

Statement of Solidarity & Support for WALDEN BELLO amidst Narco-Tagging incident

April 6, 2022



In a recent statement released by Hugpong ng Pagbabago (HNP or Alliance for Change), the regional party founded by Sara Duterte, daughter of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, activist-scholar Professor Walden Bello was unfoundedly and maliciously labeled as a “narco-politician.”

Prof. Bello is currently running for Vice President under Laban ng Masa (Fight of the Masses), a left-wing electoral coalition of democratic socialist and progressive groups, against Sara Duterte and several other candidates for the May 2022 Philippine National Elections. Last March 20, 2022, in a televised debate, Prof. Bello called out the issue of illicit drug trade in Davao City, dubbing it the “Drug Center ” of Southern Philippines. Prof. Bello questioned why the former aide of Sara Duterte (Davao City’s incumbent Mayor) was exonerated and freed despite clear involvement in a recent drug bust in Davao. Prof. Bello also pointed out that Sara Duterte’s refusal to attend the said debate displayed a glaring lack of public accountability in confronting the said issue, against the backdrop of thousands killed in the Duterte administration’s deadly “war on drugs”.

In retaliation, Prof. Bello was painted by the HNP “as a danger to peace and order and a threat to the anti-illegal drugs campaign of the government”, and accused of supporting the same drug trade he called out by supposedly withholding information from the authorities. This narco-tagging comes on top of Prof. Bello’s declaration as a persona non grata in Davao City (an act that further vilifies him), along with a 10-million peso (USD 192,000) “cyber libel” lawsuit filed by Sara Duterte’s former aide—a criminal case under Philippine laws that might lead to incarceration despite an ongoing trial.

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS vehemently condemn these defamatory and dangerous actions against Prof. Bello. While the premise behind HNP’s accusation is both baseless and senseless, we are deeply concerned by the convoluted logic and narrative constructed against Prof. Bello due to their serious implications on his safety and security. Such accusations, in this case, are politically motivated; designed to induce prejudice and shift the burden of proof to those painted as involved in the illicit drug trade. Ultimately, it is to silence those who

dare speak truth to power by exposing them not only to a trial by publicity but to the serious threats to life and liberty posed by the “war on drugs” campaign.

Prof. Bello’s reputation, credibility, and contributions as a progressive activist and public intellectual speak for themselves and are inconsistent with the imputations being hurled at him. Prof. Bello has been a key figure in the international human rights movement, being actively engaged in the advancement of democracy and social justice since the Marcos dictatorship. Furthermore, as the Right Livelihood Award (also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize) had described him, Prof. Bello has made a “major contribution to the international case against corporate-driven globalization as a human rights and peace campaigner, academic, environmentalist, and journalist.”

Prof. Bello has assumed different posts at various academic institutions in the Philippines, across Asia and the United States. Prof. Bello obtained his PhD in sociology from Princeton University in 1975 and is currently the International Adjunct Professor of sociology at the State University of New York at Binghamton. He has also served in varying positions with several well-respected policy think tanks and non-governmental organizations at the national, regional, and international levels such as Executive Director of Food First, Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the Board of Focus on the Global South, President of Freedom from Debt Coalition, Member and Former Chair of the Board of Greenpeace Southeast Asia, and Member of the Board of the International Forum on Globalization, the Transnational Institute, and Nautilus Institute, and Member of the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights.

Furthermore, as a human rights advocate, Prof. Bello has also been one of the vocal critics of Duterte’s “war on drugs.” Since 2016, he has stood in solidarity with various civil society and human rights groups condemning the campaign as a war against the poor and asserting that such a violent approach that narrowly seeks to eliminate alleged drug users and pushers will not address the root cause of the drug problem.

Narco-tagging or any other malicious form of political labeling against activists, dissenters, and opposing voices **MUST NOT BE TOLERATED**. If this can be done to Prof. Walden Bello—a globally renowned intellectual, human rights advocate, and former Philippine legislator, what more to ordinary people?

WE CALL ON all organizations, movements, networks and individuals committed to upholding human rights, democracy, justice and peace to condemn this irresponsible and life-threatening narco-tagging and the baseless cyber-libel lawsuit, and express our solidarity and support for Prof. Walden Bello, and all those who seek justice, public accountability and genuine democratic participation.

Please consider **signing** this Statement of Support for Walden Bello amidst the Narco-tagging incident!

Let us stand together against the muzzling of free speech, and all forms of harassment through political labeling/tagging!

Deadline for organizational (and individual) sign-ons is Friday, 08 April 2022. This statement will be published a day after.

[Disclaimer] This is not an endorsement for Walden Bello’s Vice Presidential bid.