

Item 5: Interactive Dialogue with the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

Statement on the Arbitrary Designation of Cordillera Indigenous Leaders as Terrorists
16th Session Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP)
July 17-22, Geneva

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The recent arbitrary designation of Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) leaders, Sarah Abellon Alikes, Windel Balag-ey Bolinget, Steve Ambucay Tauli, and Jennifer Awingan, as terrorists by the Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC) is an alarming and unjustifiable act. This decision flagrantly undermines the principles of justice and human rights while silencing the voices of Indigenous Peoples fighting for their rights and self-determination.

Labeling these Indigenous leaders as terrorists is an unfounded accusation aimed at tarnishing their reputation and discrediting their legitimate struggles for land, self-determination, and social justice. This sweeping and baseless categorization serves only to suppress dissent and discourage the pursuit of justice and equality, putting their lives, families, and organizations at grave risk.

The charges leveled against Alikes, Bolinget, Awingan, and Tauli under the provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Act lack credibility. Instead of engaging in meaningful dialogue and addressing the root causes of grievances, the Philippine government chooses to employ repressive tactics, instilling fear and stigmatizing those who advocate for the rights of marginalized communities.

This is the latest of continuing attacks and red-tagging against the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA), its leaders, and members. In 2017, Abellon-Alikes was falsely charged with arson and robbery, while Bolinget faced false murder charges in 2021, both of which were later dismissed by the trial court. In 2018, the Department of Justice (DOJ) initially included Bolinget and other CPA leaders in its designation of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) as terrorists, but their names were later removed.

In 2022, Tauli was abducted by suspected state agents but was released the following day, and in the same year, the CPA Secretary-General Bestang Dekdeken was wrongfully convicted of cyberlibel. Earlier this year, five CPA leaders, including Abellon-Alikes, Bolinget, Tauli, Awingan, and Lulu Gimenez, were falsely accused of rebellion. However, the court also dismissed the case, clearing their names of the baseless charges. Thus, we fear that this arbitrary terrorist designation can lead to unlawful arrests or worse, extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances of CPA members and other activists.

The Cordillera Peoples Alliance has long been at the forefront of promoting indigenous rights and preserving the cultural heritage of the Cordillera region. Their tireless efforts in safeguarding ancestral lands and protecting indigenous communities from exploitation deserve recognition, not vilification.

Furthermore, the freezing of the bank accounts of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance by the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) obstructs the implementation of their programs, including crucial social services. This denial of funds deprives indigenous communities in the Cordillera of valuable resources for relief, especially during times of disasters and calamities.

We vehemently condemn the arbitrary designation of Cordillera Indigenous Peoples leaders as terrorists and demand an immediate reversal of this decision including the unfreezing of their bank accounts. It is imperative that the Philippine government respects the rights of all citizens, particularly those belonging to indigenous communities, and upholds the principles of justice, inclusivity, and human dignity.

We call for the repeal of the Anti-Terror Act, as it poses a grave threat to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Filipino people.

Endorsed by:

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Attachments:

<https://atc.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/ATC-PRESS-STATEMENT-FEBRUARY-10-2023.pdf>

<https://atc.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/ATC-Resolution-No.-41-2023.pdf>