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Philippines: AI urges President Arroyo to leave a positive legacy of human rights

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo must leave a positive legacy of human rights for the peoples of the Philippines during her last ten months in office, Amnesty International said today. On 27 July, she will give her final State of the Nation Address after nine years as president. At the same time a pervasive culture of impunity for human rights violations throughout the country persists, and hundreds of thousands of people continue to be displaced in Mindanao.

In the last eight years, hundreds of unlawful and often politically-motivated killings have taken place as well as enforced disappearances, often involving torture.

The displacement of people due to the resumption of the armed conflict between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in August 2008 has been reported by international organizations as the highest number of newly displaced people in the world and the most neglected internal displacement situation in 2008. Over 700,000 people have been displaced in total and more than 250,000 are still displaced almost a year after the renewed hostilities.

On 23 July 2009, civil society organizations in Mindanao gave a voice to displaced families through the *State of the Bakwit Address*: "This war has left wounds so deep and wide and has made our lives so miserable. Some of our houses have been burned; our meagre belongings and farmlands destroyed.... We are afraid for our children. Most of the *bakwits* [internally displaced] are children. Many of them are no longer in school. We fear the children will learn nothing but evacuation, war and hopelessness."

Amnesty International urges President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to place human rights protection at the heart of her administration by ensuring the protection of civilians affected by the armed conflict and providing adequate food, water, medical treatment and support for rehabilitation of displaced families. Further, she should, as a matter of priority, demonstrate her administration's genuine commitment to human rights by addressing the lack of thorough investigations into human rights violations, particularly those committed by the government's security forces.

The next 10 months of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's presidency is a historic opportunity to leave a positive legacy of human rights.

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