

CHAPTER II

DAVAO

Alsa Masa of Davao City, located in southern Mindanao, has been the focal point for much of the public debate over vigilantes. The first significant vigilante force organized after President Aquino took office, Alsa Masa -- which has an armed element -- at first drew widespread criticism for its coercive practices and more serious rights violations, triggering a vigorous national debate over the wisdom of vigilantism.

Today, Alsa Masa remains at the center of public debate, but its image has been substantially rehabilitated. The national government, at first wary of the group because of its reported abuses, now holds forth Alsa Masa as its best argument in defense of vigilantism. In recent years, Davao City has been transformed from a rebel-controlled zone to a stronghold of anti-Communist sentiment, and the government gives Alsa Masa much of the credit for the turnaround. President Aquino seemed to have this in mind when she praised Alsa Masa as a "model in the battle against . . . [the] Communist insurgency" during a visit to Davao last October.

More closely supervised than other vigilante groups examined by the Lawyers Committee, Alsa Masa is also substantially less abusive.⁶⁸ Its behavior has never been as benign as its advocates claim, however. Alsa Masa's activities early on included harshly coercive practices and several instances of extrajudicial execution. Though reported abuses have grown less severe, lawless behavior -- including illegal arrests and acts of extortion -- continue to mar Alsa Masa's record.

A. Origins of Alsa Masa

The origin of Alsa Masa has become steeped in popular legend. The most widely told version traces the group's formation to an incident in the crowded Davao slum district of Agdao in April 1986. Three former communist

68. A number of newer vigilante forces in other regions have sought to capitalize on Alsa Masa's comparatively positive image by using the same name. Many of them have little in common with the Davao group other than the name they borrowed.

rebels, led by a 45-year-old tire dealer named Rolando ("Boy Ponsa") Cagay, are said to have gunned down a notorious rebel assassin, raised their rifles into the air and shouted "Alsa Masa" -- "Arise, masses."⁶⁹ Cagay, himself a former NPA tax collector, reportedly decided to organize Alsa Masa after witnessing the execution by the NPA of another rebel and close friend, Victorio Lamorena, whom the insurgents suspected of being a military agent.

Alsa Masa had an earlier life in Agdao, but its first incarnation did not claim popular support and the group ultimately disbanded. It was founded in early 1984 by Agdao barangay (neighborhood) captain Wilfredo "Baby" Aquino, a staunch Marcos loyalist and anti-communist. At that time, Agdao was so thoroughly controlled by the insurgents that the barangay was known as "Nicaragdao." The larger city of Davao, perpetually wracked by the violence of NPA assassination units, was practically a rebel "liberated zone" and was widely referred to as the NPA's "laboratory." Aquino's Alsa Masa became notorious for its own lawless activities, including liquidations of suspected rebels. It was unofficially disbanded following Aquino's murder by rebel assailants in November 1985.

By the time of Alsa Masa's revival in April 1986, much had changed in Davao and the new group came to life in a more receptive climate. The NPA had expanded rapidly in Davao, and by late 1985 it discovered that its enlarged ranks had been infiltrated by numerous military "deep penetration agents" ("DPAs"). The discovery touched off a violent internal purge; suspected DPAs were summarily executed, and the standard of suspicion was low. The communist leadership would later acknowledge that numerous people were killed in "error," a once supportive population was profoundly alienated, and the rebels retreated from Davao to "cleanse" themselves.⁷⁰ One resident of Agdao recalled,

[The rebels] were like gods here before
The people loved them. But then they started
killing even people who had not done

69. See "Right-Wing Vigilantes Spreading in Philippines," The New York Times, April 4, 1987; "Davao slum gave birth to Alsa Masa," The Manila Chronicle, March 16, 1987.

70. By most accounts, the rebels retreated before Alsa Masa's revival. Thus, while Alsa Masa is sometimes credited with driving the insurgents from Davao, it would be more accurate to say that the vigilante group helped to consolidate the effects of the NPA's purge.

anything -- ice cream vendors, people who sold slippers. We became very angry at them.⁷¹

By April 1986 Davao was a counter-revolution waiting to happen, and Alsa Masa was able to prosper by tapping into the community's deep reservoir of resentment toward the NPA.

