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Fourth UA: 48/22 Index: ASA 35/7793/2024 Philippines of March 8, 2024

PHILIPPINES CALL FOR FAIR REVIEW OF CHARGES AGAINST LEILA DE LIMA

Court proceedings for the last of three baseless charges against Leila de Lima, a human rights defender and former Philippine senator, are set to resume in March. This comes four months after her November 2023 bail, which the court granted due to the weak nature of the allegations, leading to her temporary release. We urge the government to conduct an impartial reassessment of this remaining charge and consider its dismissal. Furthermore, we demand accountability for those behind her nearly seven-year unjust detention and the human rights abuses she has endured.

Write to the Justice Secretary urging him to:

- Drop the final fabricated case against de Lima and put an end to her years of persecution.
- Conduct thorough, independent and impartial investigations into those responsible for her arbitrary detention and ensure full accountability for the years of human rights violations she has had to endure.
- Work toward creating an environment that enables human rights defenders like Leila to carry out their important work, without fear of reprisals.

Write to:

Secretary Jesus Crispin C. Remulla
Department of Justice
Padre Faura Street, Ermita, Manila 10020
Republic of the Philippines
communications@doj.gov.ph , osec@doj.gov.ph
Salutation: Dear Secretary Remulla:

And copy:

Her Excellency Maria Andrelita Austria
Ambassador
Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines
30 Murray Street
Ottawa, ON K1N 5M4
Tel: 613-233-1121 or 24hrs 614-2846 Fax: 613-233-4165
Email: embassyofphilippines@rogers.com

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Leila de Lima, a human rights advocate and former senator, was detained at the Philippine National Police headquarters since February 24, 2017. On November 13, 2023, she gained temporary freedom through bail. De Lima had been a vocal opponent of human rights abuses during former President

Duterte's tenure. Amnesty International has consistently stated that the charges against her were unfounded, emphasizing that witness testimonies were fabricated.

De Lima faced three drug-related charges, all believed to be unfounded. Two of these charges were dismissed by courts in 2021 and 2023. The third charge, which allowed her bail in November 2023, accuses her of overlooking a drug trade within the New Bilibid Prison. This charge suggests a violation of the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2022, carrying a life sentence. Court proceedings for this final charge are set to continue in March 2024.

Between October and November 2023, eight individuals withdrew their accusations against de Lima, totaling 13 recantations over recent years. The latest, a retired police officer, labeled his previous claims as hearsay and lies in December 2023. Earlier, in April 2022, self-styled drug dealer Kerwin Espinosa withdrew his statement about giving de Lima drug money.

Rafael Ragos, former Bureau of Corrections acting chief, also withdrew his accusations in April 2022. He claimed coercion by former Justice Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre and others, alleging he delivered bribes to de Lima in 2012. Though initially charged alongside de Lima, Ragos's charges were dropped after he agreed to testify against her, an agreement Aguirre denies.

Ronnie Dayan, de Lima's co-accused and former bodyguard, also retracted his 2016 testimony about collecting drug money for de Lima. He cited coercion by then-Representative Rey Umali during 2016 Congressional inquiries into the drug trade within the prison.

De Lima's 2017 arrest followed her efforts to expose the "war on drugs," which led to numerous extrajudicial killings and human rights violations. Like de Lima's case, there has been little justice for victims or accountability for perpetrators of these abuses.

Please take action as soon as possible until April 26, 2024! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.