



**Indigenous Peoples  
Rights International**

Championing Indigenous Peoples Rights



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## **Philippines: International Indigenous Peoples' rights group calls for dropping of trumped-up charges, immediate release of Betty Belen**

The Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI) expressed its grave concern on the illegal arrest and continuing detention of Beatrice "Betty" Belen, an indigenous woman from indigenous Uma community in the Cordillera, Philippines.

According to report submitted to IPRI, combined elements of the Philippine National Police (PNP), the 503rd Infantry Brigade of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), and the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) served searched warrants to at least 11 individuals, including Belen, in Lower and Western Uma, Lubuagan, Kalinga on October 25, 2020 at 4:00 in the morning.

The authorities allegedly recovered three rifle grenades from Belen's house. However, it was reported to IPRI that the search was conducted without independent witnesses and without the participation of village officials.

The planting of evidence to criminalize indigenous activists is now becoming rampant to sow fear and demobilize those who are at the frontline of defending indigenous lands and resources.

Belen, a member of Innabuyog – An Alliance of Indigenous Women's Organizations in the Cordillera, is a staunch environment and indigenous rights defender, and a community health worker who tirelessly serves her community. She has devoted her life in protecting ancestral lands and defending indigenous peoples' rights. This attack against her is an affront not only to the indigenous peoples' movement in the Cordillera but also to women standing up for human rights.

Belen was among those who led a barricade against the Chevron Energy company's geothermal project in Kalinga province in 2012. In 2018, she was awarded the Gawad Bayani ng Kalikasan (Environmental Hero Award) for her unwavering dedication in defending their ancestral lands.

Prior to her arrest, she has been subjected to harassment and intimidation by state agents since 2015. She was accused of providing shelter and hosting members of the New Peoples' Army, an armed group declared insurgent by the Philippine government.

Belen's arrest has severely affected her family and community. Prior to her arrest, she helps her family in farming and in soft-broom production, and she assists her two grandchildren in their distant learning.

"What happened to Belen can happen to other women who critically speak out against the threats to our ancestral lands here in the Cordillera, in fact, to anyone who expresses frustration on government policies that are detrimental to people's rights and welfare. This should not be the case," Innabuyog said in a statement.

"Activism is not terrorism. Activism seeks changes for the better, especially for marginalized sectors and that includes women and indigenous peoples. This is not an act of terrorism. We reach out to our fellow women to speak out against these violations to our constitutionally guaranteed human rights," they added.

IPRI Co-director and former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz underscored the Philippine government's obligation to protect and respect Indigenous Peoples' rights.

"Indigenous peoples should not be targeted for defending their rights and exercising their rights to self-determination over their lands, territories and resources, and to free, prior, and informed consent. All states, the Philippine government included, should understand and recognize the particularity of Indigenous Peoples' rights," Corpuz said.

IPRI joins other Indigenous Peoples organizations in demanding the Philippine government for the immediate release from detention of Belen and the dropping of trumped up charges against her. □

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