



**Keynote Address
by Cristina Palabay, KARAPATAN Secretary General
at the General Assembly of the
International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines
Toronto, Canada
27 September 2026**

From Strength to Strength: Building Solidarity for Filipino People's Rights

It is an honor for us in KARAPATAN to join you today, as we express our warmest greetings to you all in this historic 5th General Assembly of the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines. We congratulate ICHRP, the Friends of the Filipino People in Struggle (FFPS) and the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL) for the successful Kapit Bisig Global Conference, which became a significant political moment in building our understanding and strengthening our unity against the US war of suppression against the Filipino people. We congratulate ICHRP in holding its assembly, which will be equally successful, to strengthen its solidarity work for the Philippines.

This General Assembly of ICHRP comes on the year that Trump released the America First Counterterrorism Strategy – an act that affirms that the US is the world's #1 terrorist, and that US imperialism is desperate to preserve its position above imperialist powers, seize other countries' wealth and suppress those challenging its rule.

Your GA also throws us back fifty years ago, when a historic international declaration described imperialism, and how its message remains relevant to this day. The preamble of the 1976 Algiers Charter or the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Peoples stated *"Imperialism, using vicious methods, with the complicity of governments that it has itself often installed, continues to dominate a part of the world. Through direct or indirect intervention, through multinational enterprises, through manipulation of corrupt local politicians, with the assistance of military regimes based on police repression, torture and physical extermination of opponents, through a set of practices that has become known as neocolonialism, imperialism extends its stranglehold over many peoples."*

The very same Charter asserted the belief that "all the peoples of the world have an equal right to liberty, the right to free themselves from any foreign interference and to choose their own government, the right if they are under subjection, to fight for their liberation and the right to benefit from other peoples' assistance in their struggle."

The US and other imperialists as well as their puppet governments, including that of Marcos Jr., would speak and use the bywords of "human rights," "human security," "peace and

development,” “peace and order,” and many others as pretexts to their wars of intervention and aggression. They confine human rights to the largely artificial construct of the “rule of law,” and deny the indivisibility and interdependence of all rights. They mangle the concepts and provisions in international human rights law and international humanitarian law, setting the stage for the killings and enforced disappearances of the dissenters, and demonize progressive organizations and the revolutionary movement in the Philippines.

In direct contrast, the Filipino people’s struggle is a comprehensive struggle for collective rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights - including our right to self-determination and this is firmly located in the struggle against US imperialism and for our people’s liberation. It is with deepest appreciation that we have ICHRP, along with broad solidarity formations, with us in this struggle.

In solidarity, always

In contemporary history, back when ICHRP was a Committee, not yet a Coalition, international solidarity formations have been actively building the broad solidarity support for the Filipino people. We worked with ICHRP the Committee and other groups in strengthening the campaign to stop the extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in the Philippines during the US-Macapagal-Arroyo regime, when the peak of such human rights violations reached one activist killed in a day and an activist was abducted and disappeared every week.

Numerous international solidarity missions were conducted. An International People’s Tribunal and a Permanent People’s Tribunal were organized. Rallies were held in several Philippine consulates in various countries. Lobby advocacy in parliaments, ministries and the UN were fervently done, while letters to the Philippines and statements on the Philippines amplified the calls globally. The fascist terror of the Macapagal-Arroyo regime and the role of the US through its “war on terror” were unmasked domestically and at the international level. Several organizations, churches, institutions, and individuals were mobilized.

The establishment of ICHRP the Coalition in 2013 is the logical next step in consolidating those who were reached and mobilized.

During the International Conference for Human Rights and Peace in Quezon City in 2013, when ICHRP was established, keynote speaker Prof. Jose Maria Sison, then the Chairperson of the International League of Peoples’ Struggle (ILPS), called on the Conference delegates:

You must uphold the rights of peoples to national self-determination and liberation, in the face of the economic, political, and social crises due to neoliberal globalization and the drive of the US to maintain global hegemony.

You must defend and promote the economic, social and cultural rights, and the civil and political rights of the people against the intensification of exploitation and oppression by the US and local exploiting classes.

You must define and stress the anti-imperialist and democratic common grounds for the Filipino people and the people of the world in confronting the forces that violate human rights, and in striving to develop, expand, and consolidate the movement of international solidarity

for upholding, defending and advancing human rights and people's rights, and for promoting and realizing a just peace in the Philippines.

