Labor Advocates Join Faith, Human Rights Leaders in Calling for Changes to US Aid to the Philippines

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The International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) joined 236 faith, human rights and labor leaders today in calling on the US Congress to attach human rights conditions to any foreign military aid to the Philippines. US union leaders from the AFL-CIO, Service Employees International Union, United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, Communication Workers of America and others signed a letter delivered to members of Congress raising concern about human rights abuses committed by the Philippines military.

The Philippines has been called the second most dangerous country in the world for union organizing, second only to Colombia. Human rights advocates, especially trade union leaders, have been targeted for harassment and extrajudicial executions by the military, which receives financial assistance from the United States. Reports from the United Nations Special Rapporteur for extrajudicial killings, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Trade Union Confederation have all revealed a pattern of violent attacks on unionists as part of a state policy allegedly meant to stop terrorism.

Due to the Philippines government’s alleged extrajudicial killings and abductions and the military’s continuing harassment of labor rights advocates, ILRF filed a petition \[3\] with the US Trade Representative’s office in 2007 calling on the US government to review the Philippine’s designation as a beneficiary country under the Generalized System of Preferences – a petition which is still under review. ILRF has also documented the role US multinationals such as Dole and Nestlé play in collaborating with the Armed Forces of the Philippines to violate workers’ right to organize unions.

ILRF attorney, Brian Campbell, who was refused entry into the Philippines in December 2006 because his name appeared on a government blacklist of international human rights activists, said, “On my trip to the Philippines last month, I was shocked to find military units unabashedly admitting to threatening and harassing trade unions of banana workers in Compostella Valley, Mindanao. In Luzon, when the trade union at International Wiring Systems factory sought help from the International Labor Organization to end the death threats leveled at the union officers by local military units, the Philippine government thumbed its nose at the international body and refused to respond to the complaint, just as it has refused to accept a high-level mission the ILO has been requesting to send since 2007. Workers’ can only exercise their rights in an environment where human life and security is respected and protected. The United States should no longer support a military that so egregiously violates human rights and is completely unaccountable.”

As Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo visited the US to attend the National Prayer Breakfast and meet with members of Congress, attacks on labor advocates in the Philippines continued. Last week, labor lawyer Remigio Saladero, who had been imprisoned on trumped up charges, was released after
months in jail after a court dropped the charges due to prosecutors error. However, Saladero and dozens of labor leaders and organizers still face potential politically-motivated criminal charges filed at the behest of the military.

Due to pressure from ILRF and hundreds of other allies, a small portion of US Foreign Military Financing to the Philippines contained human rights conditions in 2008, but the US government has not publicly reported on how these conditions were implemented and it is clear that the Philippine military continued to broadly violate human rights last year. Decisions related to foreign military financing are primarily made by the Senate and House Appropriations Committees, chaired by Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI) and Representative David R. Obey (D-WI) respectively.

**Bama Athreya, Executive Director of the International Labor Rights Forum**, said, “It is time for the United States government to change the way it interacts with regimes around the world that violate workers’ rights. We can no longer continue to financially support a military in the Philippines that murders, kidnap and harasses labor rights advocates. We join faith leaders, human rights activists and trade unionists around the world in calling for an end to the attacks on civil society in the Philippines.”

*The International Labor Rights Forum is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. For more information, please visit [www.LaborRights.org](http://www.laborrights.org). Click here to view the letter. For more information about ILRF’s work on the Philippines, please visit: [http://www.laborrights.org/end-violence-against-trade-unions/philippines](http://www.laborrights.org/end-violence-against-trade-unions/philippines)*

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Links:
[1] mailto:brian.campbell@ilrf.org
[4] [http://www.laborrights.org](http://www.laborrights.org)