

UGAT STATEMENT

ON TERROR-TAGGING OF IP LEADERS BY THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT

We, members of the anthropological community in the Philippines, are extremely concerned about the Department of Justice (DoJ) court petition that accuses Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and some thirty highly respected indigenous peoples leaders, as “terrorists” and of committing serious criminal offenses under the Human Security Act of 2007.

The DoJ petition, which is currently lodged at Branch 19 of the Regional Trial Court in the National Capital Region, tags 600 individuals as ‘terrorists’. It relies on provisions of Republic Act 9372 or the Human Security Act of 2007, which allows warrantless arrest of persons declared as ‘terrorists’ by the courts.

We are moreover concerned that those so accused risk becoming targets for extrajudicial actions. Like Ms. Tauli-Corpuz, the other indigenous leaders are actively involved in the assertion of IP rights and in defending their ancestral domains at the grassroots, the national level, and international arenas of engagements. These engagements have exposed them, their families, and villages to danger precisely because of the sensitivity of the rights to land and ancestral domains that they are defending. Members of a broad formation of indigenous peoples and indigenous rights advocates in the country (Loyukan) have also raised alarm that regardless of assurance of due process provided by the courts, the mere listing of Tauli-Corpuz and other indigenous leaders in the petition has rendered them target of possible attacks by the military and by other interest groups given the long history of violence directed against them.

We testify to Ms. Tauli-Corpuz’ considerable contribution to the advancement of indigenous peoples’ rights on behalf of and with support from communities as well as indigenous peoples’ rights advocates in the Philippines and the world. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz has an unassailable track record. Herself of Kankana-ey descent, Ms. Tauli-Corpuz previously served as chair of the United Nations

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues from 2005 to 2009 and has published extensively about the rights and interests of indigenous peoples, women, men, and children.

Far from advocating violence and sowing terror, we say that Ms. Tauli-Corpuz, in consonance with her mandate as a UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, has rightly raised the issue of government public policy pronouncements to violently deal with indigenous communities suspected of involvement with the communist-led insurgency, including bombing schools.

In solidarity with victims of human rights violations, we, anthropologists of the Philippines bear witness to the suffering of indigenous peoples and their leaders as we work and conduct research among and with indigenous communities. We attest that the “terrorist” label and communist-membership allegations against Ms. Tauli-Corpuz and her fellow indigenous leaders would only expose them and their peoples to undue harm.

We call on the DoJ and the broader policy-making body of the current administration to exercise prudence in making pronouncements, enforce strict adherence to due process, and carefully vet evidence when it pursues legal actions. A violation of these principles puts in great risk individuals, groups, and communities that had done nothing close to acts of terrorism but rather seek to build a humane national community and a global future that thrives on social justice, solidarity, and peace.

We call on the international anthropological community, especially those working among indigenous peoples and local communities, to strongly condemn these irresponsible and malicious acts.

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