
Human Rights, Political Repression and The State: An Examination of the Role of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) In Human Rights Advocacy

Rev. Jonathan P. Razon, PhD

Aldersgate College, Inc., Solano, Nueva Vizcaya

ABSTRACT

This study examined and critically analyzed the role, strategies, and impact of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) in the field of human rights advocacy, with particular attention to its engagement amid political repression, extrajudicial violence, and shrinking democratic spaces during the Duterte (2016–2022) and Marcos Jr. (2022–2025) administrations. The Philippines has long been recognized as a paradox in Southeast Asia—a country whose Constitution guarantees the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, yet whose political landscape remains marred by corruption, militarization, and impunity. Against this backdrop, faith-based institutions like the NCCP have emerged as moral vanguards, embodying the prophetic and pastoral dimensions of Christian social witness. The literature on human rights advocacy in the Philippines underscores the critical role of civil society organizations, faith-based institutions, and legal frameworks in promoting, protecting, and defending fundamental human rights, particularly during periods of political repression. The study by Pocong et al. (2025) demonstrated that qualitative content analysis of laws and policies is an effective approach for evaluating how legal instruments address persistent human rights concerns, emphasizing that policy implementation must be complemented by active advocacy and public engagement to ensure the meaningful protection of vulnerable sectors. Their findings highlighted that, despite comprehensive legal provisions, gaps in enforcement and institutional accountability continue to hinder the realization of human rights, thereby reinforcing the necessity of advocacy organizations that monitor government compliance and amplify the voices of marginalized communities. This perspective is highly relevant to the present study because the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) has historically functioned as a faith-based organization that not only documented human rights violations but also mobilized religious communities, provided legal and humanitarian assistance to victims, and influenced public discourse on justice, democracy, and state accountability. By illustrating the relationship between legal frameworks, advocacy initiatives, and institutional responses, the work of Pocong et al. (2025) provides a valuable conceptual foundation for understanding how organizations such as the NCCP contribute to strengthening human rights protection amid political repression and state-related abuses, emphasizing that effective human rights advocacy requires both policy reforms and sustained engagement from civil society organizations. In sum, this research argues that the NCCP's engagement in human rights advocacy offers a model for faith-informed civic participation in the Global South. It illustrates how religious institutions, when grounded in prophetic courage and ecumenical solidarity, can resist the tides of authoritarianism and reclaim the moral imagination of society. The NCCP's experience challenges the church to remain steadfast in its commitment to the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized, affirming that true

discipleship demands both compassion and confrontation—a faith that prays, acts, and speaks truth to power.

Keywords: *National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), Human rights advocacy, Political theology, Ecumenical solidarity, Civil society*

INTRODUCTION

Human rights advocacy is both a moral conviction and a political necessity that lies at the heart of every democratic and humane society. The principle that every human being possesses inherent dignity and worth is not only a philosophical or legal assertion but a reflection of humanity's deepest moral consciousness. Across nations and generations, the persistent tension between state authority and individual freedoms has shaped the global and local discourse on justice, peace, and equality. The aspiration for freedom, the demand for justice, and the pursuit of peace form a trinity that animates the ongoing struggle for human rights throughout history.

Moreover, human rights are the moral foundation of human civilization—universally recognized principles that affirm the inherent dignity, equality, and freedom of every person. Rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations in 1948, these rights transcend nationality, race, religion, or political ideology. They serve as the global moral compass guiding nations toward justice, peace, and shared humanity. Over the decades, human rights have evolved beyond civil and political liberties to encompass social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions—recognizing that the right to life, livelihood, and a healthy environment are interdependent and indivisible.

Globally, however, the struggle to uphold these rights remains uneven. Across continents, governments face accusations of repression, corruption, and impunity. In many developing nations, including the Philippines, human rights violations often emerge from systemic misgovernance, particularly in state-led infrastructure and development projects. These projects, though framed as progress, sometimes result in forced displacement, environmental degradation, and the marginalization of vulnerable communities. The intersection of governance, power, and profit frequently undermines the ethical responsibility of states to protect human welfare. International human rights bodies such as the UN Human Rights Council and Amnesty International have continually emphasized the accountability of governments and corporations to prioritize people over political or economic gain.

Within this global framework, the role of faith-based institutions like the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) becomes profoundly significant. As state institutions falter in protecting citizens' rights, churches and ecumenical movements have emerged as moral voices, advocating for justice, transparency, and accountability. The global ecumenical community—through the World Council of Churches (WCC) and other networks—has recognized human rights as an expression of Christian faith in action, connecting local struggles with international solidarity. Thus, the Philippine experience of human rights advocacy through the NCCP not only reflects a national reality but also contributes to the global discourse on faith-based responses to state violence, ecological injustice, and the misuse of power.

