

IN THE KNOW

CHR found Cavite cops, Navy men guilty of rights violations

Inquirer

The Commission on Human Rights (CHR), which began its investigation of the Tagaytay 5 case in June 2006, finally put closure to the 2-year-old complaint on July 4.

In its ruling, the CHR said the Cavite police and the Naval Intelligence and Security Force (NISG) were guilty of human rights violations “involving abduction, unlawful arrest and arbitrary detention.”

The CHR recommended the filing of criminal and administrative charges against the police and the NISG.

The Tagaytay 5 are Axel Alejandro Pinpin, information officer of the farmers’ group Kalipunan ng Magsasaka sa Kabite (Kamagsasaka-ka); Riel Custodio, also a Kamagsasaka-ka member; Aristides Sarmiento, a consultant of several farmers’ organizations; Michael Masayes, a breeder of fighting cocks; and Rico Ybañez, a cockfighting aficionado.

The five men were cruising on a road in Tagaytay City on April 28, 2006, fresh from a meeting with farmers in Cavite to mobilize them for the Labor Day rally in Manila, when a white van blocked their path. Armed men jumped out of the van, barking orders for them to get off.

After being cuffed behind their backs, shoved into the van and blindfolded, the Tagaytay 5 endured three days and three nights of intense interrogation and detention.

Pinpin said in an interview that, with their blindfolds still on, he and his companions were punched and kicked around.

Once they were questioned inside what they suspected to be a firing range. The interrogation was broken by gunfire and taunts of, “You’re next!”

“We thought we were going to be salvaged (summarily executed),” Pinpin said.

On May 1, 2006, the farmers were paraded before the press at the Philippine National Police headquarters in Camp Crame as communist guerrillas out to sabotage the Labor Day rally that day.

They were charged with rebellion on May 5, 2006, and thrown together in a cell at Camp Vicente Lim in Calamba City in Laguna province.

Pinpin swore he and his companions were neither communist New People’s Army guerrillas nor was their group a communist front. “We’re not a front. We’re a legal and legitimate organization,” he said.

Pinpin also said the arresting officers seized an estimated P800,000 in cash from their bags and

pockets, money raised by the group to buy hogs and cows for the farmers' livestock program.

Weeks later, legislators filed House Resolution No. 1244, titled "Resolution urging President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to order the immediate release of [the Tagaytay 5]" and calling on Ms Arroyo to order the dropping of "malicious charges" against the incarcerated men.

The House resolution and Senate calls expressing the same sentiment went unheeded. On Feb. 20, 2007, the Tagaytay 5 started what they dubbed as "Fasting for Justice and Freedom" to demand that their rights to have sunning, bedding, conjugal visits, visitors' area, recreational facilities and regular medical checkup be respected.

The detainees suspended their hunger strike on April 28, 2007, the first anniversary of their arrest, after Pinpin and Custodio collapsed two months into their protest action.

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