



IUCN
Rue Mauverney 28
1196 Gland
Switzerland

Tel. +41 22 999 0000
Fax +41 22 999 0002
mail@iucn.org
www.iucn.org

His Excellency Benigno S. Aquino
President of the Republic of the Philippines

3 February 2011

Your Excellency,

I am writing on behalf of IUCN, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, in relation to the recent killing of Radio Mindanao Network DWAR Radio journalist Gerry Ortega.

While the exact motive behind his reported assassination will be the matter for an official investigation, Mr. Ortega was well-known as an outspoken critic of mining on the island of Palawan, a UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve that is home to isolated and vanishing indigenous communities and over 100 plants listed on the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*TM. Prior to his being killed, it had been widely reported in the media that Mr. Ortega had received numerous death threats in connection with his anti-mining stance.

In the wake of this tragic event, numerous environmental and human rights groups have condemned Mr. Ortega's killing, and several have reached out for support to international organizations that are actively involved in nature conservation, mining and indigenous peoples' issues, including IUCN.

As you may know, IUCN is the world's oldest and largest environmental organization which brings together over 1,000 Members, including States and non-governmental organizations, as well as over 10,000 scientists and experts in its six Commissions. In particular, our Philippines-based Member, the Ecological Society of the Philippines, as well as members of the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy, which includes representatives of the ALDAW (Ancestral Land Domain Watch) Network, have expressed grave concern over the killing.

IUCN's World Conservation Congress Resolution on "Support for environmental defenders" expressly calls upon me, as Director General, to speak out publicly and forcefully in support of environmental advocates who are suffering harassment or persecution. I therefore wish to convey to Your Excellency and to the Government of the Republic of the Philippines IUCN's deepest regret for and condemnation of the killing of Mr. Ortega, and to express our strong hope that those responsible for this deplorable act will be brought to justice.

IUCN believes that discourse and debate on development and environmental sustainability should be conducted in an open, frank and non-violent way. Everyone should have the right to voice their opinion on these issues without feeling threatened. I take this opportunity to urge the Government of the Philippines to take all appropriate and necessary steps to prevent the recurrence of this type of violence against environmental advocates and to do its utmost to ensure that the environmental and cultural heritage of the Palawan Man and Biosphere Reserve is preserved for future generations.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia Marton-Lefèvre". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Julia Marton-Lefèvre
Director General

CC: Members of IUCN Council
Dr. Gretchen Kalonji, Assistant Director General for Science, UNESCO