Since then, ICHRP and other broad solidarity formations for the Philippines have heeded the call, and have gone strength to strength with us.

Through the International People's Tribunals on the Philippines, peoples outside the country have expressed their indictment of the reactionary regimes and US imperialism for their crimes against the Filipino people. More importantly, these tribunals have asserted the centrality of the Filipino people and the mass movement in the struggle for genuine justice and just and lasting peace.

In supporting lobby advocacy efforts from Philippine-based human rights organizations, we have pushed the UN Human Rights Council to issue resolutions and reports that expose the dire violations of human rights and international humanitarian law; for UN experts to carry recommendations for the abolition of the notorious National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) and the release of political prisoners; for parliaments and parliamentarians to issue resolutions and statements supporting the calls for justice and particularly calls for the withdrawal of US and other governments' military aid and war materiel for the Philippines; and for the arrest, detention and trial of Rodrigo Duterte at the International Criminal Court. ICHRP's Investigate PH complemented these efforts and had successfully strengthened and consolidated the public articulation of Duterte's crimes.

Through rallies and coordinated mass actions in Philippine consulates and city centers in various countries, and whenever government functionaries conduct state visits or meetings, you have marched in step with us, sending the message that protests hound fascists wherever they go, and that their crimes cannot be buried in the gamed algorithms of their PR machineries or in the fancy dinners and parties they go to when they're outside the country.

The conferences and webinars organized by ICHRP and broad solidarity formations have also been crucial for political education on the situation in the Philippines, on the analyses on the policies driven and implemented by reactionary regimes and the US, and on international solidarity.

ICHRP is an important voice in public discourse and opinion-making in the Philippines, as it articulates insightful and grounded analyses on cases of violations and government policies detrimental to people's rights. ICHRP's statements and letters to the Philippine presidents have found their way into front pages or opinion sections in major newspapers in the Philippines.

Your letters to families of desaparecidos and victims of extrajudicial killings and illegal arrests, as well as to political prisoners have inspired them immensely, as they are able to know and feel that they are not alone and there is active solidarity for their situations and for the Filipino masses. Every letter, every cent, every box, every song or poem, every video, are profound expressions of support and solidarity.

The most tangible and lasting expressions, though, had been your visits in communities in the Philippines, through learning tours, immersion programs, and solidarity and investigative missions, where you were or are able to witness first-hand the lived realities of the majority of

poor peasants, indigenous people, workers, urban poor, women, youth and other sectors. They remember and cherish conversations and meetings with you, tending their farms with you, marching with you, overcoming the challenges and diversities in language, culture, and access to resources to realize that we are one in the struggle.

And for this work, you also faced attacks from State forces – red-tagging, blacklisting and deportations, arrests and detentions of the likes of Sr. Patricia Fox, and recently, killings, with ICHRP-US leader Lyle Prijoles together with Anakbayan-US' Kai Sorem and seventeen others in Negros. At this point, I'd like to pay tribute to Lyle, as well as to Kai, and to those who passed away, with a poem by Canadian doctor Norman Bethune:

And this same pallid moon tonight,
Which rides so quietly, clear and high,
The mirror of our pale and troubled gaze,
Raised to a cool Canadian sky.

Above the shattered mountain tops,
Last night, rose low and wild and red,
Reflecting back from her illumined shield,
The blood bespattered faces of the dead.

To that pale disc, we raise our clenched fists,
And to those nameless dead our vows renew,
"Comrades, who fought for freedom and the future world,
Who died for us, we will remember you."

Building the full range of solidarity

Lyle Prijoles, as a big fan of Star Wars and the rebellion against the Empire, would say "May the Force be with all of us."

In strengthening broad solidarity work, it is necessary to build, imagine and enhance our understanding on the full range of solidarity and its relevance to the current context of the Filipino people's struggle.

As we speak, preparations are underway for the protests this November 10 to 12 for the Summit of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). On top of using the ASEAN Summit to prettify his image before the international community after sorely losing the UN Security Council seat, Marcos Jr. wanted to sweep under the rug the massive poverty experienced by ordinary Filipinos and have that historic photo op with Trump to sign and seal the Pax Silica Initiative of the US with the Philippines. The Pax Silica Initiative and the creation of the Luzon Economic Corridor are but the latest in the Philippine government's showcase of puppetry to the US and other imperialists.