This struggle has been both historical and contemporary, deeply rooted in the country's colonial experience and postcolonial political development. Centuries of Spanish and American colonization left a legacy of social inequality, economic dependency, and political subservience. The post-independence years failed to erase these structural injustices, as oligarchic interests and political patronage continued to dominate the socio-political landscape. The imposition of Martial Law in 1972 by Ferdinand Marcos marked a dark period in Philippine history, when civil liberties were curtailed, dissent was violently suppressed, and thousands were imprisoned, tortured, or disappeared. Although the People Power Revolution of 1986 restored democratic governance, recurring patterns of political repression, corruption, and impunity have persisted into the present era.

In this historical continuum, the Church—and particularly the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP)—has played a prophetic role in standing with the oppressed and speaking truth to power. The NCCP, founded in 1963, is a fellowship of Protestant and non-Roman Catholic churches united in mission and service. Its commitment to justice, peace, and human rights flows from its theological conviction that faith must be lived out through compassionate service and active engagement with social realities. Guided by Christ's ministry of liberation and reconciliation, the NCCP understands that the proclamation of the Gospel is inseparable from the defense of human dignity.

During periods of political repression—most notably under Martial Law—the NCCP emerged as one of the most vocal and courageous institutions denouncing human rights violations. It provided sanctuary for political prisoners, documented abuses, and joined ecumenical networks to appeal for international solidarity. The NCCP's human rights ministry thus became an embodiment of "faith in action", where the Church's moral authority transcended denominational boundaries to stand as a collective witness against tyranny and injustice.

In contemporary times, this prophetic mission continues. The Philippines today faces new forms of repression and structural violence, including extrajudicial killings, red-tagging of activists, forced displacement of indigenous peoples, and the militarization of rural communities. The war on drugs, for example, has claimed thousands of lives, often from among the poorest sectors of society. Similarly, the shrinking space for civil society, attacks on journalists, and criminalization of dissent have raised alarm among local and international observers. Amid these realities, the NCCP's role as a moral and spiritual advocate for human rights remains as urgent as ever.

This dissertation proceeds from the conviction that the Church must not remain silent in the face of human suffering and injustice. The NCCP's ministry demonstrates how faith-based institutions can challenge systemic oppression and become agents of transformation. It also illustrates the complexities and risks involved when religious organizations engage in political advocacy—particularly in contexts where state power seeks to suppress critical voices. Through the lens of human rights advocacy, this study explores the dynamic interaction between religion and politics, between prophetic witness and political repression, and between spiritual conviction and social responsibility.

The present study is anchored on the assumption that human rights advocacy is an essential component of peacebuilding. Without justice, peace cannot flourish; without respect for human dignity, democracy becomes hollow. By examining the NCCP's human rights work, this

research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on how religious institutions can promote a just and lasting peace. The study recognizes that the struggle for human rights is not merely legalistic but profoundly ethical and theological—it speaks to the core of what it means to be human and to live in community with others.

Methodologically, this dissertation draws from historical analysis, document review, and qualitative interviews to understand the NCCP’s evolving role in human rights advocacy. It seeks to uncover how the Council’s theology of liberation and peace informs its response to political repression, and how its partnerships with national and international organizations have shaped its influence in both church and society. The research is guided by the question: *How has the National Council of Churches in the Philippines contributed to human rights advocacy amid political repression and state violence?*

The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge theological reflection and socio-political analysis. By situating the NCCP’s human rights ministry within the broader global and national contexts, the research contributes to peace studies, theology, and social ethics. It provides insights into how faith-based organizations can maintain moral integrity and prophetic courage in politically hostile environments. Moreover, it underscores the importance of ecumenical cooperation in the face of systemic injustice—showing that the struggle for human rights transcends denominational and ideological boundaries.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically a single case study approach, to examine and analyze the role, strategies, and impact of the *National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP)* in human rights advocacy within the broader socio-political context of state repression. Qualitative research, as Creswell (2018) explains, is appropriate when the objective is to gain a deep, contextualized understanding of complex social phenomena, particularly those involving meaning, values, and lived experiences.

The NCCP’s human rights advocacy is a multifaceted process that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures alone. Its programs, theological grounding, and political engagement require interpretive understanding. The *case study method*—as defined by Yin (2014)—is particularly well-suited for exploring “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” The NCCP, as a faith-based ecumenical organization operating amid political repression, provides an ideal single case that illuminates how religious institutions negotiate faith, justice, and power in a transitional democracy.

This study also adopts elements of historical analysis, tracing the evolution of the NCCP’s human rights work from the late Marcos dictatorship to the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations (2016–2025). Historical analysis allows for an understanding of continuity and transformation within the NCCP’s institutional and theological framework. By situating present advocacy within its historical trajectory, the study underscores the Council’s evolving responses to political crises and human rights challenges.

