

URGENT ACTION

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS ACTIVISTS REPORTED MISSING

Indigenous Peoples' rights defenders Dexter Capuyan and Gene Roz Jamil "Bazoo" de Jesus, from the Cordillera region in northern Philippines, have been missing since 28 April 2023, in a suspected enforced disappearance by state security forces. Their families received credible information that two individuals matching the missing activists' description were forcibly taken in the area where they were last seen by unknown individuals identifying themselves as working for a police agency, but have not received neither a confirmation nor a denial from government security forces that such an operation indeed happened.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Senior Undersecretary Carlito Galvez Jr.

OIC, Department of National Defense

comms@dnd.gov.ph

Secretary Benjamin C. Abalos Jr.

Department of the Interior and Local Government

bcabalosjr@dilg.gov.ph

Dear Secretaries Galvez and Abalos,

I am writing to express grave concern over the disappearance of Indigenous Peoples' rights defenders Dexter Capuyan and Gene Roz Jamil "Bazoo" de Jesus, who were reported missing for weeks now in a suspected case of enforced disappearances by state security forces. They were last seen in Taytay town, Rizal province, on 28 April. Their fate and whereabouts remain unknown. Their families have tried searching for them by visiting military and police facilities, but majority of these facilities have denied them assistance, including access, and a categorical declaration of whether or not the authorities have Capuyan and de Jesus in their custody, as the law requires.

I was distressed to learn from their families that they received information from witnesses that two men matching Capuyan's and de Jesus' description were forcibly taken by unknown individuals identifying themselves as working for a police agency, around the time and place where the two activists were last seen. The families have received neither a confirmation nor a denial from government security forces that such operation, whether official or not, indeed happened.

This is not the first time in the last year that human rights defenders and activists have been abducted; some were later released by individuals whom victims identified as connected with the government. Prior to their disappearance, these human rights defenders were relentlessly 'red-tagged' or accused by the government of being members of the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army.

In line with your offices' and the government's international human rights obligations, I call on you to:

- Clarify the fate and whereabouts of Capuyan and de Jesus; ensure a prompt, thorough, independent, impartial, transparent and effective investigation into their disappearance, and allow and carry out diligent search of your facilities;*
- Categorically state whether or not Capuyan and de Jesus are in government custody, alongside fulfilling the government's other obligations under the Anti-Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance Act of 2012; and*
- Should they be detained by the government, immediately release Capuyan and de Jesus and ensure that those suspected to be responsible for their enforced disappearance are brought to justice in fair trials.*

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Both Dexter and Capuyan and Gene Roz Jamil “Bazoo” de Jesus are Indigenous Peoples’ rights defenders from the Philippines’ Cordillera region, in Northern Luzon.

Capuyan, 56, is a member of the Bontoc-Kankanaey-Ibaloi community and was in Taytay, Rizal, where he was last seen and was supposed to seek medical help according to his family. Before his disappearance, he was identified by the government allegedly as a ranking leader of the New People’s Army (NPA). He was also among the individuals named in the list of alleged leaders of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) released by the Department of National Defense and Department of Interior and Local Government. Additionally, he was among the more than 600 individuals named in the Department of Justice’s petition to proscribe the CPP-NPA as a terrorist organization. The list was eventually cut down to eight individuals, excluding Capuyan, and the petition was subsequently dismissed by the court. Authorities are also offering a PHP2.85-million bounty for his arrest for two counts of murder, of which his family believes Capuyan was not made aware. Posters were put up in Apayao province stating he was “wanted dead or alive”.

De Jesus, 27, is a staff of the Philippine Task Force on Indigenous Peoples Rights (TFIP). He was a journalism graduate of the University of the Philippines in Bauio City, where he served as the chairperson of the Alliance of Concerned Students and the UP Baguio Council of Leaders before graduating in 2016. He also served as the Cordillera regional coordinator of the National Union of Students of the Philippines.

Before this, several other activists were also abducted by unknown individuals in suspected cases of enforced disappearances by state security forces; some were released by their captors following public clamour. In January 2023, development workers Dyan Gumanao and Armand Dayoha went missing for six days in Cebu City. The couple described in a subsequent press conference how they were emotionally and psychologically tortured, with their captors interrogating them and asking them if they were members of a terrorist group. In August 2022, Stephen Tauli, another Indigenous Peoples’ rights activist from the Cordillera region who was also repeatedly red-tagged, was abducted by unknown armed men before he was released a day after. Like Gumanao and Dayoha, Tauli said he was interrogated by his captors and forced to sign a document where he supposedly admitted that he was a CPP official. In November 2021, land rights defender and community organizer [Steve Abua](#) was abducted; he remains missing. His wife said that following his abduction, his captors called her and asked her to convince Abua to admit that he was a member of an armed group.

The Philippines’ [Anti-Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance Act of 2012](#) requires the Philippines National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines and their agencies, among others, to issue a certification stating whether or not they are holding persons reported to be missing, as well as to release any information they have about the disappearance, upon the inquiry of family members, lawyers, human rights organizations or members of the media. The law also mandates and authorizes the Commission on Human Rights to “conduct regular, independent, unannounced and unrestricted visits to or inspection of all places of detention and confinement”.

The phenomenon of red-tagging – or the linking of human rights defenders and activists to armed groups, by both the government and unknown individuals – has been happening for decades. It intensified in the last few years under the administration of former President Rodrigo Duterte, following the breakdown of peace talks between the government and the CPP in 2017. Duterte’s subsequent Executive Order (EO) 70 provides for a “Whole-of-Nation approach in defeating the Local Communist Terrorist Groups” and led to the creation of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict. Observers point to this moment in time as the beginning of a renewed campaign of red-tagging, threats and harassment – including killings and enforced disappearances – of human rights defenders, political activists, lawyers, trade unionists and other targeted groups.

Many groups, including Amnesty International and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, have called for the immediate end to this approach, expressing concern that the government’s dangerously broad counter-insurgency strategy has led to an increase in the violations of the human rights of human rights defenders and activists across the country.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 July 2023

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Dexter Capuyan (he/him), Gene Roz Jami “Bazoo” de Jesus (he/him)