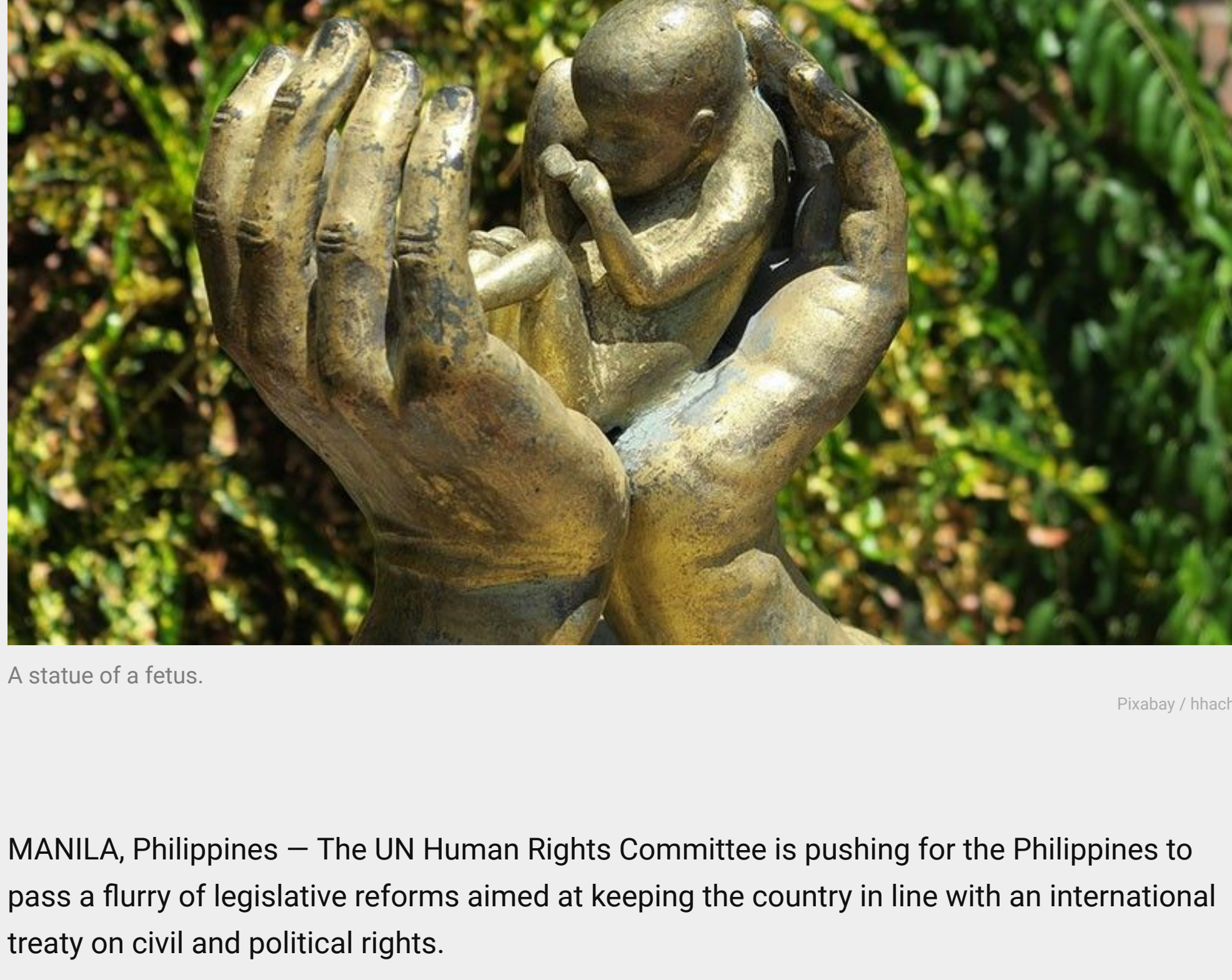


HEADLINES

# Philippines told: Decriminalize abortion, legalize divorce, pass anti-discrimination law

Xave Gregorio - Philstar.com  
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A statue of a fetus.

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MANILA, Philippines — The UN Human Rights Committee is pushing for the Philippines to pass a flurry of legislative reforms aimed at keeping the country in line with an international treaty on civil and political rights.

Among the proposals being brought forward by the UN panel composed of human rights experts are the decriminalization of abortion, the legalization of divorce and the enactment of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law.

