

[Joint Statement] The Philippines: Human Rights Organisations Condemn Renewed Judicial Harassment Against Human Rights Defenders in the Philippines

22 August 2023 – We, the undersigned organisations, are in solidarity with human rights defenders (HRDs) in the Philippines. We support their continuing pursuit for the universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of human rights. We strongly condemn the renewed judicial harassment faced by ten HRDs who were acquitted of perjury on 9 January 2023.

Previously, the defenders were [facing trial](#) before the Quezon City Metropolitan Trial Court Branch 37 on malicious and trumped-up charge of ‘perjury’—as submitted by former National Security Adviser (NSA) General Hermogenes Esperon—in reprisal for their actions seeking legal protection for human rights defenders to the Supreme Court in May 2019.

In recent developments, a petition to review the lower court’s decision which was in favour of the defenders was filed by the Quezon City Office of the Prosecutor, alongside General Hermogenes Esperon and NSA General Eduardo Ano. This renewed harassment campaign targets the same individuals including Karapatan National Council members: Elisa Tita Lubi; Cristina Palabay; Roneo Clamor; Gabriela Krista Dalena; Dr. Edita Burgos; Jose Mari Callueng; Fr. Wilfredo Ruazol; Gabriela leaders Joan May Salvador and Gertrudes Libang; and Rural Missionaries of the Philippines coordinator Sr. Elenita Belardo. Judge Aimee Marie B. Alcera, who presided over the case in lower court, is also included in the petition. The next hearing is scheduled for 29 August 2023.

The continuous weaponization of the [Anti-Terrorism Act](#) (ATA) to suppress and persecute HRDs is alarming. At least 13 defenders in the Southern Tagalog region currently face trumped-up criminal complaints, citing alleged violations under the ATA.

Using the ATA to criminalise human rights workers adds to the long list of harassment orchestrated by the Philippine Government to delegitimise the work of HRDs and human rights organisations.

Such aggressive crackdown on defenders not only violates their fundamental freedoms but also hinders their crucial work in protecting and promoting human rights for all.

Aside from judicial harassment, HRDs in the Philippines are also enduring red-tagging and other forms of harassment, further exacerbating the challenges they face in carrying

out their vital work. Such violations against defenders are in stark contrast with the Philippine Government's international human rights commitment being a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which it ratified in 1986, and most recently, its commitment in the [Universal Periodic Review in 2022](#) related to effective protection¹ of human rights defenders² in the country.

Call to Action

We align ourselves with HRDs in the Philippines and call on the Philippine Government to cease all forms of intimidation and attacks against them.

We urge the authorities to ensure an enabling environment for all HRDs, allowing them to continue their essential work without fear of reprisals.

The judicial harassment against the ten HRDs must be dropped immediately. The laws and regulations that have been weaponized to vilify and harass defenders in the country must be repealed.

1. Amnesty International
2. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
3. Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)
4. AwazCDS
5. Balay Alternative Legal Advocates for Development in Mindanaw (Balaod Mindanaw)
6. Bir Duino
7. Bytes for All
8. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
9. Center for Human Rights and Development (CHRD)
10. Centre for the Sustainable Use of Natural and Social Resources (CSNR)
11. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
12. Civil Society and Human Rights Network - Afghanistan
13. Community Resource Centre (CRC)
14. Defence of Human Rights
15. Forum for Dignity Initiatives
16. Front Line Defenders

¹ 145.81 Put in place a system of effective protection for human rights defenders and journalists and guarantee the free exercise of their rights to freedom of opinion, expression and association (Luxembourg).

² 145.61 Hold accountable all perpetrators of violations against journalists, human rights defenders and citizens expressing their freedom of expression and strengthen the laws protecting journalists and human rights defenders against attacks, threats and killings (Belgium).

17. Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI)
18. Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association (PBHI)
19. INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre
20. Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC)
21. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
22. International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net)
23. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
24. Jagriti Child and Youth Concern Nepal (JCYCN)
25. Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Center (KIRDARC)
26. Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law
27. Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS)
28. Law and Society Trust (LST)
29. Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA)
30. National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP)
31. Odhikar
32. People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD)
33. People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF)
34. People's Watch
35. Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)
36. Philippine Collective for Modern Heroism (Dakila)
37. Progressive Voice
38. Public Association "Dignity"
39. Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU)
40. The Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PHILRIGHTS)
41. Think Centre
42. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders