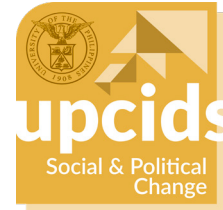




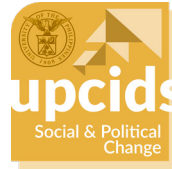
**Embassy of Sweden
Manila**



Democracy Talks in Manila

The Role of Youth Voices in Democracy

Webinar report, 8 December 2020



Democracy Talks in Manila

The Role of Youth Voices in Democracy

Webinar report, 8 December 2020

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Embassy of Sweden, Manila and the Program on Social and Political Change,
Center for Integrative and Development Studies, University of the Philippines

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Contents

Background	5
Highlights of the webinar	7
Opening remarks	9
Welcome remarks	10
Presentation of IDEA’s Global Monitor of Covid-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights.....	11
Relevant findings from the constitutional performance assessment	13
Facilitated roundtable discussion on youth views on Philippine democracy	15
Questions from the audience.....	20
Closing and synthesis	22
References.....	23
Annex A. Global State of Democracy country profile: The Philippines 2019	24
Annex B. About the speakers	29
Annex C. Programme	32
Acknowledgement	33

Background

On 8 December 2020, the Embassy of Sweden in Manila, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the Program on Social and Political Change at the University of the Philippines' Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) organized a webinar entitled 'Democracy Talks in Manila: The Role of Youth Voices in Democracy'. The webinar is a part of the Swedish Government's Drive for Democracy initiative, which aims to provide support to the institutions, processes and defenders of democracy around the world, while responding to growing threats and challenges facing democracy. This initiative includes co-organizing 'Democracy Talks' with partners globally. Participants in the Manila Democracy Talks webinar included students, youth leaders and youth advocates of democracy and human rights.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected democratic and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, human rights and access to public health in many countries. While some countries have declared a legitimate state of emergency to respond to the pandemic, some have used them as an excuse to curtail specific and critical democratic rights.

According to International IDEA's Global Monitor on Covid-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, the sweeping powers the Philippine government put in place to address Covid-19 resulted in a media crackdown and the concentration of power in the executive branch. These powers have affected specific fundamental rights in the country, particularly freedom of expression, media integrity and predictable enforcement. Moreover, the Global Monitor states that these new powers can further aggravate the country's democratic backsliding process that began in 2015.

To respond to these challenges to democracy, the webinar emphasized the importance of youth in upholding the Philippines' democratic values, especially in light of Covid-19. The webinar's objectives were: (a) to engage young people as a priority target group for the Drive for Democracy in general and in the Democracy Talks in particular; (b) to discuss what democracy means, the current state of democracy in the Philippines and the challenges democracy is facing globally and locally; (c) to question how the young people want democracy to develop; and (d) to identify concrete recommendations on how democracy and its building blocks can be strengthened going forward. The questions and recommendations from the Manila webinar will input into a larger dialogue at the Democracy Talks in Stockholm, Sweden in 2021.

The first part of the webinar included opening remarks by Ambassador Harald Fries, welcome remarks by Dr Kevin Casas-Zamora, Secretary-General of International IDEA, and a presentation on International IDEA's Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Philippines profile by Amanda Cats-Baril, Programme Manager and Regional Advisor for International IDEA. Professor Maria Ela Atienza, Co-Convenor of the UP CIDS Program on Social and Political Change, also shared relevant findings from the Constitutional Performance Assessment of the 1987 Philippine Constitution projects, conducted in partnership with International IDEA ([Atienza et al. 2020a](#), [2020b](#)).

The second part of the Democracy Talks webinar was a roundtable discussion on youth views of Philippine democracy, facilitated by Nyla Prieto, Programme Officer for Asia and the Pacific, International IDEA. The youth discussants were Dr R. J. Naguit (Founder of Youth for Mental Health Coalition, Inc., and National Chairperson of Akbayan Youth), Vince Renzo M. Liban (National Convener, Philippine Anti-Discrimination Alliance of Youth Leaders—PANTAY), Kira Velasco (Chairperson, Amarela Philippines), Robyn Camille Mijares (Executive Director, Youth Uprising) and Sohaila Macadato (Project Officer, UnYPhil-Women). The Democracy Talks webinar ended with closing remarks by Leena Rikkilä Tamang, Director for Asia and the Pacific, International IDEA.

Highlights of the webinar

Challenges to Philippine democracy amid Covid-19

One of the main themes discussed in the webinar were the challenges to democracy posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The speakers highlighted the various threats experienced by different countries, including the declaration of states of emergency, which were used by leaders to curtail certain democratic rights. Several of the speakers stated that the pandemic has exposed the already existing vulnerabilities of democracies. Policies were implemented by some countries to silence the opposition and to limit the access to information under the guise of Covid-19 protections.

The webinar also highlighted the challenges that democracy is facing in the Philippines, both new challenges caused by the pandemic and pre-existing challenges, as well as the relationship between these. The keynote speakers discussed issues such as democratic backsliding, the need for electoral reforms and accessible electoral processes for all sectors of Philippine society, and the growing social inequality among Filipinos. As discussed in the different sessions of the webinar, the pandemic has worsened these problems, especially from the perspective of democratic participation, human rights and the rule of law.

Some of the youth discussants also shared some of the challenges to Philippine democracy that they are witnessing. These include attacks on press freedom, a lack of civil society participation, a lack of access to public health resources, and the weak political party system, which limits the democratic participation of citizens.

Despite the challenges to democracy, the webinar also emphasized several opportunities for upholding democracy. The keynote speakers enumerated positive indicators, such as reforms to the Philippine judiciary, the prompt response of specific local government units and the increased activities of youth groups during the pandemic.

Importance of youth participation in upholding Philippine democracy

With the various challenges to democracy, the webinar highlighted the importance of engaging youth and allowing them to participate in conversations that are critical to upholding democratic values. The speakers and youth discussants argued that it is critical for the ideas of the youth to be turned into action.

The speakers talked about the critical role of the youth in ensuring that there are opportunities for participation and change, especially in terms of democratic processes, such as elections. Moreover, the youth discussants provided a number of ideas in which they can protect and uphold democratic values. According to the discussants, it is important to give youth the opportunity to be educated and to participate in discussions about policies that will affect them. The youth of the Philippines



The Role of Youth Voices in Democracy an online forum

8 December 2020
3:00 PM PHT via Zoom

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are experiencing several of the problems and injustices happening in the country, especially during the pandemic, and they want to help in solving these issues. The discussants further emphasized that the government should engage civil society in order to come up with better policies that will be beneficial for all citizens.

Lastly, the speakers talked about the importance of the international community in protecting democracy and ensuring youth participation. The youth discussants stated that continuous solidarity among countries with regards to protecting democracy and human rights defenders is very important, especially during the pandemic. Resources and opportunities to learn are equally significant so that the youth and other sectors can have the tools necessary to effectively protect democratic values.

