

Public Statement

The Law Society of Upper Canada expresses grave concerns about the ongoing surveillance and intimidation of human rights lawyer Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon in the Philippines

Toronto — The Law Society of Upper Canada is gravely concerned about the ongoing surveillance and intimidation of Filipino human rights lawyer Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon.

Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon has been the subject of different forms of harassment, including surveillance, labelling and verbal intimidation by members of the military over the last few months.

The ongoing harassment of Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon appears to be related to her legal work. She is a founding member of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL), which provides legal services to victims of human rights violations. In particular, the NUPL provides legal services to marginalized and vulnerable clients who include: farmers, workers, women, youth, students, children, migrant workers, indigenous peoples, minority groups, the Moro people and impoverished peoples.

Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon has also taken on high profile legal cases, including the defense of several political detainees. As a result of her work, she has been placed on the Filipino military's Watch List of "Communist Terrorist" supporters who provide legal services and she is now labelled as a "Red Lawyer".

Additionally, the Regional Intelligence Division of the Philippine National Police (PNP) has allegedly ordered the PNP office in Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon's hometown to conduct a background investigation into whether she is a "Red Lawyer".

Since March, Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon has been under the surveillance of the Intelligence Services of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. On 12, 19 and 21 of March 2014, men on motorcycles, who appeared to be members of the military, were monitoring the area around her office and questioned members of the local community as to her whereabouts.

A few weeks later, on 3 and 12 April 2014, her home was also placed under surveillance by two men on a motorcycle. Between 31 March and 10 April 2014, Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon's office was visited several times by individuals presumably being members of the Military Intelligence Group (MIG). This surveillance is particularly concerning in view of the violent death on March 25, 2014 of William Bugatti, a paralegal who was working with Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon.

The Law Society is deeply concerned about situations where lawyers who work for the protection and respect of human rights are themselves targeted for exercising their freedoms and rights under international law. International human rights instruments, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* state that respect for human rights is essential to advancing the rule of law. Article 16 of the *United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers* states that “governments shall ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely; and shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics”. Article 18 states that “lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients’ causes as a result of discharging their functions”.

The Law Society urges the government of the Philippines to:

- a. guarantee all the procedural rights that should be accorded to Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon and other human rights defenders in the Philippines;
- b. guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon;
- c. put an end to all acts of harassment against Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon and other human rights defenders in the Philippines;
- d. ensure that all lawyers can carry out their peaceful and legitimate activities without fear of physical violence or other human rights violations; and
- e. ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments.

The Law Society of Upper Canada is the governing body for 46,000 lawyers and 6,300 paralegals in the Province of Ontario, Canada, and the Treasurer is the head of the Law Society. The mandate of the Law Society is to govern the legal profession in the public interest by upholding the independence, integrity and honour of the legal profession for the purpose of advancing the cause of justice and the rule of law.

The Law Society urges the legal community to intervene in support of members of the legal profession in the Philippines in their effort to advance the respect of human rights and to promote the rule of law.

- 30 -

For more information, please contact Lisa Hall at 416-947-7625 or lhall@lsuc.on.ca.

The Law Society of Upper Canada
Osgoode Hall
130 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N6