February 10, 2022

Senator Jeff Merkley
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

ATTN: Support the Philippines Human Rights Act

Dear Senator Jeff Merkley,

We, the undersigned eleven organizations representing climate justice and environmental groups across Oregon, are writing to you to urge you to introduce the Philippines Human Rights Act (PHRA) into the US Senate, recently introduced by Representative Susan Wild from Pennsylvania into the US Congress. This Bill has already been co-sponsored by some of your Oregon colleagues in the House, Representatives Earl Blumenauer and Suzanne Bonamici.

In recent addresses to the United Nations at global climate conferences, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte and the Philippine government have boasted of the role of the Philippines in addressing the climate crisis through the Paris Climate Agreement, as well as the country’s vulnerability to increasing extreme weather events each year. But remarks from the Philippine government on adequately addressing the climate crisis serve as mere posturing, as President Duterte has shown he will sell the abundance of natural resources in the Philippines and the ancestral lands of Indigenous people to multinational corporations for the sake of his own profit.
On the frontlines of the climate crisis, the Filipino people are facing irreversible environmental and social impacts including rising seas, extreme flooding, water shortages, ecosystem collapse, food insecurity, displacement of tens of millions of people, and loss of lives. Multinational corporations have ravaged the Philippine environment with destructive large-scale mining projects, dams, and other energy projects, which have resulted in devastating impacts on Indigenous communities and the livelihood of small farmers.

Those who have stood up against this destruction have been targeted by the Philippine military and police. Under the internationally condemned "Anti-Terror Law," the so-called National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) has sweeping powers to criminalize dissent and slap a "terrorist" label on anyone who dares to speak out against the administration. Countless activists, trade unionists, members of the clergy, and land defenders have been placed on watch-lists, terror-tagged, disappeared, and murdered; at least 376 human rights and land defenders have been extrajudicially killed under Duterte.

The United States has been complicit in this destruction of lands and brutal and murderous treatment of human rights and land defenders. Since 2016, the U.S. has given a total of $550 million in military aid to support Duterte’s counter insurgency operations, particularly through aerial warfare and surveillance. These are U.S. tax dollars that go directly towards abusing the human rights of those working to peacefully defend their land and livelihood.

The Philippines Human Rights Act (PHRA)—a bill that is supported by over 200 organizations across the country and co-sponsored by 28 Representatives in the House—would suspend this security assistance from the United States to the Philippines until the Government of the Philippines has made certain needed reforms to their government and military. These restrictions specifically include: suspensions to the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippines National Police, a vetoing of U.S. loans to the Philippine military, and transparency from the U.S. government on all of the ongoing financial assistance given to the Philippine Government. As stated in the PHRA, these restrictions would be lifted only once military and police personnel who have credibly been found to violate human rights are persecuted and protections on the rights of journalists, activists, land defenders, Indigenous peoples, farmers, and government critics are established.

As climate and environmental organizations in Oregon, we recognize the immense dangers that our comrades in the Philippines—who are also fighting to defend their local environment and their land just as we are here—face in a violent and fascist regime. We see it as our duty to unite in solidarity with land defenders in the Philippines in their struggle for land and human rights. The PHRA is a crucial step of accountability that the United States government must take to begin to address and heal the harms of military and financial assistance that has led to families being torn apart, lands being destroyed, and human rights being dangerously abused.
As Oregonians, we call on you to stand up to global facism and recognize this bill as a crucial step towards global climate justice, accountability, protection of lands, and human rights. There is no climate justice without human rights. There is no climate justice under state-sanctioned fascist violence. Please be a champion for human rights and environmental justice by introducing the Philippine Human Rights Act into the US Senate.

Signed,

Dineen O’Rourke, Campaign Manager, 350PDX

Avery Temple, Climate Justice Organizer, Breach Collective

David De La Torre, Healthy Climate Program Manager, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

Hannah Sohl, Executive Director, Rogue Climate

Huy Ong, Executive Director, OPAL Environmental Justice

Noelle Studer-Spevak, Board of Directors, Families for Climate

CedarAction

International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines - Portland Chapter

Kalikasan Solidarity Organization

SunrisePDX

Sunrise Rural Oregon