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Crackdown at Pride! Free the Pride 20!

Bandilang Itim Collective

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As we pass the 100th day in the longest and harshest quarantine in the world, we find ourselves in no better position to combat the COVID-19. All dissent is criminalized,¹ and the lapsing of the Anti-Terror Bill, with its vague definition of what is considered as “terrorism” effectively legislates and normalizes the Philippines as a police state, without having to declare martial law. This is the kind of political maneuvering that would’ve made Marcos proud.

And looking back—over fifty years ago now since the Stonewall Rebellion—members of the LGBTQIA+ community stood up for themselves against oppression by the deeply homophobic and transphobic police and state legislature. A brick thrown all those years ago—an act of defiance against a society built against them—began the worldwide movement for the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community.

It is in these contrasting circumstances that we find ourselves today, two days before the 51st anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion, a Pride March was held to oppose the tyranny of the Duterte administration and the government’s militarized response to a global medical emergency that is the pandemic. The police’s response to this show of defiance by the organization Bahaghari (a National Democratic LGBTQIA+ rights group) was met with the arrests of 20 individuals, including the group’s campaign spokesperson.

The event, organized to conform with quarantine safety protocols, remained peaceful until the arrival of police armed with riot gear. The protesters were willing to establish dialogue with the security forces, but were met with illegal detention, harassment, and assault. A journalism intern was harassed and nearly arrested even after discussion between the activists and the police.² A queer activist was also repeatedly insulted while being forcefully detained.³

¹ Simoun Magsalin, “Against a Quarantine with Martial Law Characteristics,” *Bandilang Itim* <https://libcom.org/blog/against-quarantine-martial-law-characteristics-03042020>

² Rappler.com, “At least 20 were arrested at Pride March in Manila,” 2020-06-26, Rappler <https://www.rappler.com/nation/264919-cops-arrest-individuals-pride-month-protest-manila-june-2020>

³ Jon Callueng. @thejoncallueng. Twitter post. 1:41PM, June 26, 2020. <https://twitter.com/thejoncallueng/status/1276390012838219777>

Horrorific account from a member of the LGBTQ+ arrested earlier:

‘Bidang’, a polysexual, was able to escape when the police started dispersing the Pride Protest even before the program started. She was however stopped by policemen 100 meters away from Mendiola Peace Arch.

The police even commandeered the vehicle of the protesters without citing any violation they committed.⁴ The arrests are clearly illegal⁵ and are very much State harassment designed to intimidate dissidents. We do not doubt the State's use of warrantless arrests to harass dissidents will only get more frequent after the Anti-Terror Bill becomes law. Clearly, this crackdown at Pride shows that the State permits no dissent in its path of autocracy, regardless of profession, opinion, or sex and gender.

We support and lend our voice to the chorus of growing calls for material and social change that benefits those who are marginalized based on their gender identity. We oppose the tokenization of the struggles of the LGBTQIA+ community by the very same people that perpetuate their oppression.⁶ We oppose the recuperation of the fight, by those who've inherited the state apparatus from the conquistadors⁷ who've not only conquered and massacred, but erased a culture that held our queer comrades in a better light than they ever did.⁸

We call, under no uncertain terms, for an end to this Martial Law that pretends to be a Quarantine. We call for the immediate release of the 20 activists who were arrested during the Pride March. We call for the withdrawal of any and all charges made against them and their supporters.

As we fall headfirst into what appears to be another dark chapter in Philippine history, we cannot allow our enemies in the State and their running dogs in the Philippine National Police to dampen our dissent. We have seen only a preview of the horrors we will have to face in the crackdowns, warrantless arrests and murders committed by State-sponsored forces in the past three months. Once the

⁴ JUNK TERROR BILL! HANDS OFF ACTIVISTS!. @ico_untucked. Twitter post. 11:31AM, June 26, 2020. https://twitter.com/ico_untucked/status/1276357348898951168.

Members of the Philippine National Police even went as far as HIJACKING the protestors' van. When asked about the protestors' supposed violation, the police kept mum. #PRIDE2020 #HandsOffActivists #JunkTerrorBill @AP @vicenews @rapplerdotcom @cnni

⁵ National Union of Peoples' Lawyers, "NUPL on the Arrest and Detention of Pride 20: Ludicrous Charges Totally Devoid of Legal and Factual Basis." 2020-06-27, Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/nuplphilippines/posts/1015761611493683>

⁶ Rambo Talabong, "Isko Moreno: Expect Manila Pride March and Festival 2020," 2019-06-03, Rappler <https://www.rappler.com/nation/232136-isko-moreno-expect-manila-pride-march-and-festival-2020>

⁷ Jeline Malasig, "On Manila Day, Isko Moreno paid homage to Spanish colonizer Miguel de Legazpi. But not everyone is pleased," 2020-06-25, Interaksyon <https://www.interaksyon.com/trends-spotlights/2020/06/25/171441/manila-day-isko-moreno-paid-homage-to-spanish-colonizer-miguel-de-legazpi-not-everyone-is-pleased/>

⁸ Garcia, J. Neil C. "Male Homosexuality in the Philippines: A Short History" https://web.archive.org/web/20161020043938/https://ias.asia/sites/default/files/IIAS_NL35_13.pdf

Anti-Terror Bill lapses into law come July 9th, all bets are off. But only in the darkness, where monsters reign supreme, does the light shine the brightest.

Let our shared anger at the government's machismo laden response and our unyielding desire for a better life for ourselves and those we care about be the light that guides us out of this darkness.

PRIDE IS A PROTEST!

NO COPS AT PRIDE!

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