



Philippines: Stop harassment of human rights defender and their organization in Mindanao, Lift the Martial Law without further delay

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Chiang Mai, Thailand

Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)* strongly condemns the harassment and intimidation to a 21-year-old staff of Rural Missionaries of the Philippines – Northern Mindanao Sub-Region (RMP – NMR) with threats of rape against her and threats against her family. RMP – NMR has been receiving threats for the past four months but this recent incident is particularly alarming.**

On 20 November 2017, a person identifying him/herself as an intelligence asset of the 4th Infantry Division of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) threatened the RMP – NMR staff and claimed that her parents and siblings are under their surveillance. AIPP denounces such cowardly tactics employed by the military.

The staff of RMP – NMR is being pressured to provide information regarding the work of RMP – NMR, particularly disclosing their partners and allies who visit their office. RMP – NMR, based in Iligan City of the Philippines' Mindanao island with offices all over Northern Mindanao, has been active since 1969 in supporting the rural communities that are among the poorest and most voiceless in the island. The organization has been helping the communities in raising awareness and their issues, as well as stand with them against human rights violations and abuses.

The staff of RMP – NMR and human rights defenders under its sanctuary have drawn the attention of the military and have become the target of threats and harassment. President Rodrigo Duterte's declaration of Martial Law, which was extended by the Congress and Senate to the whole of Mindanao until the end of 2017, has led to intensification of military actions and impunity in the island.

The recent threat and intimidation to the staff of RMP – NMR is an example of an act to send a message of intention and capacity to cause harm or arrest anyone defying their authority. The declaration of Martial Law in the name of providing security is misguided. It has only led to further abuse of power and acts of impunity of the AFP and paramilitary forces operating in the island. Furthermore, it has caused greater harm to the common people and increased their vulnerability to violations of human rights.

The staff of RMP – NMR, human rights defenders and communities, including other organisations working in the island for promoting and protecting human rights should be assured a safe working and living environment that is free from any kinds of threat and harassment. The authorities should be made accountable to the rule of law and nobody should be exempted from any acts of human rights violations regardless of political and economic status. Further, AIPP calls on the Philippine government to lift the Martial Law in Mindanao without further delay and ensure that justice is brought to the cases of human rights violations in the island.

As we commemorate the 16-day of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, we call on our partners and allies in the region and beyond to join us in condemning gender-based violence as a method that puts emphasis on the power imbalance in our society with women and girls at the most vulnerable end. We stand with RMP – NMR in their work on human rights and their dedication to support the poorest and voiceless communities and peoples in Mindanao, Philippines.

Gam Awungshi Shimray
Secretary General
Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact

*AIPP is a regional organization of indigenous peoples in Asia with 48 member organizations and movements in 14 countries.

** See the statement and appeal for support from RMP-NMR for more information at the link <http://rmp-nmr.org/articles/2017/11/20/we-are-and-will-continue-be-people-state-killing>