

14 January 2021

## Philippines: Judicial harassment of Windel Bolinget

Since late December, there has been intensified targeting of human rights defender, **Windel Bolinget**, in relation to a trumped up murder case filed against him in August 2020. The case filed by the Office of the Provincial Prosecutor of Taguma City, Davao del Norte, names Windel Bolinget and ten other individuals. The defender was only informed of the warrant for his arrest in the last week of December. Since then, there has been constant police surveillance of his office and locality and police have been harassing his family and friends for information on his whereabouts.

[Windel Bolinget](#) is an indigenous rights defender and the Chairperson of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA), an alliance of over 300 indigenous people's organisations in the Cordillera region of the Philippines. The human rights defender has been leading many of CPA's campaigns against human rights violations such as extrajudicial killings, trumped-up cases, enforced disappearance, harassment, and intimidation of Cordillera indigenous peoples. He has also been at the forefront of local movements against large-scale mining projects, mega-dams and other projects that pose a threat to the environment.

On 6 August 2020, a criminal case was filed at Davao del Norte, against ten individuals, including indigenous rights defender Windel Bolinget, for their alleged involvement in the murder of Garito Malibato, a member of a local indigenous peoples organisation called Karadyawan, on 21 March 2018. On 25 September 2020, the Regional Trial Court in Tagum City issued a warrant of arrest for murder against the individuals. However, the CAP and Windel Bolinget were only made aware of the arrest warrant in the last week of December 2020.

The murder charges brought against the defender appear to be completely fabricated. Windel Bolinget has never been to Barangay Gupitan, Kapalong, where Garito Malibato was murdered. Following the murder, local indigenous organisations pointed to a paramilitary group as the perpetrators. Further, a relative of the victim also expressed that Malibato had received several death threats from the same paramilitary group before he was killed.

With the defender yet to be arrested, police intelligence agents have regularly been approaching relatives, friends and colleagues of the human rights defender, interrogating them for information on his whereabouts. There has also been heavy physical surveillance, with men, believed to be members and assets of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippine National Police, walking around Windel Bolinget's house and also the regional secretariat of the CPA, in search for the defender. Windel Bolinget's family and colleagues fear that, if the defender is arrested, he may be subjected to the "tokhang"-style execution (extrajudicial killing under the pretext of "resisting arrest" or "nanlaban/fought back"), which is a common occurrence in the country.

This is not the first time that the defender has been targeted for his peaceful human rights work. In 2006, Windel Bolinget was included in a military hit list, along with other leaders of the CPA. In February 2018, the Department of Justice's terrorist proscription list included the defender's name and that of former CPA leaders. Their names were eventually dropped from the list due to lack of proof. Since mid 2020, the targeting of the defender has intensified, with many pages on social media branding him, his family and his colleagues as terrorists. On 10 December 2020, flyers with a photo of the defender and text calling him immoral and recruiter of the armed revolutionary group, New Peoples Army, were scattered along the road 80 from his house in La Trinidad, Benguet to Baguio City.

Front Line Defenders recognises the importance of investigating and elucidating all the facts about the murder of Garito Malibato. Nevertheless, it believes that this latest warrant of arrest forms part of a wider pattern by the military to intimidate and vilify human rights defenders by linking them to crimes they did not commit or had no involvement in. Over the past years, several human rights defenders, including several peasant leaders of the CPA have been killed in this manner, after they were red-tagged and judicially harassed.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the increasingly hostile environment for human rights defenders in the Philippines. Front Line Defenders condemns the judicial harassment of Windel Bolinget and the fabricated charges brought against him, as it believes he is being targeted for his legitimate and peaceful work for the protection of human rights.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Philippines to:**

1. Immediately cease the investigation and drop all charges against Windel Bolinget, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being targeted solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Immediately cease the ongoing harassment and surveillance on the family and colleagues of the human rights defender;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in the Philippines and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

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