



Philippine torture. . . .

"While pouring water, several agents smashed my breasts while one contented himself by inserting his fingers into my vagina after failing to make me masturbate."

Maria Elena Ang was released on June 9, 1977 with the stipulation that she cannot leave Manila or talk with journalists.

Vilma Riopag, a 21-year old tenant farm woman, was arrested on July 17, 1977. When she was released 10 days later, Vilma was incoherent. She could not answer simple questions such as: Where are you? What day of the week is it? What city is this?

The senior medical clerk at Cebn Doctor's Hospital, Thomas Meyer, described her condition in her clinical record:

"Patient lies in bed most of the time with eyes closed. She periodically whimpers, cries and mutters incoherently. She does not respond to questions asked and appears to have largely withdrawn herself, severing most contact with what is non-self. When touched, she grimaces or whimpers."

Today Vilma is in much better condition. She can smile when asked about her farm with its ducks, chickens and coconut trees. She talks about her nine sisters and brothers, about getting up at 5 a.m. to work in the cool morning, and how "supper is what is left over from the noon meal."

Why was she arrested? She doesn't know. "I only know they questioned me about the church, the activities of the priest and the programs of the church."

"Seventy to 80 parishioners from that parish have been arrested," a Catholic sister accompanying Vilma explained. "That church is very active in organizing people to solve their economic problems. The government is very afraid of groups which become strong . . . especially at the grassroots level."

Jesuit Bishop Francisco Claver calls it persecution. In a pastoral letter (Jan. 1, 1977) he wrote:

"We as a church suffer persecution. This only means we, the church, are alive, not dead. And we are on the right track in our insistent preaching of the truth, of respect for the dignity of people, of genuine justice and development, all gospel concerns, all sadly missing, too, under the present regime."

One week later Claver added: "I would especially invoke God's wrath . . . on those who inflict actual physical harm on defenseless people in the name of 'government security.' Any form of physical torture to make people confess to crimes (that in most cases they never committed in the first place) is especially execrable. . . . They will henceforth be excluded from the sacraments, from acting as sponsors in baptisms, confirmations and weddings."

Amnesty International has identified 88 military officers accused of torture. Only 13 have been prosecuted. They received either minor or no disciplinary action.

I went to the military court trial of two men, First Lieutenant Jardiano Matillano and Second Lieutenant Regis (accused only of being present during part of the interrogation).

The court "law member," agreed that three political prisoners at Bicutan Detention Center could testify that they, too, had been tortured by Matillano. But before the three could testify, Colonel Duldulao protested.

The law member then reversed himself.

After Matillano was found not guilty a group of political prisoners in Camp Bicutan wrote: "It appeared that the victim, not the torturer, was on trial. Now people will be more scared to complain about torture."

The civilian lawyer of the victim who had complained against the torturer commented: "If we talk democracy today we will be mowed down by the arms and bullets of America. The champion of democracy is supporting a military dictatorship here."

Two days later I saw other U.S. contributions to the repression here: U.S. trained intelligence agents and interrogators.

A former prisoner had given Ramsey Clark and I a map showing the location of the "safehouse" where his torture had taken place.

We crawled through an opening in the wall and were stopped by armed guards — and a major: "I studied in Amarillo, Texas," Major Enfont told us. He explained that "of course" they interrogate civilian and military prisoners: "That is normal," he said, "that is what an intelligence program is for."

We were then taken to Lieutenant Colonel Soladas in our attempt to look at the site where the ex-prisoner claimed he was tortured. This officer had studied in both Texas and New York. He said civilians were not interrogated: only military prisoners were questioned.

He introduced us to Colonel Pompanero who proudly told us that he had studied at Fort Mead and Fort Benning (we had not asked any of them if they had ever been to the U.S.). He said no one had ever been interrogated or questioned there.

The process involved more than an hour and a half. We were shouted at, my notes were confiscated, rifles were aimed at us, and we were told jokes and served coffee. Ramsey Clark charged that all this was to use up time while the place was "cleaned up." Indeed there was little to see when we were finally given a guided tour of the buildings.

