



18 October 2017

URGENT ALERT: Stop the Attacks on Women Human Rights Defenders in the Cordillera, Philippines

We urgently seek your support against the waves of attacks against women activists in the Cordillera by the 7th Infantry Division of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Northern Luzon Command. In the past three months, political persecution endangered the lives and security of women human rights defenders Sarah Abellon-Alikes, Sherry Mae Soledad, Joanne Villanueva, Rachel Mariano, Asia Isabella Gepte and Shirley Ann Angiwot.

A Department of Justice (DOJ) Investigation Data Form names the five women activists--Sarah, Sherry Mae, Joanne, Rachel and Asia-- along with 18 individuals for frustrated murder and multiple attempted murder related to a gun firing incident that occurred in Sitio Mabileg, Brgy. San Ramon, Sigay, Ilocos Sur in August 4, 2017. According to accompanying statements of the DOJ Data Form, a certain Cpl Melvin Sevilla Saura alleges that the 5 women activists are of a group of the New People's Army (NPA), the revolutionary armed organization in the Philippines that is being pinpointed by the AFP to have engaged that day. Late last week, the prosecutor issued a resolution filing 10 counts of multiple attempted murder. The warrant of arrest is expected any day. Just recently, it came to our attention that the case involves yet another engagement of AFP forces, the 81st Infantry Battalion with the NPA. With this development, we are not discounting the possibility that other fabricated charges are still to be filed against them.

Since August this year, the 24th Infantry Battalion has consistently maligned Shirley Ann Angiwot in social media after tagging her and National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) Peace Negotiations Observer Roman Catholic Bishop Sergio Utleg and other church workers as "enemies of the State" and connected with the NPA. The 71st Division Reconnaissance Company, the 81st IB and the 24th IB are military units of 7th ID.

These events took place as 7th ID counterpart units in Nueva Vizcaya illegally arrested and detained five members of a local anti-mining alliance in Kasibu, a mining town where the peoples' resistance to destructive mining is strong.

All the named women activists belonging to legal and legitimate organisations in the Cordillera people's movement, working for the promotion and respect of indigenous peoples therein. All victims are advocates for peace, supporters of the Peace Talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the NDFP. All are working to support marginalized communities. Two of these women have young children while another recently gave birth to her first child.

Sarah and Sherry Mae are both with the Katinnulong dagiti Umili ti Amianan-Regional Development Center (KADUAMI-RDC NL). Sarah is a pioneer of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA). Rachel is with the Cordillera Health, Education, Services and Training in the Cordillera (CHESTCORE). Villanueva works with the Cordillera Women's Education, Action, Research Center (CWEARC) and Asia is a convenor of Binnadang, a network of advocates in Metro Manila supporting Cordillera indigenous peoples' issues and campaigns, and a staff of the joint secretariat of the NDFP nominated section to the Joint Monitoring Committee on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. Shirley Ann is a member of the Innabuyog-Gabriela. These organisations are actively engaged in the Cordillera people's movement for the defense of ancestral land, right to self-determination, genuine peace and democracy.

All these come in the light of the worsening state of human rights in the country due to State policies making the people open targets of human rights violations. These fabricated charges against human rights defenders fighting for equality and against all forms of discrimination demonstrates the tyranny towards dictatorship of the Duterte regime. Philippine government formed the Inter-Agency Committee on Legal Action (IACLA), similar to the Inter-Agency Legal Action Group of previous administrations, which is a platform for State sponsored terrorism using the Philippine justice system against legitimate political dissent. It has been a practice by State security forces to use trumped up charges to threaten, harass, intimidate and “neutralize” whom they deem as “enemies of the State” including legal political activists.

Call for Support

We urgently appeal for your support and solidarity for the following:

1. Issue statements of solidarity for circulation to the public and media circles. Publish these to your websites, social media platforms among others. And please send a copy to cpa@cpaphils.org.

2. We humbly request our partners and solidarity networks to write letters of concern to their embassies in the Philippines on the worsening threat to the operational space of human rights defenders and activists in the Philippines

3. Assist our fundraising for the following:

- Legal assistance to include bail, legal fees, research, photocopying of documents
- Communication gadgets to set up alarm system and hotlines for quick reaction teams in cases of emergency
- Sanctuary/Relocation
- Information and education campaigns (IEC) including actions during court hearings
- Psycho-social, counseling and medication
- Family support since they cannot come home often due to security considerations arising from the above situation
- Human rights training for community leaders so that they can help in the campaign

Financial support can be channeled to:

Peso Account: Cordillera Peoples Alliance, RCBC Baguio Peso Account 1-326-72354-8

USD Account: Cordillera Peoples Alliance, Banco de Oro (EPCIB), Session Road Branch, Account 5470156541 and SWIFT Address BNORPHMM

References:

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