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LETTER OF CONCERN ON THE INCREASING HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' LEADERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE PHILIPPINES

We, the undersigned organizations, institutions and individuals express alarm and deep concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in the Philippines. As noted by UN experts, indigenous peoples in Mindanao are massively impacted by military operations¹, and the Philippines is marked by “widespread extrajudicial executions and ongoing attacks against voices who are critical of the current Government, including human rights defenders”².

Latest, a petition filed in court by the Philippine State Prosecutor of the Department of Justice (DOJ), seek to have a number of indigenous peoples' leaders and human rights defenders declared as terrorist and outlaws pursuant to the National Security Act of 2007.

The list of alleged terrorists includes the following renowned indigenous leaders and human rights defenders from the Cordillera Region:

1. Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, former Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues;
2. Ms. Joan Carling, Co-convener of the Indigenous Peoples Major Group on the Sustainable Development Goals, former Secretary General of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues;
3. Ms. Joanna Cariño, member of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) Advisory Council and SANDUGO co-chairperson;
4. Mr. Windel Bolinget, Chairperson of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA);
5. Atty. Jose Molintas, human rights lawyer and former member of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP);
6. Ms. Beverly Longid, global coordinator for the Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self-Determination and Liberation;

¹ See statement by Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, [Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples](#) and Ms. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, [Special Rapporteur on internally displaced people](#):
<http://ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22567&LangID=E>

² See statement by Mr. Michel Forst, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#), and Ms. Catalina Devandas, [Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities](#) and Chairperson of the [Coordination Committee of the Special Procedures](#):
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22783&LangID=E>

7. Ms. Jeanette Ribaya Cawiding, Regional Coordinator of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers – Cordillera; and
8. Mr. Sherwin De Vera, Regional Coordinator of DEFEND- Ilocos and member of the Save The Abra River Movement (STARM)

An estimate of around ten (10) indigenous peoples’ leaders and human rights advocates from Mindanao are also included in this list.

All of the above-mentioned persons are known and respected nationally and internationally, for their consistent and democratic work to further human rights for the most vulnerable and discriminated. The unfounded, malicious and irresponsible terrorist accusations pose serious threats to their lives, security, and liberty, and are obviously meant to harass and intimidate them. It thereby constitutes a targeted measure to weaken the indigenous peoples’ movement in the Philippines, and an unacceptable attack on those speaking up to defend human rights. It is also an affront to the exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms associated with democratic governance and to the human rights obligations of the Philippine government. Moreover, the accusations against the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is clearly in retaliation to her press statements and communications addressing the violations of the human rights of indigenous peoples in the country. This is an unacceptable attack against a UN mandate holder who has immunity to such actions under the Convention on Privileges and Immunities of 1946.³

We therefore call on the Philippine government to:

1. Remove the names of indigenous peoples’ leaders and human rights defenders from the list of alleged terrorists;
2. Ensure the physical safety of indigenous peoples’ leaders and human rights defenders; and
3. Abide by State obligations to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including access to justice, freedom of expression and of association.

Endorsed by:

ORGANIZATION

COUNTRY

³ See statement by Mr. Michel Forst, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#), and Ms. Catalina Devandas, [Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities](#) and Chairperson of the [Coordination Committee of the Special Procedures](#): <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22783&LangID=E>

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