

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# PHILIPPINES: STOP 'RED-TAGGING', INVESTIGATE KILLINGS OF ACTIVISTS

Responding to the killings of four Filipino activists over a three-day period, Amnesty International calls on the Philippine authorities to cease from 'red-tagging' legitimate organizations, or branding them as "communist fronts" which, according to these organizations, have led to increased harassment and attacks by unknown individuals against them. Peaceful activists should not be targeted based on their political views. The authorities must also carry out a prompt, thorough, impartial and effective investigation into the killings, and bring to justice those suspected to be responsible for the killings. They must take proactive steps to ensure, protect, and promote the human rights of human rights defenders and activists in the country, and guarantee the right to an effective remedy and access to justice to victims and their families.

Local human rights group Karapatan said that two of its staff, 22-year-old Ryan Hubilla and 69-year-old Nelly Bagasala, were gunned down by unidentified persons in Sorsogon City, Sorsogon, on 15 June. The following day, 16 June, farmer-activist Nonoy Palma was shot dead outside his house in San Fernando, Bukidnon, by unknown persons riding a motorcycle. On 17 June, former activist Neptali Morada was driving his motorcycle to the provincial capitol when he was gunned down by an unknown man in Naga City, Camarines Sur.

Hubilla, Bagasala, Palma and Morada all belonged to 'leftist organizations' that have been 'red-tagged', or named by the government as "legal fronts" for the Communist Party of the Philippines. In a speech in January 2018, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said that he would "go after the legal fronts," 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 such provocative allegations, they have faced increased attacks by unknown individuals, including killings. Out of concern for the safety of their staff, Karapatan and several other groups have filed a court petition seeking information and protection; in fact, Hubilla had been planning to participate as a witness in hearings relating to this petition. Further evidencing the threats being faced by human rights defenders and activists, a group of UN human rights experts issued a statement on 7 June asking the UN to "establish an independent investigation into human rights violations in the Philippines ... including sustained attacks on people and institutions defending human rights."

Amnesty International calls on the Philippine authorities to fulfil their international obligations to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights of human rights defenders and activists, including their rights to life, freedom of expression, and freedom of peaceful assembly. All these rights are guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which the Philippines is a state party. In particular, Amnesty International calls on the Philippine government to conduct prompt, thorough, impartial and effective investigations into the killings of human rights defenders and activists in the country. Philippine authorities should also publicly instruct their officials to end the harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders and activists simply for carrying out human rights work. The authorities should encourage rather than disparage the work of human rights defenders and activists which, in some cases, puts these defenders' lives in danger.

As the human rights situation in the Philippines continues to deteriorate, Amnesty International has called on member states of the UN Human Rights Council to open an independent investigation into human rights violations in the context of the "war on drugs,". This investigation should examine, among other issues, attacks on human rights defenders and activists.

## BACKGROUND

According to the human rights group Karapatan, [Ryan Hubilla and Nelly Bagasala](#) had been assisting political prisoners, three of whom were released the day before Hubilla and Bagasala were killed, and had been subjected to surveillance because of their work. Farmers' group Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas said that [Nonoy Palma](#) was a member of its local chapter. [Neptali Morada](#) was a regional coordinator of the group Bagong Alyansang Makabayan

(Bayan) until 2000 and was working as a staff of a former local politician when he was killed; Bayan, however, said that Morada continued to experience surveillance and harassment even after he left the group.

According to media reports, Philippine National Police Chief Gen. Oscar Albayalde has said that he has ordered an investigation into the killings. The reports say that Albayalde has told Karapatan, however, that it has to prove that both Hubilla and Bagasala are indeed staff of the organization, adding that Karapatan may just be [“taking advantage”](#) of the situation by putting the blame on state forces.