

RELIGIOUS DISCERNMENT  
GROUP



fire & water

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**Convenors**

**Sr. Arabella Ballingao, RGS**  
Religious of the Good Shepherd

**Sr. Arlyne Casas, NDS**  
Sisters of our Lady of Zion

**Fr. Ramon Caluza, CICM**  
Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

**Fr. Peter Casiño, OSA**  
Order of St. Augustine

**Fr. Wilfredo Dulay, MDJ**  
Missionary Disciples of Jesus

**Sr. Lydia Eborá, RGS**  
Religious of the Good Shepherd

**Sr. Patricia Fox, NDS**  
Sisters of our Lady of Zion

**Sr. Lydia Lascano, ICM**  
Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

**Sr. Arlene Lobitaña, SSpS**  
Mission Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit

**Sr. Angelita Navarro, ICM**  
Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

**Sr. Rebecca Pacete, MMS**  
Medical Mission Sisters

**Fr. Quirico Pedregosa, Jr., OP**  
Order of Preachers

**Sr. Adelaida Ygrubay, OSB**  
Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing

**Secretariat:**

**Mobile: 0996.619.3538**

**E-Mail Address:**

**religionsdiscernment@gmail.com**

*“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,  
for the rights of all who are destitute.*

*Speak up and judge fairly;  
defend the rights of the poor and needy.”*

**Proverbs 31:8-9**

**May we speak for those who speak for us**

As we are called to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves (Proverbs 31: 8-9), we are also called to speak for the human rights defenders who stand up for the rights of the voiceless and who seek truth and justice.

The Religious Discernment Group (RDG) is one in prayer and solidarity with the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP), Karapatan, and Gabriela **in demanding the dismissal of the charges of perjury filed against these organizations and their officers** by former National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr., at the Quezon City Municipal Trial Court Branch 139 in July 2, 2019.

The perjury charges were filed against the officers of the three organizations when they sought protection from the Supreme Court through the writs of amparo and habeas data. Filed a few weeks after the Court of Appeals denied the petitions for amparo and habeas data, the complaint against Karapatan and Gabriela was initially dismissed by Senior Assistant Prosecutor Nilo Penaflor in November 8, 2019. However, in February 24, 2020, City Prosecutor Vimar Barcellano reversed the resolution.

Obviously, the charges are attempts to harass and discourage those accused from doing their work as human rights defenders; by silencing them, it is expected that they would not speak out to denounce the social injustices committed against victims of human rights abuses. In times of darkness, they have become light bearers. We pray that their light would not be extinguished by the very institutions that should be protecting them.

We are aware that the RMP, Karapatan and Gabriela have contributed so much to the cause of human rights and justice. They are simply fulfilling the ecclesial task of serving and defending the poor and the marginalized of Philippine society. We join our voices with those who seek justice for the respondents as the trial for the case reaches its end. We join our voices with those who seek justice for many others experiencing red tagging, harassment, vilification, illegal arrests and detention.

We believe that the laws of the land should protect citizens from threats and all kinds of harm and not be weaponized to suppress people's rights. Treating human rights workers as criminals, amidst times when we are encouraged to be brave and to stand up and speak out, is worrisome. If the agents of the state can threaten human rights defenders, they can do more harm to the ordinary person, especially the voiceless and powerless. We demand that agents of the state put an end to all harassments and vilifications relentlessly hurled on the many faith-based human rights defenders to sow fear, to silence them and discourage them to pursue truth and justice. Let us stand up for truth!

**May we then speak for those who speak for us, as we are continuously challenged to pray, hope and act for justice and peace in our land.**

**Statement of Support  
Religious Discernment Group Gathering  
3 September 2022**