

**Lt. Gen. Arnulfo Marcelo Burgos Jr.**

Commander, Northern Luzon Command, Armed Forces of the Philippines  
Camp Servillano Aquino,  
Tarlac City, Tarlac  
Philippines

Dear Lt. Gen. Burgos:

I am writing to express alarm over the abduction of activist and land rights defender **Steve Abua**, who has been missing since 6 November. According to his wife, Johanna, Steve was on his way to a meeting when he was forcibly taken by unidentified perpetrators either in Pampanga or in Bataan, both in Central Luzon which falls under your jurisdiction.

It is distressing to learn that during a call with the abductors, Johanna was showed a video of Steve blindfolded, with his hands tied and mouth stuffed with a cloth. The abductors asked Johanna to convince Steve to admit he is a member of the armed group New People's Army (NPA), which he is not according to Johanna. They also asked Johanna to meet with them along with their young daughter, which she refused to do. There is reason to believe the abductors may be connected with the government, as Johanna said they talked about the government giving Steve a chance to "change his ways".

I find the phenomenon of red-tagging in the Philippines incredibly alarming. Despite repeated commitments to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights, the government continues to falsely accuse activists and human rights defenders of being NPA members. Accusations that in fact increase attacks, including killings, against these individuals.

Steve's disappearance, which puts him at greater risk of torture and other ill-treatment, as well as the harassment of his family, paint an alarming picture of the state of human rights in the Philippines.

**Therefore, in line with your duties and obligations, I call on you to:**

- **Employ all means at your disposal to urgently locate Steve, guarantee his safety, and safely reunite him with his family;**
- **Investigate the circumstances of Steve's abduction, and bring anyone suspected of criminal responsibility to account in fair trials;**
- **If he is in state custody, disclose his whereabouts immediately and release him unless he is charged with a recognizable offense, under international standards. Pending his release, ensure he is treated in line with international standards.**
- **Ensure the protection and promotion of the human rights of all people, including human rights defenders and activists who often bear the brunt of violations.**

Yours sincerely,