

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death Threat

14 January 1991

PHILIPPINES:

Nerio G. Zamora, human rights lawyer

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of human rights lawyer, Attorney Nerio G. Zamora, who is reported to have been threatened with death by the provincial commander of the paramilitary Philippine Constabulary (PC) in Bohol province. Attorney Zamora is Bohol Provincial Coordinator of the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), a network of human rights lawyers which provides free legal aid to political prisoners and the underprivileged. He is also a member of the Protestant Lawyers League of the Philippines (PLLIP).

On 2 January 1991 in Tagbilaran City, in the presence of witnesses, the provincial PC commander reportedly threatened to kill Attorney Zamora and his clients. He had reportedly become angry after Attorney Zamora sought the assistance of the court to meet his clients who had been detained, and allegedly ill-treated, at the provincial PC stockade on the previous day.

In a letter reporting the incident to the national offices of FLAG and PLLIP, dated 3 January, Attorney Zamora said: "I write you this letter...not because I am afraid to die but because the threat of (the PC commander) on my life is likewise a threat to the whole legal profession and a direct affront not only to the rule of law but to the fundamental law from where our democratic processes spring." In a letter of the same date to the PC commander he wrote: "You can take my life anytime, anywhere you want...because you have all the men and the powers at your command. But this I will tell you that even in my grave I will not stop in my mission to help the poor and the oppressed and those whose rights are violated."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At least six human rights lawyers have been killed since 1987 in apparent extrajudicial killings in the Philippines; of these three were FLAG/PLLIP lawyers who had been active in the defence of human rights and in reporting abuses by members of the security forces. In addition to those killed, many more human rights lawyers have received death threats in recent years. In May 1990, FLAG/PLLIP lawyer Solema P. Jubilan received a series of death threats believed to originate with elements of the Philippine Constabulary in North Cotabato (see UA 234/90, ASA 35/16/90, dated 6 June 1990).

Amnesty International views such threats with deep concern because in the past they have sometimes been followed by the "disappearance" or killing of the named person(s) by members of government or government-backed security forces. It believes that the threats are intended to keep human rights lawyers from engaging in their lawful activities on behalf of the underprivileged and the victims of human rights violations. Amnesty International urges the Philippine Government to take prompt and appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of human rights lawyers subjected to such threats, including Attorney Zamora, and to demonstrate its unequivocal opposition to the issuance of such threats by bringing the suspected perpetrators to justice.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Attorney Nerio G. Zamora following the reported threat on his life by the provincial commander of the Philippines Constabulary in Bohol province on 2 January 1991;

- noting that in the past the issuing of death threats has sometimes been followed by the "disappearance" or killing of the named person(s) by government or government-backed security forces;

- urging the government to take appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of Attorney Zamora and his clients;

- urging that the government demonstrate its opposition to the issuing of death threats by members of the security forces by conducting an immediate investigation into such threats and bringing the suspected perpetrators to justice.

(NB -- following recent restructuring of the Philippine police services provincial PC Commanders are now known as provincial Superintendants of the Philippine National Police (PNP).)

APPEALS TO

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COPIES 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 18 February 1990.