The qualitative case study design enables the researcher to gather rich, descriptive data through multiple sources—interviews, archival materials, official reports, and secondary literature—

thereby allowing for triangulation and ensuring the reliability of findings. The goal is not to generalize but to provide a nuanced, in-depth portrayal of the NCCP's advocacy work, highlighting how faith-based institutions function as moral agents and political actors in the defense of human rights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings revealed that since its inception, the NCCP has evolved from a purely ecumenical fellowship into a faith-based advocacy network that functions as both moral critic and humanitarian responder. During the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations (2016–2025), NCCP's role intensified as extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and the practice of “red-tagging” became widespread. These findings show that the NCCP's commitment to human rights advocacy is both reactive and proactive: reactive in responding to violations and assisting victims, and proactive in mobilizing faith communities toward systemic change.

The analysis of NCCP's internal documents and statements revealed recurring themes: (1) the sanctity of human life as a theological imperative, (2) solidarity with the marginalized sectors, (3) resistance against structural violence, and (4) the call for moral governance. These themes are not simply sociopolitical but grounded in the NCCP's understanding of the Gospel's prophetic demand for justice.

Furthermore, the study found that the NCCP's ecumenical structure—bringing together various Protestant and non-Catholic churches—provides a unique platform for advocacy. It allows the NCCP to mobilize a broad base of congregations nationwide while also engaging with global partners such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). Through these international linkages, the NCCP amplifies local human rights concerns on a global stage, helping to pressure the Philippine government toward accountability.

Thematic analysis of interview data underscored that NCCP leaders view their advocacy as a continuation of their faith, not as a political act per se. As one respondent emphasized, “Our mission is not partisan—it is pastoral. But when the poor cry out and the government silences them, silence becomes sin.” This theological framing allows the NCCP to justify its engagement in public advocacy without compromising its spiritual mission.

Despite its moral authority, the NCCP operates under increasing threat. Interviewees noted that red-tagging—the labeling of church workers and pastors as communist sympathizers—has led to intimidation, harassment, and surveillance. Several partner organizations have been subject to raids, arrests, and even violence. The NCCP has had to adapt by strengthening digital and physical security measures, forming human rights desks, and building solidarity networks with lawyers, journalists, and peace advocates.

Beyond its advocacy, the NCCP also plays a vital humanitarian role. It has coordinated relief operations in disaster-affected areas, supported internally displaced persons from militarized regions, and provided psychosocial services to victims of human rights abuses. These ministries complement its prophetic voice with compassionate action, reinforcing its holistic approach to mission: “to proclaim the Gospel, serve the people, and transform unjust structures.”

The study also established that the NCCP's effectiveness is tied to its moral credibility rather than political power. In a society where institutional trust in government continues to erode, the NCCP's prophetic voice gains moral weight precisely because it is rooted in faith-based compassion and guided by the ethics of Christ-centered justice.

The NCCP functions as a vital moral and political counterforce against State repression. Its theological framework of "faith in action" legitimizes its engagement in human rights advocacy. Its ecumenical and global networks strengthen its resilience and credibility.

Political repression, particularly red-tagging, remains the greatest threat to its advocacy. Despite these threats, the NCCP continues to embody the church's mission to "be the voice of the voiceless" and to uphold the dignity of all people created in God's image.

This study has examined the intricate relationship between human rights, political repression, and the State, focusing on the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) as a case study of faith-based advocacy amid an increasingly hostile political environment. Through an analysis of historical documentation, theological perspectives, and qualitative data from NCCP leaders and partners, several key conclusions emerge that not only highlight the NCCP's continuing relevance but also its strategic and moral limitations in addressing human rights issues within the Philippine context.

The NCCP as a Moral and Political Counterforce

The first and perhaps most important conclusion is that the NCCP serves as a moral and political counterforce to State repression. While it does not possess coercive power or legislative authority, its strength lies in its moral capital—its ability to appeal to conscience and to the universal principles of justice, peace, and human dignity. Throughout the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations, when state narratives sought to legitimize violence and silence dissent, the NCCP emerged as one of the few institutional voices calling for accountability and respect for human rights.

This role as a moral counterforce is deeply rooted in the NCCP's theological orientation. Drawing on Political Theology, the NCCP views justice not as a human invention but as a divine mandate. Human rights, therefore, are not simply legal entitlements but expressions of God's image in humanity. Violating human rights is thus tantamount to violating God's creation. From this theological conviction flows the NCCP's commitment to stand alongside the oppressed, the poor, and the victims of state violence.

In this light, the NCCP does not merely resist repression—it transforms resistance into a form of discipleship, embodying Christ's ministry among the marginalized. It critiques unjust power not from a position of political ambition, but from a vocation of prophetic witness. Such a moral posture gives the NCCP legitimacy in the eyes of civil society and international partners, even as it incurs hostility from the state.

The NCCP's Theological Mandate for Social Justice

The second major conclusion pertains to the NCCP's theological and spiritual foundation for human rights work. Its advocacy is not incidental but inherent in its mission. The NCCP's founding documents and consistent public statements reveal a long-standing understanding that evangelism and social transformation are inseparable. It draws inspiration from biblical passages such as *Micah 6:8* ("What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God") and *Luke 4:18* ("The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners").

