

URGENT ACTION

FIVE ACTIVISTS ARRESTED AFTER ILLEGAL RAID

Five activists from Tacloban City, Philippines, were arrested on 7 February 2020 on charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives, following an illegal raid. The activists, along with other groups that conducted a fact-finding mission about the arrest, allege multiple violations, including fabrication of evidence, committed by the security forces. We call on the Philippine Department of Justice to promptly, thoroughly, impartially and effectively investigate these allegations and, if proven, to drop all charges against the activists, and ensure their release. The authorities should hold those reasonably suspected to be responsible to account in fair trials.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Secretary Menardo I. Guevarra
Department of Justice, Philippines
Padre Faura Street
Ermita, Manila 1000
Fax: (632) 8526-2618

Email: communications@doj.gov.ph and osecmig@gmail.com

Dear Secretary Guevarra,

I am writing to express my concern about the circumstances under which the offices of five activists from Tacloban City – **Frenchie Mae Cumpio, Mariel Domequil, Marissa Cabaljao, Mira Legion, and Alexander Philip Abinguna** – were raided, resulting in their arrest on charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives. All five are active members of organisations involved in independent journalism, human rights, and environmental issues.

According to the activists, police and military officers raided two of the locations that house their offices at around 1 am on 7 February. They reported that the police and military officers pointed their firearms at them, asked them to leave their rooms, and conducted the search without any witness – all in violation of the proper conduct of searches, as prescribed by Philippine law.

The five have also asserted that the police and military officers planted evidence against them, including firearms and explosives allegedly found on their beds. The activists maintain that, as a one-year-old baby lived with them, this would never have happened. I find it distressing to hear that the mother, who was among the five activists arrested, had no other option but to stay in detention with her child for three days, until relatives were able to get her baby.

The planting of explosives and firearms is a widely documented method used to arrest activists on non-bailable charges and hinder the activities of these groups. Several groups in the country, including the groups the five arrested activists belong to, have been subjected to arrests and harassment after being “red-tagged”, or accused of being fronts for communist groups, without any clear legal basis. These activists are known for engaging in peaceful activities.

We therefore call on your office to promptly, thoroughly, impartially and effectively investigate the allegations made by the five activists and, if proven, to drop all charges against them, ensure the release of those still detained, and to hold those reasonably suspected to be responsible for these violations accountable in fair trials.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Community journalist **Frenchie Mae Cumpio**, **Mariel Domequil** from the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, People Surge Network Spokesperson **Marissa Cabaljao**, **Mira Legion** from Bagong Alyansang Makabayan-Eastern Visayas, and Karapatan National Council member **Alexander Philip Abinguna**, were arrested on 7 February 2020 in simultaneous raids in Tacloban City.

Legion and Cabaljao are facing bailable charges of illegal possession of firearms. Legion was released on bail on 14 February. Bail requirements were still being prepared for Cabaljao, at the time of writing. Cumpio, Domequil and Abinguna are facing non-bailable charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives. They are currently being detained at a jail facility in Palo Town Police Station.

Domequil and Cumpio were arraigned on 18 February 2020. Following inconsistencies with some information presented by the prosecution – such as the serial number on the firearm supposedly recovered, and the dates indicated on the medical certificates of the two activists – the court gave the prosecution five days to change the information. The activists' lawyers will then have 10 days to comment on the changes. The next hearing for Domequil and Cumpio is scheduled on 5 March 2020. Cabaljao, Legion and Abinguna will be arraigned on 25 March 2020.

Since President Rodrigo Duterte assumed office in 2016, human rights defenders and political activists have been subjected to repeated harassment, threats and attacks, including killings. Many of these defenders and activists belong to organisations that the government and other unknown individuals have "red-tagged", or accused of being fronts for communist groups, without credible evidence, an accusation which they have repeatedly denied.

Amid the worsening human rights record of the country, the UN Human Rights Council has asked the High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report on the country's human rights situation, to be presented during the Council's June 2020 session.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 31 March 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: **Frenchie Mae Cumpio** (she/her), **Mariel Domequil** (she/her), **Marissa Cabaljao** (she/her), **Mira Legion** (she/her) & **Alexander Philip Abinguna** (he/him)

ADDITIONAL TARGETS: Ambassador Antonio Lagdameo, Embassy of the Philippines, 6-11 Suffolk St, West End, London SW1Y 4HG