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Harassment of Human Rights Lawyer

3 April 1991

PHILIPPINES: Attorney Romeo Capulong, human rights lawyer

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of human rights lawyer Romeo Capulong who, in recent weeks, has been subjected to intimidation by armed men believed to have links with the Philippine security forces. The organization believes, on the basis of past experience, that Attorney Capulong may be in danger of extrajudicial execution.

Attorney Capulong is a member of the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), which provides free legal aid to disadvantaged groups and to people detained for their political activities. Known as an outspoken defender of human rights, Attorney Capulong is currently acting as defence lawyer for a number of people accused of involvement with the outlawed Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and associated crimes. He believes that the recent harassment by armed men, and the implied threats to his life, are directly related to his involvement in these cases.

On 19 March, Attorney Capulong was followed by men in a passenger car as he drove from Manila to his home in Nueva Ecija province several hours to the north. The identity of those in the car is unknown but it is believed that they may be linked to the military intelligence apparatus. The car was a Toyota Cressida with tinted glass and license plate number NRB 838. The day before this incident, Attorney Capulong had been involved in a dispute in court while acting as defence lawyer for two alleged high-ranking members of the CPP. According to reports, the military lawyers for the prosecution had objected strongly to certain questions he asked during his cross-examination of an alleged "professional witness" for the military. The lawyers accused Attorney Capulong of attempting to elicit information from the witness which would be of use to the NPA.

On 1 April during judicial proceedings in a case involving six alleged members of the New People's Army (NPA) -- the armed wing of the CPP -- an armed man in civilian clothing entered the courtroom, and asked Attorney Capulong's personal driver whether Attorney Capulong was there. The driver said he did not know. The armed man next approached the military escorts of the six defendants; one of the escorts then pointed to Attorney Capulong. Shortly thereafter the armed man left the courtroom accompanied by another unidentified man. According to an eyewitness the two men drove away on a red Honda motorcycle with no license plates. According to Amnesty International's information at least three of the human rights lawyers killed in the past three years were shot by unidentified men in civilian clothes riding motorcycles without licence plates.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At least six human rights lawyers have been killed in the past three years in apparent extrajudicial executions in the Philippines; of these, three were FLAG 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, dozens more have received death threats or other kinds of intimidation in recent years. In May 1990, FLAG lawyer Solema P. Jubilan received a series of death threats believed to originate with elements of the Philippines Constabulary in North Cotabato province (see UA 234/90, ASA 35/16/90, dated 6 June 1990). In January 1991 FLAG lawyer Nerio G. Zamora received a death threat from the provincial PC Commander in Bohol (see UA 09/91, ASA 35/01/91, dated 14 January 1991).

Amnesty International views such threats and intimidation with 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 political detainees. Amnesty International urges the Philippine Government to take prompt and appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of Attorney Romeo Capulong, and other human rights lawyers subjected to such threats and intimidation.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Attorney Romeo Capulong following the reported acts of intimidation by armed men believed to have links to the security forces;
- noting with concern that at least six human rights lawyers have been killed in apparent extra-judicial killings in the past three years in the Philippines and that dozens more have been threatened with death or otherwise intimidated;
- expressing concern that such intimidation may be intended to keep human rights lawyers like Attorney Capulong from engaging in their lawful activities on behalf of the underprivileged and political detainees;
- urging the government to take prompt and appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of Attorney Capulong;

APPEALS TO:

General Fidel V. Ramos
 Secretary of National Defense
 Department of National Defense
 Camp General Emilio Aguinaldo
 Quezon City

Metro Manila, Philippines

Telegrams: Defense Secretary Ramos, Quezon, Philippines

Telexes: 22471 DND PH or 42004 DCSLOG PM

Faxes: + 63 2 721 3988

Lt. General Rodolfo Biazon
 Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines
 Camp Crame
 Quezon City

Metro Manila, Philippines

Telexes: 22471 DND PH or 42004 DCSLOG PM

Faxes: + 63 2 832 3793 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Franklin Drilon
 Secretary of Justice
 Department of Justice
 Padre Faura Street Ermita
 Manila, Philippines

Telegrams: Justice Secretary Drilon, Manila, Philippines

Faxes: + 63 2 521 1614

COPIES TO:

Free Legal Assistance Group
 204 Cabrera II Building
 64 Timog Avenue, Quezon City
 Philippines

Fax: + 63 2 81 75410

Mary Concepcion Bautista
 Chairman
 Commission on Human Rights
 IBP Building Complex
 Dona Julia Vargas Avenue
 Pasig Metro Manila, Philippines

**Telegrams: Chairman, Human Rights Commission,
 Manila, Philippines**

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 15 May 1991.