



06 August 2017

H.E. Rodrigo Duterte
President of the Republic of the Philippines
Office of the President, Malacañang Palace,
J.P. Laurel Street, San Miguel
Manila Philippines

RE: Threats received by Cristina Palabay

We are writing to express grave concern about intimidating threats reportedly received by woman human rights defender Cristina “Tinay” Palabay, Secretary General, KARAPATAN. We are also concerned about the many women human rights and environmental defenders in the Philippines who have received threats from military agents after conducting legitimate human rights and environmental work.

On July 20th, 2017, at around 10:20 PM, Cristina Palabay received a threatening call from a man who repeatedly asked her name and then demanded that she stop what she is doing because “times have changed” as “martial law is in place”. He further threatened that her name is currently on a ‘list’ of people considered courageous and that she is within his “AOR” (interpreted to mean Area of Responsibility). He accused Palabay of being involved in the alleged ambush of the Presidential Security Group by members of the New People’s Army (NPA) in Mindanao. Palabay denied knowledge and involvement in this, evidenced by the fact that she was in Manila. On further investigation it was revealed that the number from which the call came belongs to the Armed Forces of the Philippines Safety Battalion.

The evidence of the call and the origin of the caller should allow authorities independent of the armed forces to make a swift investigation and lay charges against both the offender and any authorising officials.

The crackdown on human rights defenders by State security forces in addition to other forms of state sanctioned violence against civilians creates a permissive culture of violence that has dire consequences for women throughout the country. Similarly, the failure to act against non-state actors, such as corporations and wealthy landholders, has dire consequences for the environment, people’s health and human rights.

In such a scenario, we strongly urge the Philippine government to:

1. Immediately authorise an independent investigation of the threats received by Ms Palabay;

2. Publically condemn the threats against Ms Palabay and other women human rights defenders and make a public commitment to ensuring charges are laid against personnel who conduct such threats and attacks;
3. Commit to and implement the UN General Assembly Resolution on Women Human Rights Defenders (A/RES/68/181) and particularly urgently implement articles 19,20 and 21 to provide ensuring that policies and programmes are put into place that protect and respect Women Human Rights Defenders and provide remedies for violations;
3. End the counter-insurgency program Oplan Kapayapaan which appears to have enabled State security forces to threaten, harass and intimidate activists, community leaders and civilians and sustain a belief that they will never be held accountable for their actions;
4. Recognise that the imposition of martial law throughout Mindanao is being used by security forces as another veil for extra-judicial violence. Consequently, lift the imposition of martial law;
5. Pursue the Philippine Government's commitments under the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) which includes the right to freedom of thought and expression, freedom of conscience, political and religious beliefs and practices and the right not to be punished or held accountable for the exercise of these rights, and the right to free speech, press, association and assembly; and

Sincerely,



Kate Lappin
Regional Coordinator
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Thailand
apwld@apwld.org