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Illegal mass arrests and abduction of members of progressive organizations a chilling, escalating trend under the Duterte regime

Dear friends,

There is a need to sound the alarm on the frequency and arbitrariness of illegal arrests and detention perpetrated by State security forces in the past two months. Fascist policies such as the Duterte regime's counterinsurgency program Oplan Kapayapaan, the creation of the Inter-Agency Committee on Legal Action (IACLA) on October 11, 2017, and the President's recent threats of using draconian measures such as the anti-terror law to arrest leaders and members of mass organizations have contributed to an environment that puts the lives and security of human rights defenders, activists, and the Filipino people in general at greater risk. The legal system is increasingly used to jail members and leaders of local organizations on the basis of trumped-up charges. As of November 20, 2017, Duterte has already added 134 persons to the number of political prisoners currently languishing in different jails across the country.

Prior to Duterte's verbal threats on November 18, 2017 to crackdown on progressive groups, Karapatan had already received several cases of illegal arrests and detention, involving development workers, rights defenders and peasant leaders. The effects of Oplan Kapayapaan's implementation has been compounded by the formation of IACLA. The spate of arrests intensified after Duterte's ramblings, with more violations on people's civil and political rights blatantly perpetrated by the police and the military.

In this light, join us in calling for the immediate release of all those who have been arrested and charged with trumped-up cases. Let us amplify the call to resist this worsening curtailment and disregard for people's rights, and an end to fascist policies peddled by the Duterte regime. These arrests are a chilling manifestation of State fascism and how desperate the government has become in silencing the varied voices of criticism and dissent.

Furthermore, let us unite to defeat and resist #DuterTyranny. We call on friends, networks, and all organizations to release statements and mobilize to collectively show that the people will not tolerate such blatant violations to people's rights.

ACCOUNT OF THE INCIDENTS

The following include the recent spate of arrests reported to Karapatan prior and after Duterte's verbal threats to crackdown on progressive organizations:

On October 19, 2017, **Jeremy Ang**, a senior consultant of non-government organization Assert Socio Economic Initiatives Network of the Philippines (Ascent) and his staff **Rita Espinoza** were arrested by elements of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) and Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP) in Kabankalan, Negros Occidental. The two were brought to Camp Alfredo Montelibano Sr. in Bacolod City before being surreptitiously transferred to Camp Crame in Quezon City on October 21, without proper notice to their lawyers.

In Mudiit, Dolores, Abra, joint forces of the 24th IBPA, 7th Infantry Division (ID) and the PNP raided the home of peasant leader **Eugene Antonio** on October 27, 2016. They served a search warrant for weapons that Antonio allegedly possessed; the search yielded nothing. Instead, soldiers and police seized documents of the Mudiit People's Organization, a local group of which Antonio is an officer. Antonio, also a pastor, has received death threats and has been the subject of red-tagging after the 24th IBPA accused him of being an NPA supporter.

On the same day in Balit, San Luis, Agusan del Sur, **Julito Otacan**, a field worker of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP), along with five other Banwaon community members, were arrested by elements of the 26th IBPA. Otacan, along with **Alejandro Barluado, Jonas Acosta, Noli Tahudan, Marlon Talatayod, and Joel Trasona**, were taken to the Police Station in Rubako, San Luis, Agusan del Sur after soldiers allegedly found grenades, firearms, and other equipment in the residents' houses. The five arrested along with Otacan are all members of the Banwaon Peoples' Organization, Tagdumahan, a group consistently targeted because of their struggles and campaigns against logging and mining concessions infringing on the Banwaon's ancestral domain.

On November 9, 2017, at around 5pm, combined elements of PNP and AFP went to the farm of **Rustico Tan** at Brgy. Palaminya, Oslob, Cebu. When authorities failed to locate Tan, they instead arrested **Lopito Paquigbao** and **Eddie Cullamat**, both farm workers of Tan. Tan is a former priest of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (MSC). The PNP eventually located Tan and is now detained at the Bohol District Jail, while Cullamat and Paquigbao are in CPDRC- Cebu City.

Both on November 10, a local peasant leader and a health worker were illegally arrested in Eastern Samar and Mindoro Oriental respectively. **Carlito Badillo** was arrested by elements of the 87th Infantry Battalion Philippine Army (IBPA) in front of a school in Tag-alag, Marabut, Eastern Samar. Badillo is a leader of local peasant organization Tag-

alag Farmers and Fisherfolk Association. He is currently under the custody of Marabut Municipal Police Station, facing charges of rebellion and illegal possession of explosives.

Meanwhile, health worker **Emilia Marquez, 29**, was illegally accosted by the 203rd Brigade of the Philippine Army while the victim was nursing her two-month old baby at the Medical Mission Group Hospital in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro. Marquez was among the “Morong 43” health workers arrested and detained by the Philippine Army in Rizal Province in 2010.

