The Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI), a global indigenous organization championing indigenous rights, fully supports its partner indigenous organizations in its fight against the Philippines' new anti-terror law.

On August 7, various Philippine-based Moro and Indigenous Peoples organizations filed the 24th petition for certiorari and prohibition before the Supreme Court against the recently-passed Republic Act 11479 or the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020.

In the petition, Indigenous Peoples stated that the vague and arbitrary definitions of terror crimes under the law may be used against Indigenous Peoples and indigenous rights advocates. The groups represented in the petition were Kalumbay Regional Lumad Organization, Kalipunan ng Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas (Katribu), SANDUGO (Alliance and Movement of Bangsamoro and Indigenous Peoples and for Self-Determination), Save Our Schools Network, LILAK/Purple Actionfor Indigenous Women’s Rights Inc, among others.

“Red baiting or red-tagging, the act of labeling persons as communists or terrorists, has been used in the past against civil society leaders who are critical of the government,” the petition stated.

Even prior to the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, the Philippine government under the Duterte administration drew flak for red-tagging activists, including indigenous rights defenders as terrorists. In fact, in 2018, more than 600 names of human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, and Indigenous Peoples were included in the government’s “terrorist list”.

The list even included IPRI Co-directors former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, and Indigenous Peoples’ Major Group (IPMG) for Sustainable Development Co-convenor Joan Carling.

“As a global indigenous organization, IPRI commits to stand with Indigenous Peoples’ fight for justice, no matter how challenging it may be. The Philippine Anti-Terrorism Act serves as a legal weapon by the state to warrant further attacks to defenders of rights, lands and the environment,” Carling said.
“IPRI will work together with indigenous organizations and advocates against this draconian law, and to promote the respect and realization of Indigenous Peoples rights as well as access to justice,” she added.

Carling also noted that the Philippines is one of the focus countries of IPRI because of its continuing serious violations of the individual and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples which are recognized and protected by international and national laws and policies.

In the midyear Global report of IPRI on the criminalization of, and impunity against Indigenous Peoples in the time of COVID-19, the Philippines has the highest number of documented incidents of criminalization in 23 countries. It recorded 32 incidents which affected 125 individuals, three communities, and six villages. These cases include land grabbing, dispersal of legitimate protest against mining, among others.

To support the fight against the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, IPRI hosted an online forum to discuss the law and its implications to Indigenous Peoples and indigenous rights advocates in the Philippines on August 10, 2020.

The speakers in the online forum were Lumad teacher Jeany Rose Hayahay, Commission on Human Rights Commissioner Gwen Pimentel-Gana, and Indigenous Lawyer Atty. Tony La Viña, who represented the petitioners to the Supreme Court.

In the online forum, Comm. Pimentel raised that extra judicial killings and other forms of human rights violations were pervasive and prevalent even without the Anti-Terrorism Law, thus the concerns of human rights defenders on the susceptibility of this new law to abuse is valid and logical.

She said, “The vagueness of the meaning of ‘act of terrorism’ in the Philippine Anti-Terror Law will open the floodgates to abuse targeting activists, including Indigenous Peoples, as they legitimately demand respecting and promoting their rights.”

Atty. Tony La Viña, on the other hand, reiterated that the new law is far from solving terrorism, as the government fails to provide basic social services to people, “I am against terrorism but this Anti-terror law does not solve terrorism in the Philippines. What works is addressing the root problems of inequality, like poverty.”

Teacher Rose from Salugpongan Lumad School also called on the public to support the fight against the Anti-Terror Law.

“We call on junking the Anti-Terror Law. We fought before and we’re still here. We will keep fighting,” she concluded. ###