



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ARE NOT CRIMINALS! End the worsening criminalization of Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines

The Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI) stands in solidarity with Lumad and all Indigenous Peoples who are continuously subjected to criminalization, killings, and unabated attacks in the Philippines.

The most recent incident was on February 15, 2021 when police authorities raided the University of San Carlos in Cebu City and arrested 26 individuals that included 19 minors. The 19 Lumad minors remain in the custody of the Philippine National Police (PNP), while the seven others consisting of three Lumad students, two Lumad leaders, and two volunteer teachers of Lumad schools – are detained and charged with kidnapping and serious illegal detention offenses. The police claims that the children they took into custody underwent “some form of warfare training”. This was belied by the children themselves and confirmed by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) who said that the children were being taught how to read and write. The Lumad schools have long been attacked and threatened based on the State’s baseless reports linking the schools to terrorist groups.

This incident was preceded by a series of other criminalization and attacks on Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines. In less than two months, we all witnessed the harrowing State-perpetrated attacks against them that resulted to the killings and arrests of over 50 Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines.

It can be recalled that on December 30, 2020, nine indigenous Tumandok were killed and 16 others were arrested in an operation conducted by a joint contingent of the PNP and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in Tumandok communities in Iloilo. Those killed and arrested were leaders and members of the Tumandok organization, an alliance of 17 indigenous peoples’ communities in Capiz and Iloilo provinces. They were well-known indigenous leaders in their respective barangays who were opposing militarization and rights violations in their communities and were active in the fight against land grabbing and the construction of the Jalaur Mega Dam in Calinog, Iloilo.

Indigenous leaders Betty Belen and Windel Bolinget and their organization, Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA), have also been subjected to various attacks. Belen was arrested in an early morning raid by joint elements of PNP, the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) and AFP in her community on October 25, 2020. She was charged with illegal possession of firearms. Her case was dismissed on February 11, 2021 for lack of legal basis of the search warrant that led to her arrest. Bolinget, on the other hand, is currently facing charges for an alleged murder that happened in Davao del Norte (Southern Philippines), a place which he never visited during his lifetime.

In Zambales, four indigenous Aetas are likewise arrested on August 21, 2020 and are currently facing charges. Two of them are minors and women, and the other two are male and are the first persons to be charged under the Anti-Terrorism Law. Before they were turned over by the AFP to judicial authorities, the two men were tortured for several days.



**Indigenous Peoples
Rights International**

Championing Indigenous Peoples Rights



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We denounce the apparent ceaseless attacks against the Indigenous Peoples, especially at a difficult time when the Filipino people, especially those in the marginalized sectors like the Indigenous Peoples, are grappling with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and are caught in the world's longest lockdown. These attacks are obviously contrived and organized as part of the anti-insurgency program of the government. Unfortunately, indigenous peoples are among the most affected from the State attacks.

We urge the Philippine government to remain true to its obligation to protect and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as it has claimed in reaffirming its commitment to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), its Constitution and national legislation. We urge them to immediately drop the trumped-up charges against arrested Indigenous Peoples. An independent investigation must immediately be launched to determine accountability and culpability. These attacks must stop, NOW!

We remain firm in supporting the Indigenous Peoples' movement in the Philippines who persist with unwavering courage in defending their rights to their ancestral lands, territories and resources, self-determination, and access to quality education.

We call on all Indigenous Peoples movements across the globe to unite in amplifying the calls for justice to the victims of criminalization and impunity. ##

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