On November 13, 2017, farmers **Oliver Molina** and **Robert Dalupang** were tending to their farms in Brgy. Diasan, Isabela, Cagayan Valley before they were reported to be missing by relatives. Molina and Dalupang are both active members of peasant organization Danggayan dagiti Mannalon ti Isabela. A search group was immediately mobilized by Karapatan Cagayan Valley, composed of family members and rights defenders. On November 18, Molina and Dalupang were eventually found in the custody of the 86th IBPA in its headquarters in Sitio Balabal, Brgy. Uno, Jones, Isabela.

On November 18, a couple was illegally arrested in Pagadian City. **Senando Jacutin, 47**, peasant organizer of Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) in Western Mindanao, and **Rosario Tabanao, 47**, coordinator of Karapatan Western Mindanao, were arrested by composite elements of the CIDG Region 9 and the 1st Infantry Tabak Division of the AFP. Authorities are set to file trumped-up charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives against the couple, based on planted evidence. Jacutin and Tabanao are currently detained at the Pagadian City Police Station.

On November 20, 2017, 9 members of the quick reaction team (QRT) led by BHRA-Karapatan were illegally arrested by members of the Philippine National Police and Philippine Air Force 730th Combat Group in Nasugbu, Batangas. The 9 individuals were members of farmers’ groups Habagat and the Samahang ng Pinagkaisang Damdamin ng Brgy. Quisumbing from Calaca and Lian, Batangas, respectively. The 9 arrested were **Leonardo Delos Reyes, 43; Carlos Sanoza, 62; Josefino Castellano, 50; Peping Sacdalan, 67; Robert Hernandez; Jocelyn Cabadin, 44; Jennelyn Bayani, 30; Orlan Cabadin, 19; and Anthony Bañaga**. All 9 were released on November 23, 2017, upon further preliminary investigation. The Batangas provincial prosecutor assigned to the trumped-up case of attempted murder against the 9 QRT responders ruled in favor of their release.

In Maco, Compostela Valley, the house of peasant leader **Renante Mantos** was subjected to illegal search by 4 elements of the military under the 46th and 71st IBPA on November 21, 2017. Mantos is the chairperson of Hugpong sa mga Mag-uuma sa Walog, Compostela (HUMAWAC), a local peasant organization in the area. The victim was not home during the incident, but his brother narrated that the soldiers were asking for Mantos’ whereabouts. Mantos and the rest of HUMAWAC have long been the target of

threat and harassment, with the military red-tagging the organization as members and fronts of the NPA.

On November 23, 2017, peasant leader **Jerry Santiago**, a Mangyan from Oriental Mindoro, was illegally arrested by elements of the police in Bulalacao, Oriental Mindoro. Trumped-up charges for the murder of a paramilitary member is set to be filed against Santiago, despite proof that he was attending a community meeting during the said date of the murder incident. Santiago is currently detained at BJMP-Roxas.

In Brgy. Osmena, Palapag, Northern Samar, 3 farmers were abducted by elements of the 20th IBPA on November 24, 2017. The victims were identified as **Richard Avino, Teny Gerbon and Arnel Aquino**. The whereabouts of the 3 are yet to be confirmed, but Katungod-Northern Samar has made rounds in several military detachment in the area. The farmers are believed to be in the custody of the 20th IBPA. **Sargie Macallan** of Katungod-Northern Samar, a provincial formation of Karapatan, was also physically assaulted by the commanding officer of the CMO Battalion in their Opong detachment on November 26, 2017. Macallan was strangled by LTC George Domingo while the former was seeking a dialogue in light of efforts to ascertain the location of the 3 farmers.

The following initial reports received by Karapatan are a mounting evidence of the Duterte regime's unabated and escalating attacks on people's civil and political rights. Using the courts and other government agencies to repress and justify the illegal arrest and harassment of activists and members of progressive organizations, the Duterte regime has turned the entire State machinery, led by the AFP and the PNP, into an all-out fascist crime syndicate.

Recommended actions:

Send letters, emails or fax messages calling for:

1. The immediate investigation of the separate incidents to be conducted by an independent body;
2. The immediate release of all political prisoners illegally arrested by State security forces on the basis of trumped-up charges;
3. An end to the targeting, harassment, and intimidation of development workers, human rights defenders, and members and leaders of progressive organizations;

4. The immediate prosecution of all elements of State security forces involved in the illegal arrest and detention of the victims;
5. The immediate abolition of the Inter-Agency Committee on Legal Action (IACLA), a body created by the PNP and the AFP, which further legitimizes and systematizes the political persecution and illegal arrest and detention of rights defenders and development workers working alongside marginalized sectors;
6. An end to the Duterte regime's counter-insurgency program Oplan Kapayapaan which encourages State security forces to threaten, harass, arbitrarily and illegally arrest development workers tagged as 'enemies of the State';
7. The Philippine Government to continue the peace talks and build towards the advancement of a Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (CASER), which includes the issue of free land distribution to farmers and farm workers;
8. The Philippine Government to pursue its commitments under the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) which includes the right to freedom of thought and expression, freedom of conscience, political and religious beliefs and practices and the right not to be punished or held accountable for the exercise of these rights, and the right to free speech, press, association and assembly; and
9. The Philippine Government to adhere and respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all major Human Rights instruments that it is a party and signatory.

You may send your communications to:

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