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Palace denies UN expert's authoritarian tag: PH democracy 'vibrant and strong'

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Metro Manila (CNN Philippines, March 31) — A top aide of [President Rodrigo Duterte](#) on Saturday denied that the administration has become authoritarian — as alleged by a [United Nations](#) expert who was included on the government's list of terrorists.

"Democracy in the Philippines is vibrant and strong. All the branches of the government are functioning and the rule of law thrives," Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea said in a statement.

He said the executive branch, which includes the President and his Cabinet, "respects the separation of powers and the independence of the other co-equal branches and doesn't meddle with their affairs."

His statement comes after UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz slammed the Duterte government for clamping down on its critics.

"The new government has become very authoritarian," Corpuz said at the first Human Rights Festival organized by non-government organization Reset-Diritti Umani in Milan, Italy on March 25.

Climate of impunity

Corpuz said the Duterte administration controls Congress, as evidenced by the impeachment case against [Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno](#) and the detention of [Senator Leila de Lima](#).

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The Palace has denied any involvement in efforts to oust Sereno and has said De Lima is no victim of political persecution but was detained over drug charges. Sereno and De Lima both voiced disagreements on some of Duterte's policies, including the bloody [war on drugs](#).

Corpuz said almost 20,000 drug suspects were killed in the drug war. Government data show more than 4,000 killed in anti-drug operations since July 2016.

Malacañang has said there are no state-sponsored killings and it is committed to investigate officers who violate rules and abuse their power.

But Corpuz believes those who protest the killings are also being killed.

Medialdea said Corpuz's remarks only show "how detached she is with the realities happening in the Philippines."

Who is Corpuz?

Corpuz, a Kankana-ey Igorot, is among 600 people the Justice Department seeks to be labeled as terrorists, according to a petition it filed before the Manila Regional Trial Court in February.

UN human rights experts slam inclusion of rapporteur in DOJ 'terrorist' list

She is accused of being a member of the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army, which the government wants outlawed. She has denied being part of these groups.

Her colleagues at the UN believe her terrorist label was "an act of retaliation" for her criticism of alleged military attacks and killings among the indigenous Lumads in Mindanao.

Malacañang has defended its list of terrorists, saying there is no witch hunt on UN special rapporteurs and that Corpuz can present evidence to clear her name.