

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 14, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio:

We write to express our continued concerns about the human rights situation in the Philippines and to urge the State Department's full and robust advocacy for good governance and human rights in all interactions with the Government of the Philippines.

As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Philippines, we are reminded that alliances are strongest when they are anchored in shared values. That requires holding even our close partners to a high standard on human rights and the rule of law.

In that context, the extrajudicial killings and other abuses perpetrated under the Rodrigo Duterte government during its so-called “war on drugs” put significant strain on our alliance and threatened to undermine the values that bind our two nations. Although Duterte’s trial is proceeding at the International Criminal Court, Filipinos who suffered abuses at the hands of his government have yet to see true accountability. Estimates of the death toll during Duterte’s anti-drug campaign vary, from more than 6,000 acknowledged by the Philippine National Police to as many as 30,000 cited by human-rights groups. The Marcos administration has made little meaningful effort to investigate or prosecute those responsible for the killings committed during Duterte’s rule.

Meanwhile, human rights violations such as the “red-tagging” of human rights groups and journalists, enforced disappearances, and unlawful killings continue under the Marcos administration. The State Department’s 2024 Human Rights Report concluded that “the overall human rights situation in the [Philippines] did not change in a clearly sustainable and systematic way” in the preceding year.

A durable alliance requires clarity: accountability for mass atrocities cannot be optional. The road to accountability starts with full, transparent, and impartial investigations into the crimes committed by the Duterte regime, alongside ongoing commitments to protect human rights by the Marcos administration. The United States should make clear that deepening security cooperation must go hand in hand with concrete progress on human rights protections, rule-of-law reforms, and accountability for past abuses. Our security cooperation should reinforce – not overlook – those efforts.

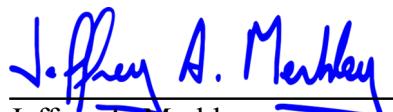
Championing shared values of good governance and human rights is important not only as we celebrate this historic milestone in our defense alliance, but also as the Philippines takes up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Chair in 2026. The Philippines’ leadership

role in ASEAN brings heightened responsibility to model respect for human rights and due process.

Mr. Secretary, we urge you to raise human rights and good governance at all levels with the Marcos administration. We also urge you to hold the Government of the Philippines accountable for continued investigations and prosecutions of the human rights violations committed under the Duterte administration and press for commitments to improve human rights protections in the Philippines moving forward.

Strengthening our alliance requires more than shared security interests; it requires shared principles, and sustained action to uphold them.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



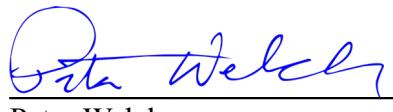
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator