

29 July 2016

Philippines – Harassment against human rights defender Melissa Comiso

On 26 July 2016, human rights defender Ms **Melissa Comiso** received threatening text messages from unknown telephone numbers. These messages form part of a larger pattern of threats to her from unidentified people in the past month.

[Melissa Comiso](#) is the Literacy and Numeracy Program Coordinator of Rural Missionaries of the Philippines – Northern Mindanao Sub-Region (RMP-NMR), an organisation that supports peasants' quest for justice, freedom, access to common goods and agrarian reform through redistribution of land to improve equality for landowners in the Northern Mindanao Sub-Region. Melissa Comiso defends indigenous people's rights, and campaigns for the withdrawal of the military from the northern Mindanao communities. Indigenous peoples' defenders in Mindanao have faced [repeated](#) targeting, including killings and harassment.

On 26 July 2016, Melissa Comiso received threatening text messages from unknown numbers, asking for her location. This followed continuous text messages threatening her and her children two days prior, including "I know you are having a hard time raising your children, you are just receiving minimal allowance from RMP schools. Come to think of it. I know where your children are. I know your whereabouts".

On 7 July 2016, an unidentified man threatened Melissa Comiso while she visited the Agusan del Norte Provincial Hospital. He attempted to give her a phone number in her hand while saying, "Don't resist ma'am because we already know your work. Contact this number. I am from the military. If you want to improve your life, contact this cellphone number." The man later followed Melissa Comiso on her motorcycle but she succeeded in losing him. On 9 July 2016, an unidentified person attempted to break into the office of the human rights defender in Butuan City but did not succeed. On 11 July 2016, a colleague of Melissa Comiso was visiting Agusan del Norte Provincial Hospital and was approached by the same unidentified man who stated he was waiting for Melissa Comiso.

Front Line Defenders is concerned by the harassment of human rights defenders Melissa Comiso, which it believes to be directly linked to her peaceful and legitimate work in the defence of indigenous peoples' rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Philippines to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Melissa Comiso and her colleagues at RMP-NMR;
2. Investigate reports of threats and other forms of intimidation against human rights defender Melissa Comiso and her colleagues at RMP-NMR, and adopt immediate measures to ensure their protection;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Philippines are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.