

Solidarity Message

The Real Score: A National Conference on Upholding Life, Dignity and Justice Manila, Philippines

Dear friends, colleagues,

The world will mark the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10. On that day, I have unfortunately no doubt that several families in the Philippines will be burying their loved ones, killed by the Police or unknown hit-men, killed as part of a senseless, government-initiated, war on drugs. I have no doubt that the dead, their families, their communities will count amongst the most impoverished and vulnerable in the country, so that to the grief and the fears will be added economic hardship.

On that day, I have also no doubt that somewhere – whether on the street of a buzzing Philippine city, or near the ruins of what was a city; in a slum or on a campus, on the side of a plantation or near a mine, standing by the door of their Church or concentrated on the keyboard of their computers, on an election campaign trail or behind the cameras – YOU will be there – documenting the killing, comforting the families, looking for funds for the burial and for the kids' school, mending the wounds of the soul and the bodies, filing an official complaint, reporting, claiming, giving voice, denouncing. Demanding. Demanding justice.

On that day, I have no doubt that YOU will be there. In spite of the threats, the stigmatization, the fears.

You will be there, as you have been over the last two and a half years and for many of you way, way before that. You will be there as you are here today, gathered in communion and companionship.

I cannot be physically with you but I wish to stand, from afar, and in humility, with you all to uphold Life, Dignity and Justice

I cannot think of a better way to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights than to do it, even if remotely, with the people of the Philippines, with the families of victims of the war on drugs, human rights defenders, lawyers, priests, artists, journalists, political activists of the Philippines.

You have been my inspiration since I was appointed Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions on 1 August 2016. I have drawn much strength from your conviction, innovation, determination. I have been in awe with your capacities to re-organise, to build coalitions across history, geography, traditions, fields of work, communities and political lines.

I have no doubt that you will continue to do so in the year ahead, as your meeting today demonstrates, I have no doubt I will be inspired still by your courage and skills in reinvigorating the work, strategy and art of defending and protecting and advocating for human rights.

You have done so in an environment whose cruelty has known no limits. There has been no sanctuary left untouched; no institutions that has not been targeted and weakened.

I wish I could say the months and years ahead will be easier. I just don't know. Much may happen next year: a new Senate; a Supreme Court determination of the constitutionality of the war on drugs; the outcome of the International Criminal Court Preliminary Investigation. We may convince the international community to establish a Commission of Inquiry into the Philippines. All of these may impact on the local realities you are directly confronting.

But ultimately, as with the last 2,5 years next year, the people of the Philippines, on the front-line of the war on drugs and other conflicts in the country, will be the ones writing the words, the comas and the final dot to the "war on drugs".

On this journey, you can count on me and many others around the world. We will be there, denouncing the violations internationally; recalling the State's obligations; pointing that the near complete lack of investigation into thousands of police killings violates the most basic State obligations; That it points to state-sanctioned killings. Asking searching questions; keeping track; keeping count. I too, following your model, will re- rethink our strategy; look for new allies; reinvigorate our engagement. I will stand with you.

A friend of mine once told me that it is not enough to challenge a perverse narrative, you have to replace it with another and the only thing that can displace a story is a story.

That too will be part, no doubt, of the 2019 journey. In the Philippines and beyond because fears and divisions have been sowed in many places.

We need to tell a compelling, engaging and empowering story; more powerful than that of hate and fears.

**Story of connection across neighborhoods; Story of humanity across differences
Story of kids, mothers, fathers, families, schools and work;
Story of hope against hatred; Story of compassion against divisions**

We will continue to tell the Story of courage:

**Courage in a police station to file a case for killing
Courage in a Court of Law to speak of what was witnessed
Courage to confess of a killing or denounce masterminds in uniforms
Courage in front of a Judge to defend one's right to defend, one's right to investigate, write, report
Courage to send testimonies and evidence to a far-away Court.**

**Many stories and acts of courage which will put an end to the war on drugs.
Many stories and act of courage which will put an end to the 1000s of killings, the cruelty, the indifference, the corruption, the hate.**

And many stories and acts of courage which will allow the Philippines to mend the deep ugly wounds and reconstruct.

With you I stand tall to uphold Life, Dignity and Justice.

Agnes Callamard, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Killings

New York City, 6 December 2018