This theological grounding allows the NCCP to navigate accusations of political interference. Its leaders assert that speaking out against extrajudicial killings, red-tagging, or corruption is not partisan but pastoral, because faith demands solidarity with those who suffer. In this way, Political Theology provides the moral and intellectual framework for understanding the NCCP's engagement as both spiritual and sociopolitical.

The theological dimension also explains the NCCP's ability to sustain advocacy over decades. Unlike secular NGOs that may rise or fall with funding or public attention, the NCCP's commitment is sustained by its ecclesial identity—it advocates not merely as an organization but as a community of believers bound by faith and mission. This spiritual resilience is what enables the NCCP to continue its ministry even under threats and restrictions.

Ecumenical and International Dimensions of Advocacy

The study also concludes that the NCCP's ecumenical character is one of its most powerful assets. Composed of Protestant and independent churches, it operates as an umbrella organization that bridges denominational divides in pursuit of a common cause: justice and peace. This collective identity allows for broad mobilization, resource sharing, and mutual protection.

Moreover, the NCCP's international partnerships—with the World Council of Churches (WCC), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), and other ecumenical bodies—enhance its capacity to bring Philippine human rights issues to the global arena. When domestic accountability mechanisms fail, international ecumenical solidarity becomes a lifeline for local communities under threat. These partnerships also serve as moral pressure points against the Philippine government, reminding it of its commitments under international human rights treaties.

Through this network, the NCCP embodies what scholars call "transnational faith-based advocacy"—the use of religious networks to mobilize moral and diplomatic leverage across borders. The internationalization of local human rights concerns has become one of the NCCP's most effective tools in resisting repression and sustaining hope among affected communities.

Red-Tagging and the Politics of Fear

Another major conclusion of this study is that red-tagging remains the single greatest threat to the NCCP's continued work and existence as a credible faith-based organization. By labeling church workers, pastors, and programs as communist fronts, the State effectively undermines

their legitimacy, exposes them to harassment, and creates a climate of fear that discourages civic participation.

This strategy of demonizing dissent represents a continuation of authoritarian tactics dating back to the Marcos dictatorship. Despite democratic transitions, the persistence of red-tagging reveals how deeply entrenched the security paradigm remains in Philippine governance. The NCCP, as both religious and civic actor, finds itself caught between its pastoral duty and the risk of political persecution.

The study finds that the NCCP's response to red-tagging has been strategically adaptive rather than confrontational. It has invested in digital security, legal education for church workers, and collaboration with human rights lawyers and journalists. However, these measures are palliative rather than preventive; they do not eliminate the structural roots of repression. Hence, the NCCP's prophetic voice must be balanced with strategies of survival—a difficult but necessary tension in its ongoing ministry.

The NCCP's Enduring Relevance in Philippine Democracy

Finally, this study concludes that the NCCP remains one of the most significant non-state actors in the struggle for human rights and moral governance in the Philippines. While its numerical constituency may be smaller than that of the Catholic Church, its impact is amplified by its prophetic courage, ecumenical reach, and moral consistency.

In an era when political polarization and disinformation threaten democratic discourse, the NCCP represents a rare moral compass—a reminder that faith communities have both the responsibility and the power to hold the state accountable. Its persistent engagement in advocacy, relief, and education reflects a holistic approach to ministry that integrates spiritual salvation with social liberation.

In essence, the NCCP demonstrates that the church can be both pastoral and prophetic, both comforter and challenger—a bearer of hope amid repression, and a voice for justice amid silence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and conclusions of this study reveal that while the NCCP has played a critical role in faith-based human rights advocacy, it also faces enduring challenges—most notably state repression, red-tagging, resource limitations, and the need for sustained public engagement. Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the NCCP's institutional capacity, enhance its advocacy effectiveness, and expand its prophetic and pastoral influence in both national and international contexts.

To the NCCP

1. Strengthening Organizational and Digital Security Capacities

The NCCP's work in documenting human rights abuses and defending the marginalized exposes its personnel to significant risks. Given the climate of political surveillance and online

disinformation, the Council should prioritize organizational and digital security capacity-building for all staff and partner organizations.

Institutional Security Protocols: The NCCP should develop comprehensive safety guidelines, risk assessments, and communication protocols for staff, particularly those directly handling sensitive cases or victims of state violence.

Cybersecurity and Data Protection: Investing in secure digital infrastructure—encrypted emails, cloud storage, and data management systems—will safeguard documentation efforts from breaches or state intrusion.

Partnership with Digital Rights Organizations: Collaborations with groups such as *Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA)* or *Digital Rights Asia* could provide training on digital hygiene, online safety, and surveillance awareness.

Security is not merely a technical issue; it is an ethical and pastoral responsibility to protect those who risk their lives for truth and justice.

