

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 35/003/2007

06 November 2007

UA 295/07 **Possible enforced disappearance / fear for safety**

PHILIPPINES **Ruel Munasque (m), aged 33, Christian community worker**

Ruel Munasque and his friend Roger Morales were abducted by soldiers on Mindanao Island in the southern Philippines on 24 October. Roger Morales was released the following day, but Ruel Munasque remains in custody at an unknown location. He is at risk of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or even death.

Roger Morales told local human rights organisation Karapatan that he and Ruel Munasque were travelling in a van when they were stopped by soldiers at a checkpoint in Zamboanga del Sur province, in the west of Mindanao Island. The two men were searched, and their wallets, mobile phones and other personal possessions were confiscated. The soldiers then handcuffed and blindfolded the men and forced them into a jeep. After an hour, the jeep stopped, but the two men were told to remain in the vehicle. There they were questioned about their political activities, and were threatened with death if they did not cooperate.

They were separated when soldiers offered to take Ruel Munasque to hospital, for treatment on an existing wound to his knee, which was bleeding heavily. Roger Morales was taken in a separate vehicle and left in Pagadian city in Zamboanga del Sur.

On 28 October, a man identifying himself as a soldier telephoned Ruel Munasque's sister, and told her that Ruel Munasque was in military custody, and had been given medical treatment. The man told her not to seek legal assistance in finding her brother. She was then able to speak to Ruel Munasque briefly, although she did not find out where he is being held. There has been no news of him since then. Ruel Munasque's sister has since filed a writ asking that his family be allowed to inspect military camps in the area in an effort to locate him. The courts are currently considering her petition.

Ruel Munasque is a leader of the Christian Youth Fellowship and a community development worker for the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). He is also a member of Bayan Muna, a political party that has been described by the military as a 'front' organisation for the banned Communist Party of the Philippines. The New People's Army (NPA), which is one of the groups conducting a campaign of violence in Mindanao, is the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Enforced disappearances and killings of activists and members of left-leaning organisations by elements within the military have increased in the Philippines since President Arroyo came into power in 2001. There have been at least 18 reported enforced disappearances so far in 2007.

The NPA has been waging an insurgency campaign in the Philippines since the 1960s. Tolerance of enforced disappearances and political killings are thought to be part of the Government's counter-insurgency campaign. Amnesty International is concerned that the government has failed to resolve the cases of people who have been subjected to enforced disappearance and to confront the issue of impunity. There are concerns that a persistent climate of impunity, and weaknesses in legal and procedural safeguards protecting the rights of suspects and detainees, are allowing enforced disappearances to take place periodically today. Victims include suspected insurgents and, civilians suspected of being sympathetic to the NPA or another armed group operating in Mindanao, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Ruel Munasque, who was abducted by soldiers on 24 October;
- urging the authorities to establish his whereabouts immediately, and guarantee that he will not be tortured, ill-treated or killed in detention;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that Ruel Munasque is given immediate access to his relatives, lawyer and any medical care he may need;
- calling for Ruel Munasque to be released immediately or charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- urging the authorities to send a clear message to all armed forces personnel that human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, will not be tolerated under any circumstances and that those found responsible will be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Gloria Macapagal – Arroyo

President of the Republic of the Philippines

Malacanang Palace

JP Laurel St., San Miguel

Manila, Philippines

Email : corres@op.gov.ph

Fax +632 742 1641

Salutation: Dear President Macapagal- Arroyo

Hon. Raul M. Gonzalez

Secretary, Department of Justice

Padre Faura St.

Manila, Philippines

Fax + 632 521 1614

Email: sad@doj.gov.ph

Salutation: Dear Secretary Gonzalez

Hon. Gilberto C. Teodoro Jr.

Secretary of National Defence

Room 301 DND Building, Camp Emilio Aguinaldo,

E. de los Santos Avenue

Quezon City

Fax:+632 911 6213

Email: osnd@philonline.com

Salutation: Dear Secretary Teodoro

COPIES TO:

Provincial Governor

Office of the Provincial Governor

Provincial Capitol, P.L. Urro St.

Pagadian City

Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines 7016

Email: aurora_cerilles@yahoo.com

and to diplomatic representatives of Philippines accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 December 2007.