

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 35/011/2003

UA 108/03

"Disappearance"/fear for safety

22 April 2003

PHILIPPINES

Virgilio Catoy (m), film-maker

killed:

Eden Marcellana (f), age 31, secretary general of the Southern Tagalog office of the human rights group KARAPATAN

Eddie Gumanoy (m), Chairperson of the peasant group KASAMA-TK

Virgilio Catoy was abducted along with four others on the night of 21 April by a group of twenty armed men who reportedly identified themselves as members of the anti-communist armed group Alsa Masa. Virgilio Catoy's whereabouts remains unknown and Amnesty International is concerned for his safety.

Virgilio Catoy was abducted along with Eden Marcellana, Eddie Gumanoy, Francisco Saez and Melvin Jocson. Eden Marcellana, secretary general of the Southern Tagalog office of the human rights group KARAPATAN, and Eddie Gumanoy, Chairperson of the peasant group KASAMA-TK, have since been found dead. Francisco Saez and Melvin Jocson, both provincial coordinators of the peasant group Anakpawis, have reportedly been located at local police stations. The five were returning from a fact-finding mission to investigate the reported abduction of three people by members of the Philippine military's 204th Brigade in Gloria town, Mindoro Oriental.

The five were returning to Calapan City along with six others by van. According to witnesses at around 7pm in Maibon, Naujan, twenty masked armed men blocked the path of their vehicle. Five of the armed men then reportedly entered the van, told the driver to leave and drove off with all eleven passengers. A while later, witnesses report, Eden Marcellana, Eddie Gumanoy, Francisco Saez, Melvin Jocson and Virgilio Catoy were told to get out. They then had their hands and feet tied together and were made to enter another vehicle. It is not clear what happened after this point, although there are indications that all of those abducted were ill-treated.

The bodies of Eden Marcellana and Eddie Gumanoy were later found and both had reportedly been shot in the head. Local reports indicate that Francisco Saez and Melvin Jocson may have been handed over to police by local officials for their own protection. It is not known what happened to Virgilio Catoy or where he was taken.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Grave human rights violations continue to be reported within the context of the government's anti-insurgency campaign against the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Such violations include 'disappearances', torture, extrajudicial executions and arbitrary arrests carried out by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) or militia groups. Local non-government organizations (NGOS) have expressed concerns that some militia groups enjoy tacit support from the AFP. Those most at risk of human rights violations include civilians - many from indigenous or impoverished communities - who are perceived to be NPA sympathizers. Also at risk are members of lawful organizations which have been publicly labelled by military officials as 'recruiters' or 'fronts' for the NPA. In provinces such as Mindoro Oriental, with a significant military presence and reported high level of rebel activity, there have been increasing reports of human rights violations committed against civilians.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- urging the authorities to immediately establish the whereabouts and guarantee the safety of Virgilio Catoy, who was abducted from Maibon, Naujan, Mindoro Oriental on 21 April;
- expressing sadness and concern about the deaths of Eden Marcellana and Eddie Gumanoy;
- calling for a full, impartial and thorough investigation into their deaths;
- urging the authorities to send a clear message that human rights violations, including forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and torture, will not be tolerated under any circumstances and that those found responsible will be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO: [Please note that fax numbers are sometimes difficult to obtain]

Secretary of National Defense

General Angelo Reyes
Department of National Defense
Camp Aguinaldo
E. de los Santos Avenue
Quezon City
Philippines

Telegrams: Defense Secretary, Quezon City, Philippines

Fax: + 632 911 6213

Salutation: Dear Secretary Reyes

President of the Republic of the Philippines

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo
Malacañang Palace
J.P. Laurel Street
San Miguel 1005, Manila
Philippines

Telegrams: President Macapagal-Arroyo, Manila, Philippines

Fax: + 632 736 1010 / 832 3793

Salutation: Dear President

COPIES TO:

Chairperson, Commission on Human Rights

Hon. Purificacion Valera Quisumbing
SAAC Building, UP Complex
Commonwealth Avenue
Diliman 1100, Quezon City
Philippines

Fax: + 632 926 6188 / 928 7240

Email: drpvq@chr.gov.ph

Salutation: Dear Chairperson

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 3 June 2003.