



12 February 2018

URGENT ALERT UPDATE: On the intensifying attacks against human rights defenders in the Cordillera, Philippines

Dear Friends,

We urgently appeal for your support in calling for a stop to the intensifying attacks against human rights defenders and communities in the Cordillera, Philippines by State security forces of the dictatorial Duterte regime. There is no let-up to the intensifying human rights violations since February 2017, where indigenous peoples and advocates fell victims of criminalization, illegal arrests and detention, political vilification, harassment and intimidation. If not put to a stop, we fear that the human rights violations will escalate to extrajudicial killings and abductions as what we experienced in past regimes.

The Cordillera has been identified as a priority area of the Duterte regime on the pretext of its 'counter-insurgency' plan under Oplan Kapayapaan and its all-out war against the New People's Army. However, the victims are mostly indigenous communities, legitimate people's organizations and community leaders who staunchly defend our ancestral lands from the plunder and exploitation of extractive industries and militarisation. Fifteen (15) cases of illegal arrests and detention took place since February 2017. Every month from July to October 2017, the 7th Infantry Division (ID) of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) filed trumped-up charges against human rights defenders, all members of legitimate peoples' organizations.

Leaders and members of people's organizations, including the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) are experiencing constant threats to their lives, including suspicious acts of surveillance. The 24th Infantry Battalion, 81st IBPA and 71st Division Reconnaissance Company under the 7th ID continue their reign of terror in Abra province and Ilocos region, whereby all communities covered by their operations experience militarization.

At a national scale, the regime's Interagency Committee on Legal Action (IACLA) intensified the State's attacks against legitimate peoples' organizations as the IACLA uses the Philippine justice system against legitimate political dissent.

It is with urgent situation that we appeal for your support and solidarity with the people of the Cordillera in asserting human rights against a backdrop of dictatorship and tyranny. Please read below how you can support (Annex 1). We have also provided a documentation of the human rights violations in the region since February 2017 (Annex 2).

Thank you.

Sincerely,

BESTANG DEKDEKEN
Secretary General, CPA

AUDREY BELTRAN
Vice Chair, CHRA

Annex 1. How you can help

We thank all individuals and groups that have extended support and solidarity to our campaign on the criminalization of women human rights defenders since October 2017. The following are some of the ways by which you can help in our human rights campaigns.

1. Issue statements of solidarity for circulation to the public and media circles and posting in websites and social media platforms. Please send a copy to cpa@cpaphils.org.
2. Sign and circulate the online petition “Drop all trumped-up charges against women human rights defenders” at <https://www.change.org/p/president-rodrigo-roa-duterte-women-resist-tyranny-drop-all-trumped-up-charges-against-women-human-rights-defenders>.
3. For individuals and organizations outside the Philippines, write letters of concern to your embassies in the Philippines
4. Assist our fundraising for legal assistance, communication gadgets to set up alarm systems and hotline for quick reaction teams in cases of emergency, sanctuary/relocation of human rights defenders at risk, information and education campaign, psycho-social and medical support to human rights victims and their families, other necessary support to families of victims, human rights training for community leaders so that they can help in the campaign. For financial support, please contact the Cordillera Peoples Alliance at cpa@cpaphils.org.

Annex 2. Human rights violations from February 2017 to January 2018

The list below is partial. Incidents without written documentation are not yet included.

1. **February 9, 2017:** Sarah Abellon-Alikes, a Kankanaey-Igorot, was illegally arrested by the Armed Forces of the Philippines. She was turned over to the Philippine National Police and was illegally detained for two days without charges. On February 11, she was charged with arson and robbery with intimidation, after which she was released after posting bail. Sarah Abellon-Alikes is a pioneer of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance and a member of the Board of Directors of the Regional Development Center – Katinnulong dagiti Umili ti Amianan (RDC-Kaduami). To read more, click [here](#).
2. **February 2017 to present:** The 24th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army (IBPA) under LTC Thomas Dominic Baluga have been consistently maligning, harassing and threatening leaders and staff of the Kakailian Salakniban Tay Amin a Nagtaudan (KASTAN), the Cordillera Peoples Alliance chapter in Abra province. These were done through public fora in communities and schools, social media, and threats of court charges.
3. **March 13, 2017 up to April first week:** Military troops belonging to the 24th IBPA conducted military combat operations, where they dropped at least 14 bombs in Malibcong, Abra, affecting at least 56 families, including 200 children. The aerial strikes caused forest fires, damaged agricultural fields, endangered civilians and forced schools to suspend classes. On March 18 and 19, 2017, soldiers of the 24th IBPA occupied schools and encamped in the nearby residential area endangering the civilians. Malibcong residents also reported a blockade of basic food and other necessities, and threat, harassment and intimidation of civilians by military and police troops. On March 18, four civilians

were illegally arrested and detained for several hours including a minor and two women in two separate incidents. To read more, click [here](#).

