

PRESS RELEASE

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Reference: Angie Ipong, Secretary General, SELDA (0949-9587373)

SELDA HITS CRIMINALIZATION OF POLITICAL OFFENSES, CALLS FOR THE RELEASE OF ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS

The Samahan ng mga Ex-detainees Laban sa Detensyon at Aresto (SELDA) today said that the statement of the Armed Forces of the Philippines denying the existence of political prisoners and branding them as “criminals” shows the “total disregard for human rights and violation of the military and the GPH of the standing agreements and jurisprudence prohibiting the criminalization of political offenses.”

Angie Ipong, SELDA secretary general, said that the AFP is actually admitting that it has violated Part III Article 6 of the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) signed by both the government and the National Democratic Front where the GPH should “abide by its doctrine laid down in *People vs. Hernandez* (99 Phil. 515, July 18, 1956), as further elaborated in *People vs. Geronimo* (100 Phil. 90, October 13, 1956), and shall forthwith review the cases of all prisoners or detainees who have been charged, detained, or convicted contrary to this doctrine, and shall immediately release them.”

The Hernandez doctrine is an established court ruling that political offenders or those suspected of political crimes should not be charged, detained nor convicted of common crimes.

Reports from Karapatan show that out of 360 political prisoners as of August 2011, at least 303 (84.17 %) of them have been charged with common crimes alone. Only 15 of them (4.17 %) have been charged with rebellion. Twenty others have been charged with common crimes in addition to rebellion, two were charged with “terrorism” while there is no sufficient available data for the rest of the twenty.

“I myself am a victim of this violation under the Arroyo government, when I was abducted, tortured, detained and accused of being a top CPP-NPA leader while being charged with

criminal cases such as double murder, double attempted murder and arson. These trumped up and fabricated charges were made to keep me behind bars for six years until the charges were dropped by the courts because of lack of evidence and credible witnesses by the AFP,” Ipong explained.

Branding political prisoners as criminals and heaping upon them common crime charges conveniently hide the political nature of their acts; allow the government to shamelessly declare them as common criminals not motivated by a higher goal, thereby violating these prisoners’ rights even more, Ipong stated.

SELDA also welcomed House resolution 1810 filed yesterday by partylist lawmakers led by Bayan Muna Rep. Neri Colmenares urging the House Committee on Human Rights and the Committee on Justice to investigate the continuous and rampant filing of false and trumped up criminal charges against persons who are politically critical of the government. (please see copy of the House resolution as attached)

What the government is doing in criminalizing political actions is no different from what the US colonial powers did a century ago to patriotic Filipinos fighting for independence. The American colonizers branded as “bandits, brigands and robbers” such nationalists as Macario Sakay and his men who were resisting imperial domination. “We hope that this government learn from history and stop the practice of discrediting patriots as ordinary criminals,” Ipong concluded.###

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The Samahan ng Ex-Detainees Laban sa Detensyon at Aresto (SELDA) is an organization of former political prisoners in the Philippines. Founded on December 4, 1984, SELDA was initiated by newly-released political prisoners of the martial law period. SELDA’s primary task is to work for the release of all political prisoners and to see to it that humane treatment of those who are still in detention are complied with by the Philippine authorities. SELDA advocates justice for current and former political prisoners. It calls for the mobilisation of resources in support of political prisoners, former detainees and their families. It carries out legislative advocacy for the indemnification and rehabilitation of political prisoners. SELDA goes into partnership and builds solidarity with concerned individuals and groups for the freedom and welfare of political prisoners and all victims of tyranny.

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KARAPATAN is an alliance of human rights organizations and programs, human rights desks and committees of people's organizations, and individual advocates committed to the defense and promotion of people's rights and civil liberties. It monitors and documents cases of human rights violations, assists and defends victims and conducts education, training and campaign.