

Social Icons

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Body

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Shot four times outside his home in the Philippines last August, Chinese-American journalist and human rights advocate Brandon Lee was airlifted back to a hospital in his hometown of San Francisco where it was later confirmed he was paralyzed from the chest down.

Among his supporters like the Cordillera Peoples Alliance, an indigenous rights group he worked with in the Philippines, Lee is considered to be one of the first U.S. citizens targeted in what the group called an "extrajudicial assassination attempt" under the Duterte administration as a consequence for his activism.

Discussing concerns of such human rights violations in the Philippines during much of its meeting Thursday, Associated Students, Inc.'s Lobby Corps at Long Beach State is now looking into advocating legislation that would stop tragedies like that of Brandon Lee.

During the meeting, Mateo Maya, chief government relations' officer, presented the group with information on the Philippine Human Rights Act, calling for the committee's show of support.

"This aid is supporting all those human rights abuses. It's basically our taxpayers' money that is going toward infringing human rights in another country," Maya said.

The Philippine Human Rights Act lobbies for Congress to suspend U.S. military aid to the Philippines until human rights violations stop and the Duterte administration is held accountable. This came after the U.S., a long-time donor to the Philippines' security budget, was to pursue a \$2 billion arms deal that many fear would instead fund further rights violations.

The human rights being infringed upon, activists claim, are due to an "Anti-Terror Law" passed under the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. According to the Philippine Human Rights Act page, this law allows terrorism to be interpreted broadly and, according to discretion, "removes safeguards that enforces the accountability of unfounded charges."

This means that even people accused of having the intent to commit terrorism are legally allowed to be jailed for weeks without charges.

Advocates of the PHRA claim the Anti-Terror Law has allowed the Duterte administration to label Filipino activists, both indigenous and U.S. citizens, as terrorists and then target them just like Brandon Lee.

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According to a report from ASI Senator Sumaiyah Hossain, ASI's Lobby Corps is not alone in focusing its attention on the PHRA.

Hossain said that there was interest during Wednesday's ASI Senate meeting about presenting a resolution in support of the Philippine Human Rights Act as well.

With the widespread interest in the PHRA, Maya pushed for his fellow committee members to begin working on a bill in support of the legislation as early as this weekend.

"It affects American Filipinos here," Maya said. "Just because American Filipino activists have been very vocal about it here in the US...they have been tried and watched by the Filipino government. So I think it's very important that we support it."

Earlier last year, California State University Northridge's Associated Students, Inc. passed its own bill in support of the legislation as well, which will serve as a reference for CSULB's Lobby Corps committee.

The next Associated Students, Inc. Lobby Corps meeting will occur Thursday, Sept. 24.

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