

H.E. Rodrigo Duterte

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Subject: Appeal for Urgent Action on the Attacks Against the Cordillera Peoples Alliance and its Leaders

Dear Mr. President,

At this time of COVID-19 pandemic and enhanced community quarantine, the smear campaigns against the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) and its leaders have intensified. Worse, innocent family members are being included, which is taboo in Cordillera society. The attacks escalated after the CPA issued a statement criticizing the dropping of leaflets by two Philippine army choppers in some parts of the Cordillera on April 12, Easter Sunday. The criticism was that the government spent a huge sum of money just to spread leaflets warning the people not to receive relief goods and donations from groups that they allege to be members of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New Peoples Army (CPP-NPA). This happened at a time when the country is facing a humanitarian crisis due to COVID-19 and resources should have been better used to address the urgent need for economic aid and health measures.

Following this incident, numerous Facebook accounts and pages attacked the Cordillera Peoples Alliance and its leaders by threatening, harassing, and tagging them as terrorists, communists and supporters of the New People's Army. On April 28, a photo of Windel Bolinget and his children was posted on Facebook bearing the text "Windel Bolinget NPA Recruiter. Before you risk the children of the Cordillera. You first send these children of yours to lead the children of the people so that you show your support to those NPA" (translated from local language). On the same day, another post showed photos of Windel Bolinget, Bestang Dekdeken and other activists with the message "Alert! Activism is the gateway to terrorism, terrorism is protected by activism." On May 1, a post with a photo of Windel and Bestang insinuated that the two are fighting over funds and positions in the organization. On May 6, a post said the families of Windel and Bestang are now well-to-do while families of NPA recruits are not. On May 7, another post showed the photos of Windel, his youngest son and Bestang, saying that the two are dividing among themselves the donations to CPA and that Windel should make his son an NPA. On April 17-21, the Facebook Account of Windel's youngest child, a minor, was taken down because his account had been reported to Facebook. Even though he is a minor, they continue to send threats and hate speech to him, with one alleging that his father is a member of the New People's Army. Santos Mero, the Vice Chairperson for Internal Affairs of the CPA, experienced threat to his family when he received a comment in Facebook stating that they will maul and stab his nieces and nephews. These are just some of the many malicious posts and disinformation published by the Philippine National Police Regional Office of the Cordillera Region, different battalions and units under the 5th and 7th Infantry Division of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and other accounts that we believe they created.

The Cordillera Peoples Alliance was established in 1984 by 27 people's organizations from around the Cordillera region to work for the Defense of Ancestral Domain and Self Determination. For the past 36 years, CPA has built a credible track record of advancing indigenous people's rights and self-

determination, and promoting human rights, genuine peace, and fundamental rights of democratic sectors. In 1986, CPA successfully lobbied the Constitutional Commission for the inclusion of provisions on ancestral land (Article VII, Section 5) and regional autonomy (Article X, Section 15) in the 1987 Constitution. CPA has grown stronger through the years, and now has a current membership of 307 peoples' organizations representing thousands of individuals. It remains the largest federation in the region and organized expression of the Cordillera people's movement to this day. CPA has gained national and international recognition for its staunch defense of indigenous people's rights. It received the Gawad Bayani ng Kalikasan in 2009 and the International Eco Water Award from the Government of South Korea in 2014. Some of its leaders like Petra Macliing, Joanna Cariño and Joan Carling received international recognition for being champions of environment and human rights defense. These awards are a testament to the exemplary work and legitimacy of the CPA.

We believe that these attacks are aimed to not only discredit the long record of CPA and its leaders in serving the people but also to silence organizations and individuals from raising legitimate issues and concerns. These acts are in violation of the Philippine government's obligations to human rights, international humanitarian law and international agreements, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We therefore provide the following recommendations for action:

1. Conduct an urgent, thorough and independent investigation on the attacks against the Cordillera Peoples Alliance and its leaders in social media platforms, particularly Facebook, and hold those responsible accountable without impunity.
2. Ensure the prosecution of perpetrators of red-tagging, political vilification, threats, harassment and intimidation against indigenous activists and human rights defenders.
3. Provide protection and ensure the safety and security of indigenous activists, environment and human rights defenders and their families who are targets of red-tagging, political vilification, threats, harassment, intimidation, and extrajudicial killings.
4. Stop the attacks against indigenous activists and human rights defenders, and uphold human rights and international humanitarian law.
5. Assume full responsibility for violation of rights by exacting full accountability of rights violators, review internal security policies endangering rights and scrap programs/policies that counter the government's human rights obligations including Executive Order 70 and Operation Plan (Oplan) Kapayapaan.
6. Realign military budget to health budget and reorient the mandate of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine Nation Police to prioritize pandemic response.
7. Resume work for genuine peace through peace talks.

CC

Hon. Carlito G. Galvez Jr.

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