



Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition *Defending Women Defending Rights*

The Philippines: Women Human Rights Defenders are targeted for legitimate human rights advocacy

The Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRDIC) is dismayed at the increasing malicious attacks and threats perpetrated by State agents against women human rights defenders (WHRDs) resisting repression and operations of mining companies in the Philippines, and stands in solidarity with them and their meaningful contributions to our pursuit of living in just, equal, free and democratic societies.

Attacks attempting to impede the work of WHRDs in the Philippines occur in the following ways: i) vilification and surveillance of WHRDs; ii) arbitrary arrests and criminalization of their work protected by international human rights treaties to which the government of the Philippines is a party; and iii) extrajudicial killings.

Some emblematic cases, representing large numbers of the ones documented by WHRDs in the Philippines, illustrate the growing threats against WHRDs and their shrinking operative environment and include:

- On July 11, 2015, it was reported that trumped up charges have been brought against WHRD Honey May Suazo, Secretary General of the Southern Mindanao Regional Chapter of the KARAPATAN Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights) in an attempt to silence her and derail her work. Ms. Suazo has been instrumental in overseeing fact finding missions in highly militarized communities and documenting violations committed by military troops in the Southern Mindanao Region. In the same indictment, WHRD Cristina Palabay, Secretary General of the KARAPATAN, was also implicated to silence her committed opposition to ongoing militarization of Mindanao and escalating human rights abuses in the region. Cristina Palabay is an internationally renowned women's rights and human rights activists in the Philippines.
- Since April 28, 2015, at least nine WHRDs working within public sector trade unions received repeated threats. These WHRDs were harassed by alleged members of the military and police who warned them that their families would face reprisals if they didn't cooperate with the authorities.
- As of 30 March 2015, 48 WHRDs faced politically-motivated, unwarranted

and arbitrary arrests based on trumped up charges. WHRDs targeted for their human rights activism are working on gender-based violence, agrarian issues, impacts of mining and other trans-national businesses, militarization, freedom of expression and association, women's political participation, among many other pressing human rights concerns.

- Since July 2010, 28 WHRDs have been murdered. Among them is Ms. Cristina Jose, community organizer of typhoon survivors in Mindanao, who was brutally killed on March 4, 2013, after leading her community and typhoon survivors in protests emphasising government's negligence in handling natural disasters and calling for action. These extrajudicial killings under the Aquino administration have gone largely uninvestigated and no perpetrators have been brought to justice.

The WHRD IC firmly calls on the government of the Philippines to:

- i) immediately and unconditionally remove all unwarranted and arbitrary restrictions on peaceful operations of WHRDs;
- ii) implement safeguards to provide a conducive environment for all human rights work;
- iii) start effective investigations into threats and attacks against WHRDs.

The WHRDIC expresses its solidarity with our sisters in the Philippines and continues to be inspired by their human rights advocacy.

Notes

The Women Human Rights Defender International Coalition is a resource and advocacy network supporting women human rights defenders worldwide. We have 32 members:

Amnesty International (AI)

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM ASIA)

The Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP)

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights (BAOBAB)

Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR)

Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL)

Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)

Frida the Young Feminist Fund

Front Line Defenders

Human Rights First

Information Monitor (INFORM)

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP)
Isis International
ISIS Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (ISIS-WICCE)
Just Associates (JASS)
The Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM)
MADRE
Nazra for Feminist Studies
Nobel Women's Initiative (NWI)
Peace Brigades International
Rainbow Rights Project (R-Rights), Inc.
Society for Appraisal & Women Empowerment in Rural Areas (SAWERA)
Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (UAF)
Women Living under Muslim Laws (WLUML)
Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights
Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice (WIGJ)
Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC)
World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)