Opening remarks

H. E. Harald Fries, Ambassador of Sweden to the Philippines

'Democracy is the best foundation for human rights, rule of law, and for a fair, decent, and sustainable society.'

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Fries highlighted the impact of Covid-19 on democracy. According to the Ambassador, democracy is under threat in many parts of the world. Ambassador Fries pointed out that more people are living in countries with increasingly authoritarian tendencies than in countries where democracy is gaining ground. Moreover, Covid-19 aggravated this alarming trend. The pandemic has the greatest impact on poor people and on marginalized individuals. Most importantly, Ambassador Fries stated that some world leaders have used the pandemic as an excuse to violate human rights in order to silence the opposition, civil society and human rights defenders.

Ambassador Fries emphasized that it is essential to involve the youth in contributing to international discussions about the protection of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Students, youth activists and youth groups are all essential actors in a vibrant society. Lastly, Ambassador Fries stated that the youth's perspectives on the current state of democracy will help with strengthening youth participation, in terms of protecting democratic values.

Welcome remarks

Dr Kevin Casas-Zamora, Secretary-General, International IDEA

'Democracy dies in silence—without information and freedom of expression, without knowledge, without participation, and without a voice.'

In his welcome remarks, Dr Casas-Zamora thanked the Swedish Embassy's prioritization of democracy, including through its Democracy Talks initiative. In addition, he highlighted the significance of focusing on the role of the youth in democracy.

Casas-Zamora emphasized the concept of sustainable democracy, referring to 'rethinking, reforming, and revitalizing' democracy to be better able to cope with current and future challenges. Some of these challenges include intergenerational such as climate change or the technological transformation of societies. Casas-Zamora further highlighted that young people should be at the heart of decision-making about such societal transformations because they are the ones who will live in the world formed by decisions being made today.

According to Casas-Zamora, the webinar's focus on the role of the youth and the democratic trends in relation to Covid-19 will allow young people to think about what democracy means to them. Casas-Zamora argued that these discussions are in line with one of International IDEA's conferences for its 25th anniversary, which was held a few weeks before the webinar. The conference presented the convergence of sustainable democracy, youth participation and climate change. In this conference, Casas-Zamora stated that young people were able to conclude that access to information and inclusive participation are critical to the eradication of inequalities, discrimination and marginalization. These points are important because they have shown how the youth can see that the fate of democracy is linked to the struggle against inequality, in terms of rights and access to opportunities. Casas-Zamora further argued that equality is a foundational principle of democracy, on a par with freedom. He stated that the pandemic has worsened the vulnerabilities of democracies around the world. Young people are aware that democracy has been suffering due to the pandemic, and Casas-Zamora argued that this cognizance should be turned into action.

Moreover, Casas-Zamora discussed some of the key findings from International IDEA's GSoD Indices (2020b), with updates in the Global Monitor (2020a), including the pandemic's acceleration of many vulnerabilities and deficits of democratic systems. Casas-Zamora emphasized the importance of 'Democracy Talks' because this is the best time to speak up and uphold democracy. It is also important to revitalize and align democracy with the ideals of young people so that they have the will to defend it.

Presentation of IDEA's Global Monitor of Covid-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights

Amanda Cats-Baril, Programme Manager, MyConstitution project, and Regional Advisor on Constitution-Building for Asia and the Pacific, International IDEA

'States of emergencies are often the basis for concerning democratic developments or restrictions on democratic principles and human rights.'

Cats-Baril began by speaking about International IDEA's collaboration with UP CIDS, especially in the continuous assessment of the performance of the 1987 Philippine Constitution towards its own goals of delivering and sustaining democracy in a post-Marcos era. Cats-Baril stated that these assessments are essential to grounding discussions about whether the Constitution should be changed in evidence. The initial assessment ([Atienza et al. 2020a](#)) was updated later in 2020 ([Atienza et al. 2020b](#)) to reflect on the impact of the pandemic on constitutional performance in the Philippines.

In her presentation, Cats-Baril discussed the global state of democracy and the GSoD Indices (International IDEA 2020b) that International IDEA uses for assessing countries' democratic performance, as well as presenting on the specific profile of the Philippines (International IDEA 2020c).

Based on the GSoD Indices and associated data and analysis, the Philippines has been a functioning democracy since the passage of the 1987 Constitution. Since then, the country's democracy has been sustained and uninterrupted. However, the findings have shown that there was a slight decline in the quality of democracy, beginning in 2019 and continuing through the pandemic. Cats-Baril further stated that, according to the GSoD, the Philippines is a mid-range performing democracy, showing no areas of significant concern but no areas of excellence.

Globally, the Philippines ranks in the world's top 25 per cent of democracies for electoral government and electoral participation. According to Cats-Baril, this is a testament to how democracy has been consolidated in the country over the years. These democratic processes involve the conduct of regular elections and peaceful transfers of power across administrations. On the other hand, the Philippines belongs to the world's bottom 25 per cent in terms of social group equality and issues of personal integrity and security. In terms of regional and global trends in democratic attributes, the Philippines has no significant deviation when it comes to democratic performance: there is higher than average electoral participation, especially from 1975 to 1995.

Cats-Baril then presented the findings on [Philippine actions in response to the pandemic](#) and their impact on democratic performance (International IDEA 2020c). From March to September 2020, more than half of the countries in the world declared a national state of emergency. By October, Cats-Baril highlighted that around 43 per cent of countries had lifted their respective states of emergency. She further highlighted that this is an interesting development due to the uncertainty of timelines and the impact of states of emergency on the restriction of fundamental rights and

freedoms. She highlighted that one of the upcoming challenges will be to end states of emergency and ensuring that these do not become the 'new normal'.

Cats-Baril stated that, in the Philippines, no actual 'state of emergency' was declared under the Constitution, but emergency expedited procedures derived from the Constitution were used to pass the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act in March 2020 (Philippines 2020), a law that was enacted granting the Philippine President additional authority to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. Prior to this, President Rodrigo R. Duterte declared other types of emergencies using existing legislations, including the Public Health Concern Act and the Disaster Act. Cats-Baril emphasized that the government's use of various pieces of legislation, without having to invoke a constitutional state of emergency and martial law, is a notable characteristic of the country's pandemic response. With regards to the Philippines' Covid-19 response, Cats-Baril pointed out that there are several aspects to watch from a democracy and human rights perspective. These include the consolidation of power in the executive branch and the lack of meaningful opposition in the Congress. Cats-Baril argued that there is a cult of personality surrounding President Duterte and this could pose a challenge to the separation of powers and limit oversight of the executive by other branches, as envisioned in the Constitution. Moreover, this could accelerate the democratic backsliding that the country has exhibited since 2019. Additionally, the country's response to the pandemic has been highly militarized. This resulted in the arrest of 120,000 individuals for alleged violations of curfew. Cats-Baril also cited reports of the degrading treatment of individuals being detained. The President's 'shoot-to-kill' order for citizens violating curfew is also concerning. Cats-Baril emphasized that these rhetorical responses have been consistent with trends occurring in the Philippines even before the pandemic. Furthermore, demolition of informal settlements and eviction of low-income families have become apparent during the pandemic. These families are left homeless and will encounter difficulties in complying with quarantine orders. Cats-Baril argued that these trends are concerning, especially the militarized response and the detainment of curfew violators.

