



LOCKDOWN CRACKDOWN

8 viral human rights issues revisited

JUNE
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EXPECT no lockdown to stop conversations in a country with the most active netizens on the planet.

A Filipino holed up at home because of COVID-19 would naturally gravitate towards the Internet, looking for the next viral topic and then chiming in with their insights, for better or for worse.

Among the topics that caught on were issues on human rights and governance. Have policies violated fundamental freedoms? Has the government been trampling on our rights? Is there actually a "lockdown crackdown"?

To say much has been said is an understatement. But, quantity and quality are two different things. Some opinions make sense while others are just mindless; some may be true, others false.

The Ramento Project for Rights Defenders shortlisted eight human rights topics that went viral over the lockdown period, endeavoring to explain them — with emphasis on quality, of course.

4 Trail of blood

"Can't you guys just keep quiet and cooperate?"

First of all, cooperation is not the same as silence. Airing concerns also isn't noncooperation by default.

Besides, one simply should not keep quiet if the government continues in its old, nefarious tactics that end lives even when it should focus on providing assistance supposedly to protect our right to life in these challenging times.

Yes, it has continued to silence critics and feed a culture of impunity. An unfortunate proof is a growing list of activists felled during the lockdown.



May 28

Carlito Badion, 52

His burnt remains were found in a shallow grave by the Pagsanga-an River in Guintigui-an village, Ormoc City, Leyte. He had wounds, including from a gunshot, all over his body.

He was the Secretary-General of urban-poor group Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap or Kadamay. According to it, unidentified armed assailants abducted him on May 26. He had received death threats prior to the incident.



May 26

Allan Aguilando, 42

He was gunned down on the morning of May 26 in New Rizal village, Catarman, Northern Samar. He was a peasant leader and the chairperson of Northern Samar Small Farmers Association.

Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas attributed the murder to elements of the military. He was reportedly tagged as a New People's Army leader by the 803rd Infantry (Peacemaker) Brigade, 8th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army.

April 30



Jory Porquia, 58

He was gunned down by armed men in Arevalo District, Iloilo City.

He was a founding member and Iloilo City coordinator of Bayan Muna. Before he was killed, he was involved in relief efforts benefitting urban-poor communities. He had been harassed by police.

May 8



Sorsogon Massacre

Killed were Jeric Vuno (30), Jerry Palanca (31), Robert Villafuerte (21), Raymundo Tañada (39) and Jaime Tañada (54), all related and residents of Dolos village in Bulan, Sorsogon.

The victims were reportedly taken from their homes, brought to a nearby river and summarily executed in an operation of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, who later claimed they were rebels.

Residents in a neighboring village were allegedly harassed and beaten up in the same joint operation.

March 31



Nora Apique, 66

She was killed in the evening by a motorcycle-riding gunman while she was en route to her home in Sitio Caraatan, Patong village, San Miguel, Surigao del Sur.

She was a municipal chairperson and provincial council member of the Kapunungan sa mga Mag-uuma sa Surigao del Sur-Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas.

She and her family had reportedly been the subject of harassment from the military and its agents for years.

March 16



Marlon Maldos, 25

He was a choreographer and trainer for Bol-anong Artista nga may Diwang Dagohoy.

Maldos was shot to death in Dela Paz village, Cortes, Bohol, by perpetrators on board a motorcycle. He suffered five bullet wounds on the body.

Maldos had been red-tagged and harassed by elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

1 #Protest FromHome

This was the opening salvo. It basically provided legitimacy to all other home-based campaigns in the Philippines.

Year 2019 was defined by street protests, registering record numbers of mobilizations worldwide. However, COVID-19 lockdowns beginning in early-2020 have prohibited gatherings in public spaces, such as rallies.

Suddenly, people were grounded at home. But, with nothing better to do, it didn't take long for them to realize their own home was a democratic space, they were still citizens who had the right to get involved and opinions from home did not break rules on social distancing.

In some countries, protests from home meant people chanting, singing or clanging pans from their balconies. Meanwhile, Filipinos have taken the fight to the national niche, social media. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter have become arenas.

3 'Compassion' draws criticism

Sen. Koko Pimentel, Overseas Workers Welfare Administration Deputy Administrator Mocha Uson and Metro Manila police chief Maj. Gen. Debold Sinas all shot up to infamy for the "human compassion" they received from the government after violating lockdown protocols.

The same could not be said for ordinary citizens locked up for violating the curfew, a policy criticized as counterproductive.

2 'Mass testing' Who should get tested?

All patients with COVID-19 symptoms

Contacts of confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases

Frontline healthcare and emergency workers, regularly

High-risk communities and sectors, such as hospitality and mass-transport workers

This rose as a reaction to "VIP testing."

