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**URGENT APPEAL FOR ACTION
ON THE USE OF THE ANTI-TERRORISM FINANCING LAW AGAINST FAITH-BASED
INSTITUTIONS/GROUPS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
July 26, 2023**

Dear friends and colleagues,

Greetings of peace!

On June 18, 2012, the Philippine Congress passed **Republic Act No. 10168 or The Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act**. Under this law, a person who, directly or indirectly possesses, provides, collects or uses property or funds or makes available property, funds or financial or other related services to carry out or facilitate the commission of any "terrorist act" is punishable by up to 40 years imprisonment and a fine of up to PhP1 million. The Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) has been tasked to investigate violations of RA 10168.

However, since 2019, this law has been weaponized to suppress, persecute and subject to criminal prosecution a number of faith-based institutions/groups and human rights defenders involved in humanitarian and advocacy work in impoverished and far-flung areas of the country. This persecution has been further intensified with the legislation of Republic Act No. 11479 or the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2020. Both laws are now increasingly used against these institutions/groups and human rights defenders whose development work caters to the most vulnerable communities in the Philippines.

Prior to the legal cases they currently face, these institutions, groups and human rights defenders have been repeatedly red-tagged and falsely labelled as terrorists. As a result of the cases against them, many of their health, educational and livelihood projects have ground to a halt, depriving thousands of peasants, fisherfolk and indigenous peoples of much-needed services.

The following are facing legal cases under RA 10168, and have had their bank accounts and other assets and properties subjected to civil forfeiture proceedings:

1. Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP) and RMP-Northern Mindanao Region

AMLC Resolution No. TF-18 dated December 26, 2019 was issued against the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP) and RMP-Northern Mindanao Region (RMP-NMR). A total of 15 bank accounts belonging to the RMP and the RMP-NMR were frozen as a result, including bank accounts unilaterally frozen by the bank for being “related accounts.” The accounts are also subjects of a civil forfeiture case at a the Manila Regional Trial Court Branch 37.

On August 15, 2022, sixteen alleged directors, officers and bank signatories of the RMP-NMR, including Czarina Golda Selim Musni of the National Union of People’s Lawyers (NUPL) and the Union of People’s Lawyers in Mindanao (UPLM), church worker Aldeem Yanez of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI), Sr. Emma Teresita E. Cupin, Sr. Mary Jane C. Caspillo, Jhona Ignilan Stokes, Hanelyn Caibigan Cespedes, Angelie Z. Magdua, Emilio Gabales, Mary Louise Dumas and Aileen Manipol Villarosa, (collectively called the “NMR 16”), were indicted under Section 8 of RA 10168 for allegedly making available funds or property to persons declared of designated as ‘terrorists’, referring to unidentified members of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army (CPP-NPA).

Two alleged rebel returnees - Gleceria Balangiao and Jackielyn Ann Elaco - falsely accused the NMR16 of being members of the “Regional Urban Poor Committee North Central Mindanao Regional Committee” of the CPP-NPA and of setting aside sixty per cent (60%) of their funds from the European Union to buy arms, medical supplies, food, clothing and support for families of the NPA, as well as other needs for tactical offensives from 2017 to 2019. The said funds were intended for the RMP-NMR’s development projects and the concerned EU funding agencies have found no irregularity or anomaly whatsoever in the implementation of the projects.

Balangiao and Elaco further claimed to have surrendered to the military on January 11, 2019. They have since been under military custody. Notably, Balangiao and Elaco are the same witnesses in the two civil forfeiture cases against the RMP, the RMP- NMR, and a number of peasant organizations likewise been victimized by RA 10168.

These criminal charges against the RMP16 were filed in the Regional Trial Court Branch 1 of Iligan City, one of the 15 designated anti-terrorism courts.

2. United Church of Christ in the Philippines at HARAN, Davao City and in Ubay, Bohol

AMLC Resolution No. TF-36, Series of 2021 dated March 12, 2021 was issued against the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), its UCCP– HARAN ministry in Davao City, and Brokenshire Integrated Health Ministries, Inc. (BIHMI) also based in Davao City, covering a bank account and one piece of real property in the name of BIHMI. However, the freeze order was also enforced against two bank accounts of UCCP Fatima, a local church

of the UCCP in Ubay, Bohol.

Their assets are also subjects of civil forfeiture cases.