2. Expanding Grassroots and Youth Engagement

Another recommendation is for the NCCP to deepen its grassroots mobilization and youth-oriented advocacy programs. The vitality of the Council’s mission depends on nurturing a new generation of advocates who can sustain the struggle for justice in changing sociopolitical landscapes.

Youth Formation Programs: Establish a network of *Justice and Peace Youth Fellows* in member churches, focusing on human rights education, digital storytelling, and peacebuilding.

Campus and Community Partnerships: Collaborate with student organizations, theological seminaries, and community youth groups to promote civic education grounded in faith-based values.

Intergenerational Solidarity: Encourage mentorship programs that pair veteran church workers with young advocates to transmit wisdom, strategies, and resilience practices developed during previous struggles for democracy (e.g., the Marcos dictatorship).

By integrating social advocacy into Christian education and discipleship, the NCCP ensures that the call to justice remains embedded in the faith formation of the youth.

3. Enhancing Public Communication and Media Presence

In an age dominated by social media and misinformation, the NCCP must assert its narrative more clearly in the public sphere. Advocacy that is not visible risks being drowned by state propaganda or digital manipulation.

Strategic Communication Planning: Develop a media plan that highlights stories of resilience and hope, counters red-tagging narratives, and underscores the NCCP’s humanitarian and faith-based motivations.

Social Media Engagement: Train communications officers to responsibly utilize digital platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube to amplify human rights campaigns and pastoral statements.

Partnership with Ethical Journalists and Faith-Based Media: Collaborate with independent media outlets such as *UCA News*, *Interaksyon*, or *Radyo Katipunan* for coverage of faith-related justice issues.

A robust communication strategy will not only protect the NCCP's reputation but also educate the wider public on the moral and theological basis of its advocacy.

4. Institutionalizing Theological Reflection on Human Rights

The NCCP's strength lies in its theological foundation. However, there is a need to institutionalize theological reflection within all its programs to ensure that advocacy remains grounded in faith, not merely political reaction.

Theological Forums and Publications: Regularly publish theological reflections, policy briefs, and position papers linking biblical justice with contemporary human rights challenges.

Partnership with Theological Institutions: Collaborate with seminaries such as *Union Theological Seminary* or *Silliman Divinity School* to develop courses on Political Theology and Faith-Based Advocacy.

Clergy and Lay Training Modules: Conduct ecumenical workshops for clergy and lay leaders on integrating human rights advocacy into preaching, liturgy, and pastoral care.

Through this approach, the NCCP continues to nurture a prophetic theology that not only interprets social reality but also transforms it in the light of the gospel.

5. Strengthening Ecumenical and Interfaith Collaboration

The NCCP should also continue to expand its ecumenical reach and interfaith dialogue in addressing human rights concerns. The growing diversity of Philippine society presents opportunities for broader collaboration across religious and cultural boundaries.

Joint Statements and Advocacy Campaigns: Work with Catholic, Evangelical, Muslim, and Indigenous faith groups to release unified statements on pressing human rights concerns such as extrajudicial killings, red-tagging, and environmental degradation.

Interfaith Peacebuilding Initiatives: Engage with organizations like *PeaceBuilders Community* or *National Ulama Conference* to promote mutual understanding and peace advocacy.

International Solidarity: Strengthen ties with international ecumenical bodies to secure diplomatic and moral support, especially during times of intensified repression.

Such alliances expand the moral legitimacy and collective strength of the NCCP's mission and demonstrate that human rights defense is a universal spiritual imperative, transcending religious differences.

6. Improving Humanitarian and Psychosocial Support Systems

The NCCP's holistic approach must also emphasize the healing and restoration of victims of state violence and their families. Advocacy cannot end with condemnation; it must move toward compassion, accompaniment, and recovery.

Community-Based Psychosocial Programs: Establish trauma care teams within local church communities to provide pastoral counseling, healing retreats, and social reintegration for survivors.

Legal Aid and Paralegal Training: Strengthen partnerships with legal organizations such as *National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL)* to enhance support for victims' access to justice.

Livelihood and Rehabilitation Projects: Integrate humanitarian response programs that rebuild the lives of affected individuals, combining economic empowerment with spiritual care.

This combination of justice and mercy embodies the holistic ministry of Christ—the NCCP's ultimate model for human rights advocacy.

7. Deepening Internal Research and Documentation Mechanisms

Finally, the NCCP should institutionalize internal research and documentation systems to monitor, evaluate, and archive its human rights interventions.

Creation of a Human Rights Documentation Unit (HRDU): A centralized team responsible for collecting, verifying, and analyzing human rights cases from member churches and partner organizations.

Annual Human Rights Reports: Publication of evidence-based reports that combine statistical data, testimonies, and theological reflections to influence policy and public opinion.

Archival Preservation: Digitization of historical documents and advocacy materials to serve as educational and advocacy tools for future generations.

Through systematic research and documentation, the NCCP can enhance both the credibility and sustainability of its human rights mission.

