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Physicians for
Human Rights

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July 24, 2017

Dr. Paulyn Jean Roselli-Ubial, MPH, CESO II
Secretary of Health
Republic of the Philippines

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Dear Dr. Ubial

We are writing to call your attention to recent reports alleging that health professionals in several Filipino hospitals are being coerced into assisting in the cover-up of extrajudicial killings. As the leader of the public health system in the Philippines, we call upon you and your colleagues to undertake a prompt, fair, and impartial investigation of these claims and take all measures necessary to ensure that no health staff or health systems under your authority take part in human rights abuses. We also call on national and international legal bodies to aggressively investigate the criminal acts at the core of these allegations, the extrajudicial killings by police and other agents of the government of the Philippines.

One of the allegations made is that police have developed the practice of transporting the bodies of already-deceased persons to local hospitals, where health staff are commanded or coerced to make some gestures of medical intervention so as to obfuscate the details relating to death. This allegation, if true, interrupts the fair and impartial investigation of crime scenes and also serves to co-opt doctors, nurses, and other health professionals to avoid accountability for human rights abuses and other illegal acts. Given the nature of the hospitals and staff mentioned in this reporting, it may be that attending physicians, residents, medical students, nurses, nursing students, and other staff were aware of or participated in these actions. Such practices would not only erode efforts to build accountability for these abuses, they would also severely damage the independence and ethical standing of any health providers and systems involved in these practices.

We recognize the difficult position that your agency is in as the legal authority charged with health promotion and health care delivery in the Philippines while extrajudicial killings are occurring on a daily basis. In order to address the severity of the allegations detailed in the report this week, we call for an independent investigation to assess whether any hospital administrators, physicians, nurses, medical residents, and nursing students have been (or are currently) involved in such practices. These concerns have also been raised with the World Medical Association, which will investigate independently. We also call upon your agency and those copied below to reconsider current certifications, licensures, accreditations, and partnerships with Filipino hospitals and training programs until and unless these allegations are addressed in a transparent manner.

Sincerely,

Homer Venters, MD, MS
Director of Programs
Physicians for Human Rights

cc: Philippine Nursing Association
Association of Deans of Philippine Colleges of Nursing
Joint Commission International
CGFNS Alliance/International Standards for Professional Nurses Program
International Organization for Standardization
Federation of State Medical Boards
National Council of State Boards of Nursing