

5 March 2020

Philippines: Judicial harassment of ten human rights defenders

On 2 March 2020, human rights defenders from **Karapatan**, **Gabriela** and the **Rural Missionaries of the Philippines** received a court notice sustaining a motion filed by a government official, finding probable cause to charge the human rights defenders with perjury.

[Karapatan](#) is an alliance of individuals, groups and organisations, formed in 1995 for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines. It is committed to the defence of people's rights and civil liberties through education, training, advocacy, research and network building. [Gabriela](#) is a grassroots-based alliance that organises Filipino women, primarily from marginalised sectors of society, and helps empower and train them to fight for their rights and interests through collective action. The organisation provides direct services to marginalised women including counselling services, medical missions, relief and rehabilitation in times of disaster, as well as capability building trainings on women's rights. The [Rural Missionaries of the Philippines](#) is a church-based national organisation, comprising priests and lay persons. The group empowers farmers, fisherfolk and indigenous peoples, and educates them on their rights.

On 2 March 2020, human rights defenders from Karapatan, Gabriela, and the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines received a court notice informing them that on 24 February 2020, a Quezon City Prosecutor had granted a motion for reconsideration, finding probable cause to charge the human rights defenders with perjury.

In May 2019, the human rights defenders had filed a petition for a writ of amparo citing the increasing attacks, smear campaigns and red-tagging¹ of human rights defenders by the Philippine military. However, on 28 June 2019, the Philippine Court of Appeals denied the petition. A government official, who had been named in the petition, filed perjury complaints against the human rights defenders for allegedly including false information.

In September 2019, an assistant Quezon City prosecutor dismissed the complaints against all but one human rights defender. Following this, the government official filed a motion for reconsideration of the dismissed complaints. On 24 February 2020, the Quezon City prosecutor sustained the motion and found probable cause to charge ten individuals with perjury. According to the Philippines law, perjury is punishable by imprisonment from six months to two years and two months. Some of the human rights defenders have applied for anticipatory bail ahead of the issuance of the warrants for their arrest.

This is not the first time members of these organisations have been intimidated and attacked. The human rights defenders have been wrongfully charged, threatened on social media, physically attacked and even accused by officials of having links to armed communist groups in the past.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the increasingly hostile environment for human rights defenders in the Philippines. It urges the government to stop the judicial harassment of human rights defenders as it believes they are being targeted for their legitimate and peaceful work for the protection of human rights.

¹ "Red-tagging" refers to the broad trend of labelling by the Philippine authorities of human rights defenders, journalists, rural communities and others perceived as threats or enemies of the State, as having links to communist groups.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Philippines to:

1. Immediately cease the judicial harassment of the human rights defenders from Karapatan, Gabriela and the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, as it is believed to be solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the human rights defenders, in consultation with them;
3. Carry out immediate, thorough and impartial investigations into the attacks, smear campaigns and red-tagging of human rights defenders by the Philippine military;
4. Take measures to ensure that government officials refrain from stigmatising the legitimate work of human rights defenders;
5. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Philippines and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

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