It would be a mistake, however, to characterize Alsa Masa's subsequent growth as "spontaneous," as the group's advocates sometimes assert. It took the concerted and nurturing attention of the local Philippine Constabulary Metrodiscom⁷² commander, Lt. Col. Franco M. Calida, to transform what was essentially a small street gang into a significant phenomenon.⁷³

When Calida came to Davao in mid-July 1986, Alsa Masa had fewer than ten members. "I told this group to go forth and multiply," Calida later recalled, and -- under his patronage -- it did. Calida claims that the group has over a million members, and a presence in all of Davao's neighborhoods.⁷⁴

Other factors, some unique to Davao's vigilante experience, contributed to Alsa Masa's growth. In contrast to most of the other vigilante groups examined in this report, Alsa Masa received substantial overt support from the local civilian government, whose coffers produced \$9,000 for the vigilante force. The fledgling force was also bolstered by the patronage of influential members of Davao's business community, including Jesus ("Chito") Ayala, a successful lawyer and key advisor to President Aquino. Additionally, the Department of Local Governments has committed substantial funds to "livelihood projects" for Alsa Masa members.

71. "Right-Wing Vigilantes Spreading in Philippines," The New York Times, April 4, 1987.

72. "Metrodiscom" is an abbreviation for Metropolitan District Command.

73. Calida's predecessor, Lt. Col. Jesus Magno, had opposed Alsa Masa, as had OIC Mayor Zapiro Respicio, and they ordered it disbanded. This policy changed when Calida came to Davao. See "Davao slum gave birth to Alsa Masa," The Manila Chronicle, March 16, 1988.

74. Testimony of Lt. Col. Franco Calida before Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights, January 13, 1988. Calida's high estimate reflects his view that Alsa Masa is synonymous with "the people." "The Alsa Masa are the people," he told a representative of the Lawyers Committee when asked how many members the group had.

B. Recruitment Practices

Equally important, Alsa Masa's recruitment practices have left Davao residents little choice but to sign up. During the early period of its organizing efforts, Alsa Masa members required each household to provide a member for its nightly patrols and menacingly painted homes of non-cooperators with an "X." Lt. Col. Calida expressed Alsa Masa's credo this way:

In the fight between democracy and communism, there is no way to be neutral. Anybody who would not like to join Alsa Masa is a Communist.⁷⁵

Membership in Alsa Masa is mandatory in many barangays, and residents are required to prove their allegiance by purchasing identification cards for a fee. Five pesos appears to be the going rate, but residents are said to be charged as much as 35 pesos in some areas. Lt. Col. Calida told the Lawyers Committee that these cards "help internal control," enabling Alsa Masa patrols to "find out who's not supposed to be there."

Alsa Masa members also reportedly demand substantial financial "contributions" from local businesses. Ethnic Chinese businessmen are said to be taxed most heavily -- as much as 2,000 pesos per month. Davaoenos find a particular irony in this practice: Alsa Masa's levies are now said to rival those imposed by the insurgents they denounce.

The fiery radio broadcasts of Jun Porras Pala, an early supporter of Alsa Masa, played a key role in implementing the group's coercive recruitment and taxation policies. Pala, a former leftist sympathizer who carries a .38 caliber pistol which he says is loaded with cyanide pellets, says he finds inspiration in the examples of Joseph Goebbels and Adolf Hitler. He told a journalist, "I just want to sit back and enjoy my life and experience the Hitler style of propaganda."⁷⁶

During Alsa Masa's formative period, Pala threatened non-believers with retribution over the air. Focusing his

75. "Right-Wing Vigilantes Spreading in Philippines," The New York Times, April 4, 1987.