Summary of Recommendations to the NCCP

Key Area	Strategic Focus
Security & Protection	Strengthen digital and organizational safety mechanisms
Youth Engagement	Build intergenerational justice formation programs

Public Communication	Amplify faith-based advocacy through media literacy
Theological Formation	Institutionalize theological reflection on social justice
Ecumenical Collaboration	Broaden interfaith alliances for collective moral action
Humanitarian Care	Integrate psychosocial, legal, and livelihood support
Research & Documentation	Create sustainable archives and policy evidence

The NCCP’s prophetic ministry must evolve with courage and creativity. The strength of its witness does not depend on institutional size or political influence, but on the depth of its faith, the integrity of its advocacy, and the authenticity of its compassion. In strengthening its internal systems and external engagement, the NCCP ensures that its mission—to *serve God by serving the oppressed*—continues to be both a moral testimony and a strategic response to the ongoing crisis of human rights in the Philippines.

The study’s findings demonstrate that persistent human rights violations, systemic red-tagging, and the shrinking civic space in the Philippines have severely undermined public trust in state institutions. The role of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) as a faith-based advocate for justice underscores the need for the government to adopt more human-rights-oriented policies that respect dissent and protect civil society actors. In this light, the following recommendations are directed toward the Philippine government and its agencies for the promotion and protection of human rights.

To the State

1. Institutionalize Accountability Mechanisms for Human Rights Violations

The cornerstone of genuine democratic governance is accountability. The state must ensure that all violations of human rights—whether committed by law enforcement, military personnel, or other state agents—are investigated promptly, impartially, and transparently.

Strengthening the Commission on Human Rights (CHR): The government should guarantee the CHR’s institutional independence by ensuring sufficient budgetary allocation, protection from political interference, and full prosecutorial powers in human rights cases.

Creation of Special Human Rights Courts: Establish dedicated judicial bodies or designate special trial courts for human rights cases to expedite legal proceedings and prevent impunity.

Internal Accountability Systems: The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) should reinforce their internal disciplinary mechanisms and cooperate fully with civilian investigative bodies.

These steps will demonstrate the state’s commitment to the rule of law and help restore public confidence in the justice system.

2. End the Practice of Red-Tagging and Harassment Against Civil Society Organizations

One of the gravest challenges facing the NCCP and similar organizations is the systematic practice of “red-tagging,” where church leaders, pastors, and human rights workers are falsely

branded as communists or terrorists. This not only endangers lives but also weakens democracy by silencing dissent.

Legislative Oversight: Congress should enact clear and enforceable anti-red-tagging legislation that defines and criminalizes the malicious labeling of individuals or organizations as enemies of the state without due process.

Executive Accountability: The Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC) and the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) must be reviewed and reoriented to ensure their operations align with human rights principles and international humanitarian law.

Public Education Campaigns: The government should undertake awareness programs to educate public officials, law enforcers, and citizens on the dangers and illegality of red-tagging, emphasizing respect for legitimate advocacy and freedom of association.

By ending red-tagging, the state can foster a more open and inclusive environment where civil society organizations like the NCCP can operate freely and safely.

3. Uphold International Human Rights Commitments

The Philippines is a signatory to numerous international treaties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Convention Against Torture (CAT). However, the effectiveness of these commitments depends on actual implementation at the national level.

Periodic Treaty Reviews: The government should regularly report and respond to recommendations made by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and other treaty bodies.

Alignment of National Laws with International Standards: Review and amend existing legislation, including the *Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020*, to ensure compliance with human rights norms and constitutional guarantees.

Collaboration with Faith-Based and Civil Society Groups: The state must actively consult with non-state actors—such as the NCCP, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), and human rights NGOs—in the drafting of human rights policies and programs.

A state that honors its international obligations signals a commitment to justice, peace, and democratic governance.

4. Strengthen Human Rights Education Across All Sectors

Human rights education (HRE) remains an essential tool in promoting a culture of respect, tolerance, and nonviolence. For the Philippines, embedding human rights values across various institutions—schools, law enforcement, and government offices—can foster long-term transformation.

Curriculum Integration: The Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) should ensure that human rights principles are fully integrated into academic curricula at all levels.

Law Enforcement Training: Continuous capacity-building and values formation should be mandated for members of the AFP, PNP, and other security agencies, focusing on ethics, nonviolence, and respect for due process.

Partnership with Faith-Based Organizations: The government can work with groups like the NCCP to develop community-based human rights education programs, especially in rural areas where violations are frequent.

Education remains one of the most sustainable defenses against authoritarianism and the culture of impunity.

5. Promote Participatory Governance and Policy Dialogue

Effective governance thrives on participation, transparency, and dialogue. The government must recognize civil society and faith-based organizations not as adversaries but as partners in nation-building.

Institutionalized Dialogue Mechanisms: Reinstate regular multi-sectoral consultations, including church groups and NGOs, in policymaking processes—particularly in areas such as peacebuilding, poverty alleviation, and environmental protection.

