



# Monthly Report on Philippines

*September 2022*



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# Introduction

This report collects information from various (local and international) organisations and media resources in order to present the situation of religious minorities and marginalised groups in the Philippines. In September 2022, the human rights of Indigenous groups, children, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, and women were affected. The present report intends to raise awareness on the situation of these groups in the Philippines and to encourage further protection measures on local and national levels as well as international cooperation.

## Country Profile: Philippines



**Full Name:** Republic of the Philippines

**Government:** Unitary Presidential Republic

**Population:** 113 million (113,071,136) (Worldometer, n.d.)

**Capital:** Manila

**Largest City:** Quezon City

**Area:** 300,000 km<sup>2</sup>

**Most spoken languages:** Tagalog (the standardised version is Filipino and was designated as the official language along with English), Cebuano, Ilocano, Hiligaynon, Bikol, Waray, Kapampangan, Pangasinan, Maguindanao, Maranao, Tausug (Tomedes, 2021, Future Learn, 2022)

**Most practiced religions:** Christianity (88.7 percent), of which 79.5 percent Roman Catholic, Islam (6 percent), 5.3 percent other or none (Philippines Statistics Authority, 2021)

**Ethnic composition:** Visayan (33.7 percent), Tagalog (24.4 percent), Ilocano (8.4 percent), Bicolano (6.8 percent) (Philippines Statistics Authority, 2022)

**Life expectancy at birth:** 69.4 years (CIA World Factbook)

## Philippines' current circumstances

Over the past years, the social and political situation in the Philippines has been characterised by an unending drug war (in which the president allegedly incited up to 12,000 killings, a number that could be considered a crime against humanity), ongoing political corruption scandals, and a poverty level of 18.1 percent (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021).

The most pressing human rights issues in the Philippines are issues of human trafficking for forced labour and sex work, violations of children's rights and discrimination against indigenous peoples in regard to the recognition of their land, as well as discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, especially Muslims.

## Terrorism financing charges against nuns in Philippines



Catholic nuns. © Gianna Bonello/Unsplash, 2021

On August 15, 2022, The Department of Justice filed a criminal charge against 16 individuals, including five nuns from the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, for a non-bailable offence of allegedly giving and soliciting funds for the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA). The department alleged that the sisters did not file their counter affidavits to refute the charges against them, but the sisters said they did not receive any documents due to an erroneous address.

The nuns from the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP) issued a statement on August 18, 2022, to denounce the criminal charge filed by the Department of Justice by stating, "All these allegations and charges were not based on solid evidence and had demonised the works of our religious congregation" (Calleja, 2022).

The nuns claimed the government has weaponized the law to pin down dissenters by intimidating them with the controversial Anti-Terror Law and whoever sought to besmirch their ministry by alleging that it financed or supported terrorism in any way should be held accountable.

The nuns added, “the accusations have negatively affected our various ministries in sustainable agriculture, education, health, environment protection, and defence of humans. They further mentioned that the effects of such allegations will add to the suffering and poverty in marginalised communities” (UCA News, 2022).



## Sexual abuse of children in Philippines



Illustration of child abuse. Source: © sammisreachers/Pixabay, 2013

In a nation like the Philippines where 17.7 million people live in dire poverty, such overcrowding and compact living have negative harmful effects on family life. Child physical and sexual abuse exploded during the Covid-19 lockdown as a result. Recent statistics of the number of child victims being referred to protection healing centers have shown that the sexual abuse of children by parents has greatly increased (UCA News, 2022).

One of the hundreds, if not thousands, is a 12-year-old child. In October and December 2020 and again in January 2021, she was raped by her biological father in their house in Calapacuan, Subic, Zambales (Sunday Examiner, 2022). She was so scared of her father and thought that no one would believe her, so she told no one. Her mother was separated from her father in 2018 but later he took custody of the children. In July 2021, her father beat her, and her little brother and she went to her aunt and uncle and told them of all the abuse that happened to her and her brothers (Sunday Examiner, 2022).

They immediately contacted the municipal social worker, and she was rescued and brought to the Preda Foundation's healing home for abused children. After she recovered emotionally and was empowered by Emotional Release Therapy, she filed her legal complaint against her abusive father. She bravely testified in court and withstood cross-examination. Her testimony was upheld. Her father's defence was denial. On her credible testimony and medical evidence, her father was convicted of three life sentences for the rape of his child. That's what awaits anyone who is convicted of molesting a child younger than 16 years (Sunday Examiner, 2022).

We cannot be sure if child abuse images led him to commit such heinous crimes, but we do know that the images are easily available even on Facebook. Besides, online sexual abuse of children paid for by foreign pedophiles has grown extensively. The Philippines is an international hub for this kind of online child abuse. During the lockdowns, many pedophiles were unable to travel to poor nations to sexually exploit the children but arranged to pay for child sex abuse shows over the Internet (Sunday Examiner, 2022).

## Kidnapping wave targeting Filipino Chinese women in Manila



Metropolitan Manila. Source: © Christian Ang/Unsplash, 2020.

There have reportedly been 56 kidnapping cases in just 10 days in the area of metropolitan Manila (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2022), mostly targeting Filipino Chinese people. The kidnappings are said to be carried out by businesses which then ask for ransom using torture and intimidation techniques. Due to lack of police and government support, families are often forced to try to find the ransom money themselves, with victims who do manage to escape scared of approaching the police in fear of further threats (This Week In Asia, year?).

