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Philippines: Abduction and killings of journalists and politicians must be investigated

Amnesty International condemns the killings of at least 21 civilians, including journalists and members of a politician's family, in the southern Philippines province of Maguindanao, the first reported killings linked to national elections to be held in May 2010.

A group of about 45 people were ambushed and abducted by about 100 armed men, according to reports. The military recovered the bodies of 13 women and eight men—some of them mutilated.

“These killings underline the danger facing civilians in the run up to the national elections. The authorities must immediately launch an independent and effective investigation into these murders and ensure that they do all they can to prevent killings and other violence,” said Donna Guest, Deputy Asia Pacific Director, Amnesty International.

The sister and the wife of Esmael Mangudadatu, vice mayor of Buluan town, were on their way to file his certificate of candidacy as provincial governor when they were attacked.

The province of Maguindanao witnessed widespread election violence during previous polls.

Amnesty International has been told that at least 12 journalists were part of the group who were targeted. It is not known how many journalists were killed.

Private armies, often employed by rich and politically influential families in Mindanao, have committed abuses with impunity.

“The government must prohibit and disband private armies and paramilitary forces immediately. The authorities should also establish clear standards on human rights protection and ensure their implementation, particularly during the election period when politically-motivated killings could increase.” said Donna Guest.