassroots organizations advocating for the realization of economic, social, and cultural rights, with a particular focus on marginalized populations. It critically analyzes the Philippine government's performance in fulfilling its ICESCR obligations, including adherence to core principles such as ensuring Minimum Essential Levels of rights, preventing retrogressive measures, and addressing discrimination. The State's obligation to prioritize those at greatest risk remains paramount, even in the context of resource constraints.

(3) The review takes place amidst significant political shifts following the election of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in 2022, succeeding the administration of Rodrigo Duterte, under which the OHCHR reported "widespread and systematic human rights violations," particularly in the anti-drug campaign.

(4) Persistent challenges include the exploitation of indigenous peoples and farmers, as laws protecting land rights and agrarian reform are undermined by influential political and corporate actors. Despite its significant mandate, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples continues to face concerns about its independence and effectiveness.

(5) We do recognize some positive developments under the current administration, including constructive engagement in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process and the release of former Senator Leila de Lima. However, as noted by UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Irene Khan, following her visit to the Philippines in February 2024, “fundamental reforms and accountability” are indispensable to addressing the “grave and deep-seated human rights problems” in the country.

(6) Regrettably, the Marcos administration has perpetuated the war on drugs, a policy previously linked to widespread extrajudicial killings. As of December 2024, 363 drug-related killings were documented, including 112 attributed to state agents. According to the Dahas Project, victims include individuals with no known drug ties, such as a police officer and the brother of a suspected drug pusher. This continued violence underscores the absence of meaningful reforms in the government’s anti-drug policy framework.



(7) Economic policies under the Marcos administration further reflect a corporate-oriented approach. The establishment of a Private Sector Advisory Council, composed predominantly of CEOs, tasked with shaping policies in sectors critical to economic, social, and cultural rights—such as energy, housing, agriculture, and healthcare—raises concerns about the potential marginalization of vulnerable communities in decision-making processes.

(8) We urge the Committee to consider these developments and recommend the adoption of decisive measures to uphold human rights in the Philippines. These should include concrete steps to address ongoing human rights violations, ensure accountability for past abuses, and align economic policies with the principles of equity and social justice as enshrined in the ICESCR.



II. IMPLEMENTATION GAPS ON THE LIST OF ISSUES (E/C.12/PHL/Q/7) AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General Information

(9) The Philippines continues to face significant challenges in implementing its obligations under the ICESCR. Based on the Anti-Red Tagging Monitoring Project of the Ateneo Human Rights Center, 456 reported incidents of red-tagging against human rights defenders (HRDs), with 450 online and six offline cases documented. Furthermore, at least 112 activists face terrorism-related charges, and five non-governmental organizations—primarily humanitarian groups—have had their bank accounts frozen.



(10) A glimmer of hope emerged with the recent civil court victory of journalist Atom Araullo against former NTF-ELCAC official Lorraine Badoy and Jeffrey Celiz, SMNI reporter who were ordered to pay ₱2.08 million in damages for defamatory statements.

(11) Despite repeated calls from UN Special Rapporteurs, the Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill remains unenacted. Alarmingly, the Philippines ranks third globally for HRD killings, with 298 recorded deaths since 2012 and 17 environmental defenders killed in 2023.

Recommendations:

(12) Establish an independent oversight mechanism to investigate and address red-tagging incidents, ensuring accountability for state and non-state actors involved.

(13) Enact the Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill to provide legal safeguards for HRDs against red-tagging, harassment, and other forms of violence or intimidation.

(14) Implement mandatory human rights training for law enforcement, military personnel, and public officials to eliminate discriminatory practices such as red-tagging.

(15) Develop a national awareness campaign to educate the public on the critical role of HRDs and dispel misconceptions propagated by red-tagging narratives.

(16) Create a monitoring and reporting mechanism under the Commission on Human Rights to document red-tagging cases, protect victims, and support legal redress.

Business and Human Rights

(17) The Philippines has not developed its National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and Human Rights, despite efforts by civil society and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) through the 2020 publication of a Guidance Document on Business and Human Rights.

(18) Additionally, the Philippines' report failed to acknowledge its support for UNHRC Resolution 26/9, which mandates the elaboration of a legally binding instrument on transnational corporations and other business enterprises in relation to human rights.

