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Your Excellency,

**The Philippines – Killing of lawyers Benjamin Ramos, Raphael Atotubo, and other members of the legal profession**

The Law Society of England & Wales is the professional body representing more than 180,000 solicitors in England and Wales. It aims to promote and support solicitors while upholding the rule of law, legal independence, ethical values, and the principle of justice for all around the world. The Law Society holds Special Consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2014.

On 6 November 2018, Benjamin Ramos, a Philippine lawyer, was assassinated by unidentified gunmen while leaving his office in the town of Kabankalan. He was a founder and member of the National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL), a nationwide voluntary association of human rights lawyers in the Philippines, committed to render legal services to the marginalised sectors of Philippines society, including the upholding and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms.

Previously on 23 August 2018, Raphael Atotubo, another Philippine lawyer, was murdered in front of his house by an unidentified gunman in the town of Bacolod. Since 2016, it has been reported that three judges, seven prosecutors and an estimated 34 lawyers have been killed for exercising their professional duties. In 2017, your Excellency was reported to have ordered national police officers to shoot lawyers who represent clients associated with the "war on drugs" and those who "obstruct justice". Such public statements put members of the legal profession at risk, undermine access to justice and the rule of law in The Philippines.

It is important to highlight that the Philippines is bound by the provisions set out in the following international instruments:

**The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966**, ratified by the Philippines on 23 October 1986:

Article 6. 1. Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.

## The professional body for solicitors

Article 17. 1. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation. 2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference and attacks.

We would also like to draw your attention to **The United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990)**, which provide that:

16. Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

17. Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities.

18. Lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions.

The Law Society respectfully urges that the relevant authorities in the Philippines take the following actions:

1. To investigate promptly and effectively the killing of Mr. Ramos and Mr. Atotubo, as well as other lawyers who have been murdered in the Philippines and bring the perpetrators to justice in proceedings that comply with international fair trial standards;
2. To take effective steps to ensure the psychological and physical integrity of lawyers and human rights defenders in the Philippines;
3. To refrain from making public statements that could be construed as endorsing attacks against members of the legal profession and the judiciary, which could contribute to put them at risk; and
4. To comply with the Philippines' international obligations to ensure that members of the legal profession and human rights defenders can carry out their professional functions without harassment and improper interference.

We will continue to monitor the investigation into the killing of Mr. Ramos and Mr. Atotubo, as well as the situation of lawyers of the NUPL and other members of the legal profession in the Philippines.

Yours sincerely,



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cc.

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