Another concerning development for the country's democracy and human rights is the impact on the peace process with the New People's Army and the prosecution of journalists and individuals who spread false information related to Covid-19, as stipulated in the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act.

On the other hand, Cats-Baril also noted that the pandemic has provided a unique experience to examine the impacts of the recent transition to increased autonomy in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). To date, it seems that this transition has enabled BARMM to respond more effectively to the pandemic and to mobilize resources to this end more quickly than other local government units and regions. While it is too early to say, it is possible that this experience could support arguments for increased decentralization and even federalism in the Philippines.

Relevant findings from the constitutional performance assessment

Professor Maria Ela Atienza, Co-Convenor, UP CIDS Program on Social and Political Change

‘The youth sector is a very important group that will have to make sure that there is proper information available about the Constitution, a proper assessment of the Constitution should be made periodically, and what are the opportunities for change both institutionally and in terms of implementation should be assessed and understood.’

In this part of the webinar, Atienza shared some of the findings of two publications that UP CIDS conducted in partnership with International IDEA: *Constitutional Performance Assessment of the 1987 Philippine Constitution* (Atienza et al. 2020a) and *Constitutional Performance Assessment in the Time of a Pandemic: The 1987 Constitution and the Philippines’ Covid-19 Response* (Atienza et al. 2020b). The collaboration consisted of adapting and applying International IDEA’s methodology for assessing constitutional performance to the Philippines context. The methodology is a multi-pronged approach that allows a nuanced analysis of whether a country’s constitutional performance (good or bad) is rooted in the substance and design of its constitution or in its implementation. The methodology relies on internal and external criteria to assess a constitution’s performance. The internal criteria are based on the constitution’s self-defined goals, including the constitutional provisions that relate to specific institutions and the compliance with the technical requirements stated in the constitution. On the other hand, the external criteria refer to the normative criteria of what a constitution should be and do, in accordance with global practices and theory, and are used to assess the constitution’s design. Atienza highlighted that there were modifications to the external criteria based on the existing literature on constitutional assessment worldwide. Democratization, decentralization, social justice, human rights, gender equality, peace and conflict resolution, and economic development were included in the external criteria. In addition, the performance assessment methodology looks at two different types of compliance. The first is called thin compliance, which can be described through straightforward evidence (i.e. whether institutions are created, appointments are made, and laws are adopted in a timely manner as called for by the constitution). The second one, which is referred to as thick compliance, examines whether substantive goals are met—for example, if the constitution envisioned a constrained executive, is effective oversight being enabled in practice by the design of the constitution?

For the first general assessment of the Philippines’ constitutional performance prior to Covid-19 (Atienza et al. 2020a), Atienza stated that, overall, there is only thin compliance with the Constitution. Many of the technical requirements of the Constitution have been met; however, thick compliance, to achieve substantive goals and deepen democracy, is lacking. Moreover, some laws mandated by the Constitution have not yet been enacted. For instance, there are no laws that allow for the easy accessibility of electoral rights for the elderly and people with disabilities. In addition, there are no laws yet that limit or ban political dynasties, as stipulated in the Constitution. Although there are notable developments when it comes to the external criteria, Atienza pointed out that there is still

a long way to go with respect to promoting substantial democratization, decentralization, social justice, human rights, gender equality, peace and conflict resolution, and economic development. In terms of recommendations, Atienza emphasized that it is possible to combine amendments to the Constitution with the passage of new laws, amendments of existing laws, administrative reforms on specific agencies, and stricter implementation of existing laws in order to achieve many of the Constitution's goals.

The updated assessment conducted in the Covid-19 era (Atienza et al. 2020b) showed that the problematic areas in the previous assessment have been aggravated by the pandemic. Atienza stated that these involved the separation of powers, checks and balances, and the issue of citizenship and labour rights. Even areas that showed positive performance in the previous assessment are being challenged as a result of the pandemic. Despite these challenges, Atienza noted that there are some positive innovations, specifically in the judiciary and local governments. She argued that these innovations can serve as inspirations for other institutions to improve in order to achieve the key goals of the Constitution (i.e. decentralization, autonomy and social justice), even in the absence of constitutional reform. As Atienza suggested, while the future of the amendment process is slowed down due to Covid-19, it remains important to continuously assess the ways in which the Constitution is fulfilling its goals and the ways in which it is being challenged. Atienza argued that this can allow for sub-constitutional changes and innovations, such as the ones presented in the two studies.

Atienza also highlighted some of the threats to democracy in the Philippines that have been identified by the studies and by the *Global State of Democracy 2019* report (International IDEA 2019). A specific example of this is how the pandemic exposed the dominance of the executive (i.e. the office of the president and the different executive agencies). She also highlighted the challenges to the judiciary as an institution and on individual members. Accountability institutions, such as the Commission on Audit, are present, yet they can be slow in terms of holding specific institutions accountable. The challenges local governments face, when it comes to meeting the requirements of responding to a pandemic, include issues around freedom of the press, freedom of information and individuals identified as part of the opposition being attacked. There is also the disproportionate role of the military and the security sector in the pandemic response. Atienza argued that there should be more civilian-oriented strategies in order to respond to the needs of citizens. She also emphasized how the rights of various labour groups, including Overseas Filipino Workers, are being threatened by the government's response, considering that these groups have been hit hard by the pandemic. Social inequality, which has always been present, was worsened by the pandemic.

Despite the threats to democracy, Atienza highlighted a number of innovations that can serve as openings for participation from different sectors. These include discussions about making elections safer, more accessible, more effective and more equitable for various sectors. In addition, different sectors of society have been petitioning the judiciary to rule on the basis of the Constitution against some government actions, even with the threats that the institution is facing (e.g. citizens' concerns about the Anti-Terrorism Act). Atienza stated that the judiciary has implemented reforms in response to the pandemic, such as digitization of its processes. She also stated that many local government units have stepped up in terms of their Covid-19 response. Finally, Atienza highlighted that several youth groups have been coordinating with different communities to respond to the challenges brought about by the pandemic.

Atienza concluded that, while the goal of the assessment is to assess state institutions, it is important to highlight that the Philippine Constitution will only work if both elites and the people respect the Constitution and work towards democracy and to promote the changes envisioned in the Constitution.

