

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: 35/04/93

Distr: UA/SC

UA 68/93

"Disappearance"/ Death Threats

12 March 1993

PHILIPPINES: Romeo Legaspi, 58, Journalist / Publisher

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Romeo Legaspi, a journalist and publisher, who "disappeared" after being abducted by four armed men believed to be linked to the Philippines National Police (PNP) on 11 January 1993 in Olongapo City, Zambales.

Prior to his abduction, Romeo Legaspi had been harrassed and threatened by police authorities about whom he had written a critical article in the Voice of Zambales newspaper. Police have denied having him in custody and, as of 12 March 1993, his whereabouts remained unknown. The Supreme Court has yet to reach a decision on a *habeas corpus* petition filed by family members in late February.

Amnesty International fears that Romeo Legaspi may be in danger of ill-treatment or unlawful execution if he is not located immediately. The organization is also concerned for the safety of Romeo Legaspi's relatives who have received death threats since they filed a formal complaint about his "disappearance".

In 1992, ten members of the PNP's Intelligence Special Operations Group (PNP-ISOG) in Olongapo, including the Station Commmander, filed libel charges against Romeo Legaspi for an article which alleged that their unit had been involved in illegal activities, and which called for its dissolution. The charges were dismissed, but he continued to receive threats and warnings from the police involved. In letters to family and friends, and in his personal diary, he expressed fear that the police authorities might take action against him. In a letter to the Chief of the Olongapo Metropolitan District Command (Metrodiscom) he appealed for official protection.

Relatives and lawyers lodged a formal complaint about Romeo Legaspi's "disappearance" with the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), and on 24 February 1993 filed a petition for a writ of *habeas corpus* before the Supreme Court. Since then, family members have received anonymous death threats believed to come from the police. Officers of the Police Criminal Investigation Service (CIS) have also visited them at home, expressing concern that they had sought these remedies before coming to the CIS.

After receiving the *habeas corpus* petition the Supreme Court ordered the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Olongapo City to hold a preliminary fact-finding hearing on the case. During the hearing, which took place between 8 and 11 March, police authorities denied arresting Romeo Legaspi and produced a written document to that effect as evidence. However, when the signatory of the document, a Police Lieutenant, was questioned he reportedly said that he had signed the document on orders from the Station Commander, the prime suspect in the case. The findings of the RTC are to be conveyed directly to the Supreme Court but it is not known when a final decision on the petition will be issued.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

"Disappearances", unlawful killings and other human rights violations have occurred against a background of armed conflict between government and government-backed forces and the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Community leaders, trade unionists, agricultural workers, human rights activists, journalists and others whose professional activities lead them to express criticism of government policy, or the behavior of the security forces, have been the most frequent victims.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams express and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:

- expressing deep concern at the reported "disappearance" of Romeo Legaspi following his abduction by four armed men believed to have links with the PNP-ISOG, in Olongapo City on 11 January 1993;

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- expressing additional concern for the safety of the relatives of Romeo Legaspi who have received death threats since filing a formal complaint about his "disappearance";

- welcoming news that a preliminary hearing on the case was held by the Regional Trial Court of Olongapo City from 8 to 11 March, and that its findings were to be conveyed immediately to the Supreme Court;

- noting the urgency of the situation, and respectfully urging the Supreme Court to issue a decision on the case as soon as possible, and to use its full authority to determine Romeo Legaspi's whereabouts.

APPEALS TO

1) General Raul Imperial
Director General
Philippine National Police
Camp Crame, Quezon City
Manila
Philippines

Telegrams: Gen Imperial, PNP Camp Crame, Manila, Philippines

Salutation: Dear General Imperial

2) PNP Superintendent
Regional Headquarters, Central Luzon
Camp Olivas
San Fernando, Pampanga
Philippines

Telegrams: Superintendent PNP, San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines

Salutation: Dear Superintendent

3) Metrodiscom Commander
Camp Maquinaya Bareto
Olongapo City
Zambales
Philippines

Telegrams: Metrodiscom Commander, Olongapo City, Zambales, Philippines

Salutation: Dear Sir

4) The Honorable Dean Andres Narvasa
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
Supreme Court of the Philippines
Taft Avenue corner Padre Faura Sts
Ermita 1000
Metro Manila
Philippines

Telegrams: Chief Justice Supreme Court, Ermita, Manila, Philippines

Salutation: Dear Chief Justice

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Richard Gordon
Mayor, Olongapo City
Olongapo City Hall
Zambales
Philippines

Sedfrey Ordoñez
Chairman, Commission on Human Rights
IBP Building
Doña Julia Vargas Avenue
Pasig, Manila
Philippines

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 23 April 1993.