

Text of action to be posted on AI Asia-Pacific website, February 2005

Philippines: Sharp rise in “vigilante” killings as human rights activist’s death remains unsolved

[Photo and caption: © Private. Bobby Alia was 14 years old when he was killed by unidentified assailants in November 2002. He had been accused of theft and possession of a knife and had reportedly been released from a police station the previous day. After his two older brothers were killed the year before, his mother is said to have been warned that Bobby would be next.]

[Photo and caption: © Private. Jacinto “Rashid” Manahan. The banner behind him reads “Citizens against summary killings and the death penalty”.]

Jacinto “Rashid” Manahan, a well known local human rights activist, was killed in Davao City in August 2004. He was shot dead outside a hotel as he prepared to leave for a university forum on the death penalty and summary executions.

Rashid Manahan had organized the forum to discuss rising numbers of “vigilante” killings in Davao City. More than 320 people have reportedly been killed in the city since 1998, the majority of whom are suspected of involvement in crimes such as drug pushing, solvent abuse and petty theft. To Amnesty International’s knowledge no one has been brought to justice for any of these killings and investigations have failed to identify the perpetrators. Most of the victims, who include street children and youth gang members from the city’s poorest communities, were shot dead by unidentified gunmen on motorcycles. The rate of killings has risen each year since 2000 with the first few weeks of 2005 seeing a further sharp rise. At least 34 people have been killed since the beginning of this year according to press reports.

Local human rights groups have repeatedly voiced fears that government agents may be responsible for the killings, or may have incited or colluded with private “vigilante” gangs. The authorities have denied this.

Such fears have been heightened by repeated public statements by the Mayor of Davao City apparently suggesting that extreme measures including extrajudicial executions are an acceptable and effective way of combating crime. At an election rally in 2004 the Mayor reportedly told a crowd, *“If I win, more criminals will get killed because I have vowed to protect the people of this city... Davao City will be very, very dangerous for criminals. I’ve been telling criminals it’s a place where you can die any time. If that’s a cue for anybody, that’s fine.”* Responding to Amnesty International’s expressions of concern he has said *“we will solve it my way”*. Amnesty International fears that his statements encourage “vigilante” attacks.

The man who killed Rashid Manahan escaped with an accomplice on a motorcycle and has not been brought to justice. While motives for the murder remain unclear, Rashid Manahan’s work against summary executions and the attacker’s methods prompted speculation that “vigilantes” may have also been responsible. His death has been seen as symptomatic of the authorities’ failure to ensure respect for the rule of law and human rights in Davao City, further undermining public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Take action!

You may use this sample letter or write your own if you prefer:

Dear

I am writing to express my grave concern at a pattern of alleged “vigilante” killings of suspected criminals in Davao City. More than 320 people have reportedly been killed since 1998 and the rate of killings has risen year by year. Those killed include children, many from Davao City’s poorest communities. None of the perpetrators are known to have been brought to justice.

I call on you to take urgent steps to protect all members of the community from extrajudicial executions, to conduct prompt, effective, independent and impartial investigations into the killings and to bring those found responsible to justice.

I am particularly concerned about the killing in August 2004 of local human rights defender Jacinto “Rashid” Manahan who was murdered while on his way to a human rights forum about the extrajudicial executions. I call on you to step up the investigation into his case in order to bring those responsible to justice.

While I recognize that the authorities have a duty to protect the community from crime, this must never be at the expense of human rights. I am particularly concerned at statements by local government officials which appear to encourage or condone the killing of criminal suspects.

I urge you to make clear public statements condemning all unlawful killings. It should be made clear that effective responses to crime lie with the building of a professionalized police force and criminal justice system, adequately resourced and trained to respect human rights and the rule of law.

Yours sincerely,

Please send appeals to:

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo
Malacañang Palace
J.P. Laurel St - San Miguel
Manila 1005, Philippines
Faxes: +632 736 1010
Salutation: Dear President Arroyo

Secretary of Justice Raul Gonzales
DOJ Main Building
Padre Faura Street
Manila 1004, Philippines
Salutation: Dear Secretary of Justice

Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte
City Hall,
City Hall Drive
Davao City 8000, Philippines
Fax: +63 82 227 4877
Salutation: Dear Mayor

If you wish, you may also write to the following newspapers describing AI’s concerns and saying that you have written to the authorities urging them to take action:

Sun Star Davao

Editor in Chief: Stella Estremera

Granland Door 5 and 6, Warehouse and Business Center, R. Castillo St., Agdao, Davao City

Email: ed_davao@sunstar.com.ph

Website: www.sunstar.com.ph

Philippine Daily Inquirer

Yague cor. Mascarido Sts.

Pasong Tamo, Makati City,

Philippines 1220

E-mail: feedback@inquirer.com.ph

Website: www.inq7.net