Facilitated roundtable discussion on youth views on Philippine democracy

During the facilitated roundtable discussion, the youth discussants shared their perspectives on how they viewed democracy before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, what they think should be the priority areas of civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector and the government for strengthening Philippine democracy, how the youth can contribute in promoting and protecting democratic values at the local, national and international levels, and how they think international cooperation can help in protecting democracy. Below are the highlights from the discussion.

Question: How would you describe our democracy before and currently with the Covid-19 pandemic? What worries you the most regarding Philippine democracy today?

Answer from Dr R. J. Naguit: There are a lot of things that we should be worried about when it comes to Philippine democracy. The threats started in 2016, when President Duterte came into power. At the institutional level, there have been different attacks. For instance, the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) was threatened with being defunded, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was removed and the President also has the backing from the super majority at the House of Representatives. These issues are concerning, especially with respect to the checks and balances that we have right now. Sustainable democracy is also a very important concept that we need to address, especially when we talk about the translation of political democracy. Right now, what we're seeing is that we're having elections, but they are still being controlled by the political and economic elites. If we want to realize the fruits of democracy, it should be enjoyed by everyone and not just by a very small section of society. We have also seen several instances where critiques were silenced—we have a Senator who's already jailed because of drug-related charges, we have the filing of a sedition case against members of the opposition, even our own party chairperson was barraged with cases related to the drug war. There is also harassment of media outlets like Rappler and ABS-CBN. With the pandemic, all of these have worsened. The Covid-19 Inter-Agency Task Force for The Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases, the agency created by the government to respond to the pandemic, consisted of cabinet members and military officials, leading to a militarized response to the pandemic. Despite Filipinos facing risks like hunger, joblessness, health and political risks, the Congress still passed the Anti-Terrorism Act, which allowed the government to name anyone as a terrorist. This is a very big threat, especially when we talk about dissent and those who are fighting for human rights and democracy. Another issue is the attack on press freedom. ABS-CBN, one of the largest media networks, was shut down. This produced a chilling effect not only on media outlets, but also on student publications. Even those who have expressed their views online have been summoned by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) and shamed by local government units. Some of the activists we work with have been arrested and some have been killed. This is a

very big issue, and the thing that really worries me is the continuing narrowing of the space for democracy, dissent and dialogue. These are all very important concepts of democracy that we should all be defending right now.

Answer from Sohaila Macadato: I will be more specific to the local region in the Bangsamoro. It's somehow similar to what RJ mentioned. In the Bangsamoro, we have membership in parties

Democracy Talks in Manila







The Role of Youth Voices in Democracy








8 December 2020

3:00 pm Manila | 8:00 am Stockholm | 6:00 pm Canberra

The Embassy of Sweden in Manila, International IDEA, and the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) are co-hosting an online forum that explores the vital role of youth involvement and participation in preserving democracy.

Special Remarks	Keynote Speakers	Moderator			
 Dr. Kevin Casas-Zamora Secretary General International IDEA	 H.E. Harald Fries Ambassador Embassy of Sweden in Manila	 Leena Rikkila Tamang Director for Asia and the Pacific International IDEA	 Amanda Cats - Baril Regional Advisor International IDEA	 Dr. Maria Ela Atienza Convener UP CIDS	 Nyla Grace Prieto Programme Officer, Asia and the Pacific International IDEA

Youth Discussants

 Dr. RJ Naguit National Chairperson Akabayan Youth	 Vince Liban National Convener PANTAY	 Kira Velasco Chairperson Amarela Philippines	 Sohaila Macadato Project Officer UnY-Phil-Women	 Robyn Mijares Executive Director Youth Uprising
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declining because we are facing a newly formed government. Aside from the transition period, we are also facing the Covid-19 pandemic in our region. We have been struggling, especially women and the youth, to ensure our participation in the region's transition to greater autonomy under the Bangsamoro Organic Law. It is very important for us to really participate in this transition period because this is the time when policies, guidelines and laws will be made by our parliament. Also, we have this public opinion towards parties. Nowadays, we only have one party in the Bangsamoro. Somehow, it is challenging to engage women and young people to establish parties for them to really participate in our new form of government. It is also the same in the Philippine context: we are being dominated by political and economic elites and everything is built around personalities, rather than political programmes or platforms. I also think there is an underdeveloped political party system. We call this *balimbing* party because we do not focus on the programmes or platforms that they are actually advocating for. There is also weak membership. In the Philippines, there are a lot of political parties, but in our region, we don't see opportunities for us to see what these parties stand for. It's confusing for us young people in the Bangsamoro. We also see the absence of a general party law in the Philippines. I think this is a struggle for the youth and women to connect with our national parties and our democratic system. We are looking forward to women and youth being included in our democracy.

Question: In your opinion, which priority areas should CSOs, the private sector and government focus on to strengthen Philippine democracy?

Answer from Vince Liban: Ever since we transitioned into a democracy in 1986, the challenge has been to deepen it. The Philippine democracy has always been vulnerable. Despite the best efforts of the 1987 Constitution, many democratic policies have not been implemented. There is an absence of an anti-political dynasty law, the electoral system remains prone to being abused by the ruling class, we have a lack of civil society participation and a weak political party system to begin with. Now we are encountering disinformation campaigns and the demonization of human rights amid the pandemic. At this point, the Philippine government should focus more of its efforts on strengthening public health policy. During this crisis, the situation of marginalized groups has been aggravated. People with disabilities, the elderly and children are facing greater barriers in terms of access to health services. There are also cases of degrading treatment towards the LGBTQ+ people who have allegedly violated curfew. Some individuals were made to perform lewd acts in Pampanga. Trans women were arrested and punished by cutting their hair in Zamboanga City. There is also social isolation and the lack of access to better health services. There are problems of unemployment and increased cases of mental health problems, not to mention the invisibility of gay people in research and indices of democracy. In terms of policy, I think a huge part where the government should come in is to engage the civil society better. We have seen the rise of civil society and the weak government coordination—the ailing public health system, a malleable education system, a regressive public transportation and mobility, and the worsening environment and climate crisis. There are a lot of issues that the government should address in view of Covid-19. Despite the challenges of addressing the pandemic, there are a lot of opportunities to look at these issues in terms of causes and policies that involve human rights. I hope the government will not continue demonizing human rights and democracy.

Answer from Robyn Mijares: The health risks posed by Covid-19 have limited the movement of people, thus posing a risk to engagement. I guess the worst fear is that important key decisions are being made by just a few and not involving the majority, especially not youth. We are not even encouraged or allowed to go out at all. This made it harder for us to participate. But I will admit that we are not completely helpless. What I have observed is there is a rise in youth organizations, not only in numbers but also in terms of activities during this pandemic. I think it's because this generation is so tech savvy, and that's one of the strengths of the youth. It's amazing to see that the youth is still trying to participate and help by being able to adapt to online conversations.