Majority of those who will be impacted by the LEC are the basic masses of peasants and workers, as it is projected that thousands or even millions will be displaced from the lands they have tilled for decades or from ancestral domains or from their coastlines that have been sources of their livelihood due to energy, transport and logistical infrastructure that will be built mainly for foreign capital. Throw in Pax Silica and voila – the link is enabled to critical minerals, semiconductors, advanced manufacturing, and strategic technologies, and thus restructuring global supply chains around US interests.

The LEC and Pax Silica Initiative will indubitably worsen the already dire impacts of the neoliberal economic policy of imperialist globalization on the national sovereignty of the Filipino people and on the full range of their human rights as a people. Through decades, the neoliberal economic policy has denationalized the Philippine economy, sold out its national patrimony, enabled the extreme plunder of human and natural resources, further rendered it captive of the US and imperialist powers, and violated the economic, social and cultural rights of the people.

Regimes, including that of Marcos Jr., with the support of the US and other foreign interventionist forces use the coercive apparatuses of the state to discourage and suppress any form of protest and political dissent, as well as the armed revolutionary movement, and in the process violated the civil and political rights of the people and international humanitarian law. The National Action Plan for Unity, Peace and Development by Marcos and the NTF-ELCAC, fitting squarely in Trump's National Counter-Terrorism Strategy and National Security Policy, is the latest operational plan that is used for this purpose.

The broad masses of the Filipino peasants and workers have been the most deprived of these collective rights. And they have been the fiercest and the most organized in fighting for these rights. Thus, it is important that ICHRP further strengthens its solidarity work especially for the peasants and the struggle for genuine agrarian reform and national industrialization. Currently, there are several campaigns against destructive projects on renewable energy including waste to energy and mining are ongoing in Nueva Vizcaya, Nueva Ecija, Bicol, Cordillera, Panay, Negros and Mindanao, while peasants in Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog confront destructive reclamation projects, energy projects, the LEC and Pax Silica. There are also several campaigns on land use conversions, as agricultural lands are converted into solar or wind farms or expansion of subdivisions and real estate, while the liberalized economy further impoverish farmers, as government subsidy is borderline invisible, their farmlands are affected by human-induced flooding, and their crops lose out to imported produce.

In building the full range of support, it is important that ICHRP and broad solidarity formations intensify the campaigns against US intervention in the Philippines and the impacts of the neoliberal economic policies on the peasants and workers, alongside the campaigns against the fascist terrorism of Marcos Jr. and the NTF-ELCAC and for the withdrawal of military aid to the Philippines.

These campaigns can be conducted through tribunals, lobby advocacy, statements and letters, rallies and mass actions in your home countries. Organizing speaking tours of those from the Philippines, especially those from the rural communities, can be likewise continued by ICHRP. Other creative forms can also be further developed such as film screenings, including of films depicting the situation in the Philippines such as Alipato at Muog and Bloom

Where You Are Planted; art exhibits, concerts or gigs; operation dikit or pinta; production and dissemination of zines, newsletters, fliers, placards and others. Creative and enhanced resource mobilization can also be done, from videoke, ukay-ukay or benefit dinner fundraisers to grant partnerships.

In order to do all these, broad solidarity formations such as ICHRP and the FFPS must strive to increase members and networks, especially from among human rights advocates, church people, artists, doctors and health workers, lawyers, members of the academe, other professionals, youth, women, LGBTQIA, and other constituencies in your countries.

But perhaps one component of this people-to-people solidarity that is most reflective of grassroots social movements like ours is that of building relationships with communities, not through single transactions, but through supportive, iterative, and long-term interactions with especially the peasant communities in the Philippines. And so we invite you all to go directly to the Philippines and immerse with the communities. Or as the revered internationalist and thoracic surgeon Norman Bethune has said “Go to the wounded. Don't wait for the wounded to come to you.”

It is with great hope and expectations that in ICHRP's general assembly today, a deeper understanding, a creative vibe, and a strengthened collective spirit of solidarity for the Filipino people may be achieved, as ICHRP goes from strength to strength.

Long live international solidarity!
Long live the Filipino people!