

PUBLIC

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UA 148/98

Threats/ Fear for safety

12 May 1998

PHILIPPINES

Jose Manuel Diokno - Human rights lawyer

Amnesty International is concerned at a recent death threat made against Attorney Jose Manuel Diokno, vice-chairperson of the human rights non governmental organization, Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG). Attorney Diokno is one of a team of lawyers prosecuting 27 Philippine National Police (PNP) officers who were involved in the alleged extrajudicial execution of 11 suspected members of the *Kuratong Baleleng* bank robbery gang in 1995.

The FLAG office received a hand-written death threat by post on 6 May 1997. The letter named Attorney Diokno and stated that he would be followed and killed when he least expected it. Reference was made to the *Kuratong Baleleng* case.

Similar death threats were made against Attorney Diokno and others involved in the *Kuratong Baleleng* case in 1997 (See UA 44/97 [ASA 35/01/97] and follow-ups).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Despite an overall decline in insurgency-related human rights violations in recent years, concern remains that members of the PNP have continued to ill-treat, torture and extrajudicially execute ordinary criminal suspects. These concerns increased following the *Kuratong Baleleng* killings of May 1995 when 11 suspected members of the bank robber gang were shot dead while in police custody. Initial investigations implicated 98 police officers, including four police generals, in the killings.

The subsequent prosecution of the high-profile case has been controversial, protracted and subject to accusations that those involved are being protected by a climate of impunity. The Ombudsman, responsible for investigating complaints against government personnel, initially exonerated all the suspected police but then laid charges against 27 officers, with only one general among the principal accused. The Ombudsman later downgraded charges against the general and no convictions have yet been reached.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of human rights lawyer Jose Manuel Diokno, who has received a death threat related to his involvement in the *Kuratong Baleleng* case;
- calling for immediate measures to guarantee his safety;
- urging a prompt and thorough investigation into the threat and that those found responsible be brought to justice;
- calling for the continued, speedy and impartial prosecution of the *Kuratong Baleleng* case so that any impression that government personnel enjoy impunity may be effectively countered.

APPEALS TO:

President Fidel V. Ramos
Malacañang Palace
Manila
Philippines

Faxes: +63 2 833 7793 or 832 3793 (via Dept of Foreign Affairs)
Telegrams: President Ramos, Manila, Philippines
Salutation: Dear President Ramos

Secretary Epimaco Velasco
Secretary of the Interior and Local Government
Dept of the Interior and Local Government
PNCC Complex
Epifanio de los Santos Avenue
Mandaluyong
Metro Manila
Philippines

Fax: +63 2 925 0332

Telegrams: Secretary Interior Velasco, Manila, Philippines

Salutation: Dear Secretary Velasco

(Notes: Secretary Velasco has responsibility for the PNP; When sending faxes, if message says "number not recognized", please try again later; it may be easier in local office hours).

COPIES TO:

Secretary Silvestre Bello 111
Secretary of Justice
Department of Justice
Padre Faura, Ermita, Manila
Philippines

Fax: +63 2 521 1614

and to diplomatic representatives of Philippines accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 June 1998.