Question: How can the youth contribute to promoting and protecting democratic values at the local, national and international levels?

Answer from Kira Velasco: I think that the youth has lots of opportunities, especially right now. Like what Robyn said, there has been a steady rise in youth organizations and youth participation. In the pandemic, personally, I have seen lots of injustices that I believe I can correct as a teenager. I think one way that the youth can protect democracy is through education. Once we've been given the proper resources and the proper opportunities to engage in political discussions or to be educated when it comes to Philippine politics, we can really protect our democracy. We see what needs to be done and what can be done in the future. As everyone knows, the youth is really the future of our country and the decisions that leaders make now will affect our future greatly. If you limit the access of the youth when it comes to civic participation and political participation, you limit our access to our future. You also limit our decision-making processes and the chance for us to grow into our leadership and values. Education and opening up opportunities not just during the pandemic, but especially after—making sure to encourage the youth in your family or the youth in your circles to participate in processes such as voting, encouraging more people to register to vote for the upcoming elections—these do a lot in protecting our democracy. I have seen that the youth really want to protect the future and correct the injustices as long as we are given the opportunities to do so.

Question: How do you think international cooperation can help in protecting our democracy?

Answer from Kira Velasco: One good example is holding webinars like this. I'm fairly young and I have never been given this kind of opportunity before. It was really amazing to see this invitation to Amarela because it came from an international organization and it wasn't something that I thought would be possible. Giving resources such as webinars or information like the papers that UP writes in terms of what's happening in the pandemic and the impact on democracy. Internationally, I think helping youth identify where their government is waning when it comes to democracy helps. Helping the government see where they can improve and giving assistance to both the people and the government will also be helpful.

Answer from Robyn Mijares: I agree with Kira. For me, international relations is very important in two ways. One is how they can leverage from the best practices of countries where democracy is fully manifested and where the youth is encouraged to participate in all aspects of society. The second is in providing support to us. There are already countries giving grants specifically to youth organizations. I believe that resources are one of the enablers of starting activities and initiatives. Another way that countries can help is through providing education and awareness. An example of this is the Swedish institute that provides scholarships to Filipinos to help them become more educated and be more aware of not just the problems in the Philippines or in the Asia-Pacific, but in how that relates globally. These scholarships provide networks of people and organizations that can talk about problems and these issues.

Answer from Dr R. J. Naguit: What we're seeing right now—the attacks on democracy, as well as the rise of populism—is happening on a global scale. I think it's important to continue to express solidarity with the different organizations at an international level, to hold joint discussions, release solidarity statements if there are specific threats that are happening in one country, and map out ways to support human rights defenders. I think with the recent developments with the passage of a Magnitsky Act in the European Union (EU) and the different cases that have been filed against our leaders in the Philippines, those are some of the issues that we might want to support and develop joint campaigns on. It's also important for us to take inspiration from the different social movements and I'm very happy that we're sharing the space here with gender advocates as well as women's rights advocates. We have to understand that these issues are also very pertinent, especially if we're going to talk about addressing democracy. Coming into 2022, an election year in the Philippines, we have to also learn to capture power away from those who are not compatible with democracy and field

our own set of candidates. Since reversing the threats to democracy is a very long haul, as most of the attacks are on institutions, we have to develop the stamina for us to keep on with the initiatives that we're doing right now—burnout, anxiety and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness are some things that I already see with some youth advocates. There has to be a level of psychosocial support that should be given to those fighting for democracy and human rights.

Answer from Vince Liban: I think young people all around the world are taking up and reclaiming political spaces and the Filipino youth will continue to take up this helm and will not falter. The same way when we were one of the first countries to transition into democracy in 1986 during the third wave of democratization. International organizations need to support young people and civil society groups who advocate for democracy and human rights. Like what Dr Naguit mentioned, we should establish international cooperation and solidarity. Democracy demands to be felt and civil society and the people need to feel that democratic institutions are at work and are working for them.

Questions from the audience

Question from Saskia de Lang: How does the Philippines' Covid-19 response compare to responses in other South East Asian countries in democratic terms?

Answer from Amanda Cats-Baril: To find a complete answer to your question, I would refer you to International IDEA's GSoD, which is available to the public and can be used to compare the Philippines' democratic profile to any country around the world. The data can also be sorted to look at regional and subregional comparisons. For starters, it is important to recognize that the Philippines has had quite a bad pandemic, numbers-wise, for the region. Currently, it's second in the ASEAN countries (Association of South East Asian Nations) in number of cases. The geography of the Philippines has also made the response very difficult. In terms of how it compares to other countries, it's important to look at how other countries were performing before the pandemic. You'll see that some trends are continuing. For example, Cambodia was already in a state where there was quite a threat to democracy before the pandemic and the use of a state of emergency there has also been questionable. It's not to say that how countries responded has necessarily changed democratically how they're performing in relation to other countries. It's really the rankings of the countries that moved in parallel with each other. Countries that were already backsliding have continued to backslide. That's true for the Philippines and most countries around South East Asia. We're seeing similar rights violations in different countries based on what they were experiencing before the pandemic.

Question from Enzo de Borja: With the threats and the public red tagging of student journalists, especially with the shutdown of ABS-CBN, how do you think colleges and universities can better protect the student press and do you think that they are doing enough in this regard?

Answer from Dr R. J. Naguit: I think universities need to take a very proactive stance in terms of ensuring that their students have the right to speak up and protecting universities as areas or spaces where we can critically discuss certain issues. Universities need to come together to have a certain stance in terms of red tagging as well as other attacks on human rights. This is a progressive realization, especially if we're going to talk about how universities will do this. I think that universities are taking steps to safeguard the well-being of their students right now. This also has to come through consultations with the different schools, universities and students.

Answer from Sohaila Macadato: In our region, we have to highly promote social media literacy and advocacy, especially for the youth. Our localities are prone to fake news on our news feeds, social media and everywhere. I think we have to encourage our young people to engage with social media literacy advocates and make their platforms visible to our fellow youth, student publications, the academe and our local radio programmes.



Question from former Commission on Elections (COMELEC) Commissioner Luie Guia: For the 2022 elections, I anticipate that more intelligent votes will come from the youth. However, the election is going to be held within the school year. How do you think it would affect youth participation in the election?

Answer from Kira Velasco: When it comes to the youth’s participation in the elections, lots of people are already registering to vote despite the pandemic. Lots of my classmates have been registered as voters already. From that experience, the youth is already going out of their way to make sure that they are able to participate in these political processes. Even if it will be during the school year, people will go out of their way and do whatever they can to make sure that they vote because we see the importance of exercising our right to vote and in having a say on who we want to lead us into a better future.

Question from John Paul Matthew Guzman: How do we engage the youth more, especially from marginalized sectors of society? Not all of the young people have access to infrastructures that most of us enjoy, hence their appreciation of democracy may not be as strong or as informed.

