July , 2019

**Police General Oscar Albayalde**

Chief, Philippine National Police

National Headquarters Building

Camp BGen Rafael Crame, Quezon City

1111 PHILIPPINES

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Dear General Albayalde,

As a member/supporter of ACAT Belgium, I am writing to express my concern over the increasingly harsh repression against human rights defenders in the Philippines, as well as over the death threats uttered against them. The last instance is that of Cristina Palabay who has been targeted for murder later this year. These threats are 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 unpunished murder of Mr Patigas and the threats come amid a deadly clampdown against defenders and political activists. The latter often end up arbitrarily in custody detention, fall victim of trumped–up charges, solely for the sake of stifling criticism.

I have also noted with grave concern that Mr Patigas is the second human rights defender killed on a “hit list’”, disseminated in Negros Occidental in 2018. The list asked to report, through a specified phone number, the whereabouts of the activists, putting their lives at great risk. Equally on the list was human rights lawyer Benjamin Ramos, who was killed in November 2018. Dozens of other human rights activists or journalists, including environmental defenders and unionists, have also been assassinated since June 2016, pointing to the gravity of such threats.

We therefore urge authorities in the Philippines to act swiftly to protect human rights defenders and press freedom in the country, whose ongoing harassment aims at hindering their legitimate activities. Specifically, I call on you to:

• Open an impartial investigation into the death threats against Cristina Palabay or any human rights defender in the country, and bring those responsible to justice in fair trials;

• Put in place effective mechanisms to protect human rights defenders, unionists and journalists at risk and ensure they are able to carry out their work without fear of reprisals, thus abiding by the core principles of the law, and press and expression freedoms;

• Launch effective investigations into the assassinations of human rights defenders and journalists; or of any collateral victim, of Mr Duterte’s war on drugs, and bring all those responsible to justice.

Particularly I shall also insist on the children of the Philippines, who too often are innocent collateral victims in Mr Duterte‘s “ruthless war”.

Accordingly I ask you to urgently take measures and action, aiming at efficiently protecting the whole of them.

We thank you for the attention you will have paid to these cases. For sure, we are looking forward to hearing from your views on the matter.

Yours Truly,

Signature

Name/ Adress