

Philippines: Unconditionally release former senator Leila de Lima and hold authorities accountable for her suffering

(Bangkok, 19 October 2022) — Former senator and chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, Leila de Lima, should be released immediately and unconditionally, said the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) following a recent hostage-taking incident.

On 9 October, three convicts allegedly linked to local terrorist groups stabbed a police officer and held de Lima hostage inside her cell at the Philippine National Police (PNP) Custodial Center. De Lima, a former senator and human rights lawyer, is being unjustly detained on trumped-up charges.

Responding police officers shot the three convicts, while de Lima, who suffered a mild stroke last year, was hospitalised for three days.¹

‘De Lima should not even be in detention in the first place. We have received reports of her mistreatment while in detention including constantly being denied access to visitors, electronic devices, and adequate medical furlough under the previous regime,’ said FORUM-ASIA.

‘We strongly condemn the PNP breach of de Lima’s security protocol and failure to ensure her rights while in custody, despite threats to her life and health. The arbitrary detention and mistreatment of de Lima is evident in the Philippine government’s judicial harassment of human rights defenders and narrowing civic space in the country.’

De Lima, a staunch critic of Duterte’s gross human rights violations, was imprisoned in 2017 on politically-motivated charges following her senate investigation into the thousands of extrajudicial killings under Duterte’s war on drugs. Her case continues to move at a snail’s pace despite the lack of evidence supporting the allegations against her. In response to the recent hostage-taking incident, President Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos Jr. offered to transfer de Lima to a different detention center but de Lima reported declined.²

‘President Marcos Jr’s offer to transfer De Lima to another facility is a mere band-aid solution. De Lima’s ill-treatment and prolonged detention over baseless, trumped-up accusations are unacceptable and clearly violate international human rights standards. The recent hostage incident underscores the urgency of her release. The Philippine government should immediately release her and dismiss the fabricated allegations against her,’ said FORUM-ASIA.

¹ <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/10/11/22/de-lima-says-has-lingering-chest-pain-after-hostage-taking>

² <https://twitter.com/bongbongmarcos/status/1578945994875863041>

For reference:

Philippines: Free Senator; End Attacks on Rights Defenders Duterte Critic Leila de Lima Held 3 Years on Fabricated Charges http://l.forum-asia.org/LeilaDeLima_3year

Joint Statement — Philippines: Outspoken Senator Arbitrarily Detained Two Years — Drop Politically Motivated Charges against Leila de Lima <http://l.forum-asia.org/SenatordeLimaFeb2019>

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

For further information, please contact:

- East Asia and ASEAN Programme, FORUM-ASIA, ea-asean@forum-asia.org

For media inquiries, please contact:

- Melissa Ananthraj, Communication and Media Programme, FORUM-ASIA, communication@forum-asia.org