

An Urgent Appeal for Solidarity Action and for the Release of the “Tagaytay 5” in the Philippines

Dear Friends,

We, Riel Custodio, Michael Masayes, Axel Pinpin, Aristides Sarmiento and Enrico Ybañez, collectively referred to by media and supporters as the “Tagaytay 5”, bring to your attention our plight and our appeal to you who uphold life, liberty and democracy to help us gain our freedom through your solidarity action.

We, Custodio, Pinpin and Sarmiento, are an organizer, an organizer and information officer, and a researcher and consultant, respectively, for the Kalipunan ng mga Magsasaka sa Cavite (“Peasant Union of Cavite”) and other peasant organizations in Cavite and Batangas. We are active advocates of genuine land reform and rural development and are anti-globalization and environment activists. We, Masayes and Ybañez, are ordinary farmers and residents of Tagaytay City in Cavite who were driving the others to their various destinations when our car was abruptly blocked and we were forcibly taken and hauled into another vehicle by rifle-wielding elements of the Philippine National Police and Naval Intelligence Security Force who did not identify themselves and without any explanation or necessary warrants.

For seven days until we were brought to court and very belatedly charged with rebellion on 05 May 2006, we were kept blindfolded with our hands handcuffed at the back, have been held in incommunicado detention, have been discretely shuttled from one “safe house” to another, were subjected to interrogation without aid of counsel or advise of our rights nor have been informed of why we have been arrested, were subjected to physical and mental torture, and were robbed of all personal and organizational belongings that were at the time in our person while our relatives frantically searched for us and were directed by the police and the military to various camps without success of finding us.

Even as we have been “arrested” without warrant and have been denied due process, we have been charged with rebellion at the Tagaytay City Regional Trial Court Branch 18 presided over by Judge Edwin G. Larida, Jr. The rebellion charged against us by the Cavite Provincial Police Office (Cavite PPO) and the Police Regional Office-Region 4A (PRO4A) through the Prosecutor’s Office of Tagaytay City were founded on alleged “intelligence reports” that elements of the New People’s Army would conduct destabilizing activities against the Arroyo government. None of those who have executed their testimonies against us claimed that knew neither us nor the identities of the alleged de-stabilizers. Neither have any of them stated that they have witnessed us actually committing any act that may constitute rebellion.

In spite of various legal manifestations and supporters’ appeals and guarantees of our persons, we remain un-arraigned until this time – more than 21 months after our forcible abduction!

Due to the painfully slow grind of the judicial process in the Tagaytay court, we petitioned the Philippine Supreme Court last August 21, 2007 to transfer the court, which hears our case. This petition remains un-acted upon until now, hence we haven’t had a court hearing

officially since June 1, 2007. With no hope in sight in the oppressive Philippine criminal justice system we continue to languish in jail.

We are currently detained at the Base Police Holding Center at Camp Vicente Lim in Calamba City, Laguna, the headquarters of the PRO4A where our custodians disregard at whim our basic rights as detainees whose alleged crimes have yet to be proven. For more than eleven months until we went on hunger strike to demand our rights in March 2007, we have been denied the mandatory daily outdoor exercises and sunning. Until now, visitation rights are restricted to deny most of our friends and supporters to see us. There is no visitors' area so that family and friends remain standing with prison bars between them and us. We are denied recreation facilities and adequate and prompt medical treatment.

In the light of the Arroyo government's desire to silence those who oppose it and the resulting grave human rights situation in the Philippines, we believe that international action and support will immensely contribute and expedite our quest for justice and freedom. We humbly appeal for your urgent action to intervene in our behalf to effect our release from detention so that we may continue to serve the interest of the peasantry and our people.

Among other actions that you may take, we urge you to call the attention of the Arroyo Government on our patently illegal detention and demand our immediate and unconditional release. You may send your letters of concern to the

PHILIPPINE CONSULATE IN YOUR RESPECTIVE PROVINCES/STATES.

Please copy furnish:

H. E. GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO

President

Republic of the Philippines

Malacanang Palace, JP Laurel St.,

San Miguel, Manila, NCR 1005

And the

THE TAGAYTAY 5 C/O ARISTIDES SARMIENTO

Base Police Detention Center

Camp Vicente Lim, Canlubang, Calamba City

Laguna, 4027 Philippines

You may also conduct forums and other activities to gather more supporters and lobby the Philippine consulates in your area to call for our release. We would appreciate if you could also launch fund drives in our behalf to augment our meager family, campaign and legal resources.

To facilitate whatever queries you may have, you may course your communications through:

Laura Sarmiento (wife of Aristides)

Email address: iamapril_ph@yahoo.com

Mobile Number: +63-927-282-7028

You may also browse online information about us by following a link to Tagaytay 5 on <http://cemjp.wordpress.com> and on <http://www.wacphilippines.com>.

Thank you very much for your time, concern and positive action.

Respectfully,



Riel Custodio



Axel Pinpin



Aristides Sarmiento