Answer from Robyn Mijares: It’s easy to say that we need to empower everyone, but it’s hard when we think about the marginalized especially in some cases when they think about how can they help others if they themselves are also in need of help. What I can say to the youth listening right now, no matter where they come from, to remember three things: First, educate yourselves. You have to know the problems, just in arm’s reach, in your communities, in your schools, in your homes, and look for solutions there. Two, find your supporters and support others. You have to create this community; it doesn’t matter where they’re from or what age they are. You have to reach out to people to change them as well. The third is act on the solutions. Do not just get inspired by it. To say ‘have courage’ is an understatement. If it was easy, everyone would have done it. Do not let age define you, because when you’re young, that’s when things are more amazing. People will be more inspired by the young.

Closing and synthesis

Leena Rikkilä Tamang, Director for Asia and the Pacific Programme, International IDEA

'We find a lot of hope in the youth, and your voices, in holding elected leaders to account. I encourage your participation in political processes both when it comes to formal positions as well as in civil society and the media.'

To close the webinar, Rikkilä Tamang provided a synthesis of the key points from the discussions. She emphasized that there are a number of aspects we should be concerned about in the Philippines, particularly from the lens of public health, democracy and human rights. At the same time, she commended the innovations that happened during the pandemic. Rikkilä Tamang stated that we cannot close our eyes to the challenges to democracy, especially the functioning of institutions, the role of the opposition, the Congress, the restriction of individual rights, press freedom and the country's overly militarized response to Covid-19. Moreover, she highlighted the importance of looking at the potential impact of these responses to the pandemic, specifically when it comes to gender equality, social and economic equality, and the implications to the mental health of citizens.

Despite all of the challenges, Rikkilä Tamang pointed out that there is a lot of optimism which can give us more hope for protecting democracy. Additionally, she took the opportunity to commend the work of the Commission for Human Rights (CHR) in protecting human rights in the Philippines. Rikkilä Tamang stated that there are many reasons to remain optimistic, considering the challenges, especially in the Bangsamoro region. She noted the example of the Bangsamoro youth participating in the democratic processes in the region.

Rikkilä Tamang mentioned that it is inspiring to learn that there is a rise in youth organizations and activities amid the pandemic, especially with the youth's use of social media to participate in relevant discussions. She also took note of the efforts of universities to protect journalists and to maintain the narrowing space for dialogue. Rikkilä Tamang referred to the upcoming elections of 2022 and said that, while every country would need to make their own decisions about whether it is safe to organize elections, it has been shown that it is possible to do so during the pandemic, as long as certain conditions are met, and precautions are taken. Elections took place in South Korea, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, to mention just a few. Rikkilä Tamang expressed her confidence that COMELEC is well prepared, and up to the task of organizing the 2022 elections.

As a final note, Rikkilä Tamang commended the youth in particular, for their efforts in holding officials accountable. She concluded by thanking everyone, especially the youth panellists, for their ideas and contributions to the promotion and protection of democracy.

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Annex A. Global State of Democracy country profile: The Philippines 2019

Figure 1. The Global State of Democracy Indices



■ High performance (0.70 – 1)
 ■ Mid-range performance (0.40 – 0.69)
 ■ Low performance (0 – 0.39)

Table 1. Philippines: Performance on the Global State of Democracy Indices

Regime Type 2019					
Democracy					
1975–1985		1986–2019			
Democratic performance by attribute					
	Representative Government 	Fundamental Rights 	Checks on Government 	Impartial Administration 	Participatory Engagement 
2009	0.57	0.59	0.66	0.41	Mid-range
2019	0.62	0.56	0.58	0.397	Mid-range
Advances and Declines					
Declines 2014–2019 ↓	0 Attributes				
	6 Subattributes		Civil Liberties; Social Rights and Equality; Effective Parliament; Judicial Independence; Media Integrity; Predictable Enforcement		
	5 Subcomponents		Freedom of Expression; Freedom of Association and Assembly; Freedom of Religion; Personal Integrity and Security; Social Group Equality		
Advances 2014–2019 ↑	0 Attributes				
	0 Subattributes				
	0 Subcomponents				
Global and Regional Comparison					
World's Top 25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elected Government Electoral Participation 		World's Bottom 25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Rights and Equality Personal Integrity and Security Social Group Equality 	

- Democracy
- Hybrid regime
- Non-democracy
- High performance (0.70 – 1)
- Mid-range performance (0.40 – 0.69)
- Low performance (0 – 0.39)