76. A. Lin Newmann, "Philippines Vigilantes," The Village Voice, September 8, 1987.

vitriol on human rights activists, religious groups and cause-oriented organizations, he warned his enemies:

We will exhibit your head in the plaza. Just one order to our anti-Communist forces, your head will be cut off. Damn you, your brains will be scattered in the streets.⁷⁷

Pala, who later split off from Alsa Masa and formed his own vigilante force, used to defend Alsa Masa's heavy-handed recruitment practices as "harassment for democracy" and its levies as "extortion for democracy." His threats were taken so seriously that when he announced that Tadtad, a notoriously brutal vigilante group, would be mobilized against a community in South Davao City for their alleged support of the insurgents, 200 families evacuated in fear.⁷⁸

Other threats by Alsa Masa members during its early recruitment drives led to even larger evacuations. On May 18, 1987, 2,000 residents of Monte Hermoso, Monte Sunting, Monte Vidio, Nueva Vida Sur and San Isidro were assembled by Captain Chagas. They were told to join Alsa Masa within a week or face the consequences of being branded NPA members or sympathizers. Approximately 90% of the people refused to join, and fled in fear.

Alsa Masa's most menacing recruitment tactics occurred in the earlier stages of its activities. Residents of Davao say, however, that the relative quiescence of more recent times is above all a measure of the extent to which Alsa Masa was able to eliminate manifestations of resistance to its control by instilling fear during its initial period of organizing. They point out that Alsa Masa's presence has made it more difficult for mass organizations to operate in Davao. Residents now hesitate to stage street demonstrations, marches and even progressive plays.

Reports of harassment of suspected "unbelievers" continue, underscoring fears that Alsa Masa members are prepared to resort to coercion to suppress expressions of dissidence. This is not to deny that much of Alsa Masa's support is freely given; the group may well be the most genuinely popular vigilante force in the Philippines. By equal measure however, its broad base of popular support

77. "Right-Wing Vigilantes Spreading in Philippines," The New York Times, April 4, 1987.

78. A. Lin Newmann, "Philippines Vigilantes," The Village Voice, September 8, 1987.

should not obscure Alsa Masa's substantial record of coercive recruitment practices.

C. General Activities

As self-proclaimed guardians of the people against the threat of communism, Alsa Masa has taken various steps to maintain Davao as a "free zone." Group members patrol Davao's neighborhoods, collect intelligence for the military, man checkpoints on roads leading in and out of the area, and notify the military of strangers in their midst. The vigilantes often work closely with the local police and the military in these operations.

The most common complaints concerning Alsa Masa today involve harassment and arrests which human rights lawyers believe are illegal. The former is said to occur fairly often in the form of small-scale extortion at checkpoints manned by Alsa Masa; commercial vehicles and even jeepneys and buses are frequently stopped and their occupants forced to make "contributions." Persons arrested by Alsa Masa are often brought to military barracks or police precincts, where they are held for a day or two and released without being charged. These arbitrary arrests are, in effect, a particular form of harassment.

Arbitrary arrests by the vigilantes appear to receive some encouragement from the local military commander's overly-broad interpretation of the power of citizens' arrests. In a meeting with a representative of the Lawyers Committee, Lt. Col. Calida suggested that membership in the NPA may be considered an ongoing crime. This view would enable Alsa Masa members to arrest virtually anyone thought to be a member of the NPA on the basis that the arrestee was committing a crime at the time of the citizens' arrest.

D. Composition of Alsa Masa

Several aspects of Alsa Masa's membership are noteworthy. As the foregoing account of the group's formation suggests, its core members were former NPA rebels, though their dominance in Alsa Masa has receded as the group's membership has expanded.⁷⁹ By some accounts,

79. Philippine military officials maintain that Alsa Masa attracted numerous rebel "surrenderees," but their accounts of mass surrenders appear to be considerably inflated. In Davao, as in several other regions examined by the Lawyers Committee, it appears that local military authorities have

the founders also included former Deep Penetration Agents, though the Lawyers Committee is not in a position to verify this.

The group has also attracted no small number of criminal elements. Lt. Col. Calida openly admits this, but dismisses concerns that their membership poses dangers to the community. A memorandum about Alsa Masa signed by Lt. Col. Calida in December 1986 contains the following observations:

It is a fact . . . that some of the members have criminal and other derogatory records. Being in depressed areas and considered to be living below the poverty line, we cannot expect that they should strictly adhere to the moral values in the same way to those who belong to the middle and upper class of our society. This social offense can be considered minor compared to the terrorism of the CPP/NPA which is void [sic] of morality.

