

STILL A LONG WAY AHEAD



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Human rights defenders (HRD) around the globe remain vulnerable to attacks from state security forces as well as armed groups. This is particular true for HRD who work on highly sensitive issues like disappearance and impunity. As a consequence of carrying out activities such as investigating and exposing atrocities, combating sexual violence, advocacy with respect to the elections and independent journalism, many HRD are subject to threats and attacks. Those working in remote areas as well as less traditional groups of HRD such as victims' groups and minority groups who may not be aware of their status as HRD are particularly at risk. Threats to free expression put some HRD, in particular journalists, at risk. In Urgency Resolutions, the European Parliament raised the issue of threatened HRD in Congo, Russia, Iran, China and Syria to name just a few. In order to support HRD the European Parliaments regularly speaks out on human rights violations throughout the world. Where appropriate, the EU puts HRD on the agenda of bilateral talks with the governments and other stakeholders. The EU has developed guidelines that serve as a framework for the protection and promotion of human rights in third countries. These guidelines were adopted in 2004. They recognise the crucial

role that HRD play in the promotion and protection of human rights in their respective countries. The guidelines provide for interventions by the EU for HRD at risk and suggest practical means to support and assist HRD. According to the guidelines in many third countries EU missions are the primary interface between EU member states and HRD on the ground. They have an important role to play in putting into practice the EU's policy towards HRD. This might happen by maintaining contact to HRD, giving HRD visible recognition, sharing information and observing trials.

The guidelines state that when EU officials are visiting third countries they will include meetings with HRD and raise individual cases with government authorities. It is necessary to translate the EU guidelines on HRD in local languages as well as to make use of local language programmes and other local media. There is also an EU initiative to create European shelter cities for human rights defenders in danger. The European Parliament requested also to set up a focal point for HRD in all three EU institutions (Parliament, Commission and Council) so as to better coordinate actions with European and international human rights bodies.



It is also important to mention that EU missions provide funding for the activities and for the protection of local HRD. Unfortunately not all EU missions are aware of the guidelines on HRD. Also some missions lack in-depth contacts with local human rights organisations. So there is still much to be done within the EU itself. The EU has to ensure that key EU staff members are familiar with the guidelines, that they monitor the situation of HRD and arrange for temporary refuge abroad where necessary. But also among human rights organisations there is a lack of knowledge on protection mechanisms and strategies. Although the guidelines on HRD provide first steps to protect activists, there is still a long way to go to implement these guidelines. The EU stresses that democracy and human rights must be at the core of partnership and cooperation

agreements. The quality and depth of this promise depend on the respect and support for HRD.

Link to the guidelines

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/GuidelinesDefenders.pdf>

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NEWS

EP-JUST – Reinvestigations in the Case of Deolito Empas

The European Commission (EC) has decided to act upon the extra-legal killings and enforced disappearances that are taking place in the Philippines. The EC, in collaboration with the Philippine government, has created the European Philippine Justice Support Programme (EP-JUST) to “help all stakeholders in the Philippines – both from government and from civil society, as well as the relevant constitutional bodies – to work together to bring an end to extra-legal killings and enforced disappearances of political activists,

journalists, trade unionists or farmer representatives. And to identify and bring to justice the perpetrators (...)” (Ambassador Alistair McDonald, EU press release Feb 11th 2010).

IPON has held several meetings with the head of the mission, Detlev Mehlis, in Germany and in the Philippines, informing him about the murder of Deolito Empas, one of five victims of killings of farmer leaders in San Narciso, Bondoc Peninsula. IPON has been working on the case since the murder in 2008. As a result of the meetings, Mehlis has decided to

include the case of Deolito Empas in the list of EP-JUST cases and he and his team will visit San Narciso to reinvestigate the murder.

In addition to the reinvestigation of cases, EP-JUST intends to improve the work of the Philippine National Police via trainings and workshops for police and other investigation officers.

The next issue of the OBSERVER will focus on political killings and provide further information on the murders in San Narciso and other parts of the Philippines.