

# INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK OF ACADEMIES AND SCHOLARLY SOCIETIES

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The International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (H.R. Network) is an alliance of more than 80 national academies and scholarly societies that supports and defends the fundamental rights of fellow academics and health professionals worldwide. We, the members of the H.R. Network's Executive Committee, are deeply concerned to learn that Victoria Tauli-Corpuz—a Philippine nurse and internationally respected U.N. human rights expert—has, together with many other human rights defenders and indigenous peoples' leaders, been accused of terrorism in a Philippines Justice Department petition recently filed in a Manila court.

Ms. Tauli-Corpuz is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and former chair of the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. In her capacity as a U.N. independent expert, she has publicly called on the Philippine government to take steps to curb violence against indigenous peoples and to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for the violence. Such activities clearly constitute the peaceful exercise of Ms. Tauli-Corpuz's fundamental right to freedom of opinion and expression, which the Philippines has an obligation to protect and respect as a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The recent accusations made against Ms. Tauli-Corpuz have come in the wake of a public statement that she made about the devastating human rights consequences for indigenous communities of ongoing military operations on the island of Mindanao. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz expressed concern about “thousands of [indigenous] Lumads” who have been forcibly displaced by conflict. She also highlighted “killings and attacks allegedly carried out by members of the armed forces against indigenous communities” and emphasized that the humanitarian needs of those displaced “must be fully satisfied,” including by allowing them to return to their ancestral lands with guarantees of safety. We understand that, like Ms. Tauli-Corpuz, many other human rights defenders and indigenous peoples' leaders named as terrorists in the Philippine Justice Department's petition have been publicly critical of government policies.

The unfounded accusations of terrorism made against Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz are widely recognized as an attempt to criminalize her work defending the rights of indigenous peoples, in accordance with her UN mandate. These accusations are inconsistent with the Philippine government's obligations under the ICCPR and the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, under which Ms. Tauli-Corpuz enjoys immunity from legal process in respect of words spoken or written and all acts done as a UN Special Rapporteur. Moreover, the accusations against Ms. Tauli-Corpuz, made in the midst of a targeted campaign

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Academies in the Network support and promote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, assist unjustly incarcerated nonviolent professional colleagues, address grave science-related human rights issues, and advocate for member institutions whose independence is threatened.

of intimidation and violent action against human rights defenders, put her personal safety—and that of the other human rights advocates and indigenous peoples' leaders named in the Justice Department petition—in serious jeopardy.

As a matter of urgency, we therefore respectfully call upon the Philippine government to remove Ms. Tauli-Corpuz's name from the Justice Department petition accusing her of terrorism, along with the names of other individuals included in the petition as a result of their peaceful defense of the rights of indigenous peoples. We also ask the government to take immediate steps to ensure the safety of these individuals.

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