Recommendations:

(19) For the Philippine government to actively support negotiations for a legally binding instrument to regulate transnational corporations with respect to human rights.



Indigenous Peoples (IPs)

(20) Indigenous Peoples (IPs) continue to face systemic discrimination, harassment, and red-tagging, particularly in their efforts to defend ancestral domains. Indigenous women, who are caregivers for families, communities, and the environment, are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence.

(21) The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 remains vital for protecting IP rights, but implementation gaps persist. Delays in issuing Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs) and Certificates of Ancestral Land Titles (CALTs) are exacerbated by Joint Administrative Order No. 1 (JAO 1), which requires agreement from five government agencies for domain delineation. A pending policy to replace JAO 1 has not yet alleviated these delays.

(22) While 182 Ancestral Domains Sustainable Development and Protection Plans (ADSDPPs) were completed by 2021, integration into local government plans is hindered by a lack of funding and programmatic support.

(23) In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) has contested the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples' (NCIP) authority over CADT delineation. Resolution No. 38 halts CADT processes for the Teduray and Lambangian Ancestral Domain Claim, allowing mining activities without Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

(24) Concerns have also been raised about potential conflicts between the Bangsamoro Indigenous Peoples Development Act and the Philippine Constitution, which could undermine IPRA protections.

Recommendations:

(25) The Philippine government must issue an Executive Order instructing the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) to expedite the issuance and awarding of Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs) and Certificates of Ancestral Land Titles (CALTs), particularly those pending since the issuance of Joint Administrative Order No. 1 (JAO1) in 2008.

(26) Adequate budgetary allocations must be provided to the NCIP to enable it to fulfill its mandate effectively, including issuing CADTs and CALTs.

(27) Institutionalize financial and technical support for the implementation of the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plans (ADSDPP) to promote the sustainable development of Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities.

(28) Local government units (LGUs) should be mandated to integrate ADSDPPs into their local development plans to ensure alignment with the needs and priorities of IP communities.

(29) Prioritize the recognition of Non-Moro Indigenous Peoples (NMIPs) in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) through legislative and executive measures, guaranteeing their access to and control over ancestral domains.

(30) The Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) must lift Resolution No. 38, allowing the NCIP to proceed with the issuance of CADTs for the Teduray and Lambangian Ancestral Domain Claim (TLADC).

E/C.12/PHL/Q/7 p.3, para. 9 (a)

(31) The implementation of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) guidelines lacks a systematic and comprehensive assessment, particularly in business operations involving large-scale mining and other extractive projects.



(32) The Kaliwa Dam Project continues despite significant irregularities in the FPIC process and opposition from the Dumagat-Remontados community. The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) did not issue a Resolution of Non-Consent, and irregular assemblies during the pandemic bypassed the formal FPIC process, leading to questionable agreements.

(33) OceanaGold Philippines' Financial or Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA) was renewed without completing the FPIC process. During the renewal, police forces violently dispersed community barricades opposing the project.

(34) The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) initiated digitalization to streamline mining applications, but this prioritization of mining investments overlooks ancestral domain delineation and undermines the consent process of Indigenous Peoples (IPs).

Recommendations:

(35) The NCIP must comprehensively evaluate the 2012 FPIC guidelines to identify gaps, incorporate best practices, and ensure responsiveness to the needs of IP communities.

(36) All complaints related to manipulated or illegal FPIC processes, including those for the Kaliwa Dam Project and Oceana Gold Philippines Inc., must be reviewed, and violations must result in project cancellations.

E/C.12/PHL/Q/7 p.3, para. 9 (b)

(37) The proposed bills on National Land Use Act (NLUA) and Indigenous Community Conservation Areas (ICCA) remain pending in Congress. Both measures are unlikely to be enacted before the 2025 midterm elections. Despite passing the House of Representatives, the bills have been gridlocked in the Senate, influenced by business interests. The NLUA bill, in particular, has been repeatedly blocked by the Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Environment, Senator Cynthia Villar, who has ties to real estate development, mining, and construction industries.

Recommendations:

(38) The President must certify the NLUA and ICCA bills as urgent to ensure their immediate enactment.

(39) The NCIP and the DENR must express unequivocal support for these bills as part of the Philippines' commitments under the Paris Agreement and other multilateral environmental agreements.