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“Abortion remains criminalized in the [Philippines,] which leads women to seek out clandestine abortion services that endanger their lives and health,” read part of an advanced copy of a 13-page report released by the body.

It suggested that the Philippines “repeal the criminal penalties imposed upon women and girls who undergo abortions and upon medical service providers who help them to do so.”

The panel also wants the country to amend its laws to “guarantee safe, legal and effective access to abortion where the life and health of the pregnant woman or girl is at risk, or where carrying a pregnancy to term would cause the pregnant woman or girl substantial pain or suffering, most notable where the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest or where the pregnancy is not viable.”

Abortion is illegal in the Catholic-majority Philippines and possibly even unconstitutional as the 1987 Constitution provides that the State shall protect the life of the mother and the unborn from conception.

But this has not stopped pregnant women from getting abortions. A 2013 study cited by the World Health Organization said there were 610,000 abortions in the year before.

## Divorce

Another hot-button women’s rights legislation is the legalization of divorce in the country, which remains to be the only state in the world except for the Vatican where divorce is not an option.

“The lack of legislation providing for divorce may compel victims of domestic violence to remain in violent relationships,” the UN rights body said.

The panel is pushing the Philippines to “expedite the adoption of legislation legalizing divorce with a view to protecting victims of domestic violence.”

CLOSER LOOK: [Divorce bills at the Senate](#)

Even if support for legalizing divorce stood at 53% according to a 2017 Social Weather Stations survey, lawmakers are still having a hard time passing legislation legalizing divorce.

The farthest that a divorce bill has gotten in Congress was in 2018, when it was passed by the House of Representatives in a 134-57 vote under the speakership of pro-divorce lawmaker Pantaleon Alvarez (Davao del Norte).

The measure, however, got stuck in the Senate where it did not progress beyond the committee level.

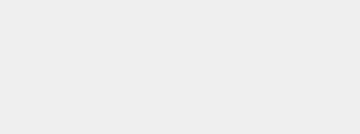
## Anti-discrimination law

Much like the divorce bills in Congress, progress on anti-discrimination measures has stalled, prompting concern from the UN panel.

These include the comprehensive anti-discrimination bills, the anti-discrimination bills on the basis of race, ethnicity and religion, and anti-discrimination bills on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, which are all pending in Congress.

The body said it is concerned about reports of the living situations and stigma faced by persons with disabilities, the “grave scandal” provision in the country’s penal laws that may expose LGBTQ+ people to harassment, stereotypes against Muslims and discrimination against Indigenous peoples.

It recommended that the Philippines hasten the passage of a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and ensure access to effective and appropriate remedies for victims of discrimination.



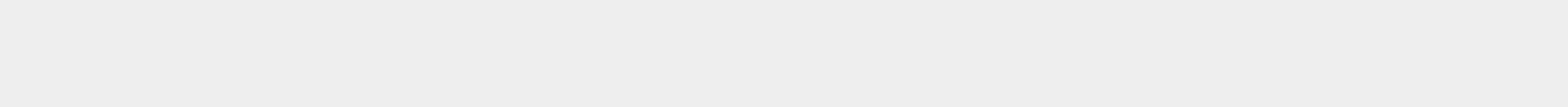
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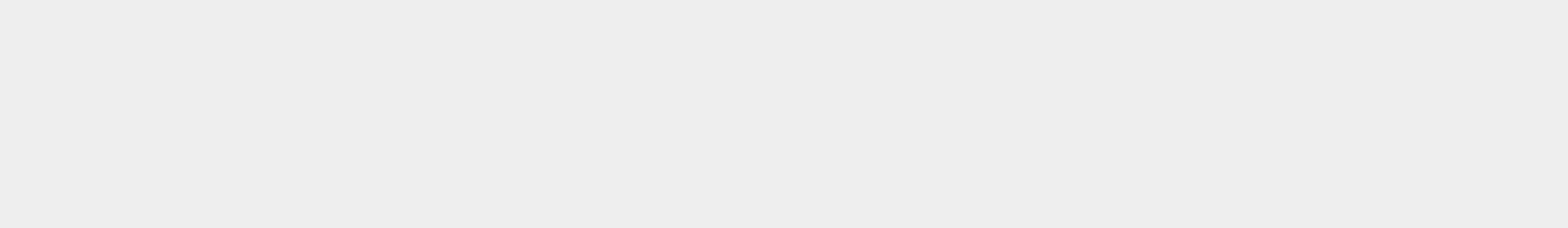
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