Calida also admits that fanatical religious sects have been incorporated into Alsa Masa.⁸⁰ The most notorious of these is known as Tadtad, which means "chop-chop" -- a reference to the group's characteristic practice of hacking its victims to death with bolo knives, a kind of machete.⁸¹

The most controversial aspect of Alsa Masa has, however, been its armed element. At first, military officials denied that Alsa Masa was armed,⁸² but the domestic and international press was replete with observations to the contrary, and visitors to the office of Lt. Col. Calida reported seeing him handing out arms to the vigilantes.

staged ceremonies in which peasants were forced to confess to -- and publicly renounce -- NPA membership. A Philippine human rights group that visited Davao in March 1987 found that persons forced to "surrender" in public ceremonies were mainly poor residents who were "forced to sign their names on a sheet of paper admitting their membership in the NPA." Those included on one list of "surrenderees" were found to be mostly children, some as young as seven years old. Whole towns and villages have been reported to surrender in this fashion, and to join the ranks of the Alsa Masa.

80. See testimony of Lt. Col. Franco Calida Before Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights, January 13, 1988.

81. Abuses by Tadtad groups in various provinces figure prominently in the chapters of this report.

82. "Military Denies Arming Alsa Masa in Davao," Radyo ng Bayan, March 12, 1987.

These reports seemed, at first, to place Alsa Masa squarely outside the zone of officially-sanctioned conduct; President Aquino's early pronouncements on the subject of vigilantes stressed that they must be unarmed.⁸³ Significantly, she withheld her endorsement of Alsa Masa during a visit to Davao in late March 1987 in which she publicly praised a vigilante force which claims to be unarmed.⁸⁴

Although the President continues to favor unarmed vigilantes, the national government has come to accept that vigilante groups may have an armed element, essentially consisting of persons otherwise authorized to bear firearms.⁸⁵ Alsa Masa's supporters thus no longer deny that the group has an armed element; they argue that the arms-bearing members have proper authorization.

This point, too, has been hotly controverted. When Lt. Col. Calida testified before a Senate Committee in mid-January 1988, he was repeatedly pressed about controls on arms distributed to members of Alsa Masa. Senator Ernesto Maceda, for example, expressed concern that Alsa Masa "could be used as a means by even criminal elements to license their unlicensed firearms."⁸⁶ Senator Ernesto Herrera said that he had observed during visits to Davao that firearms from particular neighborhoods are pooled and distributed each night to members of the neighborhood patrol without regard to who is licensed to bear arms.⁸⁷

Lt. Col. Calida's main defense against charges relating to Alsa Masa's armed element is that this component consists of members of the Civilian Home Defense Force (CHDF), a civilian militia that operates under military supervision. He told the Senate Committee that, after screening applicants to the armed component of Alsa Masa, he "recommend[s] them to become members of the CHDFs in order to authorize them" to be trained and then to bear arms.⁸⁸

This defense of Alsa Masa's use of arms has raised as many questions as it has answered, however. As noted in Chapters I and IX, the Constitution adopted in February 1986 directs that the CHDF, which became notorious for

83. See Chapter IX.

84. See *id.*

85. The apparent discrepancy between President Aquino's statements and other manifestations of government policy is addressed in Chapter IX.

86. Hearings before Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights, January 13, 1988.

87. *Id.*

88. *Id.*

human rights violations during the Marcos era, be dismantled. During the January hearings, a representative of Senator Aquilino Pimental underscored the paradox of Lt. Col. Calida's policy, saying to the witness:

Speaking as an ordinary Filipino citizen, I am made to understand that one of the cornerstones of the new government would be the dismantling of the CHDF. But from the proceedings of your testimonies this morning, it appears that in Davao, at least, there seems to be no attempt or no move for the dismantling and, as a matter of fact, there is assumption of a CHDF involvement in home peace-keeping activities.⁸⁹

A particularly controversial aspect of this issue concerns the arming of teenaged members of Alsa Masa. Senator Wigberto Tanada raised this issue with Lt. Col. Calida, saying:

