



Pastor Berlin Guerrero



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Pastors in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) face on-going harassment

July 2008

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines, a partner Church of The Uniting Church in Australia, needs your continued support, as their Pastors continue to face ongoing harassment! **Pastor Berlin Guerrero** is currently detained at the Cavite Provincial Jail in Trece Martirez City, Philippines where he has been held for over one year. **Pastor Rodel Canja** was abducted and tortured on 6 May 2008, and while being released on 9 May, holds grave fears for his and his family's safety and security.

Background to Incidents:

Pastor Berlin Guerrero was abducted by armed men on May 27, 2007. Pastor Berlin, his wife, Mylene, and their three children were leaving Malaban Church in Laguna City after attending a celebration marking the 59th anniversary of the UCCP. He was initially missing for 12 hours, during which his military and police captors tortured him, demanding that he confess to being an official of the Communist Party of the Philippines and give information about family members and leaders of church, labour, and peasant organizations. He was threatened with his wife and children suffering the same fate if he did not cooperate.

"When my husband Pastor Berlin was ripped from our family's arms by plain-clothed men on our way home from Church one-year ago, I had no idea how our lives would be uprooted. At first I was unspeakably afraid that Pastor Berlin would be killed and that I would never see him again. When he was surfaced under the custody of the police, I was so happy to see my husband alive. Over one year has passed and our fight for Pastor Berlin's freedom is not yet over. We are determined to fight for justice, for Pastor Berlin and all victims of human rights violations," says Mylene Guerrero, wife of Pastor Berlin.

The persecution of Pastor Berlin Guerrero has dramatically affected his three children Julian (18yrs), Lora (16yrs), and Jairus (14yrs). Due to security concerns, the family has been dislocated and two children were forced to stop their schooling. The stress and trauma has impacted the family. The torturers threatened to sexually assault Pastor Berlin's wife and teenage daughter in front of him; even with counselling and support, Lora remains traumatized. The youngest son Jairus had emergency surgery when he experienced life-threatening intestinal adhesions; this complication of an abdominal surgery in infancy was also likely induced by stress and trauma from the last year.

The UCCP and other organizations petitioned the Supreme Court to order Pastor Berlin's immediate release given that there is no legal basis for his arrest. Thirteen months after his abduction a resolution from the Supreme Court of the Philippines on the petition to quash the warrant of arrest for Pastor Berlin and for his immediate release, the UCCP were notified on 25 June 2008 that the Supreme Court has remanded the case to the Philippine Court of Appeals (the country's second highest judicial court, after the Supreme Court of Appeals), for a more thorough examination of the facts in Pastor Berlin's case.

"This signals another long wait for the freedom of Pastor Berlin and for the justice and truth to come out. Let us continue to pray for his release, even as we remain uncowed by the threats and harassments that the forces of evil continue to unleash among our people who are just defending their right to life and liberty".
Rev. Ephraim Guerrero, UCCP Pastor and brother of Pastor Berlin.

On 6 May 2008 **Pastor Rodel Canja** (aged 25) was about to attend the Annual Conference of the UCCP Northeast Southern Tagalog Conference. Just after 9am a van stopped in front of him. One man casually invited him to ride in the van and warned him not to ask any questions. Inside the van, another man pointed a gun at him while the man who invited him to ride in the van placed a handkerchief soaked in a chemical in his nose that left him unconscious. When Pastor Rodel regained consciousness, he found himself in a room. For

four days, up to four men alternately interrogated him about Pastor Berlin Guerrero and two other UCCP Pastors. While clicking their guns, the men repeatedly asked Pastor Rodel to confirm that Pastor Berlin was a member of the "P" (Communist Party of the Philippines). At one point, Pastor Rodel heard a gunshot and thought that he was finished. His abductors chorused in laughter while his mind went blank. On 9 May, Pastor Rodel's abductors warned him that "many things can happen to his siblings" if he tells his family and others about what they did to him. Then they blindfolded him and loaded him into a van. While inside the van, his abductors talked about plans to murder him instead of dropping him off alive somewhere. It was already dark when they finally released him. Before leaving, his abductors again told him to remember their warnings.

In those four days, Pastor Rodel feared that he would be shot dead. Though he was not severely tortured physically, he has to battle with deep psychological trauma and continuing fear for his life and the safety of his parents and siblings. The images of the men playing with their guns on him have been etched in his mind. Pastor Rodel Canja was the former roommate and co-worker of Pastor Berlin, and even before the abduction of Pastor Berlin in May 2007, Pastor Rodel has also been a victim of harassment and interrogation about Pastor Berlin.

The recent abduction of Pastor Rodel and the abduction of Pastor Berlin last year fall into the pattern of persecution by the security forces against critics of government corruption and human rights violations. Consistent with various groups, including media groups and Church institutions being branded as 'enemies of the state,' these Pastors have been abducted, tortured and interrogated as alleged members of the Communist Party of the Philippines. It appears Pastor Rodel was abducted in the interest of the security forces to continue their attempts to press charges against Pastor Berlin and other church workers whom they perceive to be "enemies of the state." From 2001 to present, 27 church people including 20 UCCP pastors and lay workers have been victims of extra-judicial killings.

What you can do:

Write polite and respectful letters to (an airmail letter to the Philippines will cost \$1.35 using a stamp marked 'International Post'):

<p>Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo President of the Republic of the Philippines Malacañang Palace JP Laurel Street San Miguel, Manila NCR 1005 Philippines E-mail: corres@op.gov.ph</p> <p>Salutation: <i>Your Excellency</i></p>	<p>The Hon. Raul M. Gonzalez Secretary, Department of Justice Republic of the Philippines Padre Faura Street Manila NCR 1004 Philippines E-mail: sad@doj.gov.ph</p> <p>Salutation: <i>Dear Secretary</i></p>	<p>The Hon. Leila M. De Lima Chairperson, Philippine Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines SAAC Building Commonwealth Avenue UP Complex, Diliman 1104 Quezon City, Philippines</p> <p>Salutation: <i>Dear Chairperson</i></p>
<p>Mr. Gilberto C. Teodoro, Jr. Defense Secretary Department of National Defense Room 301, DND Building, Camp Aguinaldo EDSA, 1110 Quezon City Philippines E-mail: opla@dnd.gov.ph</p> <p>Salutation: <i>Dear Secretary</i></p>	<p>His Excellency Ernesto H. De Leon Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Philippines to the Commonwealth of Australia Embassy of the Philippines PO Box 3297 Manuka ACT 2603</p> <p>Salutation: <i>Your Excellency</i></p>	

Points to make in your letter/s:

- Express concern at the continued human rights violations against UCCP clergy and members, and specifically (most recently) the abductions of Pastors Berlin Guerrero and Rodel Canja;
- Express deep concern at the continued detention of Pastor Guerrero;
- Acknowledge that the Supreme Court's decision to defer the matter to the Philippine Court of Appeals means a significant delay in the possible release of Pastor Guerrero, and more stress to Pastor Guerrero and his family as he waits in detention;
- Ask for the immediate and unconditional release of Pastor Guerrero, as the charges against him appear politically motivated; and
- Ask what progress has been made to bring the abductors of Pastor Guerrero and Pastor Canja to justice.