E/C.12/PHL/Q/7 p.2, para. 7 (a)

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E/C.12/PHL/Q/7 p.3, para. 5 (a)

(43) Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental threats due to their deep connection to the land. Their exclusion from policymaking exacerbates this vulnerability. In 2022, 27 Teduray individuals tragically died in a landslide during Typhoon Paeng in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao. Despite prior warnings about the area's hazards, the community was forcibly relocated by a political family to make way for a private beach resort. This tragedy highlights the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous communities, whose voices are often silenced in decisions affecting their safety and cultural heritage.

E/C.12/PHL/Q/7 p.3, para. 5 (b)

(44) And yet, the NCIP is excluded from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) and its local counterparts, neglecting Indigenous Peoples' vulnerability to climate change impacts.

Recommendations:

(45) Include NCIP in the DRRMC and integrate Indigenous leaders in local disaster risk management councils.

(46) Adopt the recommendations of the Commission on Human Rights' National Inquiry on Climate Change in national climate programs.



II. ISSUES RELATING TO THE GENERAL PROVISIONS OF THE COVENANT

Article 2 (1): Maximum Available Resources

(47) Despite a decline in poverty levels, 5.8% of the population in the Philippines remains multidimensionally poor, with another 7.3% vulnerable to poverty, facing deprivations in health, education, and living standards. Rural poverty is particularly severe, with 2.7 million farmers and fisherfolk below the poverty line. Poverty rates vary across regions, with 11 out of 17 regions exceeding the national average, and some areas like BARMM experiencing poverty rates double the national rate. The government must adopt the multidimensional poverty index and fully implement the community-based monitoring system (CBMS) to address key deprivations and improve poverty reduction efforts.

Levels of Inequality

(48) While the government reports progress in reducing inequality, the World Bank report highlights that inequality remains high. With an income Gini coefficient of 42.3% in 2018, the Philippines ranked as the 15th most unequal country out of 63 globally and the second highest in East Asia. The World Inequality Database reveals that the top 10% of the population earns 45.4% of national income, while the bottom 50% earns only 14.3%. Wealth distribution is even more skewed: the top 10% controls 63.5% of personal wealth, while the bottom 50% holds just 4.1%. Recent data shows that only 1.29% of the population is upper class, while 56% is lower class and 43.6% middle class. This stark disparity underscores the need for systemic interventions to address income and wealth inequalities.





The economy, GDP, Debt to GDP Ratio

(49) Despite national economic growth, nine regions reported growth rates below the national GDP. Furthermore, external debt continues to rise, reaching \$139.6 billion in September 2024, compared to \$111.2 billion in 2022. The government's debt-to-GDP ratio stands at 61.3%, exceeding the 60% threshold deemed manageable for developing economies by multilateral lenders and significantly higher than the pre-pandemic level of 39.6% in 2019.

Recommendations:

(50) To address these challenges, the government should conduct a public debt audit to scrutinize questionable loans and repeal automatic appropriations for debt service. Prioritizing sustainable fiscal policies and equitable resource distribution is essential for achieving long-term economic stability and reducing inequality.

Taxes

(51) The government's tax system remains largely regressive, with 56% of tax revenues derived from indirect taxes such as value-added and excise taxes. Meanwhile, direct income taxes show limited contribution from the wealthiest, as only 3.5–3.9% of the Bureau of Internal Revenue's collections from 2017–2022 came from the richest 10% of taxpayers. A government study highlighted that increased excise taxes on fuels slightly raised poverty incidence across sectors, disproportionately affecting farmers and transport workers.

Recommendations:

(52) The government should implement progressive taxation, including enacting a wealth tax targeting higher-income individuals.

Social spending, including social security, food, water and sanitation, housing, health and education

(53) In terms of social spending, the Philippines lags behind other developing countries despite a substantial increase in expenditures. A Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) study cited in the Department of Social Welfare and Development's Social Protection Plan 2023-2028 revealed that social protection coverage is only 36.7% of the population, below the East and Pacific Region's average of 44.1%. Expanding social protection coverage and increasing investments in social security, food, water, sanitation, housing, health, and education are essential to bridging these gaps and addressing the country's pressing social needs.

