



## Christian Human Rights Defender faces trumped-up murder charges in the Philippines

February 2019

Filipino health care worker and human rights defender Rachel Mariano is facing trumped-up murder and attempted murder charges in her homeland in a deliberate bid to silence her.

Rachel is an Indigenous Ibaloi and has worked tirelessly as an advocate in asserting the rights of Indigenous peoples in Icos to self-determination, ancestral lands and community-based health care systems.

She is also a member of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, which has a formal partnership with the Uniting Church in Australia.



Rachel Mariano (right) and her daughter Aisa (left)

Members of the 81<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army based in Ilocos Sur filed a case of one count of murder, two counts of frustrated murder, and six counts of attempted murder against Rachel, in an alleged shoot out between the Philippine Army and the armed communist group, New People's Army (NPA), in Patiacan, Quirino, Ilocos Sur on 15 October 2017 where a soldier was killed.

Under Filipino law frustrated murder is when the victim was wounded in the attempted murder, but due to medical intervention their life was saved. If the wound inflicted was not life threatening, then the charge is attempted murder.

Two more trumped-up charges were filed against her together with four other women human rights defenders (Sarah Abellon, Sherry Mae Soledad, Joanne Villanueva and Asia Gepte). One case covers four counts of attempted and frustrated homicide related to an alleged armed clash between the Philippines army and the NPA in Sigay, Ilocos Sur on 4 August 2017 and the other case with 10 counts of attempted homicide related to another army and NPA shoot out that occurred in Salcedo, Ilocos Sur on 22 July 2017.

The Filipino army and police have a long history of placing false charges against human rights defenders in a bid to harass and intimidate them. The Uniting Church has campaigned on many such cases.

Rachel is being detained in a provincial jail in Ilocos Sur awaiting trial. She is married to Bill, who is a pastor in the UCCP, and they have three children.

### What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

**Senator The Hon. Marise Payne**  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern at the imprisonment of health worker Rachel Mariano in the Philippines on trumped up charges of murder, frustrated murder and attempted murder.
- Express concern that these charges are being brought against her and four other human rights defenders, Sarah Abellon, Sherry Mae Soledad, Joanne Villanueva and Asia Gepte, as a means to harass and intimidate them over their peaceful human rights work.
- Ask that the Australian Government seek the immediate and unconditional release of Rachel Mariano
- Request that the Australian ask the Philippines Government to drop the charges against her and the other four women human rights defenders.

Also write to:

Mr Jim Tito B. SAN AGUSTIN  
Chargé d'Affaires  
Embassy of the Philippines  
1 Moonah Place  
Yarralumla, ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Mr San Agustin

E-mail: [cbrpe@philembassy.org.au](mailto:cbrpe@philembassy.org.au)

Points to make in your letter or e-mail:

- Express deep concern at the imprisonment of health worker Rachel Mariano in the Philippines on charges of murder, frustrated murder and attempted murder.
- Express concern that these charges are being brought against her and four other human rights defenders, Sarah Abellon, Sherry Mae Soledad, Joanne Villanueva and Asia Gepte, as a means to harass and intimidate them over their peaceful human rights work.
- Ask for the immediate and unconditional release of Rachel Mariano
- Ask the Philippines Government to drop the charges against her and the other four women human rights defenders.