

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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PHILIPPINES: PROTECT 'RED-TAGGED' INDIVIDUALS

Amnesty International expresses deep concern over threats against and the endangerment of two Filipino journalists, a priest, two human rights lawyers, and a government employee, including claims that they are affiliated with the Communist Party of the Philippines. As has happened in the past, “red-tagging” or branding individuals and organizations as “communist fronts” has become a means to endanger their lives, leaving them at risk of harassment and attacks by unknown individuals. The authorities must seriously investigate all threats against the two journalists and others who have been “red-tagged”; take proactive steps to protect the safety and other rights of journalists and others at risk; and ensure an environment that allows individuals to undertake their professions without fear of violence and other reprisals.

On 28 August, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines reported Christian priest Fr. Rolando Abejo and an unnamed employee of the Cagayan de Oro City government received via courier a package containing flyers naming them, human rights lawyers Beverly Musni and her daughter Czarina, and journalists Leonardo Vicente Corrales and Froilan Gallardo as members of the CPP and its armed wing, the New People's Army. The flyer naming Corrales offered PhP 1 million (over USD 19,000) in reward money for his death. Corrales received the same flyers via courier – whilst a name and mobile number was obtained based on information from the courier service, the number is now inactive and the identity not yet verified.

Corrales, a former director of the NUJP, is the associate editor of the newspaper *Mindanao Gold Star Daily*; Gallardo is a journalist with the online news site MindaNews. Corrales was the subject of another incident of “red-tagging” in February 2019 that also identified his wife and son.

Both Corrales and Gallardo believe that the allegations against them are related to their work as journalists. Corrales told the NUJP that the probable reason why he was targeted was a column he wrote in June about members of the Higaonon Indigenous People in the southern Philippines who were displaced by military operations in their area. Gallardo said he suspects that he was targeted because of an interview he conducted with NPA members who had attacked the office of a local energy company and seized weapons held on site.

The “red-tagging” of Corrales and Gallardo occurs at a time of ongoing attacks against journalists, and human rights defenders in general, under the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. Labelling groups and individuals who are critical of government policies as “communist fronts” has become a way to undermine the peaceful exercise of their human rights to freedom of expression, and has in some cases resulted in violent attacks, including killings. As recently as June 2019, four human rights activists belonging to “leftist organizations” that have been “red-tagged” were [killed in a span of just three days](#). In March 2019, 14 people in Negros Oriental in southern Philippines were [killed during police operations](#) supposedly targeting “communist rebels”.

Amnesty International calls on the Philippine authorities to fulfil their international obligation to respect and protect the rights of journalists, including their right to freedom of expression, as well as to life and security of person. These rights are guaranteed, among other treaties, by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the Philippines is a state party, and by the Philippine Constitution.

In particular, Amnesty International calls on the Philippine government to conduct prompt, thorough, impartial and effective investigations into any incidents of “red-tagging” involving violence, threat of violence or incitement to violence, as well as the violent attacks that have resulted from them; bring those responsible for related offences to justice in fair trials; and protect those who are being accused of links to communist groups.

BACKGROUND

In a speech in January 2018, President Duterte said that he would “go after the legal fronts” of the CCP referring to groups with alleged ties to the communist movement, and reiterated his order to the military to “destroy the [communist] apparatus.” Many of these groups say that in the wake of these unfounded allegations and the renewed presidential command, they have faced increased attacks by unknown individuals, including killings.

On 11 July 2019, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution directing the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report on the human rights situation in the Philippines, including in relation to extrajudicial killings, mostly of members of poor communities, in the context of the “war on drugs”, and the persecution of and attacks against human rights defenders, journalists, and government critics.