

PRIORITY

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Possible "disappearance"

27 September 1991

**PHILIPPINES: Renato Tabasa Zabate, member of a farmers'
organization**

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Renato Tabasa Zabate who has not been seen since 8 September 1991 when he was abducted by armed men believed to be members of the Philippine National Police (PNP) in Tabuk, Mandaue City, Cebu province. Renato Tabasa Zabate is a member of the United Farmers Organization (UFO), an affiliate of a militant peasant's organization in Cebu province and it is believed that he may have "disappeared" into police custody as a result of his activities as a farmers' organizer.

At about 1.14 pm on 8 September Renato Tabasa Zabate left the house of relatives with a friend. As the two walked down the road they noticed several armed men drinking beer in the street. Two of the men approached them and held guns to the backs of Renato and his friend. Renato Tabasa Zabate was then reportedly pushed into a waiting jeep and driven away in the direction of Talamban. Information from unofficial sources indicates that Renato Tabasa Zabate may be being held for interrogation at the Cebu Metropolitan District Command Headquarters of the PNP at Camp Sotero in Cebu City.

During the early part of 1990 members of UFO and other workers' organizations in the region were reportedly subjected to harassment and intimidation by military forces and anti-communist vigilante groups for being suspected supporters of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the outlawed Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). In May 1987 Renato Tabasa Zabate was arrested and detained by military agents. He was held in custody at a "safehouse" (an unofficial detention centre) in sitio Iba, Lagtang, Talisay, to the southwest of Cebu City along with two others. The three were released eleven hours later without charges.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has recorded at least twelve cases of "disappearance" or incommunicado detention in the first nine months of 1991. Of these one victim was subsequently found dead and is believed to have been the victim of extrajudicial execution by members of the security forces. More than 50 people were reported to have "disappeared" in the Philippines during 1990. Of these, at least five are believed to have died or to have been killed while in custody and some appeared to have been tortured. At least 15 whose detention was denied by security forces subsequently reappeared after a period of police or military custody. The majority were still missing at the end of the year.

"Disappearance" and incommunicado detention in the Philippines have occurred against a background of armed conflict between government and government-backed forces and the NPA. The majority of those held in unacknowledged or incommunicado detention have been members of lawful non-governmental organizations publicly labelled by the security forces as

fronts for the NPA or CPP, or individuals suspected of NPA or CPP membership. In the overwhelming majority of the cases in which there is clear and substantive evidence, the perpetrators have been members of government or government-backed forces.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern for the safety of Renato Tabasa Zabate and urging the authorities to take steps to clarify his fate and whereabouts;
- calling for an immediate and impartial investigation into this case and asking to be informed of the progress of the investigation;
- urging the government to ensure that all those suspected of committing human rights violations are brought promptly to justice and tried before a civil court.

APPEALS TO:

1.

General Renato S. de Villa
Secretary of National Defense
Department of National Defense
Camp General Emilio Aguinaldo
Quezon City
Metro Manila, Philippines

Dear General

Telegrams: Defense Secretary de Villa, Quezon, Philippines
Telexes: 22471 DND PH or 42004 DCSLOG PM
Faxes: + 63 2 721 3988

2.

General Cesar P Nazareno
Director General
Philippine National Police
Headquarters of the Philippines Constabulary
Camp Crame, Novaliches
Metro Manila, Philippines

Dear General

Telegrams: Police Director General Nazareno, Metro Manila, Philippines

3.

President Corazon Aquino
Malacañang Palace
Manila, Philippines

Your Excellency

Telegrams: President Aquino, Manila, Philippines
Telexes: 40414 MALCOM PN, 45618 RMC PM,
63370 PRES PN or 82361 PRES PU
Faxes: + 63 2 832 3793 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
+ 63 2 731 1325 (via Press Secretary to the President)

COPIES TO:

Silvestre H. Bello III
Secretary of Justice
Department of Justice
Padre Faura Street

Ermita, Manila
Philippines

Mary Concepcion Bautista
Chairman
Commission on Human Rights
IBP Building Complex
Dona Julia Vargas Avenue
Pasig Metro Manila, Philippines

and to diplomatic representatives of the Philippines in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 7 November 1991.