



International Labor Rights Fund

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October 16, 2006

Barry F. Lowenkron, Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Lowenkron:

I am writing to express my concerns about, and to bring to your attention, the recent murder of Bishop Alberto Ramento, the chairperson of the Supreme Council of Bishops and the leader of the Philippine Independent Church (IFI). Bishop Ramento was stabbed to death and was found lying in his church in Tarlac City, north of Manila, on the morning of October 3, 2006. Bishop Ramento's murder is another in a growing number of political killings that has wracked the Philippines since Gloria Macapagal Arroyo became President in 2001. Over 750 religious leaders, community leaders, students, farmers, union leaders and members, and reporters have been summarily executed in the past 5 years by members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

Bishop Ramento was a staunch human rights advocate and worked tirelessly to support the impoverished workers and farmers in the Philippines since the time of the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship. He was the chairman of the board of the Workers' Assistance Center, a center devoted to the promotion and protection of human rights for Philippine workers employed in the Cavite Export Processing Zone to produce goods for United States companies. Bishop Ramento also worked hard on behalf of the Hacienda Luisita Sugar Mill workers, who went on strike in 2004 and were brutally attacked by the AFP, who shot and killed seven of the striking workers on November 16, 2004.

Bishop Ramento's murder comes at a difficult, and very suspect, time for those he worked so hard to help. Bishop Ramento's organization, the Workers' Assistance Center, has been helping several workers who have been brutally and physically attacked by police and security forces working on behalf of the Philippine Economic Zone Authority. The beatings are in retaliation for the on-going strikes by the workers in the Cavite Export Processing Zone.

Bishop Ramento's murder is not an isolated incident, but is rather part of a pattern of a growing number of murders of community and religious leaders who are working to further the cause of human rights, democracy, justice, and rule of law in the Philippines. On April 28, 2006, Gerardo Cristobal, former union president and a member of the Solidarity of Cavite Workers (SCW) was also ambushed and shot by three masked men later identified as policemen. These violent actions, as well as the ongoing refusal to negotiate collective bargaining agreements and the

violent dispersal of strikes at two factories in the Cavite export processing zone (Chong Won Fashion Inc. and Phils. Jeon Garment Inc.), represent just a few examples of the repression of labor and human rights supporters in the Philippines.

In May 2006, I attended a meeting, or “dialogue”, at the Philippine Human Rights Commission between the families of several other community leaders who were also murdered by the suspected agents of the AFP and PNP, including the widow of the leader of the Nestlé union Diosdado “Ka Fort” Fortuna. At that hearing, the Human Rights Commission released a report officially ruling that the murder of Mr. Fortuna was an extra-judicial killing and a human rights violation representing a breach of international law, which indicates strong evidence of official government involvement in the murder. The Commission promised to hold open hearings to further investigate his murder and the murders of several other community leaders killed by masked agents in the same manner. However, the Commissioners admitted that they are severely limited in their ability to fully investigate these human rights violations due to threats and interference by AFP and PNP. It has been nearly six months since the Commission promised to hold the open hearings and nothing has happened. During that time, the Philippine government has made no real commitment to ending or investigating the hundreds of killings.

Until these killings end, the Philippines will remain the dangerous, volatile and undemocratic nation it is today. I urge you to please contact your counterparts in the Philippine government, the Philippine Human Rights Commission and other appropriate authorities. Request that open hearings into these and other the murders commence immediately and that the PNP and AFP cooperate fully with the independent investigations into these murders, including cooperating with investigations into the involvement of the police and military themselves.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,



Brian Campbell
Attorney-at-Law
International Labor Rights Fund

cc: James Carter, U.S. Department of Labor
Mario A. Fernandez, Embassy of the United States in Manila
Christopher R. Hill, U.S. Department of State
Jeffrey R. Krilla, U.S. Department of State