



Nations Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, who has been labeled a terrorist by the Duterte administration, recently urged Italians to help stop what she described as “fascism” in the Philippines. **AFP/File**

Rule of law still prevails in the Philippines – Palace

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[Alexis Romero](#) (The Philippine Star) - April 1, 2018 - 12:01am

MANILA, Philippines — Malacañang yesterday disputed the claim of United Nations Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz that the Philippine government has become authoritarian, saying the rule of law still prevails in the country.

Corpuz, who has been labeled a terrorist by the Duterte administration, recently urged Italians to help stop what she described as “fascism” in the Philippines.

Speaking to delegates of the Human Rights Festival in Milan last March 25, Corpuz said the “authoritarian” government in the Philippines is controlling Congress and is going against institutions formed to balance the executive branch.

Corpuz cited the impeachment petition filed against Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno and the arrest and detention of Sen. Leila de Lima, a vocal critic of President Duterte, on charges related to illegal drugs.

Those who want Sereno removed alleged that she failed to meet the 10-year requirement for the filing of statements of assets, liabilities and networth and misusing public funds, among other allegations.

In refuting Corpuz’s claims, Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea said her statements show “how detached she is with the realities happening in the Philippines.”

He insisted that the executive department does not interfere with the affairs of its co-equal branches – the judiciary and the legislature.

“Democracy in the Philippines is vibrant and strong. All the branches of the government are functioning and the rule of law thrives. The executive branch respects the separation of powers and the independence of the other co-equal branches and doesn’t meddle with their affairs,” Medialdea said in a statement.

Corpuz and about 600 other persons were tagged as terrorists by the government after President Duterte scrapped the peace negotiations with communist rebels, although the Department of Justice (DOJ) is still waiting for the Manila Regional Trial Court Branch 19 to declare them, as required by the Human Security Act of 2007, terrorists.

Under the law, the DOJ should file a petition asking the court to declare a person or a group as terrorist.

Also in the list were Communist Party of the Philippines founding chairman Jose Maria Sison, communist leaders Benito and Wilma Tiamzon, National Democratic Front of the Philippines consultant Rafael Baylosis, former peace panel chief Luis Jalandoni and former Bayan Muna party-list representative Satur Ocampo.

Waging war

Corpuz, in a commentary published in Financial Times last week, claimed that the Duterte administration is waging a war against messengers who report about human rights violations in the country, as she reiterated her criticism over her inclusion in the list of individuals that the government wants to tag as terrorists.

“I am the UN special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples. My mandate is to report when communities anywhere in the world are forced to relocate, their lands uprooted, their leaders either deemed criminals or killed. Not everyone wants to hear it, but the message needs to be spread. In the Philippines, they are shooting the messengers,” she wrote.

Corpuz, who repeatedly denied allegations of having links with the Communist Party of the Philippine and New Peoples’ Army, said her inclusion in the list made her fear for her safety.

“In lumping its critics together with criminals, the government seeks to make us all guilty by association and thus the next targets of the vigilantes and rogue police officers who have led President Duterte’s bloody war against drugs. Now, he has started a new war – with new targets,” she added.

A member of the Kankanaey Igorot tribe, Corpuz vowed to continue fighting for indigenous peoples’ rights in the Philippines and other parts of the world.

“I have spent my life peacefully advocating for the rights of my people and other indigenous peoples around the world. I am sad to see the Philippines once again slipping towards the fascism that too many other nations have embraced, but I am not ready to give up now, either,” she said.

Her next report to the UN, she added, would focus on the topic of indigenous criminalization in different parts of the world.

“As the government continues to press its case, I will have to include my own experience, even though it pales in comparison to what others have faced. If I am arrested, or personally attacked, this next UN report might be delayed, but I am only one of many messengers speaking out against the many violations of human rights,” she said.

“You can keep shooting the messenger, but you will run out of bullets before we run out of messengers and, at the end of the day, the message will be heard,” added the UN rapporteur. – **Janvic Mateo**