

Another surge of involuntary disappearances?

MEMBERS of a labor group calling themselves the Sosyalistang Kilusang Manggagawa sought the help of our organization this week to locate two of its members who went missing from Dec. 2 to 4. The victims were Ludivico Arnel Ramos, 30, married and Joselito Esguerra, 35, single.

Ramos' wife told the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND) her husband went to Monumento in Caloocan City at around 2 p.m. on Dec. 2, 2001 to have his defective cellular phone repaired. Since then, Ramos failed to come home. She added that Ramos also failed to respond to her text messages. Meanwhile, Esguerra's sister reported that Esguerra failed to return home and neither did he reply to the text messages they sent him. Ramos and Esguerra were together that Sunday afternoon when they disappeared.

After two days of frantic search in Metro Manila's detention camps, FIND finally discovered Ramos and Esguerra in the custody of the Philippine National Police Region 4 at

Camp Vicente Lim in Canlubang, Laguna. A statement released by the agency stated that those arrested were top-ranking members of the Partido Marxista Leninista ng Pilipinas, an armed clandestine group operating in Metro Manila and Rizal.

FIND does not want to undermine or challenge the arrest of Ramos and Esguerra; we do not wish to impede the PNP from doing actions within the bounds of its official job as mandated by our laws. We only want to raise our concern with regard to the manner of the arrest, which we think suffered serious lapses because it fell short of the just and acceptable procedures. We also worry about the possible adverse implications of these.

The PNP arrested Ramos and Esguerra in a manner similar to a police raid. This means that as the two were coming out from a fast-food shop in Caloocan, the PNP suddenly apprehended them. They were forced to board an FX van and were taken away even as a few passersby looked on. They were not presented any warrant of arrest or informed of

the cause of their arrest. They were also blindfolded and were prematurely accused as cell phone snatchers before they were brought to Camp Vicente Lim. They were charged with illegal possession of firearms but they were not allowed to call their lawyer or their relatives to inform them of their whereabouts.

Most of all, the arrest of Ramos and Esguerra has stoked fears of an apparent upsurge in the phenomenon of involuntary disappearance, which is one of the cruelest forms of human rights violations used by the State to stifle opposition. There is actually an entire range of human rights guaranteed by the Constitution, which the crime of involuntary disappearance breaches. This includes the right to liberty and security and the fundamental and inviolable right to life, among others.

We have been lobbying the government since 1995 to enact into law a bill that will criminalize involuntary disappearance and eventually stave off the roots of this phenomenon. We appreciate the support of our lawmakers namely Rep. Krisel



Lagman-Luistro who has filed House Bill 1913. We express the same for Senators Loren Legarda-Leviste and Francisco Pangilinan for filing Senate Bills 1854 and 1856, respectively. The passage of these bills will finally penalize enforced or involuntary disappearance and boost our efforts to resist such crime.

We urge the public to be informed and involved. In doing so, we continue to harness our collective power to defend and secure our constitutional rights, which took generations of not only social activists but even ordinary citizens, to work for... even to suffer and die for.—**LOUIE G. CRISMO, secretary general, Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance, P.O. Box AC 546, Cubao, Quezon City**