WHEREAS, sometime in late 2020, the Philippine National Police (PNP) Region 11 filed a trumped-up charge against Agnes Mesina, Windel Bolinget, Jackie Valencia, Reynaldo Gameng, and Lutgardo Jurcales, Jr., for the murder of Garito Malbato on March 21, 2018. A warrant for their arrest was also issued on September 25, 2020;

WHEREAS, Mesina’s record speaks of a steadfast advocacy of people’s rights. As an environment activist and advocate of indigenous peoples, Mesina has stood at the forefront of mass struggles for the defense of life, land, indigenous communities, natural resources, and national patrimony. According to Karapatan-Cagayan Valley, she has played a crucial role in campaigns against black sand mining, bioethanol and the entry of foreign large scale mining companies in the region. Mesina is also a union organizer, working with public school teachers and other government employees for the protection and promotion of their rights and welfare. As an advocate of good governance, she has led campaigns against pork barrel, graft, and corruption;

WHEREAS, due to her activism, Mesina is not a stranger to state-sponsored false criminal charges. In 2012, Mesina, then a lay worker of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines and a volunteer for public school teachers, was arrested on trumped-up
charges of frustrated murder. The arrest happened while she was at a meeting with then-ACT Teachers Representative Antonio Tinio, right after they held a consultation with public school teachers. That case was immediately dismissed that same year—including another fabricated charge against her for murder in 2015;

WHEREAS, Gameng, 41, is a farm worker and leader of Danggayan Dagiti Mannalon iti Isabela (DAGAMI), an alliance of peasant organizations in Cagayan Valley. He has led his fellow farmers in Isabela struggles for genuine land reform, and against usury, high amortizations in leasehold and rent, land grabbing and dispossession, and landlord collusion by officials of the Department of Agrarian Reform, among others;

WHEREAS, Bolinget is chairperson of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA). Bolinget, who belongs to the Kankanaey and Bontok indigenous peoples groups in Mountain Province, has led the CPA in struggles for indigenous peoples’ rights and against logging, mining, and developmental projects which destroy the environment and sources of livelihood of indigenous peoples in the region, as well as the militarization that comes with these projects;

WHEREAS, Valencia is a peasantfolk organizer and human rights worker. As such, she has actively campaigned for the release of political prisoners, joined fact-finding missions and quick reaction teams, and done the paralegal work for the defense of victims of trumped-up charges. In 2018, as the secretary general of the human rights group in Cagayan Valley, she actively took part in the campaign for the recognition of more than 3,500 victims of the Marcos Martial Law;

WHEREAS, Jurcales is the Director of the Popular Struggles Commission of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan). Also an official of Bayanihan Alay sa Sambayananan (BALS), the relief arm of Bayan, he serves as coordinator of other relief arms of mass organizations under Bayan. He is a founding member of Advocates of Science and Technology for the People (AGHAM), a mass organization of scientists and technologists which would later on be admitted as member-organization of Bayan. Aside from being active in humanitarian work, environmental advocacy, and other campaigns in the country, he is likewise active in international work, being a coordinator of Ban the Bases, an international formation composed of anti-bases groups in the US, Europe, and Asia;

WHEREAS, all have been subjected to intense red-tagging and harassment, which have aggravated during the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte and his National Task Force to End Local Armed Conflict (NTF ELCAC). The faces and names of Mesina and the others from Cagayan Valley were shown in posters and vandalized public spaces which depict them as “communist-terrorists” and recruiters of the NPA. The posters, as many as about 500 per incident, were hung along main highways in Region 2. Meanwhile, Bolinget, his family, and CPA reported that they have observed heightened surveillance since December, apart from the previous offline and online terrorist-tagging attacks against him;
WHEREAS, the complaint is obviously fabricated and false since it is based completely on a perjured witness of the PNP Region 11, one Ranel Tibog Vender, who merely dropped the names of the four activists in his affidavit as part of a “team x x when saw [sic] alias “Arot”, they immediately attacked and shot him using assorted caliber of firearms.” The witness is a self-proclaimed “rebel returnee,” who echo the same claims of similar persons who have been publicized as “former NPAs” by the NTF ELCAC;

WHEREAS, earlier news reports on Malibato’s killing quoted indigenous peoples’ organizations in Mindanao like Karadyawan, of which Malibato was member, and PASAKA identifying the paramilitary Alamara as perpetrators. Malibato and Karadyawan were both victims of military’s red-tagging. The PNP’s false narrative thus follows the old line of the NTF ELCAC of alleged “infighting” among activists whom they tag as part of the armed rebellion being waged by the CPP-NPA;

WHEREAS, one glaring fact is that, contrary to the self-serving and unsubstantiated claims of Vender, neither of the five activists have ever set a single foot at Davao del Norte on March 21, 2012, or even anywhere else in Mindanao, at any time in that year. All are based in Cagayan Valley and Cordillera, to which their numerous activities in their respective capacities—including Mesina’s as MAKABAYAN Regional Coordinator—can attest;

WHEREAS, the five activists fear tokhang-style executions or extrajudicial killings in connection to this trumped-up charge, especially since many who have died as EJK victims have been subjected to red-tagging and harassment just like they were. This, too, after the Baguio PNP chief practically gave a shoot-to-kill order against Bolinget;

WHEREAS, the fabricated murder charge has no other objective than political harrassment against activists and critics of the anti-people policies of the current administration;

WHEREAS, this trumped-up charge against Mesina, Bolinget, Gameng, Valencia, and Jurcales—as well as the real dangers it causes to their lives and safety—also occurs at the heels of the massacre of nine indigenous leaders and illegal arrests of 16 others by the PNP and AFP last December 30 in Capiz and Iloilo provinces.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the House of Representatives condemn in the strongest terms the fabricated criminal charges against Agnes Mesina, MAKABAYAN Regional Coordinator for Cagayan Valley, and four other activists.
Adopted,

Rep. FRANCIS L. CASTRO
ACT Teachers Party-List

Rep. CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE
BAYAN MUNA Party-List

Rep. EUFEMIA C. CULLAMAT
BAYAN MUNA Party-List

Rep. FERDINAND GAITE
BAYAN MUNA Party-List

Rep. ARLENE D. BROSAS
GABRIELA Women's Party

Rep. SARAH JANE I. ELAGO
KABATAAN Party-List