

Secretary Menardo I. Guevarra
Department of Justice, Philippines
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Dear Secretary Guevarra,

I am writing to express my concern about the ongoing prosecution of five activists arrested in Tacloban City early this year – Frenchie Mae Cumpio, Mariel Domequil, Marissa Cabaljao, Mira Legion, and Alexander Philip Abinguna – who are active members of organizations involved in independent journalism, human rights, and environmental issues.

The circumstances of the raid of their offices that resulted in their arrest on 7 February 2020 remain questionable, with allegations of fabrication of evidence and the absence of witnesses. I therefore find it worrying to learn that, on 23 June 2020, the court denied their motion to quash the search warrant despite no substantial investigation having been made into these allegations.

Police and military officers raided their offices at around 1 am on 7 February. It was reported that the raiding team pointed their firearms at the five activists, before asking them to leave their rooms to then conduct the search without any witness. As you are aware, if these allegations are true then the events were in violation of the proper conduct of searches as prescribed by Philippine law.

The activists also allege that the raiding team planted evidence, including firearms and explosives allegedly found on their beds. Unfortunately, it seems that the planting of explosives and firearms is a widely-documented method in the Philippines, to arrest activists on non-bailable charges and hinder their activities.

It is within that context that I am concerned that the dismissal of the activists' motion to void the search warrant, without proper investigation into the allegations made, is prohibiting the five activists from receiving a fair trial.

We call on your office to promptly, thoroughly, impartially and effectively investigate the arrested activists' allegations. If these allegations are proven, all charges against them must be dropped, those still detained should be released, and those reasonably suspected to be responsible for the violations should be held accountable in fair trials.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,