

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 1444



Introduced by **KABATAAN PARTY-LIST Representative Sarah Jane I. Elago,**
ACT TEACHERS PARTY-LIST Representative France L. Castro,
BAYAN MUNA PARTY-LIST Representatives Carlos Isagani T. Zarate,
Ferdinand Gaité and Eufemia C. Cullamat,
and **GABRIELA WOMEN'S PARTY Representative Arlene D. Brosas**

RESOLUTION,
EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, CALLING
FOR THE IMMEDIATE AND UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE OF THE SEVEN HUMAN
RIGHTS DEFENDERS (HRD7) ARRESTED ON INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS
DAY

WHEREAS, the 1987 Philippine Constitution provides that no person shall be deprived of liberty without due process of law, and that no person shall be detained solely by reason of his political beliefs and aspirations;

WHEREAS, on International Human Rights Day, December 10, 2020, operatives of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group and the local units of the Philippine National Police arrested seven human rights defenders--one journalist and six other activists--in four separate raids during the wee hours;

WHEREAS, at dawn, elements of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) raided the house of Dennise Velasco, a labor organizer, in Lagro, Quezon City; the office in Mandaluyong City of journalist Lady Ann Salem and labor organizer Rodrigo Esparago; the office of trade unionists Mark Ryan Cruz, Romina Astudillo and Jaymie Gregorio in South Triangle, Quezon City; and the house of labor organizer Joel Demate in Santa Ana, Manila; and presented search warrants all signed by Judge Cecilyn Burgos-Villavert;

WHEREAS, according to the victims, they were asked to either face the wall, drop to the floor facing down, or move out from their places while the planting of evidence and "search" were ongoing. CIDG then claimed that they found firearms such as armalite rifles and pistols, different sets of magazines, hundreds of rounds of ammunition, and grenades in their custody, thus, arresting them. They are currently facing trumped-up

charges for violations of RA 10591 (Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Law) and RA 9516 (Illegal Possession of Explosives);

WHEREAS, according to the police, they are criminals and members of a gun syndicate and that their arrest is part of CIDG NCR's intensified campaign against 'loose firearms and criminal gangs.' Days later, the National Task Force to End the Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), via its spokesperson USec. Lorraine T. Badoy, said that the captured human rights defenders are high-ranking NPA leaders;

WHEREAS, one of the arrested, journalist Lady Ann Salem, is the communications officer of the International Association of Women in Radio and Television, and editor for online news site Manila Today--one of the alternative media outfits red-tagged by the NTF-ELCAC as part of the so-called communist propaganda machinery during a Senate hearing on December 1;

WHEREAS, Dennise Velasco of Defend Jobs Philippines; Romina Astudillo, Deputy Secretary-General of Kilusang Mayo Uno-Metro Manila and Kabataan Party-list second nominee in the 2016 elections; Mark Ryan Cruz, Regional Executive Committee of KMU-Metro Manila; Jaymie Gregorio Jr. of KMU-Metro Manila; Joel Demate of Solidarity of Labor Rights and Welfare (SOLAR); and Rodrigo Esparago of Sandigang Manggagawa sa Quezon City (SMQC) are trade union organizers;

WHEREAS, all search warrants used for the series of raids were issued by Judge Burgos-Villavert, executive judge of Quezon City. She was also the judge who held a meeting with then PNP-NCRPO chief, now PNP Director-General Debold Sinas and issued the 'search' warrants for the raids of offices and residences of several progressive groups and its members in Negros and Metro Manila in 2019, which led to the arrest of more than 50 activists;

WHEREAS, their modus operandi or the patterns in the manner of illegal arrests are now evident as the favored tactic of Major General Debold Sinas since his stints as Central Visayas Police Chief: the police serve search warrants for suspected illegal possession of firearms on targeted offices and/or residences during the wee hours (usually around 2-3 am), all issued by Judge Villavert, then plant pieces of evidence such as firearms, grenades, ammunition, and guns to provide basis for the arrest, detention, and filing of trumped up charges against human rights defenders;

WHEREAS, such attacks on activists, critics of government, and dissenters have intensified as the Duterte administration cracks down on critics, dissenters, and the opposition in preparation for the 2022 elections. They red-tag and victimize journalists, trade unionists, doctors, lawyers, human rights defenders, and community workers who engage in peaceful, legal, and constitutionally-protected activities focused on advancing the struggles and serving and amplifying the calls of the most exploited sectors of society;

WHEREAS, as of August 2020, there are at least 646 political prisoners in the Philippines according to Karapatan; 413 or 64% of whom were arrested during Pres. Duterte's administration;

WHEREAS, the arrest of these seven human rights defenders and activists on the very day of the celebration of human rights internationally is an affront to the Filipino people and epitomizes the human rights crisis in the Philippines under the Duterte administration—a stark reality check to the image that the administration wishes to project to the international community;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, that the Members express the sense of the House of Representatives in calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the seven human rights defenders arrested on International Human Rights Day, now collectively known as the "Human Rights Day 7;"

RESOLVED FURTHER, that we call for an immediate independent probe into the illegal arrest of the seven human rights defenders, and into the irregularities of the issuance of search warrants and police conduct of search and seizure operations.

Adopted,



Rep. **SARAH JANE I. ELAGO**
Kabataan Party-list



Rep. **CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE**
Bayan Muna Party-list



Rep. **FRANCE L. CASTRO**
ACT Teachers Party-list



Rep. **FERDINAND GAITE**
Bayan Muna Party-list



Rep. **ARLENE D. BROSAS**
Gabriela Women's Party



Rep. **EUFEMIA C. CULLAMAT**
Bayan Muna Party-list