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Philippines: End Acosta's detention without trial

The Philippine authorities must release Ericson Acosta or else promptly bring him to trial.

Amnesty International expressed concern that the 37-year-old activist and journalist has been held in detention without trial for six months now.

On 13 February, Acosta was arrested by the military in San Jose, Samar. The military alleged he was an official of the once-banned Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Acosta said he was detained at a military camp and subjected to 44 hours of interrogation with only two hours of sleep. He also said that interrogators threatened to kill him.

Death threats and prolonged sleep deprivation for the purpose of interrogation violate the international prohibition against torture and other ill-treatment. These practices violate the Convention against Torture, which the Philippines has ratified.

On 16 February, the charge of illegal possession of explosives was filed against Acosta at the Regional Trial Court Branch 41 in Gandara, Western Samar. Under Philippine law, this is a non-bailable offence.

Six months later, Acosta remains in custody pending action by the investigating prosecutor. Under article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the Philippines is party, anyone subject to arrest or detention is "entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release."

In Philippine law, the time limit from an arraignment to trial is set at 180 days by the Speedy Trial Act (RA 8493). However, 180 days have already passed without Acosta being arraigned, since the prosecutor has yet to file a formal complaint to the court.

Under international human rights law, confessions obtained by torture or other ill-treatment are inadmissible in court. The Philippine authorities must investigate these allegations and hold the perpetrators accountable.

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