Article 3: Equal Rights of Men and Women

Participation of women in the labor market

(54) Despite higher tertiary education completion rates among women, the Philippines still faces low female labor force participation. This issue stems from cultural stereotypes that women are primarily responsible for domestic and caregiving duties, leading many to leave the workforce after marriage or childbirth. To address this, changing cultural norms through gender equality education is crucial. Additionally, providing public support systems such as public laundromats, daycare centers, community kitchens, and extended parental leave could alleviate caregiving burdens, enabling women to remain in the workforce.

Recommendations:

(55) To combat this issue, it is essential to incorporate gender equality education at all levels of schooling, challenging the notion that women are primarily homemakers. Furthermore, the government should prioritize funding for quality public services, including care work support, and ensure that wage increases are indexed to inflation and labor productivity.

(56) Additionally, returning wage determination to the executive and legislative branches, instead of regional wage boards, could help address disparities in compensation and further support women's participation in the labor market.

Article 6: Right to Work

On informal employment

(57) Surveys on this sector, which include questions about informal work, have not been made publicly available for unknown reasons. Progress on the Technical Working Group (TWG) tasked with accurately measuring the number of informal workers has been delayed, and no agreement has yet been reached on the appropriate questionnaire.

Recommendations:

(58) The Philippine government should release the results of the 2008 informal employment survey and expedite the completion of the TWG to ensure comprehensive and transparent data on informal workers.

Article 7: Right to Just and Favorable Conditions of work

Livelihood and emergency employment programme

(59) The government's primary emergency employment program, TUPAD, is a short-term public employment initiative that lasts for only 10 days. However, this program is often marred by patronage networks, with beneficiaries being selected through political connections, leading to inefficiencies and unfair distribution.

Recommendations:

(60) To ensure more sustainable income for beneficiaries and eliminate the influence of patronage, the government should reform TUPAD by extending the duration of employment to at least 100 days. Additionally, creating a national database of informal and unemployed workers will enable more transparent and equitable distribution of benefits. Furthermore, expanding the Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE) Integrated Livelihood Program (DILP) with increased funding will help reach more workers in need.



Workers in the informal economy

(61) The Magna Carta for Workers in the Informal Economy bill has stalled in Congress for an extended period. Despite having a supermajority in Parliament, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the executive have not prioritized it. The delay is not due to legislative obstacles but rather a lack of political will from successive administrations.

(62) Informal workers are discouraged from voluntarily enrolling in social security not only due to bureaucratic challenges but also because they are required to pay both the employee and employer contributions. This creates an unfair burden, as informal workers, who are more vulnerable than their formal counterparts, are asked to contribute more to the system.

Recommendations:

(63) Pass the Magna Carta for Workers Law in the Informal Economy.

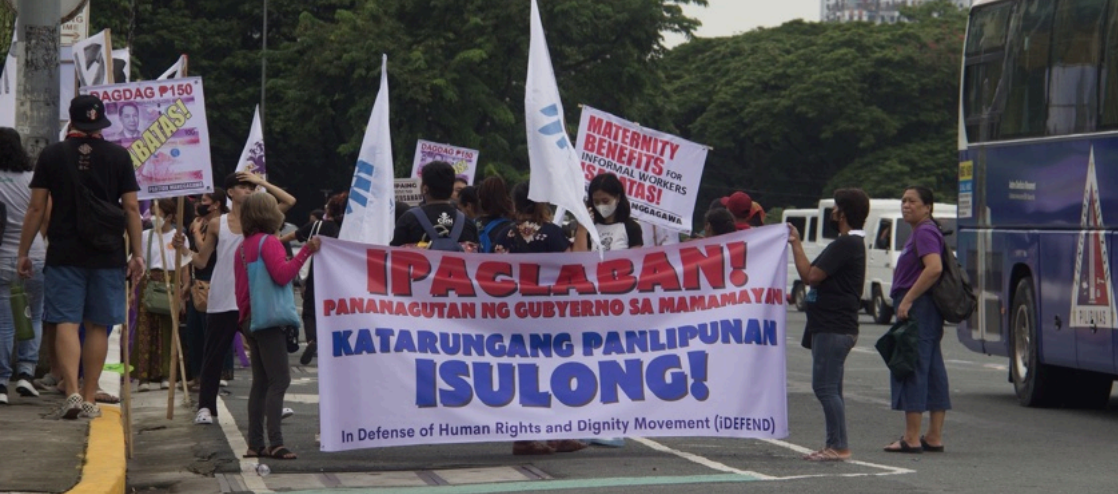
(64) Government must subsidize totally, or at least the employer share, of the social security contribution of informal workers.

Practice of Labor Contractualization

(65) The Labor Code (Articles 106-109) grants the Labor Secretary the authority to regulate or prohibit contracting and subcontracting arrangements. No new law is required, but political will is needed. The failure to exercise this power reflects a lack of government commitment to limit non-regular employment. Successive administrations have used the absence of legislation as an excuse, despite Congress passing the Security of Tenure bill, which President Duterte vetoed.

Recommendations:

(66) The Philippine government should enforce restrictions on non-regular employment, particularly in third-party agencies. The administration should prioritize the passage of the Security of Tenure bill.



Occupational Safety and Health Standards

(67) The labor law compliance system faces challenges due to a shortage of inspectors, limiting coverage mainly to establishments with 20+ workers. Most micro, small, and medium enterprises MSMEs are excluded, and even formal sectors lack regular inspections. The self-assessment option allows companies to bypass inspections, creating a loophole that needs reform for better worker protection.

Recommendations:

(68) Increase the number of labor inspectors, deputize volunteers from unions and companies, and eliminate self-assessment as an opt-out for inspections.

Participation of Workers in Tripartite Bodies

(69) Appointments of labor representatives in tripartite bodies are often opaque and influenced by patronage, with a lack of transparency in selection processes. Tripartite councils in economic zones often exclude unions, undermining worker representation. Additionally, minimum wages, including in NCR, remain below the poverty threshold, with regional wage boards focusing only on inflation and GDP, neglecting other factors. As a result, real wages stagnate while labor productivity increases. The two-tier wage system is ineffective, as the second tier, based on productivity, is voluntary and rarely implemented by employers.

Recommendations:

(70) Reform the selection of labor representatives in tripartite bodies, establish tripartite councils in all ecozones with union participation, and return wage determination powers to the executive and legislative branches.

(71) Additionally, index wage increases to inflation and labor productivity to better reflect workers' needs.

Article 8: Trade Union Rights

(72) The government delayed the ILO High-Level Tripartite Mission (HLTM) from 2020 to 2023, citing the pandemic but likely avoiding scrutiny for non-compliance with labor standards. The HLTM found the government equating unionism with subversion, leading to violations, including killings and arrests of unionists without accountability. The administration has not fully implemented the HLTM recommendations, especially regarding social dialogue and worker representation. It remains complicit in corporate-led union busting and suppresses workers' legal actions, including protests and strikes. Additionally, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) has violated its own rules, and bills protecting trade union rights remain unaddressed.

Recommendations:

(73) Fully implement the ILO HLTM recommendations.

(74) Ensure worker representation in presidential bodies investigating violations against unionists.

(75) Strictly enforce Joint Memorandum Order 1 and DOLE rules on freedom of association.

(76) Make the protection of trade union rights a priority legislative agenda.

Article 9: Right to Social Security Unemployment Insurance

(77) The unemployment insurance program remains limited due to strict contribution requirements, with benefits confined to just two months of equivalent last salary.

Recommendations:

(78) Increase unemployment benefits and reduce the contribution requirements to expand access.

Basic Social Security for All Workers

(79) While the Social Protection Floor (SPF) was studied during the pandemic with ILO assistance, its recommendations have not been implemented. The current administration has shown a preference for limiting social protection by defunding public services and redirecting resources into political patronage.

Recommendations:

(80) Implement the SPF recommendations and allocate sufficient funding for its successful execution

Article 10: Protection of Family and Children

While there are laws in place to protect families and children, numerous issues persist. Child labor remains widespread, especially in informal sectors, depriving children of education and subjecting them to dangerous working conditions. Gender-based violence continues to affect women and children, with insufficient mechanisms for immediate support and long-term rehabilitation. Additionally, many children are deprived of access to quality healthcare, nutrition, and education due to poverty and social inequalities. The implementation of existing laws is inconsistent, and societal stigma often prevents victims from seeking help.

Recommendations:

(81) Strengthen and enforce child protection laws, particularly in the informal sector.

(82) Establish more accessible support services for survivors of gender-based violence.

(83) Increase government funding for healthcare, nutrition, and education programs targeting vulnerable children and families.

(84) Raise awareness on children's rights and gender equality in local communities and schools.