Figure 2. The Global State of Democracy Indices: Philippines, 2019

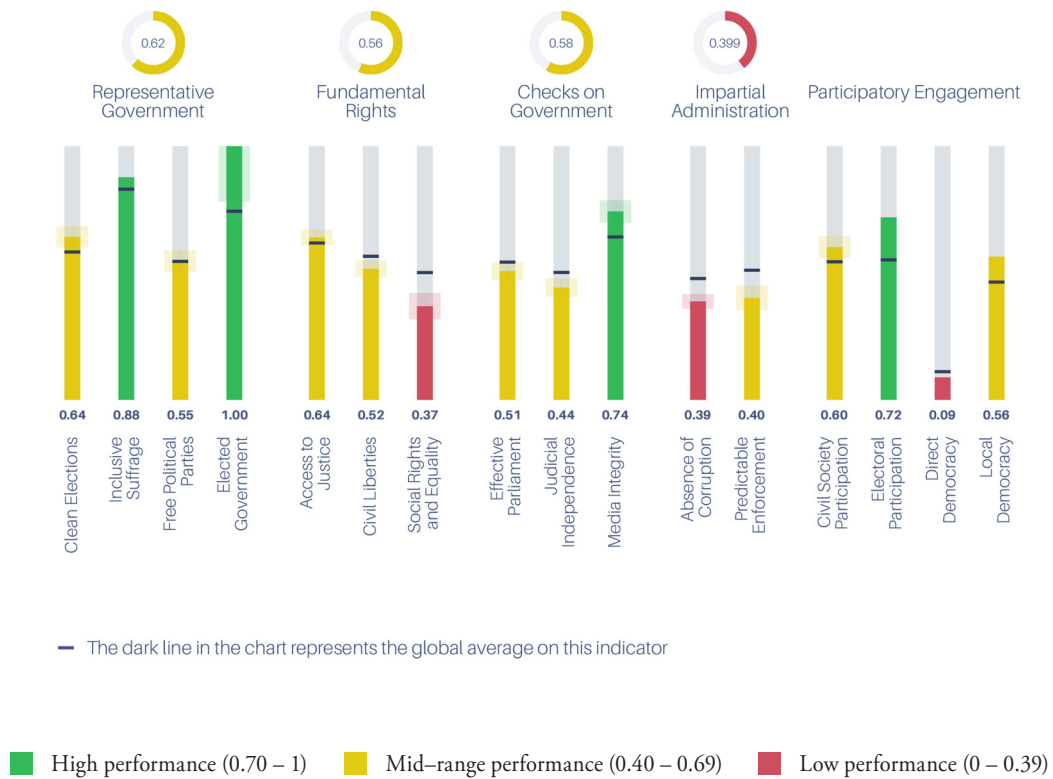


Figure 3. Philippines—Trends over time

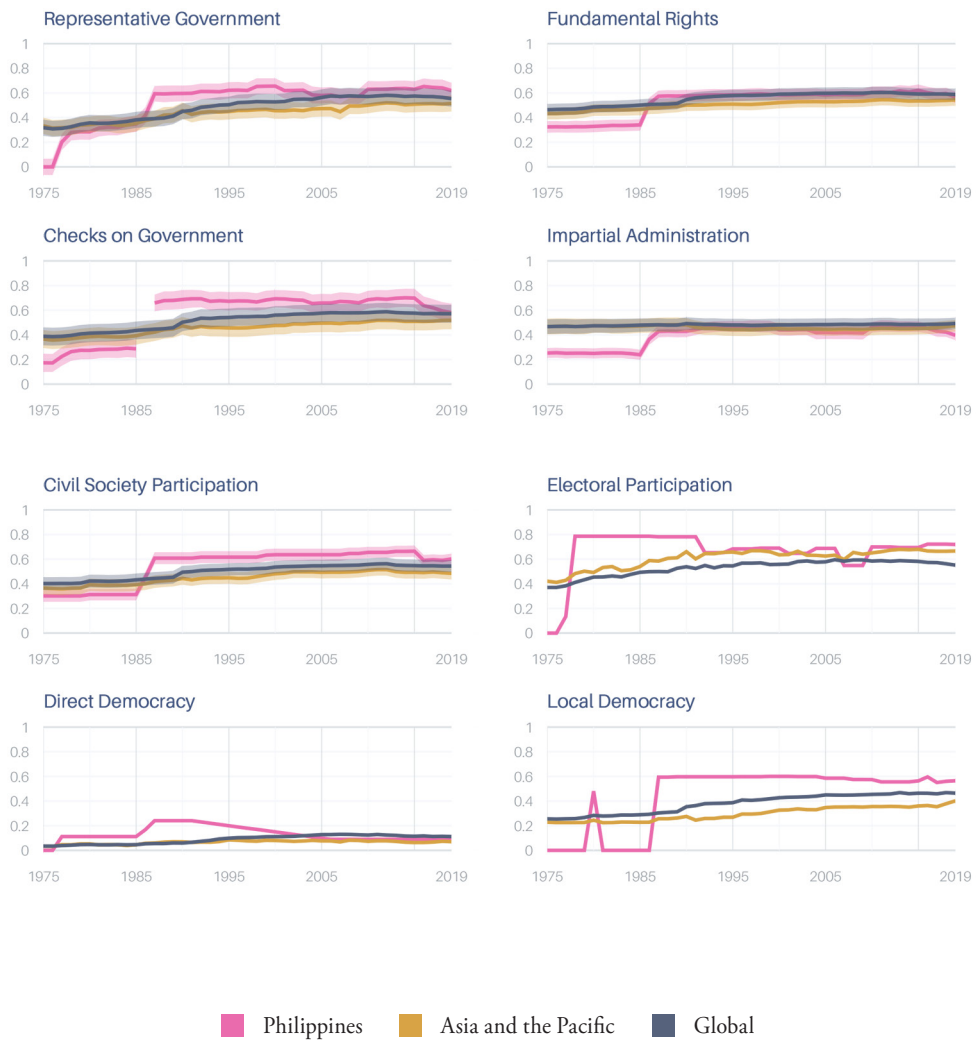


Table 2. Philippines—Tracking the development of SDG 16

SDG 16	GSoD Aspect	Year 2015	Year 2019	Gains/ Declines
SDG 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	Personal Integrity and Security	0.41	0.29	↓
SDG 16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	Access to Justice	0.63	0.64	↑
	Judicial Independence	0.56	0.44	↓
	Predictable Enforcement	0.51	0.40	↓
SDG 16.5 Substantially reduce bribery and corruption in all their forms	Absence of Corruption	0.43	0.39	↓
SDG 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	Judicial Independence	0.56	0.44	↓
	Effective Parliament	0.63	0.51	↓
	Free Political Parties	0.54	0.55	↑
	Civil Society Participation	0.66	0.60	↓
SDG 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	Elected Government	0.78	0.78	=
	Clean Elections	0.65	0.64	↓
	Electoral Participation	0.69	0.72	↑
	Effective Parliament	0.63	0.51	↓
	Local Democracy	0.56	0.56	=
	Social Group Equality	0.45	0.30	↓
SDG 16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	Freedom of Expression	0.62	0.47	↓
	Media Integrity	0.84	0.74	↓
	Freedom of Movement	0.56	0.46	↓
	Freedom of Religion	0.60	0.52	↓
	Freedom of Association and Assembly	0.74	0.59	↓

■ High performance (0.70 – 1)
 ■ Mid-range performance (0.40 – 0.69)
 ■ Low performance (0 – 0.39)

Annex B. About the Speakers

Professor Maria Ela Atienza, PhD

Co-Convenor, Program on Social and Political Change, University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies

Maria Ela Atienza is a Professor and former Chair at the Department of Political Science, University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman. She is Editor of the *Philippine Political Science Journal*, the Scopus and internationally refereed journal of the Philippine Political Science Association, and Co-Convenor of the Program on Social and Political Change of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies. She also served as Director of the UP Third World Studies Center (2010–2013) and President of the Philippine Political Science Association (2007–2009). Professor Atienza’s research interests and publications cover local governance and devolution, human security, health policy and politics, and women and gender issues.

Amanda Cats-Baril, JD

Programme Manager, MyConstitution project, and Regional Advisor, Constitution-Building in Asia and the Pacific, International IDEA

Amanda Cats-Baril is Programme Manager of MyConstitution project in Myanmar and Advisor for Constitution-Building in Asia and the Pacific for International IDEA. In this capacity, she supports constitution-building processes in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and the Philippines, among other contexts, by providing technical assistance to governments, civil society organizations and International IDEA projects. She is also responsible for managing the annual Melbourne Forum, a regional network of practitioners and scholars on constitution-building in Asia and the Pacific. Cats-Baril is an international lawyer who specializes in constitutional law, human rights, post-conflict transitions and democratization.

Dr Kevin Casas-Zamora

Secretary-General, International IDEA

Kevin Casas-Zamora has more than 25 years of experience in democratic governance as a researcher, analyst, educator, consultant and public official. He embodies the rare combination of a distinguished academic career—strongly focused on electoral systems and democratic institutions—with practical experience as a high-level public official in his home country as well as in multilateral organizations.

