

PUBLIC

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"Disappearance"/fear for safety

28 November 2002

PHILIPPINES

Victor "Jun" Saducos (m), aged 34, peasant

Victor "Jun" Saducos was abducted on 23 November by armed men believed to be members of the 204th Brigade of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). His whereabouts remain unknown, and Amnesty International is concerned for his safety.

At around 11pm on 23 November, about 20 armed men wearing army fatigues, many with their faces covered, reportedly surrounded the family home of Victor Saducos in Barangay Tabinay Maliit, Puerto Galera, in the province of Oriental Mindoro. When the family refused to open the door, four of the men forced their way in. They allegedly told Victor Saducos, who was holding one of his four children: "Don't use your child as a shield, she might get hurt too". They then gagged and tied him up. As he was being dragged away from the house, his wife reportedly heard him cry in pain several times. She also reportedly heard a gunshot. Before leaving the house, the remaining armed men ransacked the building and demanded that the family hand over a gun which was allegedly in their possession. The family protested they did not own any guns. The men also ordered Victor Saducos' wife not to report the incident to the police.

Members of a local human rights organization, *Karapatan* (Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights), travelled immediately to the area to investigate Victor Saducos' "disappearance" but were reportedly threatened and harassed by local military officials. The day after the abduction, at least 18 other families and local residents are reported to have fled the area in fear for their lives.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Grave human rights violations continue to be reported within the context of the government's anti-insurgency campaign against the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Such violations include "disappearances", torture, extrajudicial executions and arbitrary arrests. Those most at risk of human rights violations include civilians - many from indigenous or impoverished communities - perceived to be NPA sympathizers. Also at risk are members of lawful organizations which have been publicly labelled by military officials as "recruiters" or "fronts" for the NPA. In provinces such as Oriental Mindoro, with a significant military presence and reported high level of rebel activity, there have been increasing reports of human rights violations committed against civilians.

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

- urging the authorities to establish immediately the whereabouts and guarantee the safety of Victor Saducos, who was abducted from his home in Puerto Galera, Oriental Mindoro on 23 November;
- urging that, if he is in detention, he be released immediately, unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that, if he is in detention, he is not tortured or ill-treated and to allow him full access to lawyers, relatives and medical care;
- urging the authorities to send a clear message to all armed forces staff

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that human rights violations, including forced "disappearances", extrajudicial killings and torture, 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]

Secretary of National Defense
General Angelo Reyes
Department of National Defense
Camp Aguinaldo
E. de los Santos Avenue
Quezon City
Philippines

Telegrams: Defense Secretary, Quezon City, Philippines

Fax: + 632 911 6213

Salutation: Dear Secretary Reyes

President of the Republic of the Philippines

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo
Malacañang Palace
J.P. Laurel Street
San Miguel 1005, Manila
Philippines

Telegrams: President Macapagal-Arroyo, Manila, Philippines

Fax: + 632 736 1010 / 832 3793

Salutation: Dear President

COPIES TO:

Chairperson, Commission on Human Rights
Hon. Purificacion Valera Quisumbing
SAAC Building, UP Complex
Commonwealth Avenue
Diliman 1100, Quezon City
Philippines

Fax: + 632 926 6188 / 928 7240

Email: drpvq@chr.gov.ph

Salutation: Dear Chairperson

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 9 January 2003.