Just to eliminate confusion, let us quickly illustrate its meaning: Just like mass weddings and graves don't involve everyone tying the knot or getting buried, mass testing does not mean testing the whole nation. It does, however, cast a wider net.

The World Health Organization itself noted that mass testing is crucial. Local experts have kept saying the lockdown would be futile without it. In the US, which recently breached 100,000 deaths due to COVID-19, an early lack of it is called by epidemiologists as "the original sin."

It's "expanded targeted testing," corrects Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque. The question remains: "Asan na?" Here's hoping 1.5 to 2 percent of the nation (as set by the government) gets tested ASAP.

terproductive. Social workers and volunteers also got arrested during relief efforts for alleged violations of the Bayanihan to Heal As One Act and other laws that could have thrown the three viral officials in jail. Furthermore, a spate of warrantless arrests and needless public apologies involving social media posts drew flak from netizens.

Perhaps compassion has no place in a purge on dissent if you are on the wrong side of the aisle. Sad.

This means the world will never be the same again (at least until we have no vaccine). You can go out but only if you observe the “minimum health and safety standards.” If you can do things without physical presence, choose that. The “new normal” is living with your guard up.

But, solutions may be inaccessible to some. Home gardens may not apply to slums. The poor may not afford online learning. How can farmers work from home? COVID-19 taught us that not all people can afford even bare minimums; that some key factors — healthcare, resilience, equality — have not been prioritized as they should. These learnings can't be left out in this restart.

In the ideal new normal, no one is left behind. No citizen suffers from delayed health services or a lack of COVID-19 testing. Government maintains the highest level of efficiency and accountability so that the nation does not suffer. The new normal means citizens combatting the pandemic through collaborations with the government and the private sector. We must have fairness and sustainability in providing basic services, especially for the underprivileged. We need equal access to health services and financial aid.



CARLO ACIERTO
President
Youth of the Iglesia
Filipina Independiente

The new normal should be about directly changing Filipino customs. We are very physical and naturally drawn to each other; we *mano, beso*, hug, etc. We should learn to maintain the closeness despite separation and distance.

DUNHILL ANGELO MARAYA
South Central Luzon AVP
Youth of the Iglesia
Filipina Independiente



The new normal for me is creating a norm from the viewpoint of the privileged. It may turn out into nothing doable or beneficial to those who have suffered even before the pandemic and those who continue to drown in poverty. We should not be complacent and satisfied with artificial and band-aid solutions to the issues of the masses.



JON DAVE ANGELES
Chairperson
Kalipunan ng Kristiyanong
Kabataan sa Pilipinas



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LOCKDOWN CRACKDOWN

5 'Kapamilya, deal or no deal?'

On May 5, ABS-CBN went offline as the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) issued a cease-and-desist order against its operation. Back in March, it committed to keep the network on air while Congress deliberated on the franchise renewal.

Netizens were quick to react to the unexpected shutdown of the Kapamilya network, arguing about whether or not the move was legal or fair or necessary. From labor and corporate laws to legal doctrines in Latin (*dura lex sed lex*) to very distasteful fallacies and illogical connections, it has been divisive.

It has to be said that the NTC arrived at a fork in the road because of delayed hearings on the franchise renewal in

Congress (why this came to be is also argued, some even citing pressure from the President). As of this writing, the closure is unresolved.

With Channel 2 unable to air, ABS-CBN is reportedly bleeding P35 million daily. Dragging the hearings on could force the network to fold, let go of 11,000+ people and end its public-service programs. Granting this was not an attack on press freedom, it still counts as Congress' epic fail. It failed to do what voters elected and taxpayers pay it for — an error that may cost jobs, tax revenues and a credible news source in a time of post-truth. It is undoubtedly causing a “chilling effect” on all of the Fourth Estate.

6 Terrorism 101

Just a few reasons to be alarmed

- You can be named a terrorist for being at a rally.
- You can be considered a terrorist for destroying public or private property (which can be staged).
- You can be called a terrorist for being misconstrued as “planning” to “provoke” the government when you're simply meeting outspoken and critical friends for coffee.
- You can be guilty by affiliation, say for membership to an organization, resharing content critical of the government or even donating to humanitarian causes.
- You can be detained without a warrant of arrest for 24 days. Who knows what can happen then.
- You can be wiretapped for 60-90 days.
- You can not claim reparations for wrongful detention.

It is ironic that a law to curb terrorism is being dubbed a “monster.”

On May 29, the House committees on Public Order and Safety and on Defense and Security adopted Senate Bill No. 1093 and approved a similar counterpart bill (House Bill No. 6875) for plenary debate. On June 1, the President certified the proposed Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 as urgent. It was passed two days later. Questioning how the measure advanced amid a crisis, netizens countered with #JunkTerrorBill. They echoed criticisms claiming that the overboard definitions of terrorism, fewer restraints on law enforcers and more stringent punishments could lead to greater rights violations.

