07 November 2023

Dear Members of the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture,

I trust this message finds you all well. On behalf of the Medical Action Group, I extend warm greetings to each of you.

I am writing to express our deep concern regarding ongoing issues of torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and the deteriorating conditions in Philippine detention facilities. We believe that the information we are sharing here will be invaluable during your upcoming visit to our country.

The Medical Action Group, along with fellow members of the United Against Torture Coalition (UATC), has been at the forefront of efforts to prevent torture and reform prison conditions for over two decades.

In 2021, the UATC organized a Detention Summit titled "Compassionate Care Behind Bars." This virtual event brought together various stakeholders to achieve these crucial objectives:

1. Address jail congestion, vaccination programs, and torture prevention.
2. Share strategies for dealing with COVID-19 in prisons and reforming the prison system.
3. Enhance collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders.

The Detention Summit produced a report highlighting the significant health challenges faced by individuals in Philippine detention facilities, with a focus on overcrowding, limited access to healthcare, and poor living conditions especially during the COVID-19 pandemic such as:

1. Overcrowding in Detention Facilities: Persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) in the Philippines often enter the prison system with pre-existing health problems. Overcrowding, inadequate nutrition, poor sanitation, and limited exercise opportunities further exacerbate health risks.
2. Drug Use and Its Consequences: Many individuals entering Philippine prisons have a history of drug use, but inadequate treatment programs and poor conditions may encourage drug use. The prevalence of HIV infection is significantly higher among the prison population.
3. Mental Health Challenges: Overcrowding and poor conditions impact the mental health of inmates, particularly vulnerable individuals. The shortage of healthcare staff and access to specialist care worsens the situation.
4. Ill-treatment of PDLs: Philippine detention facilities do not meet the standards for physical and mental health, as defined in international human rights agreements.
5. Impact of COVID-19 on Detention Centers: The pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges, with overcrowding, limited access to sanitation and healthcare, and a heightened vulnerability to future health emergencies.
6. Issues Confronting the Philippine Detention System: Challenges include overcrowding, a fragmented setup, lack of information technology, inadequate training, and low priority for prison health.

Given these issues, the Summit has put forward the following recommendations:

1. Conduct Comprehensive Investigations: The Subcommittee should facilitate impartial and transparent investigations into allegations of torture and ill-treatment in collaboration with local authorities.
2. Review Laws Governing Interrogation and Detention Practices: Assess national laws related to interrogation and detention practices, proposing legal reforms and advocating for training programs to eliminate abusive practices.
3. Safeguard Access to Legal Representation: Ensure detainees have access to legal representation and are informed of their legal rights.
4. Enhance Detention Conditions: Advocate for prison condition improvements, including bail provisions, early compassionate release, and access to medical care, food, and sanitary conditions.
5. Foster Mental Health Support: Promote the establishment of mental health support programs within detention facilities.
6. Tailor Support for Vulnerable Groups: Develop specialized support programs for vulnerable groups, such as women, girls, and LGBTI+ individuals.

These recommendations are vital to addressing torture and detention conditions in the Philippines and upholding human rights.

We emphasize the gravity of the situation in Philippine prisons, with one of the highest jail occupancy rates globally, exacerbated by the government's "war on drugs." Overcrowding, inadequate resources, and poor medical care have created life-threatening conditions. The pandemic has further worsened the situation, with multiple COVID-19 cases among detainees.

We kindly request the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture to examine these concerns during your official visit to the Philippines. We deeply appreciate your dedication to preventing torture and improving detention conditions worldwide. We hope your visit contributes to positive change in our country.

Should you require further information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you for your diligent attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,



Edeliza P. Hernandez, RN

Executive Director

Medical Action Group