

H.E. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo
President of the Republic
Malacañang Palace,
JP Laurel St., San Miguel
Manila, Philippines

February 2010

Your Excellency,

Release and Safeguard Community Health Workers

I am writing to express our concern about the arbitrary arrest of 43 community health workers in Morong, Rizal Province, on 6 February 2010. The health workers were brought to Camp Capinpin in Tanay, Rizal, headquarters of the 202nd Infantry Brigade of the Philippine Army. They were not allowed contact with anyone outside and their well-being remains unknown.

According to local and international newspapers, including the New York Times, the military arrested the group of community workers when they were taking part in a training on community health service in a farmhouse of Dr. Melecia Velmonte. Without showing any evidence, the military detained them on charges of rebellion and storing ammunition, and refused any visitations, even from families and lawyers. We also learnt that the search warrant, dated 5 February, did not indicate the exact address of the Dr. Velmonte's compound. Apparently, the arrest was not carried out according to proper procedures.

We are disappointed that, rather than stopping rebellion, the military is disturbing innocent civilians. Most of the arrested are affiliated with the Council for Health and Development (CHD) and Community Medicine Development Foundation (CMDf), NGOs striving for a better standard of medical services in local communities, especially the remote areas. Framing human rights workers as rebels has become a convenient tool to suppress criticism of the Philippine government. Moreover, the military has denied the constitutional rights of detainees to contact with the visitors and legal counsel.

This arbitrary arrest without proper procedure and adequate evidence has diminished the international image of the Philippines. We urge you **to immediately release the 43 workers and stop ill-treatment of them.**

We are looking forward to your favourable response on the issue.

Yours faithfully,

[SIGNATORIES OF THIS LETTER BELOW]

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