

URGENT ACTION

END ATTACKS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Cristina Palabay of Philippines-based human rights alliance Karapatan received on 22 April a text message from an unidentified person warning her and several others that they are targeted to be killed this year. Hours earlier, Karapatan member Bernardino Patigas was shot dead in Escalante City, Negros Occidental. He is the second human rights defender killed who was on a supposed 'hit list' released in 2018. The killing of Patigas and the threats against Palabay come amid increasing risks for human rights defenders in the country.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Police General Oscar Albayalde
Chief, Philippine National Police
National Headquarters Building
Camp BGen Rafael Crame, Quezon City
1111 Philippines
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Email: ocpnnp@pnp.gov.ph/srocpnp@yahoo.com/pnpdo.adm1n@gmail.com

Dear General Albayalde:

I am writing to express my concern over death threats received by human rights defender in the Philippines, **Cristina Palabay**. Cristina is the secretary general of Karapatan, a coalition of several human rights groups and individuals. On 22 April, she received a text message from an unidentified person, warning her and several other human rights defenders that they are targeted to be killed this year.

The threats were all the more alarming as they came just hours after another human rights advocate, Bernardino Patigas, was gunned down in Escalante City, Negros Occidental province. The killing of Patigas and the threats against Palabay and other human rights defenders come amid what appears to be an increasingly deadlier campaign against human rights defenders and political activists.

I note with grave concern that Patigas is the second human rights defender killed who was on a supposed 'hit list' disseminated by unknown individuals in Negros Occidental in 2018. The list, reported by Philippine media, asked the public to report through a specified phone number the whereabouts of these people, putting their lives at great risk. Also on the list was human rights lawyer Benjamin Ramos who was killed in November 2018. Dozens of other human rights activists, including environmental defenders, have also been killed since June 2016, as reported by media and human rights groups within and outside the country. All these point to the gravity of the threats against Palabay and other activists.

I therefore urge your office to act swiftly to protect human rights defenders in the country. Specifically, I call on you to:

- Open a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the death threats against Cristina Palabay and other human rights defenders in the country, and bring those responsible to justice in fair trials;
- Put in place effective mechanisms to protect human rights defenders at risk in consultation with them and in accordance to their wishes, and ensure they are able to carry out their work without fear of reprisals; and
- Launch an effective investigation into the killings of human rights defenders and bring all those responsible to justice in fair trials.

Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to Karapatan, at least 50 farm workers and human rights advocates in the Negros region have been killed since President Rodrigo Duterte took office in July 2016. The number includes Bernardino Patigas, who was gunned down on 22 April 2019, as he was leaving an election-related activity in Escalante City, Negros Occidental, where he was seeking re-election as member of the city council. Patigas was the founder and secretary-general of North Negros Alliance for Human Rights Advocates, a member-organization of the human rights alliance Karapatan.

According to Karapatan records, 48 human rights defenders belonging to the group have been killed since 2016. Patigas is the second human rights defender killed who was on a supposed 'hit list' distributed by unknown individuals in Negros Occidental in early 2018; the first was human rights lawyer Benjamin Ramos, who was killed in November 2018. The Philippine National Police has ordered an investigation into the killing of Ramos but has yet to release its findings.

Human rights organizations in the Philippines, including Karapatan, have faced smear campaigns and have been tagged by the government as fronts of the Communist Party of the Philippines. This characterisation and the increased threats against them from the government has subjected them to harassment and attacks, including killings, by unknown individuals.

Many of the organizations linked by the government to communist groups have criticised the Duterte administration's so-called 'war on drugs', which has resulted in the extrajudicial execution of thousands of people suspected of using or selling drugs, mostly from poor communities.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Filipino

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 10 June 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Cristina Palabay (she/her)