The Filipino Chinese minority is estimated to represent around 600,000 to 900,000 individuals in the Philippines (Minority Rights Organisation, year?). Ethnic Chinese people face discrimination based on the stereotype of being perceived as ‘wealthy people’ (this is despite the significant income gaps that exist within the community). Filipino-Chinese women in particular are believed to be targeted for kidnappings both based on this stereotype of wealth and also because they are considered easier to physically kidnap.

This is not the first time Filipino-Chinese women have been targeted in such cases according to The Inquirer, which reported that “In 1996 (...) 665 members of the community were kidnapped in the past three years, 31 of whom have been killed” (Inquirer, 2022). In 1993, the Movement for the Restoration of Peace and Order was established by Teresita Ang-See with the aim of fighting these targeted kidnappings of Filipino-Chinese women. Speaking of the wealth stereotype that Filipino Chinese people face in relation to kidnappings, she said that “At that time even Cabinet members had this idea that the Chinese can take care of themselves. In other words, they can afford to pay ransom” (PhilStar Global, 2002).



## September 1st celebrations: Ibaloi peoples seek recognition of their land rights



The city of Baguio, The Philippines. Source: © Gian Paul Guinto/ Unsplash, 2020.

Baguio is a city in the Cordillera region of the Philippines, which is situated on the island of Luzon - the most populated and Northern island of the country), known as the summer capital of the Philippines due to its low temperatures (Philippines Cities, 2022). The city was built under the American colonial government on the land of the indigenous Ibaloi peoples in 1900.

Every year, September 1st is known as ‘Baguio Day’ - a local holiday celebrating the charter anniversary of the city. However, the celebration is known to be particularly insensitive to the Ibaloi peoples, with the chanting of “Uggayam “ and the conduct of “Pitik”, both non-Ibaloi rituals (Good Morning Baguio News, year?). City Councilor Jose Molintas made a speech saying that the celebrations had offended the Ibaloi, ignoring their historical oppression and discrimination linked to them being chased from their lands (Inquirer). He added that “The Baguio indigenous peoples had been ‘chasing for their lands’ since the year 1900 because their land rights were not recognized and respected by the colonisers and the government that took over”. Although some have called for a government apology on a national level, Molintas affirmed in the same speech that “our government will never realise it until we, the city council, start to discuss and do something about it.” In total, there are an estimated 237,000 Ibaloi people in the Philippines (Peoplegroups) who are at risk of such discrimination.

Despite the 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act in the Philippines, according to Molintas the city has been selling ancestral lands supposedly covered by native titles. This has led to the illegal occupation of Ibaloi lands: “In short, Baguio had been making money out of [our] ancestral lands” (Molintas, year?).

Molintas linked this case to the Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia case (*Mabo v. Queensland*), in which the terra nullius doctrine was overturned - in other words, the recognition that Mabo people had been living on that land for thousands of years before it was colonised. This decision also led to the Native Peoples Act in Australia which aimed to help indigenous peoples claim recognition of their native land. Molintas therefore called for a similar apology for the Ibaloi people, as well as encouraging the city leaders to listen to Ibaloi people in order to understand their true customs and traditions (Good Morning Baguio, 2022).

## ‘Hijab Day’ bill proposed to fight discrimination against Muslim minority



Women wearing a hijab. Source: © Satria SP/Unsplash, 2018.

In the new bill 1272, Senator Robin Padilla asked for a new national ‘hijab day’ to be observed each year on the second of February. Padilla said that this was part of a new effort to fight discrimination against Muslims and Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines, aiming to “foster cultural understanding and inclusivity in our country” and counter “colonial mentality”, adding that “stereotypical representations lead to misconceptions and one-dimensional view that Muslim women are powerless and oppressed” (Philippine News Agency, year?). He recognised that Muslim women are endangered by discrimination in the country, which can take the form of assaults or being denied access to schools. Hijab day aims to raise awareness about this type of discrimination and educate people on Muslim traditions. After hearing discrimination testimonies, Padilla concluded “When there is discrimination, there is ignorance. Many people who engage in discrimination think they are knowledgeable, but they are fools” (Manila Bulletin, year?).

On an international scale, World Hijab Day began in 2013 and was founded by Bangladeshi American Nazma Khan in an effort to educate and raise awareness to people around the global about why Muslim

women choose to wear a hijab and the stereotypes that it entails.

The Muslim minority in the Philippines represents an estimated five percent of the total population (UCA News, year?), however this community is systematically underrepresented in media and politics. According to the 2021 National Commission on Muslim Filipinos, “when Muslims are depicted at all in popular media, these materials present them as the ‘other’ and feature long held (and false) stereotypes, such as deceitfulness and violence.”

Earlier this year on August 17, Senators lead by Padilla passed a bill criminalizing discrimination which intended to include profiling and refusing employment based on religion and race (UCA News, year?). In this bill, individuals discriminating against Muslims or other minorities could face prison sentences of up to six years in addition to fines. Senator Padilla also filed a bill (n° 1273) aiming to allocate more cemeteries to Muslims and other minorities to ensure that their burial traditions are respected.



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