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To:
Benigno Aquino III
President of the Republic
Malacañang Palace,
JP Laurel St., San Miguel
Manila Philippines
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Your Excellency,

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation wishes to extend our best wishes on your recent election into office. We have followed your campaign's successes even as we have witnessed an increasing threat to our friends and colleagues working in human rights.

A long road with many challenges lies ahead, but CIVICUS implores you to make protection of human rights and civil society a priority. We urge you to commit to upholding the values enshrined in the Philippines' constitution and international agreements, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

CIVICUS is particularly concerned by the growing danger to human rights defenders and civil society activists. By seeking to improve the freedoms and living conditions for all Philippine citizens, these incredible people risk arbitrary detention, torture and assassination. There have been over 900 extrajudicial killings and more than 200 forced disappearances of civil society activists and media persons since 2001. The well known and respected organization Karapatan: Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights has had 34 members of its staff killed. In recent weeks, there were several new attacks. Jose Daguio, a former radio broadcaster, was shot and killed in his yard. Activist Fernando Baldomero was shot dead in front of his house while preparing to bring his son to school. Peasant activist Fernando Bejino was killed in Siaton, Negros Oriental. Richard Piteste, a lawyer for a Maguindanao massacre witness, suffered a neck wound when he was shot in Cotabato City.

CIVICUS urges you to heed the warning signs for a perilous future should the state of Philippines' human rights continue down its current path. A prominent example on the current systematic abuse is the continued detention of 43 health workers, widely known as the Morong 43, who have been imprisoned since they were detained and tortured in early February 2010. These 43 health workers were participating in a week long First Responders Training, sponsored by the Community Medicine

Foundation, Inc. and the Council for Health and Development when they were abducted and illegally detained by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).


They were initially detained without access to legal counsel or visits from family for nearly three days at Camp Capinpin, Tanay, Rizal. Even after this initial period, it was still difficult for friends, relatives, legal counsel, medical doctors and religious ministers to gain access to them. These 43 doctors, nurses and other health workers, including some pregnant women, have been subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading mental and physical treatment amounting to torture.

Reports of illegal arrests, use of torture through physical and mental abuse, and denial of visitation rights demonstrate clear violations of Philippine and international law. CIVICUS urges you to begin fulfilling your promise of a new path for the Philippines by protecting the victims of human rights abuses and bringing those responsible to justice. We ask that you:

- (1) Free the Morong 43: 38 of the health workers are in detention at Camp Bagong Diwa, Taguig City and 5 of the health workers remain detained at Camp Capinpin in Tanay, Rizal.
- (2) Investigate the AFP's conduct in the arrest, detention, interrogation, and general treatment of the 43 health workers.
- (3) Investigate attacks on human rights defenders and media persons.
- (4) Guarantee the independence of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines in line with the United Nations' Principles Relating to the Status of National Human Rights Institutions.
- (5) End impunity for state authorities who commit human rights violations by bringing those guilty of torture and other abuse to justice according to Philippine and international law.

The Philippine people have demanded an end to the corruption and abuses by electing you as their leader and your promises give hope for a brighter future of human rights protections. CIVICUS encourages you to demonstrate your commitment to rule of law and human rights by bringing justice to victims of human rights violations to their families and showing that the new Philippines is no longer a place for such abuses.

Sincerely,



SECRETARY GENERAL

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