

URGENT APPEAL - THE OBSERVATORY

PHL 001 / 0111 / OBS 012

Assassination

Philippines

January 28, 2011

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in **The Philippines**.

Description of the situation:

The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources of the assassination of Mr. **Gerardo Ortega**, journalist and environmental rights defender in Palawan Island.

According to the information received, on January 24, 2011, after his daily morning radio broadcast, Mr. Gerardo Ortega was shot dead inside a clothing store, along the national highway in Puerto Princesa City.

On January 26, 2011, the police filed murder charges against the suspect Romeo Seratubias, former administrator in the southwestern Palawan province, who allegedly owned the gun used by another suspect, Mr. Marlon Ricamata, who was apprehended at the scene by the police on January 24, and who confessed that he had been hired to silence the broadcaster for a fee of 150,000 pesos (approximately 2,470 Euros). At least three other men were also charged in the shooting of Mr. Ortega. Among them, Mr. Dennis Aranas alleged lookout during the attack, Mr. Noel Armando – the alleged contact between Messrs. Ricamata and Aranas, and Mr. Jun-Jun Bumar – who allegedly gave Ricamata 10.000 pesos (165 Euros) as initial payment and 15,000 pesos (248 Euros) for operational funds.

Mr. Ortega was reportedly receiving death threats from an unknown source through text messages, since his radio program started to air in 2009. He had been moving around with a bodyguard since then.

Mr. Ortega was the program manager of the Philippine Ecotourism Palawan of the ABS-CBN Foundation and a staunch critic of the current provincial administration and activities of mining companies in Palawan, often speaking out against corruption in his 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. Program on Palawan's DWAR radio station. Ultimately, Mr. Ortega supported a law center petition filed before the Supreme Court on behalf of residents of the province to declare as unconstitutional a litigious sharing agreement between the provincial government and the national government over the proceeds of the USD 10-billion Malampaya natural gas project off the coast of the province.

The Observatory recalls that according to the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, Mr. Ortega is the 142nd journalist killed in the country since 1986. The Philippines is considered as one of the most dangerous places for reporters.

The Observatory strongly condemns the assassination of Mr. Gerardo Ortega, which seem to have been merely aimed at silencing his work and urges the Philippines authorities to order a thorough, impartial and transparent investigation into his assassination, in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before a civil competent and impartial tribunal and apply to them the penal sanctions provided by the law.

Actions requested:

Please write to the Philippines authorities urging them to:

- I. Order a thorough, impartial and transparent investigation into Mr. Gerardo Ortega's assassination, in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before a civil competent and impartial tribunal and apply to them the penal sanctions provided by the law;
- II. Provide adequate reparation to Mr. Gerardo Ortega's family;
- III. Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of all human rights defenders in the Philippines;
- IV. Put an end to all acts of harassment against all human rights defenders, including journalists reporting on human rights abuses, in the Philippines, and ensure in all circumstances that they be able to carry out their work without unjustified hindrances;
- V. Conform in any circumstances with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted on December 9, 1998 by the United Nations General Assembly, in particular its article 1, which states that "everyone has the right, individually or in association with others, to promote the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels", article 6(b), which establishes that "everyone has the right, individually or in association with others, as provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others, views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms", and its article 12.2 which provides that "the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration";
- VI. Guarantee the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international human rights instruments ratified by Philippines.

Addresses:

- H.E. Benigno S. Aquino III, President of the Republic of the Philippines, New Executive Building, Malacañang Palace, JP Laurel St., San Miguel, Manila 1005, Philippines. Fax: +63 2 736 1010, Tel: +63 2 735 6201 / 564 1451 to 80; E-mail: corres@op.gov.ph / opnet@ops.gov.ph;
- Hon. Paquito Ochoa, Chairperson, Presidential Human Rights Committee (PHRC), 3rd Flr. New Executive Bldg. Office of the President, Malacanang Compound, Manila, Philippines. Trunk Line: + 632 735 6201 Loc. 5301 & 5503. Telefax: + 632 734 6761. Email: phrc.phil@gmail.com
- Hon. Loretta Ann P. Rosales, Chairperson, Commission on Human Rights, SAAC Bldg., UP Complex, Commonwealth Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines. Fax: +632 929 0102. Email: chair.rosales.chr@gmail.com
- Atty. Jasmin Navarro-Regino, Regional Director, CHR, Region 3, 3rd Flr. Kehyeng Bldg, Dolores Junction, Dolores, City of San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines. Tel. No. +45 2 9614830. Tel-Fax. No. +45 2 9614475. Email: chrreg3@yahoo.com / attyjnr@yahoo.com

- Police Director General Raul M. Bacalzo,, PNP Chief, Office of the Chief, PNP, National Headquarters Philippine National Police, Camp Crame, Edsa, Quezon City, Philippines. Tel: +632 9116213. Fax: +632 7248763
- Clarence V. Guinto, Police Superintendent, Acting Chief, Human Rights Affairs Office, Human Rights Affairs Office, Office of the Chief, PNP, National Headquarters Philippine National Police, Camp Crame, Edsa, Quezon City, Philippines 1111. Tel. Nos. +632 723 0401 to 20 local 3668. Mobile: +63 916 442 4536. Email:
- Ms. Teresita Quintos-Deles, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), 6th Floor, Agustin 1 Building, F. Ortigas Jr. Avenue (formerly Emerald Avenue), Ortigas Center, Pasig City 1600, Philippines. Trunk line: +632 6360701 to 07. Fax +632 638 2216. Office of the Secretary (OSEC): +632 544 4217. Email: osec@opapp.gov.ph
- Permanent Mission of the Philippines to the United Nations in Geneva, 47 Avenue Blanc, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland, Fax: +41 22 716 19 32, Email: mission.philippines@ties.itu.int
- Embassy of the Philippines in Brussels, 297 Avenue Moliere, 1050 Brussels, Belgium, Tel: +32 2 340 33 77 / 2 340 33 78, Fax: +32 2 345 64 25.

Please also write to the diplomatic representations of the Philippines in your respective countries.

Paris-Geneva, January 28, 2011

Kindly inform us of any action undertaken quoting the code of this appeal in your reply.

The Observatory, a FIDH and OMCT venture, is dedicated to the protection of Human Rights Defenders and aims to offer them concrete support in their time of need.

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

- Email: Appeals@fidh-omct.org
- Tel and fax FIDH: +33 (0) 1 43 55 25 18 / 01 43 55 18 80
- Tel and fax OMCT: + 41 22 809 49 39 / 41 22 809 49 29