

Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen

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Enforced Disappearance and Death of Elena Tijamo

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP) is deeply concerned about the death of Elena Tijamo, a dedicated human rights defender and community coordinator. Before she resurfaced in a hospital in Manila on August 30, 2021, Elena had been a victim of enforced disappearance for over 13 months. On June 13, 2020, four unidentified armed men and two women had kidnapped her from her home in Sitio Avocado, Barangay Kampingganon, Bantayan Island, Cebu (Visayas). Since then, her whereabouts were unknown. On August 30, 2021, one of her family members based in Manila - far away from where she was originally abducted - received a call from an unknown person saying that Elena had received surgery and had died in a hospital. It took her family two more days to get access to her body, which had already been brought to a funeral home under a false name.

Elena Tijamo worked as coordinator for sustainable agriculture for the Farmers Development Center, Inc. (FARDEC) in the Central Visayas. She served also as community radio coordinator of FARDEC in Bantayan Island, Cebu. It has a radio program, Radyo Sugbuanon in partnership with the International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT) Philippines.

Before her disappearance, Elena Tijamo was falsely accused by the Philippine military of supporting the communist insurgency of the New People's Army ("red-tagged"). For years, AMP has been pointing out that the Philippine Government, under the guise of fighting terrorism, brutally cracks down on human rights defenders and other civil society players. Thereby, the Government seeks to hamper and delegitimize the commitment of the civil society to human rights, a clean environment, a just distribution of land and the rights of Indigenous People. The Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, and the implementation of Memorandum Circular No. 32 and Executive Order No. 70 must be understood in this context. In the name of counterterrorism, these serve to legitimize repression and violence against civil society and lead to vilification, death threats, immense psycho-social stress and substantial legal uncertainty for individuals and institutions.

Elena Tijamo is one of many victims of the deteriorating human rights situation in the Philippines. At least 244 cases of extrajudicial killings have been documented since Duterte took office in June 2016. However, in recent years, enforced disappearances of human rights defenders were relatively rare. This form of violent repression was systematically used by the Philippine military during the administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who had declared a "total war" against the insurgents in 2006. In 2017, former General Jovito Palparan was convicted for his involvement in the enforced disappearance of Sherlyn Cadapan and



Karen Empeño in 2006. The Aktionsbündnis is worried that this brutal crime is making a come-back in the Philippines.

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte - Philippinen strongly condemns the enforced disappearance and the death of Elena Tijamo and calls upon the Government of the Philippines to

- Immediately and impartially investigate the enforced disappearance and the death of Elena Tijamo and prosecute the perpetrators and all parties involved in the crime,
- Immediately stop all intimidation, threats, and violence against human rights defenders by state security forces, civil servants, and government officials in the Philippines,
- Withdraw the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020.

We call upon the German Government to

- Immediately and publicly condemn the enforced disappearance and the death of Elena Tijamo,
- Speak up for the end of impunity in the Philippines within the framework of diplomatic relations,
- Speak up for a continuation of the investigation mechanism into human rights violations in the Philippines in the framework of the UN Human Rights Council,
- Work within the EU to ensure that human rights violations and in particular the announced reintroduction of the death penalty are treated as severe violations of international agreements and that this will have corresponding consequences for trade relations, such as the suspension of trade preferences granted to the Philippines under the GSP+-status,
- Support Philippine civil society organizations and their advocacies on EU and UN level for respect and protection of human rights in the Philippines.

The Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen (AMP – Action Network Human Rights - Philippines) is an initiative of seven major German church-based agencies and human rights organizations to promote advocacy and information work in Germany and the EU regarding the human rights situation in the Philippines. Member Organizations of the AMP are Amnesty International Germany, Bread for the World, International Peace Observers Network (IPON), MISEREOR, Missio Munich, philippinenbüro e.V., and the United Evangelical Mission (UEM). The main focus of the network lies on the core human rights issues of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and fabricated charges against political activists.

