

**Forum: “Fighting Torture Impunity through Effective Implementation of the Anti-Torture Law”**

**Remarks by**

**Ambassador Guy Ledoux, EU Delegation to the Philippines**

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Presidential Human Rights Committee Undersecretary Catura, DILG Undersecretary Enrile, DoJ Undersecretary Baraan, CHR Commissioner Mamauag, PNP Human Rights Affairs Office Viernes, AFP Human Rights Office Col. Motril, MAG Chairman Dr. Tan, distinguished guests, members of the media, ladies & gentlemen. Good afternoon.

Let me first express my gratitude to the organisers, the Medical Action Group and Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, for their commitment and for inviting me to speak at today's event which marks the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

60 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which put an absolute ban on torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment under any circumstances, today's event is important to re-emphasize the issue's relevance and importance as torture persists around the world. There is the need to raise awareness regarding this issue, to mobilise support for victims and to create a general understanding of respect for human dignity within society and all institutions.

It is recognised that positive gains have been made by the Administration in its effort to stop the practice of torture in the Philippines and non-state organisation and civil society are playing an important role towards the elimination of torture. Let me especially note the significant improvement in the legal environment for torture prevention in the Philippines – and in the first place the enactment of the Anti-Torture Law in 2009 as important milestones. I am glad to note the efforts of the Commission on Human Rights to monitor torture cases and that the Oversight Committee is now convening regularly. I acknowledge in particular CHR's efforts of taking the necessary steps to address the legal and medical

concerns of the victims in coordination with our partner Medical Action Group. I cannot emphasise enough the good example CHR and MAG are showing to jointly address a specific human rights issue and I hope that this cooperation will continue.

Yet much needs to be done to fully enforce the Anti-Torture Law and to hold those responsible for torture cases accountable. I am very much concerned about recent reports in the media and from civil society on incidences of torture in some parts of the Philippines. These include the "Torture Wheel" discovered in a police precinct in Laguna province.

Torture is not only a tragedy for its victims – it is also degrading for those who perpetrate it, and inevitably it harms the welfare of societies which tolerate such outrages. Here I am reminded of Amnesty International's recent assertion that American TV shows like "24" and "Homeland" glamorised torture and created the perception within society that torture was justified in some situations. – It is not. There is no justification for torture.

Allow me to reiterate at this point the fact that addressing torture will remain the responsibility of all relevant actors. The presence of the government (CHR, PNP, DILG, DoJ, DoH and the Armed Forces) and the civil society today indicates the willingness to engage in constructive dialogue and to collectively find a way to stop the menace of torture.

The EU has made the fight against torture a key priority in our external relations, including this issue in our dialogue with partner countries providing substantial funding to support projects aiming at the prevention of torture and through assistance to torture victims throughout the world.

Let me quote the EU's High Representative for External Action Catherine Ashton at this point:

*"Torture is an abomination of our humanity, our dignity and our values - wherever and however it happens, torture is wrong. The universal prohibition of torture is firmly established under international law. It must be eliminated, and – in cases where we find that it still happens – we must do all in our power to restore its victims to health, in body and in mind. States must take persistent, determined and effective measures to prevent and combat all acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. States must also ensure that perpetrators of such acts be brought before justice."*

The full respect for human rights is one of the major preconditions for any European country to apply for the EU membership. The core values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law are embedded in the EU's founding treaties and reflected in its policies and actions.

In the Philippines, the EU's support for human rights focuses on protecting human rights defenders, the promotion of the rights of children affected by armed conflict, and indigenous peoples rights activists who are all vulnerable to abuses such as harassment and torture. More concretely, since 2006 the EU through European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights or EIDHR has provided more than EUR 6 million (or 360 million pesos) in grants to civil society organisations to address various human rights issues. This support includes the project by Medical Action Group and Task Force Detainees.

Through the EIDHR facility Filipino human rights defenders were provided direct assistance such as legal representation, psychological counselling, material and sanctuary support. Among them are 137 human rights defenders under our Defending the Defenders Project with a church group. Also, just to cite a previous example, one of our EIDHR projects provided legal assistance to a security guard who was tortured and jailed but subsequently released by the

Court. Another EIDHR project in Mindanao helped protect 28 human rights defenders working in labour unions from threats and harassments.

Also in Mindanao, more than 80 individuals belonging to displaced indigenous communities affected by harassment and eviction from their lands in Bukidnon, Mindanao were given support by the EU in the form of relocation and temporary houses, farm implements, simple farm tools and food assistance.

Access to justice is critical to human rights. Hence, while something is being done directly to address human rights issues at the grassroots level, it is also important to strategically engage national institutions. This is why we have provided a follow up grant of EUR 10 million (or 600 million pesos) to support the Philippine government effort to achieve the aim of making justice accessible for all Filipinos. Like its precursor, the new EU-Philippines Justice Support Programme or EPJUST 2 has a special emphasis on addressing the issue of impunity in extra-judicial killings and other worst human rights violations. EPJUST 2 is being implemented by the Department of Interior and Local Government, one of the key agencies of government that is critical in strengthening the pillars of the Philippine justice system.

Ladies and Gentleman, I welcome the large participation at today's event and am convinced that your participation in today's event will further contribute to work toward the elimination of torture in the Philippines.

Thank you and good afternoon.