Concerning this matter of firearms, we have on record and we have seen in the newspapers published photographs of Alsa Masa checkpoints where teenagers, children, are shown to be carrying high-powered firearms.⁹⁰

Calida denied this charge, suggesting that "if there are [armed youths], probably in the checkpoints, they were made to pose by some media representatives, I don't know, but it is our policy not to recruit . . . teenagers to be a member of the CHDFs."⁹¹ Numerous credible and responsible journalists have, however, observed armed teenagers manning Alsa Masa checkpoints in Davao.⁹²

Calida admits, however, that children as young as eight years old have been recruited as members of Alsa Masa:

They have helped us a lot especially those 8 to 10 years old because they are utilized as

89. *Id.* (Remark of Teracita Daffon, representative of Sen. Pimental.)

90. *Id.*

91. *Id.*

92. See, e.g., "Cory's Course," *MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour*, January 4, 1988.

our "pasabilis" [lookouts]. The same style as the communists are doing in Davao City before. When there are troops coming in their area then these small children run and warn the enemy about their presence. And in the barangays now, the CHDFs also or the Alsa Masa, through their warning system, utilize also small children.⁹³

E. Extrajudicial Executions

The most serious abuses attributed to Alsa Masa are extrajudicial executions. Most of these occurred during the group's first year of operations; one occurred as recently as late September 1987.

Paul Perdido

On March 9, 1987, Paul Perdido, a 23-year-old dentistry student at the Mindanao Aeronautical and Technical School in Agdao, was shot dead on campus by a group of armed Alsa Masa members. The group entered the campus, firing "indiscriminately," according to one account, and arrested a student leader. Witnesses said that the armed men threatened to kill all of the students who were active in the leftist League of Filipino Students (LFS).

Perdido was in the men's room when the assault began, and as he was going outside a group of armed men jumped over a fence and shot him. Witnesses went to get Dr. Tulio, a university official, to attend to Perdido. When Dr. Tulio arrived at the rest room, Perdido was still alive, but the assailants ordered Dr. Tulio to leave. They shot Perdido again, and took his shoes. It is widely thought that Perdido was killed because the vigilantes mistook him for Larry Baluso, an activist in the LFS.

After the incident, members of Alsa Masa held a dialogue with both students and administrators at the school. Although they did not explicitly admit that they had killed Perdido, they acknowledged that they had made "some mistakes" relating to the incident. They informed the school that it would be notified in advance of future arrests on campus by Alsa Masa members.

93. Testimony of Lt. Col. Franco Calida Before Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights, January 13, 1988.

Although the murder was investigated by both the police and the Davao office of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), no one was arrested, principally because the key witness -- Dr. Tulio -- said he was unable to remember the faces of the assailants.

Vilma Boca and Rogelio Quinola

On May 20, 1986, 20-year-old Vilma Boca and 21-year-old Lolita Quinola were approached outside a house in Sasa, Davao City by Celso "Baludoy" Ramos and Mario "Bobong" Sioco, both former residents of the Panacan Relocation Area.⁹⁴ Earlier that day the women reportedly had collected a debt from Sioco's mother. Brandishing firearms and knives, Ramos and Sioco forced the women to go to the Valderama warehouse. There, Vilma Boca was shot in the head and died instantly; Lolita Quinola was stabbed in the side and shot in the head by Ramos, but survived the attack. By one account, the victims were attacked because they were suspected of being NPA finance collectors.

A complaint was filed against the two assailants before both the Davao branch of the (CHR) and the public prosecutor. The latter dismissed the case, reportedly on the ground that the suspects could not be located. But the two were said to have been seen at a local police station after the complaint was filed.

The two assailants belonged to "Pogi 19," a youth gang operating in Panacan which is said to have committed numerous acts of violence. According to a Philippine human rights group, Pogi 19 operated under the direction of a military intelligence officer, Harry Bumulang. In the fall of 1986, Pogi 19 began to operate more openly in coordination with military units, and by early November it was operating as an Alsa Masa force.

