

URGENT ACTION

LAST CHARGE AGAINST LEILA DE LIMA CONTINUES

Court proceedings on the third and final bogus charge against human rights defender and former Philippine senator, Leila de Lima, are resuming in March, or four months after she was allowed to post bail in November 2023 that resulted in her temporary freedom. In granting de Lima's petition for bail, the court said the allegations against her were weak. We call on the government to impartially review this last remaining charge, with a view to dropping this, and to hold accountable those responsible for her nearly seven years of arbitrary detention and other human rights violations against her.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
- [Click here](#) to let us know the actions you took on **Fourth Urgent Action 48.22**. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

Secretary Jesus Crispin C. Remulla
Department of Justice
Padre Faura Street, Ermita, Manila 10020
Republic of the Philippines
Email: communications@doj.gov.ph OR
osec@doj.gov.ph

Philippine Embassy in the United States
Ambassador Jose Manuel del Gallego Romualdez
1600 Massachusetts Avenue, NW,
Washington DC 20036
Email: info@phembassy-us.org
Salutation: Dear Ambassador Jose Manuel del Gallego
Romualdez

Dear Secretary Remulla, or Dear Ambassador,

I welcomed the good news before the end of 2023 that human rights defender and former Philippine senator, **Leila de Lima**, was finally freed, although temporarily, after she was granted bail in the third and last fabricated charge against her. I remain concerned, however, as court proceedings for this final case are resuming in March, and she continues to face the risk of being sent back to prison solely for her human rights work. I write to urge your office to impartially review the last charge against her, with a view to dropping it, and put an end to her years of persecution.

As of December 2023, at least 13 witnesses had retracted their testimony against de Lima, with the court also citing the weakness of the allegations against her as the basis for the granting of her bail petition last year. These retractions and the latest court decision are veritable proof of concerted efforts to fabricate evidence against de Lima and persecute her, which resulted in her arbitrary detention for nearly seven years and other human rights violations against her.

I call on your office to drop the final fabricated case against de Lima and put an end to her years of persecution. I also call on your office to conduct thorough, independent, and impartial investigations into those responsible for her arbitrary detention and ensure full accountability for the years of human rights violations she endured. Finally, I urge you to work toward creating an environment that enables human rights defenders like Leila to carry out their important work, without fear of reprisals.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Human rights defender and former Senator, **Leila de Lima**, had been detained at the headquarters of the Philippine National Police (PNP) since her arrest on February 24, 2017. She was temporarily released from detention on November 13, 2023, after she was granted bail. She was one of the staunchest critics of the human rights violations under the administration of former President Duterte. In the nearly seven years of her arbitrary detention, Amnesty International has said that the charges against her were fabricated, and that the allegations by witnesses against her were manufactured.

De Lima faced three fabricated drug-related charges in total, two of which were dismissed by two different courts in 2021 and 2023. In the third and last case, for which she was allowed to post bail in November 2023 for her temporary freedom, she is accused of allegedly tolerating “widespread drug trade” inside the New Bilibid Prison (NBP), a violation that carries the maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Court proceedings on this last charge are expected to resume in March 2024.

In October and November 2023, eight people retracted their testimony against de Lima. The latest was a retired police officer, who said in December 2023 that his allegations were “pure hearsay and full of lies”. Prior to this, in April 2022, self-proclaimed drug trader, Kerwin Espinosa, recanted his previous testimony where he claimed that he gave a total of P8 million (about USD \$152,000) in drug payoffs to de Lima when she was Justice Secretary.

Rafael Ragos, a former acting chief of the Bureau of Corrections, also recanted his statements against de Lima in April 2022. Ragos said he was forced to “manufacture lies” by former Justice Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre and other senior officials. Ragos previously testified that in 2012, he delivered money from prisoners in the NBP to de Lima’s residence on two occasions, while she was Secretary of Justice, for her bid to become Senator. Ragos was previously accused alongside de Lima, but the charges against him were dropped after he agreed to act as a witness against her. Aguirre has since denied Ragos’s accusation.

On May 13, 2022, de Lima’s co-accused and former bodyguard, Ronnie Dayan, likewise recanted his testimony in 2016 that he collected drug money from Espinosa for his then employer de Lima when she was still the Justice Secretary. A co-respondent in one of the two remaining cases against her, Dayan said former Oriental Mindoro Representative, Rey Umali, coerced him to testify against de Lima during the 2016 Congressional inquiries into the illegal drug trading in NBP.

De Lima’s arrest in 2017 came after she attempted to investigate abuses committed in the context of the so-called “war on drugs”, which has resulted in the extrajudicial execution of thousands of suspected drug offenders. As in the case of de Lima, there has largely been no justice for the victims of these abuses and their families, nor accountability for the perpetrators.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Filipino, or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: April 26, 2024

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Leila de Lima (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://oneamnesty.sharepoint.com/sites/iar/106a2b0c-4016-4a9d-ac53f21b7c181491/>