

PUBLIC

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UA 96/03 "Disappearance"/fear for safety

PHILIPPINES **Datu Abdullah Sabdura Ala (m), aged 48, Muslim community leader
Ustadz Zulkifle Alimudin (m), aged 28, teacher of Arabic**

Datu Abdullah Sabdura Ala and Ustadz Zulkifle Alimudin were abducted in Davao City on the southern island of Mindanao on 3 April and 6 April respectively. They were abducted by armed men believed to be members of the Regional Intelligence and Investigation Division of the Philippine National Police (PNP). Their whereabouts remain unknown and Amnesty International fears for their safety.

In the afternoon of 3 April, Datu Abdullah Sabdura Ala is reported to have held discussions with local government officials regarding the recent arrests without charge of a number of Muslims in the area. Some of his relatives had reportedly been briefly detained by police following recent bombings in the city. Before being released, they were reportedly threatened with with re-arrest. Later the same day Datu Abdullah Sabdura Ala was shopping in a store on the Maa Highway, Davao City, when he was abducted by four armed men wearing masks. Witnesses saw him being dragged into a waiting vehicle which had no number plates.

On 6 April Ustadz Zulkifle Alimudin was reportedly waiting by the road for a ride home in Barangay Inawayan, Santa Cruz on the outskirts of Davao City, when he was seized by a group of armed men and dragged into a waiting vehicle.

Relatives of the two men are reported to have enquired at local police stations but the men's whereabouts remain unknown. On 8 April a local government official publicly criticized the police for denying any involvement in the men's abductions. He called on the police to investigate the "disappearances", and stated that there was much unease among the Muslim community amid fears that further abductions could take place. Amnesty International is currently seeking further information following reports of other "disappearances" in the city.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the 1970s the government has been engaged in armed conflict with the Muslim secessionist group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on Mindanao island. Grave human rights violations, including "disappearances", torture, extrajudicial executions and arbitrary arrests, continue to be reported in the context of the government's anti-insurgency operations. Those believed to be associated with or sympathetic to the MILF are particularly at risk of human rights violations. The MILF has also reportedly committed human rights abuses.

In March and April 2003, bombs exploded at Davao City airport and a ferry terminal, killing at least 38 people and injuring many others. Several suspects have been arrested. President Arroyo subsequently declared Davao City to be in a "state of lawlessness". Calling for "total war on terrorists", she ordered a crackdown by police and the armed forces. The mayor of Davao City is also reported to have ordered the police to carry out arrests without any warrant.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Datu Abdullah Sabdura Ala and Ustadz Zulkifle Alimudin who were abducted in Davao City on 3 and 6 April respectively;

- urging the authorities to establish immediately their whereabouts and guarantee their safety;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that, if they are in detention, they are not tortured or ill-treated and are allowed full access to lawyers, relatives and any medical care they may need;
- urging that, if they are in detention, they be released immediately, unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- urging the authorities to send a clear message to all police and armed forces personnel that human rights violations, including forced "disappearances", will not be tolerated under any circumstances and that those found responsible will be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO: *(Please note that fax numbers are sometimes difficult to obtain)*

Director General, Philippine National Police

Hermogenes Ebdane

National Headquarters

Camp Crame

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Quezon City, Philippines

Telegrams: Director General, Philippines National Police, Quezon City, Philippines

Fax: + 63 2 724 8763

Salutation: Dear Police Director General

Secretary of National Defense

General Angelo Reyes

Department of National Defense

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Camp Aguinaldo

EDSA, Quezon City

Philippines

Telegrams: Defense Secretary, Quezon City, Philippines

Fax: + 63 2 911 6213

Salutation: Dear Secretary Reyes

COPIES TO:

Chairperson, Commission on Human Rights

Hon. Purificacion Valera Quisumbing

SAAC Building, UP Complex

Commonwealth Avenue

Diliman, 1100 Quezon City

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and to diplomatic representatives of the Philippines accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 May 2003.