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## **Philippines to free prisoner of conscience after charges against him dropped**

A Philippine poet and activist who has been detained on trumped up charges for almost two years must be released immediately, Amnesty International said after the Philippine Department of Justice (DoJ) dropped all charges against him.

Ericson Acosta was first arrested in Samar province on 13 February 2011 by the military. He was eventually charged with the illegal possession of explosives.

But the Philippine government has said Acosta will now be released after the DoJ ordered the Samar provincial prosecutor to drop all charges against him on 31 January 2013, citing “serious irregularities” in the military’s handling of his arrest and detention.

“This is great news, not just for Ericson Acosta himself, but also for accountability and justice in the Philippines. He must now be released immediately,” said Isabelle Arradon, Amnesty International’s Deputy Asia-Pacific Director.

“But he should never have been detained in the first place – the charges against him were spurious at best, and an example of the authorities trying to silence a peaceful activist.”

When Acosta was arrested in February 2011, he was taken to a military camp where interrogators threatened to kill him if he did not confess to being a member of the Communist Party of the Philippines, which is linked to the insurgent armed group, the “New People’s Army”.

A few days later, he was charged with the illegal possession of explosives.

Despite the Philippine Speedy Trial Act guaranteeing a maximum of 180 days from arraignment to trial, Acosta has been kept in detention since.

Amnesty International adopted him as a prisoner of conscience in early 2012, and has been campaigning for his release ever since.

“Acosta’s treatment in detention has been a clear breach of both Philippine national law and international human rights standards – something that the Department of Justice has finally recognized,” said Arradon.

“Unfortunately this fits a disturbing pattern in the Philippines, where the authorities often use the justice system and trumped-up charges to harass human rights defenders and activists.”

Speaking to the Free Ericson Acosta Campaign, a local movement that has campaigned extensively for his release, after the DoJ’s announcement, Acosta said:

“In jail, I yearned for sea and sky. Freedom cannot be achieved by mere yearning, only by struggle.

“I would personally thank everyone who campaigned for my release—my family, lawyers, friends, former classmates and colleagues, fellow artists and human rights advocates.

“The unwarranted arrest and torture torment political prisoners each day they remain in prison. Political prisoners are rendered de facto criminals and terrorists, deprived of due process, forced to be at the mercy of the military. This injustice has to end.”