

PHILIPPINES 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Philippines is a multiparty, constitutional republic with a bicameral legislature. President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, elected in May 2016, began his constitutionally limited six-year term in June 2016. Midterm elections in 2019 for 12 (of 24 total) senators, all congressional representatives, and local government leaders were seen as generally free and fair, despite some reports of violence and vote buying. The ruling party and allies won all 12 Senate seats and maintained an approximately two-thirds majority in the 306-seat House of Representatives.

The Philippine National Police is charged with maintaining internal security in most of the country and reports to the Department of the Interior. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (armed forces), which reports to the Department of National Defense, is responsible for external security but also carries out domestic security functions in regions where the government assesses a high incidence of terrorist or separatist insurgent activity, particularly the Mindanao region. The two agencies share responsibility for counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations. The national police Special Action Force is responsible for urban counterterrorism operations. Governors, mayors, and other local officials have considerable influence over local police units, including appointment of top provincial and municipal police officers and the provision of resources. The government continued to support and arm civilian militias. The armed forces controlled Civilian Armed Force Geographical Units, while Civilian Volunteer Organizations fell under national police command. These paramilitary units often received minimal training and were poorly monitored and regulated. Some political families and clan leaders, particularly in Mindanao, maintained private armies and, at times, recruited Civilian Volunteer Organization and Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit members into those armies. Civilian control over some security forces was not fully effective. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed numerous abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings, by and on behalf of the government and

they reported can be used to undermine worker protections.

There were also gaps in the law, and the government enforced contracting and occupational safety and health laws inconsistently. Media reported, for example, problems in the implementation and enforcement of the domestic worker's law, including a tedious registration process, an additional financial burden on employers, and difficulty in monitoring employer compliance.

The government and several NGOs worked to protect the rights of the country's overseas citizens, most of whom were Philippine Overseas Employment Agency contract or temporary workers. Although the agency registered and supervised domestic recruiter practices, authorities often lacked sufficient resources to provide complete worker protection overseas. The Overseas Worker Welfare Administration provides support to overseas workers in filing grievances against employers via its legal assistance fund. The fund covers administrative costs that would otherwise prevent overseas workers from filing grievance complaints. Covered costs include fees for court typing and translation, visa cancellation, and contract termination.

The government continued to place financial sanctions on, and bring criminal charges against, domestic recruiting agencies found guilty of unfair labor practices.

Informal Sector: Nearly 40 percent of the country's workforce was in the informal sector. They were covered by labor law but did not receive social benefits similar to workers in the formal economy. The informal sector includes small and microenterprises, agricultural workers, and domestic helpers. The government's *Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers* program is a community-based package which provided short-term emergency employment to displaced, underemployed, informal-sector workers.