

UA 308/00

Fear of t

PHILIPPINES Binajar Hussein
Alber Ulavedes
Nasser Lalil
Radzmil Salahi
Radjae Alvares
Nur Arabani
Salih Salahi
Alnasir Alih Parijal
Mobin Sappayani
Jalton Ahman

The 10 people named above, one of whom is reported to be 15 years old, were arrested by the Philippine armed forces on 25 September, during a raid on a mosque on the island of Jolo. The army claim they are members of the armed opposition group Abu Sayyaf, who recently gained international notoriety after a series of kidnappings of local and foreign hostages. Detainees are often tortured during interrogation in the Philippines.

The soldiers reportedly recovered weapons and a grenade from a cabinet inside the mosque, in Alat. However, in an interview in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, a local religious leader has said that some of those arrested were cleaners working at the mosque, and others were homeless people sheltering there.

They are now held in Sulu Provincial Jail, in the southern Philippines. A team from the local office of the Philippine Commission on Human Rights (CHR) tried to visit them there, but the warden refused to let them in. It is not known whether the detainees have been allowed access to lawyers or their families. According to the CHR, the local police are preparing charges against them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At least 80,000 people are reported to have fled their homes in Jolo since the Philippine armed forces launched a major offensive on 16 September, reportedly deploying 4,000 air and ground troops in an attempt to rescue 19 foreign and local hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf. The Philippine Secretary of Defence, Orlando Mercado, is reported to have said that the offensive was also intended to "destroy the Abu Sayyaf" so that the government could "retain its respect and dignity". Since the start of the military offensive, two French journalists held captive by the Abu Sayyaf have escaped and 12 Filipino preachers have been rescued. Another Filipino, who has been in captivity for more than five months, is still unaccounted for, as are three Malaysians and an American. Some 53 alleged Abu Sayyaf members have been arrested.

There have been persistent reports of human rights violations by the armed forces against the civilian population of Jolo since the beginning of the offensive. Civilians fleeing the conflict have told local journalists that the armed forces have carried out indiscriminate bombings, resulting in civilian casualties, summary executions, arbitrary arrests and "disappearances" of suspected Abu Sayyaf sympathisers. These reports are difficult to corroborate, because the armed forces control access to affected areas and all telephone lines, including mobile networks, have been cut.

The Abu Sayyaf, based in the Sulu archipelago of the southern Philippines, is believed to have several hundred armed members, some of whom profess Islamic

ideologies. It has made political demands, but also engaged in criminal activities, including extortion. It has committed grave human rights abuses, including killings and hostage-takings, and is believed to have increased its support after reportedly receiving large ransom payments for the recent release of western hostages.

Amnesty International has condemned abuses by the Abu Sayyaf and has urged it to cease the practice of hostage-taking.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of the detainees named above, and urging the authorities to ensure that they are not tortured or ill-treated;
- urging that they be allowed immediate access to lawyers, their families and full medical attention;
- urging that anyone arrested as a suspected Abu Sayyaf member be afforded the same rights as any other criminal suspect, and that those against whom there is a case be tried in a court of law, in accordance with internationally recognized human rights standards;
- expressing concern that civilians have reported that the armed forces have committed human rights violations during operations against the Abu Sayyaf, and urging that all such reports are fully and independently investigated and that anyone found responsible is brought to justice;
- urging that independent human rights monitors be allowed full access to Jolo to investigate all reports of human rights violations.

APPEALS TO:

Chief of Staff, Armed Forces of the Philippines

General Angelo Reyes
GHQ, Camp Emilio Aguinaldo
EDSA, 1110 Quezon City
Philippines

Fax: +632 911 7907 or 911 7783/ 911 7708

Salutation: Dear General Reyes

Director General, Philippine National Police

Panfilo Lacson
National Headquarters
Camp Crame
EDSA, cor. Santolan Road
Quezon City
Philippines

Fax: +63 2 722 5443 or 724 8763

Salutation: Dear Police Director General

Secretary of Interior and Local Government

Alfredo Lim
Dept of the Interior and Local Government
Francisco Gold Condominium II
EDSA cnr. Mapagmahal St
Diliman, Quezon City
Philippines

Fax: +63 2 925 0332

Salutation: Dear Secretary Lim

COPIES TO:

The Jail Warden
Sulu Provincial Jail
Jolo
Sulu
Philippines

Aurora Navarette-Reciña
Chairperson, Commission on Human Rights
State Accounting Building
University of the Philippines Campus
Commonwealth Avenue
Diliman, 1100 Quezon City
Philippines
Fax: +63 2 929 0102 / 631 6449
Email: apnr@compas.com.ph

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 15 November 2000.