

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

WEB NEWS STORY

Philippine police responsible for torture must be prosecuted

The Philippine government should ensure that police officers responsible for torture shown in a video broadcast on Tuesday in the national media are brought to justice, Amnesty International has said.

A video released to the Philippine media showed a plainclothes police officer torturing a suspect apparently held for petty theft in a police station, as uniformed police officers looked on. The video prompted the authorities to suspend all 11 officers of the Tondo precinct in Manila, who are now under investigation by Manila police authorities.

The footage showed the suspect naked, being yanked by a cord attached to his genitals, and whipped with rope. The anonymous informant who leaked the video told Philippine media that this type of degrading treatment was commonplace in police stations.

“The Philippine police leadership have recently claimed that almost the entire police force have undergone human rights training. However, this message seems to have been lost in practice,” said Donna Guest, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Asia-Pacific.

The Manila police station footage comes in the wake of recent allegations of police torture of five detainees held on suspicion of involvement in the Communist armed insurgency in the northern province of Pampanga. In a media interview while in detention, one of the detainees, Lenin Salas, revealed severe bruising and cigarette burns that he said were results of torture and other ill-treatment by the police.

Amnesty International is urging the Philippine government to investigate these cases under the new Anti-torture Law, passed in July 2009. The government has yet to prosecute anyone under the law.

The Tondo police station case and the Lenin Salas allegations are the first reports of torture under the new administration of President Benigno Aquino.

“This is the right time for the Aquino administration to take a stand against torture, by showing that perpetrators, particularly police officers who have been sworn to serve and protect the people, will be prosecuted,” said Donna Guest.

Protection of human rights was one of Aquino’s key campaign promises but Amnesty International is concerned that he has not done enough in the first fifty days of the administration.

For example, rather than establishing the promised “human rights superbody” to conduct investigations on all reported cases of political killings, Aquino’s government has established a ‘Truth Commission’, which will only focus on allegations of corruption by the previous administration, with no remit to examine human rights.