

# Philippines: Senate should adopt human rights defender protection law

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– UPDATE –

Despite its adoption by the House of Representatives in January 2022, the bill was not acted upon by the Senate due to time limitations. On 4 July 2022, a parliamentarian [refiled the bill](#) (now known as [Human Rights Defenders Protection Act – House Bill No. 77](#)), hoping for an expeditious approval by both the House of Representatives and the Senate, and an eventual approval by the President, finally turning the bill into law.

## Original story follows

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On 17 January 2022, the House of Representatives adopted House Bill No. 10576, known as the Human Rights Defenders Act, on its third and final reading. Two hundred members of the House approved the proposed measure, with zero abstentions or votes against it.

The House had [adopted the Bill once before in 2019](#), but at that point the Senate failed to adopt its corresponding bill and the law was not enacted. At that time 183 members of the House supported its passage; we welcome the increased support for the bill seen at the recent House session.

This recent development represents a significant step towards the recognition and protection of defenders in one of the most dangerous countries for activists. ‘Human rights defenders have been killed, arrested, detained, red-tagged, and threatened for so long – especially for the past six years under the murderous regime of President Rodrigo Duterte – and a law to criminalise these acts and recognise the State’s duty to protect defenders is long overdue,’ said Karapatan Secretary General Cristina Palabay.

The Bill was developed in consultation with civil society and is based on the [Model Law for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders](#). A reconciliation of the Senate and House Bills will ultimately constitute law in the Philippines. It is critical that the final law resulting from the reconciliation process ensures the highest protections in law for human rights defenders.

‘The passage of the [Anti-Terrorism Law](#) last year, which complemented the Duterte Administration’s arsenal of tools, facilitating its ability to label, detain and eliminate government critics, and the prevailing climate of impunity and attacks against defenders, including the [redtagging of the authors of the House Bill](#), further underscores the urgent need for the passage of the human rights defender law,’ said ISHR’s Tess McEvoy.

We once again join [national](#) and [international](#) civil society, as well as the [UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#), in reiterated calls for the enactment of the law on human rights defenders. It is important to set domestic norms and a legal framework addressing the specific situations of human rights defenders.

All eyes are now on the Senate to expedite the adoption of its corresponding bill, Senate Bill 179, which has been pending with the Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights since it was presented by Senator De Lima in February 2018.