Republic of the Philippines

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION No. 1085

Introduced by
BAYAN MUNA Representatives EUFEMIA C. CULLAMAT,
CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE and FERDINAND R. GAITE,
GABRIELA Women’s Party Representative ARLENE D. BROSAS,
ACT TEACHERS Party-List Representative FRANCE L. CASTRO,
and KABATAAN Party-List Representative SARAH JANE I. ELAGO

RESOLUTION
URGING THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, THROUGH THE COMMITTEE
ON HUMAN RIGHTS, TO CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION, IN AID OF
LEGISLATION, ON THE ILLEGAL ARREST OF LEADERS OF PROGRESSIVE
ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVISTS IN TACLOBAN CITY BY COMBINED
FORCES OF THE PNP REGION XIII, CIDG, AND AFP, AS WELL AS THE
REPORTED PLANTING OF FIREARMS, EXPLOSIVES, AND OTHER
EVIDENCE

WHEREAS, On February 7, 2020, at around 1 AM to 2:30 AM, combined elements of PNP
Region 8, Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) and the Armed Forces of the
Philippines, led by Police Lt. Col. Marvin Pedere, barged into the offices of progressive
organizations in Tacloban City and conducted simultaneous raids. These include the offices of
Bayan Eastern Visayas, Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP), Katungod Sinirangan Bisayas,
Anakpawis Eastern Visayas, and Eastern Vista, an independent media outfit;

WHEREAS, five (5) activists from progressive organizations were illegally arrested during the
raid. Marissa Cabaljao from the People’s Surge Disaster Survivors Network, Mira Legion of Bayan
Eastern Visayas, and Alexander Abinguna, Secretary-General of Katungod Sinirangan Bisayas
were arrested in their office in Barangay Calapaniwan, Tacloban. Also included in the arrest was
Marissa Cabaljao’s one-year-old baby. Simultaneously, Mariel Dumequeil, staff member of RMP,
and Frenchie Mae Cumpio, Executive Director of independent media outfit Eastern Vista, were
also arrested in their office in Barangay Fatima, Tacloban City. Their cellphones were confiscated
and they were then brought to the Municipal Police Station in Guindapanan, Palo, Leyte where
they were detained;

WHEREAS, officers of the PNP and CIDG claimed to have found several firearms, live
ammunition and grenades in the offices in Barangay Fatima where Legion, Cabaljao and Abinguna
were arrested. Meanwhile, firearms and ammunition were found in the office in Barangay
Calapaniwan where Cumpio and Dumequeil were arrested. The arrested activists, however, strongly
assert that the weapons were planted by the raiding teams to justify their illegal arrest;

WHEREAS, the raids were reportedly conducted based on a search warrant issued on February
3 by Executive Judge Eligio Petilla of Tacloban Regional Trial Court Branch 44;
WHEREAS, on February 10, three days after the arrest, Altermidya – People’s Alternative Media Network reported that at 4:30 PM, no case had been filed against the arrested activists, which was past the 36-hour maximum period for arrest without warrant. It was only the maximum period that cases were filed against the five activists. Trumped-up charges for illegal possession of firearms and explosives were filed against Cumpio, Domequil, and Abinguna, while trumped-up charges for illegal possession of firearms were filed against Legion and Cabaljao;

WHEREAS, the arrested activists reported cases of harassment in the months leading up to the raid on February 7. On January 31, days before the raid, a neighbor reported to Cumpio that an unidentified man carrying flowers and a photo of her visited the Eastern Vista office. On December 13, she reported men in motorcycles with no plate numbers, believed to be military assets, tailing her and her colleagues. Cumpio has reported receiving threats of an office raid since late 2019;

WHEREAS, a day before the raid, Alexander Abinguna of Katungod Sinirangan Bisayas wrote to the Commission on Human Rights to request a pre-emptive inspection of the offices of people’s organizations in Tacloban to prove that they had no firearms and ammunition. This was due to the reports of surveillance and harassment reported by its members and after similar mass arrests against people’s organizations happened in Negros and Manila in 2019;

WHEREAS, on 12 February 2020, Mira Legion of Bayan Eastern Visayas, was temporarily released on bail. On February 19, Marissa Cabaljao of Surge Disaster Survivors Network was also temporarily released after posting bail. The three (3) other activists remain detained. The hearings of their cases are ongoing;

WHEREAS, the arrest of the activists in Tacloban follows the same pattern of mass arrests in Negros in November 2019 where fifty-seven (57) members of progressive organizations were arrested after a raid in their offices was conducted where guns and ammunition were reportedly recovered. After which, trumped-up charges were filed against the arrested persons. Thirty-one (31) of them were eventually released due to lack of sufficient basis;

WHEREAS, these attacks are clearly designed to intimidate and harass activists, leaders and members of progressive organizations advocating for the rights and interests of the people. The planting of firearms, explosives and other evidence is clearly pre-mediated so that the cases filed against the arrested activists are non-bailable, keeping activists in jail while trumped-up charges are tried in court;

WHEREAS, the arrest of the five activists in Tacloban is only one case among the many attacks against human rights defenders and activists in the region covered by Memorandum Order No. 32 which mandates the increased deployment of state forces in Samar, Bicol, and Negros regions. Memorandum Order 32 was issued after Executive Order No. 70 was issued by President Duterte, which mandated the creation of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). The national task force has since unveiled itself as a tool to silence any form of dissent from activists and people’s organizations, human rights defenders, and critical media outfits, mainstream and alternative, by falsely tagging them as “enemies of the state” and armed combatants of terrorist groups;

WHEREAS, it is imperative for members of Congress, as representatives of our people, to defend the rights of our people and check on excesses and violations committed against them. Laws and rules should serve the interest of our people, and should not be weaponized to suppress their rights and oppress them;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the House of Representatives, through the Committee on Human Rights, conduct an investigation, in aid of legislation, on the illegal arrest of leaders of progressive organizations and activists in Tacloban City by combined forces of the
CIDG and PNP Region XIII, as well as the reported planting of firearms, explosives, and other evidence.

Approved,

REP. EOTEMIA C. CULLAMAT
Bayan Muna Partylist

REP. CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE
Bayan Muna Partylist

REP. ARLENE D. BROSAS
GABRIELA Women's Party

REP. SARAH JANE I. ELAGO
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REP. FERDINAND R. GAITE
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