On May 25, 1987 -- almost exactly one year after the attack against Vilma Boca and Lolita Quinola -- this Alsa Masa group tortured and killed Quinola's brother, 24-year-old Rogelio Quinola. The assailants, led by Celso Ramos, took Quinola, an NPA surrenderer, to Ramos's house. They stabbed Quinola with broken bottles, smashed his head with a stone, and finally shot him dead. Throughout the attack, the assailants reportedly shouted,

94. This community was created in the mid-1970s for families uprooted by development projects in their former neighborhoods.

"Informer, informer," suggesting that they doubted the sincerity of Quinola's surrender.

Neighbors who heard the victim's screams were threatened not to give their testimonies to lawyers, the media or human rights organizations. Although a case was filed before the Davao Office of the CHR and the city prosecutor, witnesses have been unwilling to come forward. The family reportedly has been reluctant to press the case after its discouraging experience following the attack against Lolita Quinola. The fiscal dismissed the case, citing insufficient evidence.

Pressure generated by complaints about its abuses apparently led this Alsa Masa group to moderate its lawless behavior, at least for a time. But in April 1987, group members tortured and killed a man whom they had apprehended for stealing a pair of pants from a resident. The victim was tied to a tree, beaten, and then shot in the stomach and head multiple times. The local police picked up Ramos the following day; several days later, he was released -- with gun in hand.

Peter Alderite

If Davao's Alsa Masa is the most prestigious vigilante force in the Philippines, Tadtad is probably the most notorious. Nevertheless, Tadtad members have been integrated into Alsa Masa, and in several provinces it appears that the heavy-handed Tadtad cultists are "brought in" -- sometimes from other provinces -- to persuade recalcitrant populations to organize a local Alsa Masa group. This pattern apparently formed the backdrop to the murder of trade union organizer Peter Alderite in April 1987.

Thirty-one-year-old Alderite was a warehouse clerk at a banana plantation operated by the Lapanday Development Corporation (LADECO) in Mandug, Davao City. Mandug has long been considered sympathetic to the NPA, and its residents resisted organizing an Alsa Masa group. Tadtad was trying to organize an Alsa Masa group in the area, and a group of its members came to LADECO on April 28, 1987 in search of several trade union organizers whom they suspected of supporting the NPA. Peter Alderite, who served on the board of directors of the Lapanday Worker's Union and opposed the formation of vigilante groups, was the first union organizer whom they found. Jun Pala had previously called for the surrender of

six union officers, including Peter Alderite, calling them NPA supporters.

The Tadtad group, led by Leonardo Boco (also known as Commander Liwanag) hacked Alderite to death with bolo knives, and then dragged his corpse to the road, leaving it there as a "warning" to other residents. The other plantation workers were ordered not to touch the body.

The assailants reportedly had been transported to Mandug in military vehicles from a LADECO plantation in Guihing, Digos, Davao del Sur. In Mandug, they were seen in the company of military personnel from the 11th Regional Special Action Force.

During Senate hearings in January 1988, Lt. Col. Calida acknowledged that some Tadtad members had been transferred to Davao (and elsewhere) from other provinces, despite government-issued guidelines confining the operation of citizens' self-defense groups to their own barangays. Responding to a question about this practice prompted by the Alderite case, Calida had this to say: "As you said, [Tadtad] is being transferred from one province to another. Did our law prohibit our people to transfer from one province to another?"⁹⁵

No member of the Tadtad group from Digos has been disarmed or charged with murder, despite the fact that during a radio interview, Leonardo Boco admitted killing Alderite, saying the victim had opposed the formation of vigilantes and was an NPA member. An official investigation into the killing was commenced, but Alderite's family withdrew their complaint when they learned that witnesses were unwilling to come forward. There were as many as 20 witnesses to various stages of the murder, all reportedly too afraid to testify against Peter Alderite's murderers.

Roberto Morade

Although Alsa Masa is a self-proclaimed anti-communist group, its members have committed numerous lawless acts that bear no apparent relation to their cause. The murder of Roberto Morade and shooting of his brother-in-law, Ricardo Cale, reflect the danger of arming ill-disciplined and poorly-supervised citizens.

95. Testimony of Lt. Col. Franco Calida Before Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights, January 13, 1988.

