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Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 471

Introduced by AKBAYAN Party-List Representatives
Hon. Kaka Bag-ao and Hon. Walden Bello

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Philippines is one of the original signatories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and is currently distinguished as an advocate of human rights within the Asian community of nations having signed/ratified/acceded to twenty-three (23) international covenants and treaties on human rights under the United Nations. Yet, despite this advocacy that started more than half a century ago, the right to development and to adequate food continues to elude more than 40% of the population, most of who reside in the upland and coastal villages of the rural countryside and congested slums of the cities.

The tragic inability of the government to improve the lives of the poor over the past three decades has largely resulted in a continuing history of social and political unrest. Today, this unrest manifests in various armed resistance movements that either seek to overthrow the government or secede from its system of rule, exemplified by ongoing hostilities with communist rebels.

In the congested city slums, the harsh and cruel environment of perennial poverty and hunger has driven many of its residents to more extreme measures of survival by defying the laws in a culture of crime and violence. Millions of Filipinos, unable to look for employment or better paying jobs, leave their families to seek greener pastures abroad. Their remittances average more than \$6 billion annually, but many of them come home in coffins because of the inability of the government to assure their protection against injustice through effective labor agreements.

While the Constitution mandates that the State value the dignity of every human person and guarantee full respect for human rights, this sacred principle, anchored on international precepts, has not been translated into effective laws, ordinances and implementing rules that ensure the full protection of the Filipino citizen against abuse of authority among law enforcers.

The current Philippine literature on human rights is a product of the continuing battle of ideas in the realization of human dignity and social justice. Unfortunately, many of these ideas have remained at the level of treaties and Constitutional policies. Those that have translated into enabling acts and local ordinances by and large remain at the level of theory without the benefit of effective enforcement.

With the increasing social demands of a fast growing population, local government units constantly face the dangers of popular unrest and increased criminality without sufficient safety nets and a human rights-based law enforcement system. Likewise, due to lack of consensus in the interpretation of individual rights, especially among the poor women and children, law enforcement in this regard has been erratic and ineffective.

59 There is an urgent need to put the promotion and protection of human rights at the
60 core of the implementation of the criminal justice system, local legislation and governance, the
61 enforcement of laws, and the maintenance of peace and order which are all fundamental
62 ingredients in the building of long-lasting peace. We have to dovetail the present efforts
63 towards the promotion and protection of human rights. There must be concrete local
64 institutions that will reflect and carry out the lofty human rights provisions that the country, as
65 a matter of national policy, adhere to.

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67 While the Commission on Human Rights is mandated to address the enforcement of
68 human rights precepts in the making and enforcement of law, the Commission and its 16
69 regional chapters are hardly in a position to reach out to the 80 provinces, 1,496 municipalities,
70 138 cities and 42,025 barangays in the country. To achieve the desired integration, therefore,
71 Human Rights Resource Centers must be set up in the provinces.

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73 Immediate passage of this bill is sought.

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Hon. KAKA BAG-AO
Representative, Akbayan Party-list



Hon. WALDEN BELLO
Representative, Akbayan Party-list

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AN ACT
TO STRENGTHEN PHILIPPINE COMMITMENT TO HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION AND PROTECTION BY ESTABLISHING HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCE CENTERS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “Human Rights Resource Center Act of 2007”.

SECTION 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It shall be the policy of the State to promote social justice in all phases of national development as it values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights. It shall articulate the twenty-three (23) international covenants and treaties on human rights, to which it is a signatory and has ratified in its national and local laws.

It shall also be the policy of the State to give priority to education among the youth to foster patriotism and nationalism that shall promote their total liberation and development as a human being.

SECTION 3. *The Human Rights Resource Centers.* – Human rights resource centers, hereinafter referred to as the HR Resource Centers, are hereby established throughout the country to integrate the promotion and protection of human rights in the implementation of the criminal justice system, in the conduct of local governance and in local law enforcement. These centers shall be the repository of all human rights concerns at the provincial level.

The HR Resource Centers shall be attached to the Office of the Governor but the planning, policy-making and implementation shall be done with transparency and accountability. However, the Regional Office of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the Office of the Provincial Prosecutor, the Office of the Provincial Commander of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Office of the Provincial Director of the Philippine National Police (PNP) shall collaborate and coordinate in ensuring the effective operation of the HR Resource Centers including, but not limited to, the mobilization of resources and the provision of technical support.

At the operational level, the HR Resource Centers shall be headed by a volunteer lawyer from the Integrated Bar of the Philippines with support staff composed of volunteers from students of law schools who are rendering paralegal services as part of their curriculum

141 requirements, people's organizations and nongovernment organizations (POs and NGOs,
142 respectively) with credibility in the locality and independent of the local government.

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144 **SECTION 4. *Functions of the HR Resource Centers.*** – The HR Resource Centers shall
145 have the following functions:

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147 (a) Set up a library of international covenants and treaties to which the Philippines is a
148 signatory, has acceded to and/or has ratified;
- 149 (b) Provide the necessary resource persons, literary and other educational materials to persons
150 or group of persons who advocate and work for a continuing program of education that
151 enhances respect for the primacy of human rights;
- 152 (c) Monitor compliance with international treaty obligations and national legislation on human
153 rights for the purpose of ensuring the proper enforcement of laws and observance of
154 international obligations at the local level;
- 155 (d) Coordinate with various government agencies involved in the promotion and protection of
156 various aspects of human rights, as well as with the Presidential Committee on Human
157 Rights;
- 158 (e) Coordinate with barangay, municipal and provincial human rights officers, desks or
159 committees, as the case may be, and with the Regional Office of the CHR on issues arising
160 from violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the people,
161 particularly those of women and children, for purposes of referring or endorsing the same
162 through an appropriate mechanism to the proper government agencies for appropriate
163 action and immediate resolution;
- 164 (f) Take an active part in efforts aimed at promoting peace and development in the area and
165 serve as the convergence point for these efforts at the local level;
- 166 (g) Recommend the enactment of necessary local legislation that will protect and promote
167 human rights in the province; and
- 168 (h) Participate in the development planning and budgeting process of the local government unit
169 concerned using the principles of rights-based development wherein development plans for
170 the locality come from the citizens who are targeted to be the direct beneficiaries of the
171 plans rather than the government imposing the plans on the citizens.

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173 **SECTION 5. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** – The CHR, in consultation,
174 coordination and collaboration with the Supreme Court, the Department of Justice, the AFP, the
175 PNP, the Integrated Bar of the Philippines and human rights NGOs and POs duly recognized and
176 accredited by the government, shall prepare the implementing rules and regulations necessary
177 to carry out the provisions of this Act.

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179 **SECTION 6. *Effectivity.*** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in
180 at least two newspapers of national circulation.

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183 ***APPROVED,***