3. The bank accounts of **Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women** were frozen by virtue of AMLC Resolution No. TF-38, series of 2021, on May 5, 2021. While the Court of Appeals has denied the motion for extension of the AMLC to freeze Amihan's account, the group's assets and properties continue to be subjects of a civil forfeiture case in Manila courts.

Resolution No. TF-38, Series of 2021 likewise included non-profit organizations **Panday Bulig, Inc., Community Based Health Services, Archdiocesan Health Apostolate, Mindanao Resource Center, Mindanao Farmer's Resource-NMR, Mindanao Farmer's Resource Center, Inc., Amihan-NMR, Inc. and Bread Emergency Assistance and Development, Inc.** covering eight bank accounts belonging to the said organizations.

4. AMLC Resolution No. TF-27, Series of 2020 dated May 28, 2020 was issued against Eastern Vista journalist **Frenchie Mae Cumpio** and RMP lay worker **Maribel Domequil** covering cash in the amount of the P557,360.00, which was seized by elements of the Philippine National Police – Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (PNP-CIDG) while they were planting firearms, ammunition and explosives in Cumpio and Domequil's office in Tacloban City on February 7, 2020.

On September 30, 2021, the DOJ issued a resolution finding probable cause to indict Cumpio and Domequil for violation of Section 8 of RA 10168. In a complaint filed by the AMLC Financial Crimes Investigation Group, Cumpio and Domequil were falsely accused of "facilitating the distribution of funds and other logistical supplies, such as ammunition, to members of the CPP-NPA" in a mountainous area in San Andres, Catbalogan City, Samar sometime in March 2019.

The said activists were arrested in a simultaneous pre-dawn raids on February 7, 2020. Notably, however, this criminal complaint seems to have been filed as a retaliatory measure after Cumpio and Domequil demanded the return of the money which was inside a safety deposit box in the raided office. The money, which was intended for distribution to the beneficiaries of a humanitarian project, was not included by the police in the inventory of items seized, and neither was it specified as among the items to be seized in the search warrant. Cumpio and Domequil had no record of any suspicious transactions that would have triggered an investigation under RA 10168.

The AFP and the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) later branded Cumpio and Domequil as secretary of the "Regional White Area Committee" and "CPP-NPA finance officers" in a press briefing and in social media posts. They are currently detained at the Tacloban City Jail Female Dormitory.

The charges against them have been filed with RTC Branch 45 of Tacloban City.

We call on all our allies and communities, especially faith-based groups and institutions, development workers, women's groups, peasant rights advocates, alternative media practitioners and all freedom-loving peoples, here and abroad, to support the RMP and RMP-NMR, UCCP and its beleaguered local ministries, Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women and its affiliate local peasant organizations as well as community journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio and RMP lay worker Mariel Domequil, and stand with us against the intensified harassment and persecution of human rights defenders like them who are fighting injustice, inequality and impunity and the weaponization of the law in the Philippines.

We urgently appeal for your support and solidarity by:

2. Writing letters and statements supporting the faith-based institutions and groups and human rights defenders and to send the letters and statements to the following:

Mr. Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., President of the Republic of the Philippines
Email: op@president.gov.ph/pcc@malacanang.gov.ph or send a message through <http://president.gov.ph/contact-us/>

Mr. Lucas Bersamin, Anti-Terrorism Council Chairperson and Executive Secretary
Email: op@president.gov.ph/pcc@malacanang.gov.ph or send a message through <http://president.gov.ph/contact-us/>

Mr. Eduardo Año
Anti-Terrorism Council Vice Chairperson and National Security Adviser
Email: publicaffairs@nsc.gov.ph

Mr. Matthew David
Member, Anti-Terrorism Council, and Executive Director of the Anti-Money Laundering Council
Email: secretariat@amlc.gov.ph

Atty. Richard Palpal-latoc
Chairperson, Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines
Email: ocrpp@chr.gov.ph

2. Issuing statements of solidarity for the faith-based institutions and groups and human rights defenders to be circulated to the public and media circles, and calling on the Philippine government to repeal Republic Act 10168 or the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act and Republic Act 11479 or the Anti-Terrorism Act, which have both been weaponized and brandished to suppress dissent, persecute and curtail the

movements and pro-people advocacies of human rights defenders and other political activists.

3. Publish these on your websites, social media platforms among others, and include the following calls:

Drop the unjust terrorism charges against human rights defenders!
Junk the terror laws!

Please send us a copy of your email to the above-named officials, to our address below:

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