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URGENT APPEAL FOR SOLIDARITY AND ACTION ON THE THREATS AND INTIMIDATION AGAINST WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS KATHERINE PANGUBAN AND CLARIZZA SINGSON

Dear friends and colleagues,

In the aftermath of the massacre of nine individuals in Sagay, Negros Occidental, and the killing of Atty. Benjamin Ramos of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyer (NUPL) in Kabankalan, Negros Occidental, women human rights defenders are facing increased threats and harassment presumably because of their assistance to the relatives of the massacre victims and their human rights work.

Atty. Katherine Panguban, head of the NUPL Women and Children Committee, who is assisting the relatives of massacre victims and survivors received reports that fabricated non-bailable charges of kidnapping and serious illegal detention have been filed against her.

Clarizza Singson, Karapatan National Council member and Secretary General of Karapatan-Negros chapter, received recent threats through SMS/texts presumably from State agents that she and other activists will soon be killed.

We also issued an earlier alert on the massacre and the killing of Atty. Ramos. You may access the <http://karapatan.org/URGENT+APPEAL+FOR+SOLIDARITY+AND+ACTION%3A+9+farm+workers+massacred%2C+their+lawyer+murdered> document through:

As we continue to seek justice to the victims of the Sagay massacre and their lawyer Benjamin Ramos, let us also raise our collective voices against the threats and intimidation experienced by Atty. Katherine Panguban and Clarizza Singson, two young women human rights defenders who have staunchly worked for the defense of human rights and people's rights.

ACCOUNTS OF INCIDENTS

Atty. Katherine Panguban was part of the National Fact Finding Mission (NFFM) on the Sagay massacre organized by KARAPATAN, Hustisya, the National Federation of Sugar Workers and the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP – Peasant Movement of the Philippines) last October 24-25, 2018. As head of the Women and Child Committee of the NUPL, Panguban provided services in ensuring legal protection for the welfare of the 14-year old massacre survivor, "Lester." (*his real name is deliberately withheld for his security and protection*)

Lester was taken from the custody of Elenita Sumicad and Bobstel Sumicad, recognized guardians of "Lester," by the police and the City Social Welfare and Development (CSWD).

On 24 October 2018, Panguban accompanied Elenita and Bobstel Sumicad to the CSWD to regain the child's custody. However, a CSWD official claimed that as a witness to the massacre, Lester must stay with the CSWD. Panguban pointed out that there was no such voluntary commitment signed by Lester's guardians.

At this point, the head of the CSWD, Consolacion Espinosa, invited Elenita Sumicad to the office of Sagay City Mayor Alfredo Maranon III, explicitly stating that Panguban shouldn't come with them. Elenita did not agree to Espinosa's proposal. This angered the CSWD head and announced that Sumicad can no longer receive "aid" from her office. Elenita's 17-year old son was among those killed in the massacre.

At the police station where Lester was being held, Lester's biological father, Vic Pedaso, (who abandoned Lester and his mother when Lester was only 4 years old), arrived at the police station and announced that as the father of Lester, he was in favour of giving the CSWD custody of his child.

The NFFM team members, who were with the Sumicad couple at the police station, communicated with Lester's mother, Flordeliza J. Cabahug, who was working in Manila, and informed her of the status of her child's custody issues.

The following day, Flordeliza Cabahug arrived in Sagay City to take Lester in her custody. She was assisted Panguban, and in the presence of Vic Pedaso, the CSWD formally turned over Lester to his mother. A turn over agreement was signed by Cabahug, Pedaso, Panguban, and representatives of the Office of the CSWD namely Nehemiah Harold Mission and Consolacion spinosa.

Flordeliza Cabahug also executed a duly-notarized engagement of services agreement with the NUPL, human rights group Karapatan, and children's group Salinlahi to help her regain custody of her child and to represent her in other possible legal cases and issues raised by Pedaso. Cabahug, in another agreement, also specified that the custody of her child remains with her and not with Panguban. Both documents were signed on October 25, 2018.

However, Panguban and members of the FFM learned that before the arrival of Flordeliza Cabahug, Lester was coerced to sign an affidavit, contents of which he disagreed with, which was supposedly subscribed before City Prosecutor Ronald Yngson of Sagay City. Lester was not assisted by any of his guardians or legal counsel when he signed the said affidavit.