Article 11: Right to Adequate Standard of Living

Poverty and Exclusion

(85) From 2018 to 2021, poverty incidence increased among various sectors: fisherfolk (26.2% to 30.6%), children (23.9% to 26.4%), rural residents (24.5% to 25.7%), women (16.6% to 18.4%), and migrant workers (8.8% to 10.2%). Marginalized groups, such as farmers, are often excluded from social pensions, deepening their vulnerability. Demolitions, informal settlers, and family farmers require judicial remedies and enforced rights.

Recommendations:

(86) Ensure that individuals facing forced evictions, especially informal settlers and marginalized groups, have access to due process, temporary protection orders, and relocation options.

(87) The enforcement of the Magna Carta for the Poor to guarantee housing, livelihood, and social services during displacement.



Support small-scale fishers in securing their livelihoods

(88) Despite laws like RA 10654, illegal fishing persists, and large-scale commercial vessels encroach on municipal waters, displacing small-scale fishers. The government must substantiate its claims of 90% compliance by commercial vessels with monitoring measures. Reclamation projects threaten coastal communities, exacerbating livelihood loss. Recent oil spills, particularly in Bataan, have led to severe economic losses for 11,000 fisherfolk.

(89) In 2024, the Supreme Court allowed a commercial fishing company to access municipal waters reserved for small fishers. The government must appeal this ruling to defend small fishers' rights under the Amended Fisheries Code.

Recommendations:

(90) Put a stop on reclamation projects that displace coastal communities and jeopardize the livelihoods of small-scale fishers.

(91) The government should challenge the Supreme Court First Division's decision affirming the Malabon Regional Trial Court's ruling, which declared the preferential access of municipal fishers to the 15-kilometer municipal waters unconstitutional.

Agrarian Reform and Land Distribution

(92) The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) faces systemic delays and resistance from corporate landowners. Violence against farmers has escalated, and land awards are being reversed through dubious legal means. Private security forces intimidate agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs), hindering land distribution. Additionally, minimal budgets for land acquisition and distribution and policy gaps further exacerbate delays.

(93) The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) has deprioritized land distribution due to budgetary constraints, focusing on programs like SPLIT, which re-documents previously awarded lands. Legal support for ARBs is lacking, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. Furthermore, conflicting policies from DAR and DENR create confusion and hinder progress.

(93) The New Agrarian Emancipation Act provides debt relief to ARBs, but concerns arise over its fairness, particularly for those whose land titles were revoked under CARP. The act may inadvertently exclude rightful beneficiaries, questioning its effectiveness.

(94) Failure to delineate retention areas has led to disputes, with farmers facing ejection despite legal rights. New applicants, often loyal to landowners, undermine the integrity of the agrarian reform program, perpetuating land tenure instability.

Recommendations:

(95) The government must implement a sustained program supporting agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) to address challenges such as unpaid land amortization due to insufficient income. Programs should provide access to agricultural inputs, training, credit, and markets.

(96) A new agrarian reform law is needed to fast-track land acquisition, improve support services, and penalize non-compliance. Institutional capacity must be strengthened, and resources allocated for monitoring and evaluation.

(97) Policies should align with social justice principles, ensuring accelerated land distribution and legal assistance for ARBs.

(98) Transparency and accountability require regular publication of disaggregated land distribution data by the Department of Agrarian Reform.

Article 12: Right to Physical and Mental Health

(99) The Philippines continues to face significant challenges in fulfilling its healthcare obligations, ranking 57th in the 2022 Global Health System Index. The country struggles with issues of accessibility, equity, and quality of healthcare, particularly affecting marginalized populations.

(100) Public health expenditures accounted for just 5.5% of GDP in 2022, a decrease from previous years, reflecting insufficient funding for health services, especially in rural areas.

(101) The zero-budget allocation for PhilHealth in the 2024 General Appropriations Act further undermines financial risk protection, while mismanagement and corruption have led to over PHP 600 billion in unused surplus funds.

(102) Local health expenditures are limited, with many rural health units lacking necessary resources like equipment, medicines, and healthcare workers, forcing patients to travel long distances for basic care.

(103) Primary healthcare remains underfunded, leading to an overreliance on secondary care for preventable diseases.

(104) Mental health services, despite the 2018 Mental Health Law, are poorly implemented due to stigma, insufficient funding, and a shortage of trained professionals.

