

18 December 2017

### **Philippines: Human rights defender arrested in rebellion case**

On 12 December 2017, human rights defender and environmentalist **Sherwin De Vera** was arrested in Northern Luzon, in Ilocos Sur province.

[Sherwin De Vera](#) is the coordinator of **Defend Ilocos**, a regional environmental network in North Western Philippines affiliated with Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment. Defend Ilocos played a key role in leading the Save the Abra River Movement (STARM), which led protests against the detrimental effects of the continued operations of the Lepanto Mining Company on the local communities' right to a safe and healthy environment in Ilocos Sur. Defend Ilocos is also involved in mobilizing and organizing against the proposed setting up of a coal-fired power plant in Luna, La Union. The human rights defender is also a former worker of Filipino human rights NGO [Karapatan](#).

On December 12, around 6.30pm, Sherwin De Vera was arrested by the Philippine National Police (PNP) when he was on board a bus to his home in Bantay, Ilocos Sur. The PNP stopped the vehicle at a checkpoint, found Sherwin De Vera, and informed him that he was being arrested. The police failed to produce a warrant when Sherwin De Vera demanded to see a copy. He was verbally informed that a rebellion case had been filed against him. He was shown a copy of the complaint, Case no 2014-155., allegedly filed in the Province of Abra on 4 September 2014, when he was brought to the PNP office. Since then, three additional cases have been opened against Sherwin De Vera. In the four cases, he is being charged with one count of rebellion, one count of attempted murder, 28 counts of attempted murder, and 20 counts of attempted murder. All the incidents he is allegedly charged with are from 2014, when Sherwin De Vera took over the coordination of Defend Ilocos. He is currently detained in Abra Provincial Jail.

Previously, on 18 July 2017, Sherwin de Vera was [followed](#) by men in military uniforms in Vigan City. The following day, he learned that army personnel had enquired about his activities at the city's university after he visited their campus.

Environmental, land and indigenous rights defenders have been increasingly targeted in Philippines with threats, attacks, intimidation and harassment from military agents as part of a larger crackdown on civil society. The use of trumped-up charges to jail human rights defenders through perjured testimonies, defective warrants, and false charges is becoming more frequent.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the arrest of, and charges against, human rights defender Sherwin De Vera, which it believes are solely motivated by his peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

#### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Philippines to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Sherwin De Vera as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Immediately ensure that all charges against him are dropped, that the cases are closed, and that there be no further forms of harassment against Sherwin De Vera as it is believed

that this pressure is not only related to his legitimate human rights activities but, furthermore, constitute a direct transgression of the rights of the human rights defender;

3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in the Philippines and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

*Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 5 (a and b) "For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (a) To meet or assemble peacefully, (b) To form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups" and to Article 6 (a) "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (a) To know, seek, obtain, receive and hold information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including having access to information as to how those rights and freedoms are given effect in domestic legislative, judicial or administrative systems".*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director