

February 21, 2023

Dear Secretary Raimondo and Ambassador Tai:

President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte are dragging the Philippines back to the anti-democratic and anti-union practices of their fathers' regimes. The US cannot simply drive ahead with Indo-Pacific Economic Framework negotiations while the Philippines, one of the negotiation's largest participants, attacks its labor movement and protects the perpetrators.

October 2022 witnessed a marked escalation in the authorities' anti-union campaign. On October 10, while Kilusang Mayo Uno officers Kara Taggaoa and Larry Valbuena were being arraigned on trumped-up "direct assault" charges, police arrested them on new robbery charges. Both bogus charges arise out of the same peaceful, permitted July 11, 2020 protest. Police allege that Taggaoa and Valbuena ordered some of the 150 protestors to rob and "maul" an armed plainclothes police officer. On October 26, 2022, police arrested Benjamin Cordero, a Quezon City labor leader, on "frustrated homicide" charges-charges he cannot contest because documents supporting the charge have not been disclosed. Other trade unionists report growing police harassment and red-tagging, indicating that the Marcos regime is embracing its predecessor's tactics with less public bluster.

While anti-union attacks surge, accountability rests at a standstill. Impunity remains the order of the day. No one has been successfully prosecuted in the murders of over fifty trade unionists during the Duterte regime, while the Marcos administration obstructs international investigation of the killing of up to 30,000 during Duterte's drug war. The laws that permitted the Philippine army and police to wage forced disaffiliation, intimidation, and harassment campaigns against trade unions, have not been reformed, nor have the officers been disciplined. The Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 remains on the books. Former President Duterte's all-purpose vehicle for attacking enemies, the NTF-ELCAC, continues to hound unionists and workers seeking to bargain collectively from their homes.

Those who attack human rights go free, while those who defend and exercise their rights are killed, caged, or silenced. Senator Leila de Lima, a leading investigator of Duterte's extrajudicial killings, has been held without trial on trumped-up drug charges in February 2017.

The US must demand that the Philippines drop the charges against these three trade unionists; end the attacks on and judicial harassment of trade unionists; and enact the recommendations of the ILO High-Level Mission. The US must condition the Philippines's participation in the Generalized System of Preferences, entrance into any Indo-Pacific Economic Framework programs, and other trade benefits on the Philippines's government having adopted and implemented policies ensuring the protection of labor rights and labor activists and the end of impunity.

Sincerely,

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

American Postal Workers Union (APWU)

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)

Communications Workers of America (CWA)

Global Labor Justice International-Labor Rights  
Forum (GLJ-ILRF)

International Association of Machinists and  
Aerospace Workers (IAM)

United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural  
Implement Workers of America (UAW)

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

