

Item 9: Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Chair of the UNPFII, and the Board of Trustees of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples on UNDRIP implementation

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A Statement Endorsed by Local and International Organizations on the Arbitrary Designation of the Philippines Government against Cordillera Indigenous Leaders as Terrorists

On July 10, the Philippines' Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC) arbitrarily designated four Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) leaders as terrorists. This is an alarming and unjustifiable act that undermines justice, due process of law, and human rights. Labelling these Indigenous leaders as terrorists is baseless, aimed at tarnishing their reputation and suppressing their legitimate struggles for land, self-determination, and social justice. It also aims to sow fear amongst active members of indigenous organisations, which are critical of the government's record of violating the individual and collective rights of indigenous people at an alarming rate.

The charges under the Anti-Terrorism Act lack credibility. The CPA leaders and members faced similar attacks in the past, with the courts dismissing all these false criminal charges. These recent charges will only put them at high risk as they now become open targets by the military with their designation as terrorists.

Furthermore, freezing the CPA's bank accounts as a result of this designation obstructs their programs and deprives Cordillera indigenous communities of crucial resources, especially during disasters. The Cordillera Peoples Alliance, known for promoting indigenous rights and safeguarding ancestral lands, deserves recognition, not vilification. We are Indigenous. We are not terrorists.

Therefore:

1. We call on the EMRIP, UNPFII, and the SR on Indigenous Peoples Rights to urge member states NOT to use anti-terrorism or national security laws to criminalize Indigenous defenders and activists asserting their rights as protected under international human rights and humanitarian laws.
2. We appeal to the UN SR on Indigenous Peoples' Rights to send an urgent communication on this matter to raise serious concern on this unjust act and call for its withdrawal; and urge the government to ensure their safety and that their human rights are not further violated. We are concerned that the arbitrary terrorist designation might lead to unlawful arrests, extra-judicial killings, or enforced disappearances including their family and organizations.

Thank you!

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>