This does not bode well for people with strong opinions against the government and groups liberally red-tagged by the government and its supporters.

7 Emergency powers

The Bayanihan to Heal as One Act has given President Duterte emergency powers to better address the country's needs in its fight versus COVID-19.

Among others, the law granted the President the power to discontinue programs or activities in any agency of the executive branch, including government-owned and -controlled corporations, so that the savings could be repurposed for amelioration programs, healthcare support and other initiatives combatting the pandemic.

Enacted on March 24, the law is set to expire after three months unless extended by Congress, something the Office of the President is out for. It is hoping to keep the powers until September supposedly because the end of COVID-19 is not in sight yet (“the end” could be June 24 next year, claims Cagayan de Oro City Rep. Rufus Rodriguez, who filed for the extension in Congress).

Some would have no qualms accepting this push, claiming COVID-19 is really a formidable foe. Many are wary about it, though. From the beginning of the community quarantines, individuals and groups have asked for more transparency, more medical and less militaristic solutions, and more equitable and efficient assistance programs — largely unheeded calls.

The country now holds the record for the world's longest lockdown. The President himself says funds are running low, too. What will the powers do with no resources left? And where'd the money go in the first place?

#Iloilo42: 'Worst yet to come'

By MC Mace Sulayao

Accepting the challenge to stand up for other people's rights is never an easy thing. It comes with failing, learning and knowing how to stand again.

It was half past 11 in the morning of May 1 when family, friends and colleagues of Jory Porquia were arrested in Iloilo City while demanding justice for his death. We gathered for a peaceful indignation caravan, which authorities perceived differently. I was one of the 42 arrested that day. It was a first-hand experience of injustice. I never thought it would happen to me but it did.

We were peacefully waiting for other contingents to arrive when the first group of uniformed men approached us and asked about our plans. The negotiations went well. Our group thought that we would push through with our activity. But, before departing, another group from the Philippine National Police approached and told us to cancel our caravan for violating community quarantine protocols. After trying to bargain, the negotiations collapsed, and our group decided to disperse. Upon leaving, we were cordoned and told we would be arrested. No one understood what was

happening. The only thing that was clear to us was that our constitutional rights were being violated by state forces.

I was scared, worried, angry and on the verge of tears. It was the first time something like this happened to me. I feared what could happen with police taking us one by one. I was worried about what my friends and family would feel — and think of me. I was worried about tomorrow. My eyes were watery but I didn't cry because I was so angry. I even mustered up the courage to tell the police how I felt.

While being held under police custody, I repeatedly asked my fellow detainees: Shouldn't this government be focusing on addressing the people's needs in a time of crisis? Why would you kill someone like Jory (before being slain, he organized feeding programs), people who were helping the community survive? Why would you prioritize silencing critics? Upon stepping out of jail, I got the answers to my questions. I also knew the worst was yet to come.

One month after our arrest, our nation

became worse. What leader would be persistently deaf and blind to the people's demands? Hundreds of thousands are set to lose their jobs and COVID-19 cases are rising without a clear plan for mass testing. We are taking loans here and there; selling our sovereignty; and seeing extrajudicial killings continue.

An “anti-terror” bill is being rushed — a measure excusing the warrantless arrests, detention without a case in court, wiretapping and surveillance, bank scrutiny and asset freezes of suspected terrorists, who could be branded without due process. It not only targets progressive groups but also other dissenters. With online *tokhang*, the arrest of home-based protesters, the shutdown of ABS-CBN, etc., this government no longer respects our rights to life and security, free speech, press freedom, freedom of assembly and association, and more.

While all these take place, we have no justice for some 30,000 drug suspects and 300 activists felled because of state policy, no freedom for

more than 600 political prisoners, no accountability for the hundred incidents of government-led bombings, no peace for thousands of internally displaced people and thousands more caught and detained amid the pandemic, among others. After over two months, it is becoming clearer that Duterte's priority is not the welfare of the people but the interests of butchers and warmongers. His approach has been truly unscientific and purely militaristic.

It is dumbfounding how this government is leaving us with no choice. Either we die of the infection without medical solutions to medical problems or brutally in the hands of state agents. Our President wants to cover up his incompetence by instilling fear among the people.

Now is the time to expose his incapacity to lead the nation. I encourage the Filipino youth to creatively fight for our democratic rights and the people's interests. Let us demand our wellbeing and dignity, rightly deserved but outrightly neglected!

The Iloilo 42 were among at least 92 activists, workers and humanitarian volunteers arrested on Labor Day. Out on bail, the 42 were charged with disobedience to persons in authority, and violation of Batas Pambansa 880, the Law on Mandatory Reporting of Notifiable Diseases and the Bayanihan to Heal As One Act.

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