

6 May 2021

Philippines: Two human rights defenders arrested in coordinated raids by police and military

On 2 May 2021, human rights defender **Dan Balucio** and youth human rights defender **Maria Jesusa “Sasah” Sta. Rosa** were arrested in coordinated raids led by the police and military in the region of Bicol. Dan Balucio is currently detained at the Sto Domingo Police station and Maria Jesusa is detained at Police Station 2 in Naga City, where they both have access to their lawyers.

[Dan Balucio](#) is a human rights defender and pastor of the United Church of Christ of the Philippines. He is also the spokesperson for Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, an umbrella organisation of workers’ unions, peasant associations, youth, women and indigenous peoples, committed to advocating for social rights, and the organisation of campaigns to peacefully protest the extra-judicial killings of human rights defenders and the militarisation of communities. [Maria Jesusa “Sasah” Sta. Rosa](#) is a youth human rights defender and the spokesperson of Jovenes Anakbayan, a regional chapter of Anakbaya, a Filipino youth organisation that works to organise and mobilise young farmers, workers, students, professionals, fisherfolks, women, minorities and church people, among others to peacefully and actively advocate for the upholding of human rights and democracy.

On 2 May 2021 at 3:30am, around 30 police and military personnel forcibly entered the premises of Shannan Christian Academy in Albay, where Dan Balucio lives with his wife and two young children. The human rights defender and those at home with him were all forcibly brought out of the house, while police and military personnel entered and went through their belongings. Only after an hour of the search first beginning was the human rights defender shown a search warrant, once the captain of the Barangay police and the local Councillor arrived to the premises. The search continued for another 30 minutes, during which time police allegedly found guns, ammunition, a grenade, and a red flag, leading to Dan Balucio’s arrest.

On the same day, 2 May 2021, in a very similar manner, Maria Jesusa “Sasah” Sta. Rosa was arrested from her home in Naga City following a raid led by police and military personnel. During the raid, guns, ammunition, a grenade, and other items were allegedly found by the police and military personnel in the youth human rights defender’s home. It was later noticed that the search warrant provided for the raid had an address that was different to the address where the search took place and from where Maria Jesusa was detained.

According to human rights defenders on the ground, the raids and arrests were very similar to the [raids](#) that took place in provinces surrounding Metro Manila on 7 March 2021, that saw the arrest of four human rights defenders and the killing of five other human rights defenders. Both Dan Balucio and Maria Jesusa have firmly denied the accusations that they were in possession of any firearms and have asserted that the items were planted during the course of the search. These arrests are the most recent instances in an ongoing pattern of attempts by the military to intimidate and vilify human rights defenders on false and baseless accusations.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the increasingly hostile environment for human rights defenders in the Philippines and condemns the arrest of human rights defenders Dan Balucio and youth human rights defender Maria Jesusa “Sasah” Sta. Rosa, as it believes they are being targeted for their legitimate and peaceful work to protect and promote human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Philippines to:

1. Immediately cease the investigation and drop all charges against Dan Balucio and Maria Jesusa "Sasah" Sta. Rosa, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being targeted solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the human rights defenders, in consultation with them;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in 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.