Inclusive Governance Frameworks: Encourage local government units (LGUs) to adopt participatory governance models that engage religious and community leaders in local development councils.

Transparency and Access to Information: Strengthen the implementation of the *Freedom of Information (FOI) Act* to ensure public access to data on human rights cases, law enforcement operations, and development projects.

A participatory approach reaffirms the democratic essence of governance and reduces the alienation between the state and the people.

6. Protect Religious Freedom and the Right to Conscientious Advocacy

The Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines guarantees freedom of religion and belief, including the right of religious institutions to engage in moral and social advocacy. However, recent incidents of harassment against clergy and church workers undermine this principle.

Legal Safeguards: Ensure that the constitutional right to religious freedom includes protection from state interference in matters of moral and social witness.

Stop Harassment of Church Workers: The Department of Justice (DOJ) should create a monitoring body to address and prosecute cases of threats, harassment, and violence against religious leaders and human rights advocates.

Encourage Ethical Partnerships: Foster cooperative relationships between the government and faith-based institutions in humanitarian work, peacebuilding, and social welfare.

Recognizing the prophetic voice of the church as essential to moral governance strengthens democracy and enriches the nation's moral fabric.

7. Institutionalize Peace and Justice Mechanisms in Policy Implementation

The Philippine government must embed human rights, peace, and justice within all its development and security programs. This means transitioning from a militarized to a human-centered approach to governance.

Mainstreaming Human Rights in Development Projects: Government agencies such as the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) must incorporate human rights impact assessments in infrastructure and resource management projects.

Independent Oversight of Security Operations: Create independent monitoring bodies—composed of legal experts, faith leaders, and civil society representatives—to review operations involving the use of force.

Peacebuilding as Governance Policy: Institutionalize peace education and conflict resolution programs within local government systems, promoting nonviolent methods of resolving disputes.

Such integration not only prevents abuses but also ensures that national development is genuinely inclusive and rights-based.

8. Support Transitional Justice and Victim Reparations

The state's moral obligation extends to acknowledging and repairing the harm done to victims of human rights violations. Transitional justice mechanisms—truth-telling, reparations, and institutional reform—are vital for national healing.

Truth Commission: Establish a national truth commission to investigate and document past human rights violations under both the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations.

Victim Compensation: Provide reparations and livelihood assistance for families of victims of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and wrongful imprisonment.

Memorialization Programs: Support the creation of national and local memorials that honor victims and serve as symbols of collective remembrance and resistance to tyranny.

Acknowledgment and restitution of past injustices are indispensable for reconciliation and the restoration of moral legitimacy in governance.

Summary of Recommendations to the State

Focus Area	Recommended Action
Accountability	Strengthen CHR, create human rights courts
Red-Tagging	Criminalize and end state-sanctioned labeling
International Standards	Align national laws with human rights treaties
Education	Institutionalize human rights education
Participatory Governance	Engage civil society in policymaking
Religious Freedom	Protect church advocacy and prophetic witness
Peace & Justice Integration	Embed human rights in all government programs
Reparations	Establish truth commissions and victim support mechanisms

A democratic state that claims legitimacy must be grounded in the moral principle of respect for human life and dignity. The government’s responsibility extends beyond the prevention of abuse; it involves actively promoting justice, truth, and peace as public values. The recommendations presented herein call for a reorientation of governance—from coercion to compassion, from impunity to accountability, and from silence to participatory truth-telling. In heeding these recommendations, the Philippine government can rebuild trust, renew democratic vitality, and uphold the sacred worth of every person—affirming that governance, when exercised justly, is indeed an act of moral stewardship.

CONCLUSIONS

The struggle for human rights in the Philippines is a continuing and often perilous journey. Across decades, the Filipino people have witnessed repeated cycles of repression, impunity, and resistance—from the Martial Law years under Ferdinand Marcos Sr. to the extrajudicial killings and militarization under Rodrigo Duterte, and continuing under the administration of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. These political regimes, despite their differences in rhetoric and governance style, share one disturbing continuity: the persistence of structural violence and the silencing of dissent in the name of “peace and order” or “national development.” Within this complex socio-political landscape, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) has remained a steadfast moral and prophetic voice. Its commitment to defend human dignity and promote social justice reflects the very essence of faith put into action.

1. The Unfinished Struggle for Human Rights

The human rights situation in the Philippines remains deeply alarming. Widespread poverty, red-tagging, political persecution, and the criminalization of activism continue to undermine democratic spaces. Communities affected by state projects—such as large-scale mining, flood control, and infrastructure development—often bear the brunt of displacement and environmental destruction. Despite the constitutional guarantees of freedom, justice, and due process, countless individuals, particularly those from marginalized sectors, continue to suffer in silence. In this context, the role of faith-based institutions becomes ever more critical. They provide not only sanctuary and solidarity but also a moral lens through which society may discern truth from deception, justice from oppression, and peace from mere subjugation. The NCCP, through its decades-long engagement in human rights advocacy, has proven that the church cannot remain a passive observer to suffering. Its mission is not confined to the pulpit or the sanctuary; rather, it extends to the streets, the communities, and the halls of power.