Harm reduction services

(105) Drug rehabilitation is similarly inadequate, with a punitive government approach overshadowing evidence-based harm reduction strategies. Overcrowded and underfunded facilities fail to provide comprehensive recovery support.

(106) In 2024 the government thru the UN Joint Programme and the UNODC held a national drug policy summit, which raised many recommendations from civil society, however the process by which those recommendations can be adopted and approved remains vague and no follow up has happened since. Least consideration has been given to study and discuss harm reduction policies and direction since this was not the government's priority.

Recommendations:

(107) Increase health funding to at least 7% of GDP, prioritizing local healthcare and PhilHealth support for vulnerable groups.

(108) Improve financial transparency in health agencies through audits and better fund management.

(109) Boost local healthcare by mandating LGU funding for primary care, upgrading Rural Health Units, and encouraging local funding initiatives.

(110) Address healthcare worker shortages with incentives and training.

(111) Ensure affordable medicines by regulating prices and expanding subsidies.

(112) Strengthen mental health services in underserved areas.

(113) Adopt harm reduction strategies for drug dependence.

(114) Enhance health governance through oversight and performance-based funding.

Dissagragated data for IPs

In 2010, the ethnic variable was first used in the Philippine census, but its methodology was criticized by Indigenous Peoples (IP) advocates, and to date, the NCIP estimates the IP population at 10-20%. This lack of reliable and disaggregated data hinders proper assessment and contributes to IPs' marginalization.



Recommendations:

(115) Review the methodology used in the 2010 census and improve data collection for IPs.

(116) Update directories of indigenous groups, communities, and organizations.

(117) Revoke "No Home Birth Policies" and support indigenous women with access to healthcare and training for traditional birth attendants.

(118) Improve access to digital technologies and educational programs in indigenous communities.

(119) Ensure resource allocation and protection for IP and tribal schools.

(120) Address gaps in gender-based violence monitoring and provide support for indigenous women.

(121) Ensure accountability in resource extraction by enforcing cultural impact assessments and transparency in royalty payments.



IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

(122) In summary, while civil and political rights violations in the country have seen a reduction, the ongoing challenges in the realization of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ESCR) remain urgent. The high incidence of poverty, lack of livelihood opportunities, inadequate wages, high inflation rates, and food insecurity continue to undermine the well-being of the Filipino people, especially the poor and marginalized. These economic disparities persist, leaving a significant portion of the population unable to fully enjoy their basic rights to food, health, housing, and education.

(123) Despite some legislative efforts by the government, these actions have proven inadequate in addressing the underlying structural issues that perpetuate inequality. The government's reliance on neoliberal economic policies that prioritize corporate interests over the welfare of the people further deepens this divide. These policies are not only inadequate but actively hinder the fulfillment of ESCR for the most vulnerable communities, exacerbating their poverty and marginalization.

(124) Furthermore, defenders of ESCR, particularly land and environmental rights defenders, face constant threats, harassment, and criminalization through red-tagging, terror-tagging, and legal tactics such as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) suits. These defenders are essential in calling attention to the systemic violations and environmental degradation caused by policies that favor large corporations, and their work is crucial to achieving a just and equitable society where the rights of all people, especially indigenous and marginalized communities, are fully respected.

(125) The realization of ESCR is fundamental not only for ensuring the well-being and dignity of every Filipino but also for fostering a fair, just, and inclusive society. These rights are interdependent, and failure to address one aspect of ESCR leads to the further erosion of others. The realization of ESCR is not a mere luxury but a necessity for social stability and long-term development.

(126) Therefore, it is critical that the government take more decisive action in guaranteeing these rights. This includes ratifying the Optional Protocol of the ICESCR, which will enable individuals to seek justice at the international level when domestic remedies fail. Protection for human rights defenders must be reinforced, including ceasing all attacks and intimidation. Accountability for perpetrators, particularly corporations that violate human rights, must be a priority, ensuring that they are held responsible for abuses against indigenous peoples and environmental defenders. The abolition of agencies such as NTF-ELCAC is essential in dismantling a system that perpetuates violations under the guise of national security.

(127) Only through these actions can the Philippine government begin to genuinely realize the Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights of its people, enabling a future where every Filipino, regardless of their socio-economic status or background, can live a life of dignity, opportunity, and security.





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