My two weeks in the Philippines ended with a teach-in on human rights by students, urban poor, families of detainees, workers and religious groups. The Minister of Education sent an order to St. Theresa's College not to hold the meeting there. So the more than 5,000 people met on the street. At the end, a decision was made to march to downtown Manila to protest the decision not to allow the Sisters at St. Theresa to use their college.

ACCUSED TORTURER: Lieutenant Jardiano Matillano, left, was found not guilty by military court, above, in trial described by U.S. attorney John Caughlan of Seattle, Wash., as "inept, half-hearted." Below, Sister Marriane, head of the task force aiding detainees and their families.

— NCR/Don Luce photos



I walked with the group in the front line with a priest and about 20 Catholic nuns. We were met with the military police and fire engines. Water from powerful hoses knocked the nuns in their flowing habits off their feet. Then the police rushed in with clubs, beating up those they could catch. Several people were wounded.

When the police attack ended, the sisters gathered the wooden shoes scattered around the streets and helped some of the wounded into their convent. The police laughed as they watched the nuns, their wet dresses clinging to tiny bodies, protecting the students as they walked past the police line.

[Reprinted by the Friends of the Filipino People with the permission of the National Catholic Reporter, P.O. Box 281, Kansas City, MO 64141]

Don Luce, co-director of Clergy and Laity Concerned, was a member of a Human Rights Investigating Team in the Philippines during the World Peace Through Law Convention in August 1977. Other members of the team were: Ramsey Clark, John Caughlan, Tom Miller, Deborah Kaufman, and Nhu Miller. The Friends of the Filipino People joined with the Anti-Martial Law Coalition in sending this Human Rights Investigating Team to the Philippines.

The Friends of the Filipino People is a nation-wide organization devoted to ending United States support for the Marcos dictatorship by cutting off U.S. military and economic aid to Marcos, by withdrawing U.S. military and naval bases from the Philippines, and by stopping financial assistance to Marcos through such U.S.-dominated international agencies as the World Bank.

Besides sending the Human Rights Investigating Team to the Philippines, the Friends of the Filipino People has helped bring about such things as:

- Passage by Congress of the Human Rights Amendment in 1975.
- Passage by the House of Representatives of a 17% cut in U.S. military aid to Marcos in 1977.

- Release of Trinidad Herrera, Catholic civil rights activist, from Marcos' jails in 1977.

If interested fill out and send coupon below to:

Friends of the Filipino People
110 Maryland Ave., N.E., Room 504
Washington, D.C. 20002

- ☐ I wish to join the Friends of the Filipino People.
I enclose \$1.00 membership fee.
- ☐ I wish to contribute to the Friends of the Filipino People.
I enclose \$_____.
- ☐ I wish to have more information about the Friends of the Filipino People.

Name.....
Address.....
City..... Zip.....

Church denies regime's facade in Philippines; fights torture



By Don Luce

Exclusive to the National Catholic Reporter

MANILA — Delegates to an international human rights organization gathering here had two sources of information: official and unofficial.

The official source was represented by the Chief Justice of the Philippine Supreme Court, Fred Ruiz Castro. He told delegates to the World Peace through Law Center (of Washington, D.C.) annual convention that martial law in the Philippines "has been imposed and administered with a benignity and grace that has confused and confounded both hostile and friendly observers."

The unofficial sources were former prisoners of Philippine detention centers, church leaders, Filipino lawyers and torture victims who described martial law under the Marcos regime in very different terms.

Even the decision to hold the convention in Manila had created problems. Most of the best known names in human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists had boycotted it. They feared the convention would whitewash mistreatment of protesters and prisoners here.

The people of the Philippines have been under martial law for five years. There is no legislature, no elections and almost no judicial review. Since 1972 an estimated 60,000 people have been arrested and some 6,000 are still detained.

Former detainees claim there is much torture, and reveal scars from electric burns and beatings to document their claims.

Conference laws prohibited any criticism of martial law and prevented any political statements by delegates attending the session. Some 3,000 of the 4,000 delegates were Filipinos — President Ferdinand Marcos had instructed each government agency to send between two and five delegates, with the government covering their expenses.

