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We are writing to convey our concern at the murder of local official and environmentalist Elpidio de la Victoria, and to urge protection for his colleague Antonio Oposa, Jr. On April 12, 2006 de la Victoria was shot four times outside his home, in front of his family, and died of his injuries the next day.

Both men had long worked on environmental conservation and in recent years had been engaged in the protection of the Visayan Sea. They had recently called for an end to commercial fishing in the area. Soon after, according to reports, a one million peso reward was offered for their killings.

De la Victoria and Oposa appear to have been targeted for their efforts to protect the environment and the economic and social rights of Philippines citizens. Oposa mounted the legal challenge that bears his name, *Oposa vs. Factoran*, which led to a landmark decision recognizing the standing of children to challenge forestry policies on the basis of intergenerational equity. The outcome of that case put the Philippines in the forefront of trends in environmental law and economic and social rights.

Human Rights First appreciates the progress made to date, including the creation of a task force and the arrest of the alleged “trigger-man,” an off-duty policeman later identified by witnesses. We also understand the mayor of Cebu City announced a reward for the arrest of whoever was behind the killing. However, a review of past cases raises concerns that there will in fact be a rigorous investigation and prosecution by police and prosecutors.

Article 12 of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders) calls on states to ensure the protection against any violence, threats, or retaliation, as a consequence of the legitimate exercise the right to participate in peaceful activities.

The state also has clear obligation under Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to protect its citizens from extrajudicial execution.

Oposa and his family must be guaranteed witness protection as provided for in the Act for Witness Protection, Security and Benefit. While protective measures are essential, the only effective long-term method to reduce risk to human rights defenders is to end impunity for those that plan, order, or carry out such attacks. De la Victoria is just the most recent of dozens of human rights activists, labor organizers, environmentalists, journalists, and political party members who have been killed in recent years. Unless the government takes firm action to end impunity and increase protection for human rights defenders and others at risk, this trend will continue at great cost to local communities and to the international reputation of the Philippines.

Thank you for the careful consideration of this case,

Sincerely,



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