4. **May 2017 to present:** Rima Mangili Libongen, an Ibaloi, has been stalked and harassed by two suspected military or police agents. On May 30, one of these men monitored the proceedings of a youth assembly that Rima facilitated in her hometown Itogon in Benguet province. Early in the morning of June 3, the two men accosted her and clasped her forearm. They only let her go when shopkeepers started opening the doors to their stores. Later that day, the two men tailed Rima again. She received an SMS message on her cellphone saying “Oh, so you go to many places.” To avoid getting harassed, she changed her number. But on June 8, she received a new message saying, “You’ve been pinpointed.” To read more, click [here](#).
5. **July-October 2017:** Five women activists – Sarah Abellon-Alikes, Sherry Mae Soledad, Joanne Villanueva, Rachel Mariano and Asia Isabelle Gepte – were charged with trumped-up cases of 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. Sarah and Sherry Mae are both with RDC-KADUAMI. Sarah is a pioneer of the 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. To read more, click [here](#). On February 9, 2018, Sarah, Sherry Mae, Joanne and Rachel appeared in court and posted bail.
6. **August 2017 to present:** The 24th Infantry Battalion of the 7th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army has been waging a smear campaign against Kakailian Salakniban Ta’y Amin A Nagtaudan (KASTAN), the Cordillera Peoples Alliance chapter in Abra province, and threatening its leaders and staff with lawsuits. The 24th IB has alleged that KASTAN is nothing more than a terrorist front; that its staff and at least one of its community leaders are recruiters for the “terrorist” New People’s Army; that the services KASTAN renders to communities are just means for luring these communities into the “terrorist” movement. To read more, click [here](#).
7. **October 27, 2017:** Joint forces of the 24th IBPA, 7th Infantry Division (ID) and the PNP raided the home of peasant leader Eugene Antonio in Mudiit, Dolores, Abra. 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. To read more, click [here](#).
8. **October 28, 2017:** Cordillera Peoples Alliance Chairperson Windel Bolinget and Vice Chairperson for Internal Affairs Xavier Akien, along with staff of the Center for Development Programs in the Cordillera were harassed and illegally detained for one hour by the Philippine National Police in Ilocos Sur. They were subjected to four more checkpoints in the same province after the incident. The group was on their way home to Baguio City after attending a community meeting in Patungcaleo, Quirino, Ilocos Sur, with the Save Quirino Movement (SQM). SQM is a people’s organization and a local partner of the CPA and CDPC. To read more, click [here](#).

9. **October 2017:** A petition circulated to eject the people living in the Ifugao Peasant Movement (IPM) staff house owned by the Tanguid Family in Poblacion East Lagawe, Ifugao province. The IPM confronted the Barangay council for the malicious petition and it exposed that it was led by an agent of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, whose identity they were not sure of, and that the barangay council had no hand in that petition. Harassment by suspected state security forces is also continuing where Fernando Alikes Jr., an organic farmer and church leader, has been receiving calls from suspected state security agents pretending to be New Peoples Army commanders of Ifugao and Nueva Viscaya with threatening messages. To read more, click [here](#).
10. **October 2017 to present:** Joanne Villanueva, one of the five women currently facing trumped-up charges, experiences heightened surveillance. In October 2017 and on January 6, 2018, a man who introduced himself as “Eric” and a member of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) accosted Joanne and offered her financial assistance, for the trumped-up charges against her to be dropped and protection if she agrees to “cooperate” with the agency.
11. **November 2017:** CPA and CHRA learned that a complaint was filed against Rachel Mariano and UCCP Pastor Francisco Bonuan. They are linked to an alleged gun fighting between the New Peoples Army and the Armed Forces of the Philippines in October 2017 in Patiacan, where an AFP soldier was killed.
12. **December 12, 2017:** Sherwin de Vera, coordinator Defend Ilocos, a regional environmental network in Ilocos region, was arrested in Ilocos on rebellion charges he was supposed to have committed way back in 2014. He was detained at the Abra Provincial Jail and was released after posting bail in January 2018. Sherwin is a staunch defender of the environment and human rights, and advocate of indigenous peoples’ rights. Sherwin and Defend Ilocos played a key role in leading the Save the Abra River Movement (STARM), which campaigned against the mining operations of the Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company in Benguet province. To read more, click [here](#).
13. **January 19, 2018:** CPA Chair Windel Bolinget received a text message on his phone, which said “... a police asset is tracking you down they believe you are umbrella wings of CPP NDF NPA.”
14. There were observations of monitoring and surveillance of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance regional office by military agents all year round. Incidents of malicious tagging against the CPA happened a few times when placards bearing the letters CPP NPA NDF were secretly hung outside the office by unidentified men. Malicious tagging and political vilification, if continued, will make the CPA and its leaders open targets of extrajudicial killings and other forms of human rights violations.