There were attempts to open up the meeting. After Ruiz Castro's speech, a group of Filipino lawyers, including some former senators, asked to address the conference challenging the justification of martial law. They were refused permission.

During the conference Marcos lifted the curfew and ban on foreign travel for Filipinos. One lawyer immediately tested the measures, which natives here regarded as cynical, by applying for permission to attend the Amnesty International meeting in Sri Lanka. Permission was denied.

For delegates interested in human rights issues, Filipinos were willing to discuss openly their own situations. One main center of opposition to widespread arrests and torture is the Catholic church — the Association of Major Religious Superiors here has prepared two reports on conditions faced by political detainees:

"While torture is continually denied, torture of detainees still continues," the report states. It documents the cases of tortures by using electrodes, beatings, boiling water on genitals, water torture, and many other types. Much of the torture goes on in "safehouses," private homes or motel rooms used for interrogation.

One of more than a dozen ex-detainees I met is Maria Elena Ang, 23, a senior journalism student at the University of the Philippines. Sister Marianne told me that Maria had described her arrest and torture this way:

"On the morning of August 5, 1976, I was on my way to Lourdes church in Quezon City when unidentified military authorities pounced on me. It was like this. Just as I was to cross the street to go to church, two men in plainclothes emerged from a red car which was squatting right in front of the church gate.

"I was just to utter a word when they suddenly grabbed me and dumped me into the car. No warrant of arrest . . . not on the spot, nor in the car, nor in their secret headquarters or 'Safehome,' — where I was kept for 15 days — or even afterwards."

Maria described her treatment: "About 10 to 20 men swelled the ranks of those already in the room. They threatened to kill me, get my relatives and torture them in front of me. They slapped my face and hit me in the thighs. They threatened me with a sharp-edged bolo knife against my throat.

"They then gave me the MERALCO treatment. MERALCO is the supplier of electricity in the city. An agent forcibly removed my blouse and bra and unzipped my fly. Another brought in a hand-cranked

electric generator used as a military telephone. Still another forced me to drink glassfuls of water and poured ice-cold water on my hands, my bare feet . . . all over my body. It was to intensify the shock.

"The exposed wires were attached to my bare little toes. Attorney Lazaro Castillo started cranking the generator. The current shot painfully through my body. I screamed and pleaded. He turned the crank faster and faster and I was screaming continuously.

"Then Major Arsenio Esguerro of the 5th Military Intelligence Group came in," Maria continued. "By this time I was stripped naked and lying on a short table. He

REPPRESSED: Girl prepares food, right, in Tondo, an urban slum. Three sisters wear badges of mourning when army lieutenant accused of torture is found not guilty. Woman on right sorting pieces of broken glass for glass factory — earning 8 cents a bucket.

— NCR/Don Luce photos

signalled the start of the NAWASA session . . . NAWASA being the supplier of water in Manila.

"A man poured water over an Igorot-weave cloth bag on my face. I vomited, but nothing came up but water since I had had no breakfast.

This is the account from one torture victim, as relayed to Don Luce by Sister Marianne, one of the Sisters at St. Theresa working with detainees and their families. The girl, Maria Elena Ang, had told the nun:

"Then Major Arsenio Esguerro of the Fifth Military Intelligence Group came in. By this time I was stripped naked and lying on a short table. He signalled the start of the NAWASA session. . . ."



Ang was released after being tortured with the stipulation that she cannot talk to journalists or leave Manila. The only protection Ang and others have is international publicity.



Don Luce, co-director of Clergy and Laity Concerned, filed this report from Manila, Philippines, where he was attending the World Peace through Law human rights convention.

With former U.S. attorney general Ramsey Clark, Luce attempted to visit detention camps, torture and interrogation centers in the Philippines. He was unsuccessful. Firsthand reports and interviews with those who have been tortured, and Luce's account of the brave role of Catholics and the church under the Marcos' dictatorship, provide a grim picture of repression and torture.

