

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: ASA 35/007/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 118
6 May 2004

Philippines: Human rights need to be respected as election campaign intensifies

Amnesty International calls today on government forces, armed opposition groups, and all political parties to fully respect international human rights law and humanitarian principles in the context of the national elections on Monday 10 May.

Over recent months, a series of reported extra-judicial executions appear to have taken place within the context of military anti-insurgency operations against the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Philippine Communist Party (CPP). While some observers blame the attacks on local political rivalries, there are concerns that those responsible may be part of or linked to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

On 28 April, Isais Drummond Manamo, the Secretary General of the political party Anak Pawis in Mindoro Oriental province was killed by an unidentified armed man. The following day, both Rogelio Perez, a Bayan Muna party official in Quezon, and his wife Cristina Perez, a Bayan Muna party member, were shot at. Rogelia Perez died as a result of the attack while his wife was severely wounded.

Violent attacks on Bayan Muna and Anak Pawis party members appear to be part of a wider pattern of killings and "disappearances" of left-wing opposition activists and human rights defenders. All were members of lawful political parties which have been publicly labelled by senior military officials as "front organizations" for the NPA. Amnesty International believes that such statements render members of lawful organisations vulnerable to grave human rights violations, particularly in provinces with a significant military presence and high levels of reported rebel activity.

Amnesty International urges the Government of the Philippines to take measures to ensure the protection of political party members and to conduct full and impartial investigations into cases of alleged extra-judicial executions which have occurred in the past months.

Since the start of the elections campaign, it is reported that the NPA has been responsible for a number of human rights abuses, including unlawful killings. According to government forces, these attacks are part of a general campaign of intimidation and extortion of funds by the armed opposition group related to the May national election.

Amnesty International calls on the NPA to abide by international humanitarian law which prohibits deliberate attacks on civilians and those not taking direct part in hostilities.

Background

Elections in the Philippines have traditionally resulted in violent confrontations due to localised political rivalries, NPA attacks or alleged use of force by the military against unarmed civilians. The police reported the killing of 64 people during the 1998 elections, and of 132 people in the 2001 mid-term elections. Since last December, at least 71 people have reportedly died as a result of election-related violence.

For over 30 years the Philippine government has been fighting an armed communist insurgency in part fuelled by poverty and unequal distribution of wealth. The Philippine government is currently taking part in peace talks in Oslo, Norway with the National Democratic Front (NDF) representing the CPP/NPA.