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"Disappearance"

25 May 1990

PHILIPPINES: Antonio BUENAVISTA

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Amnesty International is deeply concerned for the safety of Antonio Buenavista (aged 42) who has not been seen since 7 January 1990 when he was taken from his home in barangay Santa Cruz, Hagonoy, Bulacan province, by five armed men in civilian clothes believed to be connected with the 171<sup>st</sup> Company of the Philippines Constabulary (PC). It is also concerned for the safety of his family who have moved away from barangay Santa Cruz because they fear retribution from the perpetrators, who they have named in their formal complaints.

According to eyewitnesses, Antoni Buenavista was dragged from his home at about 7pm on 7 January. His abductors wore masks and were armed with four automatic weapons (Three M-16s and one M-14) and one .45 revolver. When he tried to resist by holding onto a piece of furniture in the house, one of the men shot him in the arm with an M-14 rifle forcing him to release his grip. Outside the house, he was struck on the back of the head with a rifle butt and knocked unconscious before being put into a waiting white car. When his wife, Esther Buenavista, began to call for help, one of the armed men reportedly shouted "Shut up you bitch. Come any closer and we'll kill you!". One of the men shot at her but reportedly missed because the gun was pushed by her son Jesus Buenavista. Following the shooting, the two ran for safety and sought help from the barangay captain who helped them report the case to the Mayor and the police in the municipality of Hagonoy.

Relatives inquired about Antonio Buenavista's whereabouts at the 171st Company of the Philippines constabulary (PC) in Malolos, and at other military and police detachments but authorities denied having Antonio Buenavista in their custody.

There are indications, however of a link between the perpetrators and military and paramilitary authorities in the area. Two days after the incident, the suspected perpetrators were reportedly seen, bearing arms, at a detachment of the 171st PC Co. in barangay Santa Cruz. since the incident they have reportedly been seen in the barangay, still armed, and fraternizing with military personnel. On the night of the incident, the white car driven by the perpetrators was reportedly seen in front of the Hagonoy Municipal Hall. Residents of nearby Barrio Mercado reported that the same car was seen leaving the barrio at dawn on the morning of the next day, 8 January. Barrio Mercado is the site of a CAFGU (Citizens' Armed Forces Geographical Unit) detachment under the command of the 171st PC Co.; CAFGU are official paramilitary forces actively employed in the government's counter-insurgency campaign against the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing the New People's Army (NPA).

A petition for habeas corpus was filed on behalf of Antonio Buenavista before the Regional Trial Court (RTC) on 16 January 1990, but it was dismissed, the reasons for the dismissal are not known. According to witnesses the respondents in the case were present at the hearings bearing arms and two-way radios. Charges of kidnapping and illegal possession of firearms were also filed against the alleged perpetrators, and on 23 April the RTC issued warrants for their arrest. However, according to residents of barangay Santa Cruz, the suspects continue to roam freely in the community, still fully armed.

Relatives said that Antonio Buenavista had been detained once before in April 1989 on suspicion of being a sympathizer of the CPP but had been released. It was also reported that he had refused to join the local CAGFU. Amnesty International believes that his "disappearance" may be related to allegations that he is a sympathizer of the CPP.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International received information regarding dozens of "disappearances" in the first five months of 1990, compared to about 40 in the previous year. Several of the victims have been found dead, apparently killed by government or government-backed forces, and a number have been located in military custody where they have been held incommunicado and without charge for long periods. The majority of the "disappeared" are members of lawful non-governmental organizations alleged by the authorities to be front organizations for the outlawed CPP and its armed wing, the NPA. The victims have also included ordinary villagers alleged by military informers to be members or sympathizers of the NPA.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: telegrams/telexes/express and airmail letters:**

- expressing concern for the safety of Antonio Buenavista who has not been since he was abducted on 7 January 1990 by armed men believed to be connected with the 171st Company of the Philippines Constabulary;
- urging that the whereabouts of Antonio Buenavista be made known immediately and that he be promptly released from custody or charged with a recognizable criminal offence;
- seeking assurances that his physical safety is being guaranteed while in custody;
- urging that the suspected perpetrators, for whom arrest warrants were issued on 23 April 1990, be disarmed, detained and promptly tried;
- urging that all possible measures be taken to ensure that members of the Buenavista family suffer no harassment, intimidation or physical harm at the hands of government or government-backed forces.

**APPEALS TO:**

President Corazon Aquino  
Malacañang Palace  
Manila, Philippines

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Secretary of National Defense  
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Regional Command 3 Headquarters  
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Panpanga, Philippines  
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Col. Edgar Galvante  
171<sup>st</sup> Constabulary Command

Malolos, Bulacan  
Philippines

Telegrams: Col. Galvante, 171<sup>st</sup> CC, Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines

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And 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 6 July 1990.