

## Activists in Exile: Possible Actions for Solidarity using the Example of Myanmar and the Philippines

Massive restrictions on civil society spaces, arbitrary arrests and death threats force many activists into exile. The search for sanctuary is a difficult and exhausting process. It also contradicts the urge of activists to remain active in their home country. Yet for many, this protection is vital. A dilemma with existential consequences for individuals and entire movements. How can threatened activists be supported and protected? What is needed for a common solidarity work with the country of origin? An exchange about strategies of solidarity.

Clarizza Dagatan (Karapatan Negros)

Nyein Chan May (German Solidarity with Myanmar Democracy e.V.)

Hannah Wolf (Action Alliance Human Rights-Philippines)

Moderation: Majid Lenz (Stiftung Asienhaus), Mirjam Overhoff (philippinenbüro e.V.)



Clarizza Dagatan and Nyein Chan May first gave an introduction about the situation in their respective home countries, the Philippines and Myanmar.

“In the Philippines,” Clarizza Dagatan said, “if people organize to uphold their people’s rights, the powerful elite - landlords in cohort with the state - immediately suppresses those advances”. Nyein Chan May told us that 12,400 people are in detention in Myanmar according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).

Nyein Chan May left Myanmar in 2020, where she founded the first student union in 2012 and positioned herself as a pro-democracy activist and now as an anti-junta activist. Clarizza Dagatan was likewise a student

activist since “way back” in the 80s. Dagatan is in Germany because she cannot live with every day death threats, as her colleagues are constantly getting killed with impunity. She said: “That’s why we are here: to keep us alive, to continue upholding our human rights work”. An introduction of how the Action Alliance Human Rights-Philippines tries to support and [protect the activists](#) in exile was subsequently given by Hannah Wolf.

We then collectively discussed **challenges in exile**, which the present activists said were to get attention from the global community while also struggling with their mental health, like suffering PTSD and sleepless nights. Their struggle may weigh even heavier due to other marginalizations such as ageism and standardized German bureaucracy, for example the asylum seeking process. It was mentioned that **in order for the situation in their home countries to change**, we have to collectively listen in an intersectional manner to the locals, abolish patriarchal structures as well as provide democracy education. Human rights organizations from abroad may help with improvement in the home country, even including bilateral humanitarian communication between governments and parliaments.

Some called themselves lucky enough to have had connections abroad that care about their well-being, which may **help or support improving the overall situation** for the activists in distress. Good host organizations, such as the church or NGOs may be able to help with the asylum application. It was emphasized that one should get creative and things that may seem arbitrary at first, were very important values like having friends that act in good faith.