



Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
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Philippines

Part 1: Political and Human Rights Conditions

The Philippines, with a population of 89 million, is a multiparty republic with an elected president and bicameral legislature. It remains vulnerable to political turmoil, sporadic attempts to use extraconstitutional means to resolve leadership crises, human rights abuses, and concerns about credibility of elections. Corruption and weak rule of law continue to be underlying factors exacerbating this vulnerability. The 2007 national and local elections generally were free and fair but were marred by violence and allegations of vote buying and electoral fraud. The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there continued to be serious problems in certain areas, particularly extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances. Since 2007 the government has intensified its efforts to investigate and prosecute these cases, and there has been a significant decrease in the number of killings and disappearances, although concerns about official impunity persist.

Part 2: U.S. Government Democracy Objectives

Advancing democratic values and strengthening democratic institutions are top priorities for the United States. U.S. democracy and human rights promotion efforts in the country support free and fair elections; assist the government and civil society groups in improving adherence to the rule of law and respect for human rights; and strengthen good governance while combating corruption with transparent and accountable institutions. The U.S. Government addresses these issues by providing development assistance programs for government and civil society partners to develop the policies and tools necessary for a freer, fairer, and more democratic system set within the framework of the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Part 3: Supporting Top Priorities and Other Aspects of Human Rights and Democratic Governance

U.S.-funded programs currently support civil society initiatives that monitor election tabulation; allow NGOs to monitor campaign finance in selected electoral contests and media reporting; and assist electoral modernization efforts in preparation for local and national elections. The U.S. embassy sent a team of U.S. officials to observe the August 2008 regional elections in the

Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. The U.S. Government also continues to work closely with an NGO on electoral programs, voter registration, education, automation, and monitoring in preparation for the 2010 general elections. These initiatives clearly demonstrate to the electorate, elections officials, and local politicians the U.S. Government's strong support of a free and fair democratic process. U.S. officials also use every opportunity to convey the message that extrajudicial killings and disappearances must cease and to encourage the government to investigate thoroughly and prosecute cases. U.S. assistance programs build the capacity of journalists to report credibly, accurately, and professionally on human rights violations; strengthen the justice sector's effectiveness in prosecuting cases of extrajudicial killings and disappearances; and professionalize the security forces. The U.S. Government also provides direct and indirect assistance to law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and the courts to investigate, prosecute, and convict human traffickers, and it helps these agencies devise strategies to prevent future abuses.

The United States continues to provide computer software support and training to the Philippine Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and several human rights NGOs to improve efficiency and security in documenting, storing, and reporting of human rights abuses. The CHR distributed to its regional offices a U.S.-funded secure information management system that allows the CHR and NGOs to track human rights cases while protecting sensitive information and shielding the identity of victims or witnesses who provide testimony on human rights abuses. In 2008 the U.S. Government sponsored conferences, forums, and consultations with interested government agencies and NGOs on human rights, including extrajudicial killings and the "writ of amparo," a legal remedy that mandates a government agency to produce a missing person, provide information on the person's whereabouts, or demonstrate that the agency is taking steps to locate the person. U.S. officials, working with the Supreme Court, developed materials on the writ of amparo that have been distributed to academia, churches, government institutions, international development organizations, civil society organizations, and the public.

To encourage respect for due process among members of the armed forces, U.S. military assistance programs train thousands of soldiers to strengthen professionalism, commitment to human rights, and discipline. Graduates of these programs populate top ranks of the armed forces, helping to ensure that command responsibility is understood at all levels of leadership. In 2008 the U.S. Government provided training in prosecution of human rights violations to 386 judges, 251 public prosecutors, 79 private prosecutors, and 45 public attorneys, while 1,369 military personnel received U.S.-funded training on human rights. The United States also collaborated with the Philippine National Police to develop human rights training materials and deliver courses on community policing techniques and human rights to 4,197 police officers.

The U.S. Government continues to support efforts to strengthen good governance, prosecute corrupt officials, and institute anticorruption measures. U.S. programs seek to improve the anticorruption capacities of the Ombudsman's Office and the Finance Department through the provision of training, equipment, and technical support. U.S. programs also support corruption prevention assessments of select government agencies, including the Supreme Court, enabling the deployment of targeted anticorruption measures. U.S. support continues to provide the Antigrift Court and other courts with tools for improving case management and expanding the use of continuous trials.