Casas-Zamora is Senior Fellow at the Inter-American Dialogue, a Washington, DC-based policy research centre. Until recently, he was a member of Costa Rica’s Presidential Commission for State Reform, and Managing Director at Analitica Consulting (Analitica Consultores). Previously, he was Costa Rica’s Second Vice President and Minister of National Planning; Secretary for Political Affairs

at the Organization of American States; Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution; and National Coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report.

He has taught at Georgetown University, George Washington University and the University of Texas at Dallas, among many higher education institutions. He holds a Law degree from the University of Costa Rica, a master's in Government from the University of Essex and a PhD in Political Science from the University of Oxford. He has authored several studies on campaign finance, elections, democratization, citizen security and civil–military relations in Latin America.

Nyla Grace Prieto

Programme Officer, Asia and the Pacific, International IDEA

Nyla Grace Prieto is a Programme Officer at the Asia and Pacific Regional Programme of International IDEA. In this capacity, she leads the citizen-led democracy assessments and citizen engagement initiatives in the region, providing technical advice and support to civil society organizations, government agencies and other organizations. Prieto is responsible for promoting youth engagement in political processes through IDEA's democracy youth academy. She also coordinates International IDEA's support in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), creating awareness among the Bangsamoro Transition Authority and other stakeholders, and providing advice and technical expertise on International IDEA's institutional support.

Leena Rikkilä Tamang

Director for Asia and the Pacific, International IDEA

Leena Rikkilä Tamang joined International IDEA in 2002. Between 2004 and 2013, she managed International IDEA's programme on Supporting the Constitution-Building Process in Nepal. She created and supported initiatives designed to forge a consensus on political reform and to develop the capacity of Nepalese stakeholders on constitutional options. Prior to her time in Nepal, Tamang worked at the South-Asia programme, including on Myanmar, at International IDEA.

Tamang is the former Secretary-General of Finland's Advisory Board for Relations with Developing Countries (Ministry for Foreign Affairs). She is a member and former Chair (2001–2002) of the Network Institute for Global Democratization (NIGD). Her work with NIGD has included coordinating projects promoting North–South dialogues on democracy and globalization; she was also involved in the World Social Forum process.

She is also a former Board Member of the Asia–Europe Foundation and has been teaching at Finland's University of Tampere in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, from where she graduated, as well as in the department of Environmental Politics. Tamang has worked in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Vietnam and on Myanmar, and has published on democracy at the global level, women's political participation and inclusive democratic processes.

Youth discussants

Vince Renzo M. Liban

National Convener, Philippine Anti-Discrimination Alliance of Youth Leaders (PANTAY)

Vince Liban is a human rights advocate and student leader advocating for democracy, gender equality and youth empowerment, among others. He finished his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science in 2015 and is currently pursuing his master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of the Philippines Diliman. He is a member of Akbayan Youth and currently works as the National Convener of PANTAY, a national network of young Filipinos campaigning for the passage of the SOGIE Equality Bill in Congress and gender equality and non-discrimination in the Philippines.

Sohaila Macadato

Project Officer, UnYPhil-Women

Sohaila Macadato is a project officer at UnYPhil-Women, a non-stock and non-profit women-youth organization duly registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) with chapters both in Luzon and Mindanao. The primary goal of UnYPhil-Women is to assist women who are subjected to violence, sexual and physical abuse, trafficking, and other forms of discrimination.

Robyn Camille Mijares

Executive Director, Youth Uprising

Robyn Mijares is the Founder and Executive Director of Youth Uprising, a non-profit youth organization which supports the youth in creating a positive change towards a more inclusive, fair and sustainable communities.

Dr R. J. Naguit

Founder/National Chairperson, Youth for Mental Health Coalition, Inc. and National Chairperson, Akbayan Youth

R. J. Naguit is a Filipino activist, nurse, medical doctor and mental health advocate. He graduated as a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2012 and Doctor of Medicine in 2017 from the University of Santo Tomas, Manila and is currently pursuing a Master in Community Development degree from the University of the Philippines Diliman. Currently, he serves as the Founder/National Chairperson of the Youth for Mental Health Coalition, Inc. and National Chairperson of Akbayan Youth, the youth wing of Akbayan Citizens' Action Party, a socialist, feminist and ecological political party in the Philippines.

Kira Velasco

Chairperson, Amarela Philippines

Kira Velasco is a Senior High School student in the STEM strand and the Chairperson of Amarela Philippines, a youth-led initiative that advocates for sexual and reproductive healthcare. Velasco advocates for sexual and reproductive awareness, healthcare and rights, women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, and press freedom.

Annex C. Programme

Democracy Talks in Manila: The Role of Youth Voices in Philippine Democracy 8 December 2020

- 15:00–15:05 **Preliminaries and house rules, introduction of speakers**
- **Nyla Prieto**, Programme Officer, Asia and the Pacific, International IDEA
- 15:05–15:10 **Opening remarks**
- **H. E. Harald Fries**, Ambassador of Sweden to the Philippines
- 15:05–15:10 **Welcome remarks**
- **Dr Kevin Casas-Zamora**, Secretary-General, International IDEA
- 15:15–15:25 **Brief presentation on the Global Monitor of Covid-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights**
- **Amanda Cats-Baril**, Programme Manager, MyConstitution project, and Regional Advisor, Constitution-Building in Asia and the Pacific, International IDEA
- 15:25–15:35 **Relevant findings of the Constitutional Performance Assessment**
- **Professor Maria Ela Atienza**, Co-Convenor, UP CIDS Program on Social and Political Change
- 15:35–16:05 **Facilitated roundtable discussion on youth views of Philippine democracy**
- **Dr R. J. Naguit**, Founder/National Chairperson of Youth for Mental Health Coalition, Inc., and National Chairperson of Akbayan Youth
 - **Vince Renzo M. Liban**, National Convener, PANTAY
 - **Kira Velasco**, Chairperson, Amarela Philippines
 - **Robyn Camille Mijares**, Executive Director, Youth Uprising
 - **Sohaila Macadato**, Project Officer, UnYPhil-Women
- 16:05–16:25 **Q&A from audience**
- 16:25–16:30 **Synthesis and closing remarks**
- **Leena Rikkilä-Tamang**, Director for Asia and the Pacific, International IDEA

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There are various challenges to democracy which have worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some countries have experienced democratic backsliding and other problems from the perspective of democratic participation, human rights and the rule of law.

To discuss these issues in the context of the Philippines, a webinar entitled 'Democracy Talks in Manila: The Role of Youth Voices in Democracy' was organized in December 2020 by the Embassy of Sweden in Manila, International IDEA and the Program on Social and Political Change at the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS). The webinar was part of the Swedish Government's Drive for Democracy initiative, and among the participants were students, youth leaders and youth advocates of democracy and human rights.

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