

Presbyterian missionary targeted by Philippine government

by [Dawn Araujo-Hawkins](#) in the [June 1, 2022](#) issue



(Photo courtesy of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines)

On April 11, Cathy Chang, a Presbyterian missionary living in the Philippines, discovered she had been “red-tagged” by the Philippine government after meeting with a progressive political candidate.

According to Human Rights Watch, red-tagging is a decades-long practice in which the Philippine government publicly accuses individuals or organizations of supporting the communist New People’s Army. The Philippine military often harasses, tortures, or kills suspected communists.

Chang, who has lived in the Philippines since 2015, serves with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, where she works on issues like migration and human trafficking. The UCCP is one of many organizations that has been vocal about the disregard of human rights under Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, who was elected in 2016.

Presbyterian News Service reported that Chang called the experience of being red-tagged “surreal.”

“I am doing OK, but this feels very personal. I wish that I had more time and energy for ministry,” she continued.

She admitted, however, that the experience had already had a chilling effect. She had been planning to travel to the United States this summer to serve as a missionary advisory delegate at the Presbyterian Church (USA) general assembly. But now she worries she could be prevented from reentering the Philippines. She is also concerned about her visa.

Duterte has made targeting missionaries for red-tagging something of a hallmark of his administration.

In 2018, Patricia Fox, an Australian Catholic sister who had been living in the Philippines for 30 years, was famously red-tagged and forced to leave the country. According to Presbyterian News Service, that same year, three United Methodist missionaries from the United States, Malawi, and Zimbabwe were denied visas and also forced to leave.

In a statement, the UCCP called Chang’s red-tagging an affront not only to her but also to the “prophetic ministry of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

“We will remain vigilant and steadfast in faith,” the statement continued, “as we will work and march towards peace and freedom in solidarity with oppressed sectors of our society.”