On 26 October 2018, Flordeliza and Lester went to Manila to seek sanctuary despite text and messages of Pedaso that the police will provide them protection. Three days later, Panguban learned that Pedosa filed a report before the Philippine police, saying that Panguban forcibly took Cabahug and her son.

On 30 October 2018, Cabahug and Lester voluntarily executed an affidavit attesting that they were never abducted or coerced to come with Panguban or any member of rights group Karapatan or any other organizations.

Then, on 1 November 2018, news reports came out that Pedaso had filed complaints of kidnapping and serious illegal detention before the Philippine Police and the Sagay City prosecutor's office against Panguban.

Since then, Sagay Police have issued statements against Panguban and Karapatan insisting on the fat lie that Panguban and Karapatan kidnapped Cabahug and Lester.

On November 7, 2018, Cabahug, Panguban and Karapatan held a press conference with Commission on Human Rights Chairperson Chito Gascon at the CHR Compound to belie the statements of Pedaso and the police.

On November 9, 2018, Karapatan National Council member and Secretary General of its Negros Chapter, Clarizza Singson, received renewed threats through SMS/texts tonight from a certain number +639104431029.

Her name and that of other Negros-based activists, including Roque Rillo of the National

Federation of Sugar Workers, Noli Rosales of the Kilusang Mayo Uno and Christian Tuayon of Bayan, were mentioned.

The texts were translated as follows:

1) “Wag nyong baliktarin ang issue, kayo ang nanggugulo sa negros, mga high profile kayo ng NPA, ikaw, roque, noli at christian ang susunod.”

“Do not twist the issue, you are the troublemakers in Negros, you are all high profile NPAs. You, Roque, Noli, and Christian will be next.”

2) “Ituloy nyo lng dahil kung wala na kayo, tatahimik ang negros, kayo ang masipag manggulo at gumawa ng issue, si christian nawala sa libertad, natakot sa warrant.”

“Just continue because if you are not here any more, Negros will be quiet. You are troublemakers, making issues. Christian is not anymore in Libertad, he was afraid of the warrant.”

3) “Namiss namin si Christian, hindi kami natuloy noong Oct. 1 dahil nawala kayong lahat na mga magulo, uubusin namin , cge bira lng kayo kasi malapit na lng..”

“We missed Christian, we did not push through last Oct. 1 because you troublemakers weren’t there. We will finish you all. Just continue because your time will come soon.”

As in the case of Atty. Benjamin Ramos, names and pictures of Singson and Tuayon were among those in the malicious flyers and posters circulated by the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines in Negros last April 2018. Rillo and Rosales have also received threats in the past.

We call on the Philippine government to:

1. Conduct an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation of the separate incidents to be conducted by an independent body;
2. Stop the malicious red-tagging, threats, intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders;
3. Enact the Human Rights Defenders’ Protection Bill which seek to create an enabling environment for human rights defenders, including human rights lawyers, to continue their work, and exact accountability from State forces;
4. End Duterte administration’s counter-insurgency program Oplan Kapayapaan which encourages State security forces to threaten, harass and intimidate activists, community leaders and civilians;
5. Adhere to and respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and all major Human Rights instruments that it is a party and signatory.

We urgently appeal for your support and solidarity through:

1. Issuing statements of solidarity for circulation to the public and media circles. Publish these on your websites, social media platforms among others. Please send a copy to karapatan@karapatan.org.

2. Reporting malicious posts on social media and flagging said posts, users, and pages as false news or hate speech.
3. Conducting or joining mass actions and campaigns to support rights defenders under attack.
4. Assisting efforts to raise financial and material support for the legal defense and safety fund for the activists and human rights defenders. Please email karapatan@karapatan.org on the details.
5. Informing and lobbying with officials of government and inter-governmental bodies in other countries.

You may send your communications to the following Philippine-based authorities:

Mr. Rodrigo Duterte

President of the Republic
Malacañang Palace,
JP Laurel St., San Miguel,
Manila, Philippines 1005
Voice: (+632) 564 1451 to 80
Fax: (+632) 742-1641 / 929-3968
E-mail: op@president.gov.ph or send message through <http://op-proper.gov.ph/contact-us/>

Mr. Jesus Dureza

Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process
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Please send us a copy of your email/mail/fax to the above-named government officials, to our address below:

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