The NCCP's theology of liberation challenges the notion of a neutral church. It affirms that to follow Christ is to stand with the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to confront systems that perpetuate inequality and violence.

2. Faith-Based Advocacy as Prophetic Witness

At its heart, the NCCP's human rights work is a form of prophetic ministry. The prophets of the Old Testament—Amos, Micah, Isaiah—did not only call for personal repentance but also denounced social injustice and corruption. Similarly, the NCCP's engagement in human rights issues is an extension of that prophetic tradition. It calls the state to account for its failure to uphold the rule of law and protect its citizens, while simultaneously inspiring churches to live out the gospel through concrete acts of compassion and justice.

This prophetic stance often comes at a cost. Church workers have been harassed, red-tagged, and even killed for their involvement in social justice movements. Yet the NCCP continues to speak truth to power, not out of defiance, but out of fidelity to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Its work serves as a reminder that faith without justice is hollow, and worship without compassion is empty ritual. Through its witness, the NCCP transforms the Christian faith into a living, breathing force for societal change.

3. Integrating Theology and Action

One of the NCCP's greatest strengths lies in its ability to integrate theological reflection with practical action. It understands that faith and justice are inseparable—that the gospel message of love and salvation must find expression in concrete social engagement. Its programs on peacebuilding, ecological justice, indigenous rights, and humanitarian response all emerge from this deep theological foundation.

By emphasizing a contextual and liberative theology, the NCCP has helped shape an ecumenical consciousness that links personal faith with collective responsibility. This theological framework has empowered local churches to see themselves not merely as religious institutions but as agents of transformation within their communities. Through Bible studies, pastoral training, and advocacy workshops, the NCCP fosters an understanding that every believer has a role in defending the oppressed and caring for creation.

4. The Church as a Moral Compass in a Time of Crisis

In an age marked by moral confusion, fake news, and authoritarian tendencies, the church's voice remains one of the few credible sources of moral authority. The NCCP's advocacy reaffirms the belief that true peace cannot exist without justice, and genuine development cannot occur without respect for human rights. The Council's persistent call for accountability and compassion offers a stark contrast to the prevailing culture of impunity and indifference.

Moreover, the NCCP's collaborative efforts with global ecumenical partners such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) elevate the Philippine human rights struggle to the international stage. These partnerships not only expose local injustices to global scrutiny but also draw strength from a wider community of faith that believes in the universality of human dignity.

5. Hope and Commitment Moving Forward

As the Philippines continues to grapple with human rights challenges, the work of the NCCP remains both relevant and necessary. It stands as a reminder that faith communities are not powerless against injustice. The power of collective faith, rooted in compassion and courage, can confront even the most oppressive systems. The NCCP's ongoing programs on advocacy, education, and community empowerment continue to nurture a new generation of church leaders and human rights defenders who see justice as integral to their discipleship.

The journey ahead is undoubtedly difficult. Yet, the NCCP's witness invites all people of faith to persist in hope. It reminds us that the pursuit of justice is not a sprint but a pilgrimage—a continuous walk with God and with those who suffer. It is in this walking, this steadfast companionship with the poor and oppressed, that the church finds its true purpose.

6. Conclusion: Faith as Resistance, Justice as Worship

In conclusion, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines exemplifies what it means to be a church “for the people.” Its faith-based advocacy transcends institutional boundaries and political affiliations, embodying the gospel's radical call to love and justice. Through documentation, education, and prophetic witness, the NCCP has become a living testimony that religion, when rightly understood, is not an opiate but a catalyst for liberation.

The struggle for human rights in the Philippines is far from over, but through the tireless efforts of organizations like the NCCP, the light of hope continues to burn brightly. Faith becomes resistance. Justice becomes worship. And love becomes the greatest form of protest against all that dehumanizes and divides.

Ultimately, the NCCP's story reminds us that human rights advocacy is not merely a political act—it is a sacred vocation. To defend the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to speak truth to power are not just civic duties but holy imperatives, flowing from the heart of the gospel itself. As the prophet Micah declared, and as the NCCP continues to embody: *“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”* (Micah 6:8)

REFERENCES

Annual Human Rights Reports. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP).

Human Rights Reports and Statements. Various Years. National Council of Churches in the Philippines.

Philippines: Human Rights in the Time of Duterte. (2021). Amnesty International.
Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (1948). United Nations.

Pocong, F., Mallorca, R., Batulan, K., & Comison, B. (2025). The Face of Child Labor in the Philippines: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Laws and Policies. *Asian Research Journal of Education*, 2(3), 75-81.
<https://myeduheart.com/publications/journals/IJIMR>

WCC & NCCP Joint Statements on Human Rights. (2018–2023).