

International People's Tribunal: Seeking Accountability for War Crimes against the Filipino people



INTERNATIONAL
PEOPLES TRIBUNAL

We are publishing this question and answer primer to explain the key findings, evidence and proceedings of the International People's Tribunal on War Crimes in the Philippines. Convened in May 2024 in Brussels, Belgium, the tribunal addressed serious allegations of war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) committed in the Philippines. The following questions and answers aim to offer a clear and concise overview of the tribunal's conclusions and context of its verdict.

What is the International People’s Tribunal on War Crimes in the Philippines?

The International People’s Tribunal on War Crimes in the Philippines was a tribunal convened to address allegations of war crimes and violations of IHL in the Philippines. It convened on May 17-18, 2024, in Brussels, Belgium, to issue its findings and conclusions.

Who are the defendants in this tribunal?

The defendants are President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr, former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, President Joseph R. Biden, and the Government of the United States of America.

What are the charges against the defendants?

The charges include:

- Killing and massacre of civilians.
- Abduction, torture and other cruel, inhumane and degrading treatments.
- Directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects.
- Forced displacement of civilians.
- Acts or threats of violence intended to spread terror among the civilian population.
- Impeding humanitarian aid.
- Use of means and methods of warfare that are indiscriminate, cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering, or cause widespread long-term and severe damage to the natural environment.

What kind of evidence were presented to the tribunal?

Evidence presented included:

- **Oral testimonies:** The tribunal heard a total of fifteen witnesses, including eight in person and seven through video deposition. Eleven were either victims or their family members and colleagues, while four were experts or resource persons.
- **Victims and family members:** Testimonies from survivors and families of those affected by the violence provided firsthand accounts of the atrocities committed.
- **Experts and resource persons:** These included professionals who provided context and analysis of the human rights and IHL violations in the Philippines, based on their expertise and research.
- **Written evidence:** This included affidavits, written statements, letters and other documents containing accounts or statements by victims and witnesses.
- **Publications and reports:** Various reports, publications and resolutions were submitted to support the allegations and provide a broader context of the situation in the Philippines.
- **Multimedia evidence:** Photographs, audio and video recordings were presented to corroborate the testimonies and provide visual and auditory evidence of the violations.

What were the key findings of the tribunal?

The tribunal made several key findings:

- The conflict between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) qualifies as an armed conflict under international law.
- Both the GRP and NDFP are bound by IHL and human rights laws.
- The GRP's counterinsurgency operations involved repeated attacks against civilians, extrajudicial killings, indiscriminate bombings, forced displacements and other violations.
- The GRP engaged in summary executions, outrages upon personal dignity and degrading treatment of captured or wounded combatants.

- Individuals and organizations suspected of links with the NDFP were persecuted through abductions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and in some cases, summary execution or liquidation.
- The United States provided significant support to the GRP directing its operations, training and providing war materiel in its counterinsurgency campaign, making it complicit in the violations.

What was the ruling of the tribunal?

The tribunal unanimously found the defendants GUILTY OF ALL CHARGES of war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law as alleged in the indictment.

What are the next steps following the verdict?

The tribunal will issue a full decision containing detailed findings and will continue to monitor the situation in the Philippines. Copies of the verdict will be served to the defendants and published for various international bodies and interested parties.

Who were the jurors in this tribunal?

The panel of jurors included:

- Lennox Hinds** was head juror. He is a distinguished attorney and law professor with extensive experience in international human rights law. Hinds has been involved in numerous high-profile cases and has a reputation for his work in civil rights. He served as Nelson Mandela's attorney in the United States and acted as U.S. counsel for the South African government, the African National Congress of South Africa, and the South West Africa People's Organisation of Namibia. He is the permanent representative to the United Nations for the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. In 1998, the UN appointed him as lead counsel to represent defendants accused by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda of genocide, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. He is among the few U.S. attorneys selected by the United Nations to join the panel of defense lawyers.

• **Suzanne Adely** is the president of the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) and a known labor and human rights lawyer. She is a known advocate for workers' rights and social justice.

• **Séverine De Laveleye** is a member of the Belgian parliament and an experienced legal professional with a background in international law and human rights. She has been involved in various international tribunals and has a strong focus on humanitarian issues.

• **Julen Arzuaga** is a Basque parliamentarian and a human rights lawyer and activist with a deep commitment to defending the rights of oppressed peoples. He has a significant background in legal advocacy and human rights documentation.

• **Joris Vercammen** is a former priest and professor in the Old Catholic Seminary ng University of Utrecht. Through his relations with the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, he supported the GRP-NDFP peace negotiations for more than two decades. He is also an active human rights advocate.

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