On September 22, 1987, Ricardo Cale was followed home by Roberto Latayada and Ricardo Catahusan, both of whom he had known since childhood. Latayada and Catahusan are described as "thugs," and are known members of Alsa Masa. Drunk, they shouted obscenities and harassed Cale as he walked, and then followed him into his house. Catahusan began to fight with Cale, and as they fought Roberto Morade arrived at the house. Latayada shot Morade, who died instantly. Cale, meanwhile, knocked Catahusan to the ground, whereupon Latayada shot Cale. The bullet entered the left side of his head, hit his teeth and came out his left cheek. Powder burns on Cale's face indicated that he had been shot at close range.

Cale's wife was shot next. A bullet entered her chin and lodged in her collarbone. She was still hospitalized when the Lawyers Committee interviewed Ricardo Cale on October 18, 1987.

Ricardo Cale's father filed a complaint with the local police. He did not notify the military because he believes that it would not be willing to prosecute members of Alsa Masa.

F. Official Support for Alsa Masa: Policy and Reality

Alsa Masa is distinguished from other vigilante groups examined in this report by the extraordinary level of official support it enjoys, both locally and nationally. As noted earlier, the group expanded under the overt patronage of Davao Metrodiscom Commander Lt. Col. Franco Calida (popularly known as the "Godfather" of Alsa Masa), and it has also benefited from local and national government funding. Since President Aquino's endorsement of Alsa Masa in October 1987, it has become the showpiece of the national vigilante movement.

As the preceding account of its practices reflects, Alsa Masa's human rights record has improved over the course of the past year, and this may be due in part to the comparatively high level of supervision it receives from local military authorities. According to Lt. Col. Calida, the armed members of Alsa Masa are supervised by the nearest tactical unit of the Airborne Division of the Philippine Army.⁹⁶

96. Testimony of Lt. Col. Franco Calida Before Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights, January 13, 1988.

Despite the unusually high degree of supervision provided to Alsa Masa, the group's practices diverge in many respects from the national government's guidelines governing vigilante groups. Those guidelines, which are discussed in Chapter IX, set forth various requirements designed to ensure lawful behavior by vigilante groups.

A key provision of the guidelines limits the right to bear firearms to members of vigilante groups otherwise licensed to bear arms. Control over firearms among Alsa Masa's members appears to be uneven, however. On the positive side, Lt. Col. Calida has at times arrested vigilantes bearing arms illegally.⁹⁷ He is also said to make genuine efforts to ensure that persons receiving arms are members of the CHDF. But he also reportedly is lax in supervising CHDF members once they receive arms, and rifles apparently circulate freely to unlicensed carriers. As noted earlier, even teenaged members of Alsa Masa are widely reported to bear arms.

The guidelines also require that vigilantes who violate the law must be prosecuted.⁹⁸ Yet, as our discussion of extrajudicial executions committed by Alsa Masa reflects, prosecutions have been consistently thwarted, in large part because witnesses are intimidated.

In various other respects, there is a wide divergence between the guidelines and the practices of Davao's Alsa Masa:

- The guidelines insist that vigilante groups must be "exclusively for self-defense"⁹⁹ and cannot operate offensively¹⁰⁰; Lt. Col. Calida does not deny that Alsa Masa members accompany the military on offensive operations;
- The guidelines require that membership in vigilante forces "must be purely voluntary,"¹⁰¹ and President Aquino has also stressed this; coercion has been the hallmark of Alsa Masa's recruitment practices;
- The guidelines provide that potential members of vigilante groups must be screened "to weed out criminal elements"¹⁰², although Lt. Col. Calida

97. See, e.g., Davao Mirror, December 17, 1987.

98. Guidelines on Civilian Volunteer Self-Defense Organizations [hereinafter "Guidelines"], Art. IV.B.

99. Id., Art. IV.A.

100. Id., Art. IV.C.

101. Id., Art. IV.A.

102. Id.

claims he does this,¹⁰³ he has also conceded that
Alsa Masa's members include known criminals¹⁰⁴,
and

- The guidelines provide that vigilante groups may not operate outside their own or adjoining barangays¹⁰⁵; while Lt. Col. Calida has said that this provision is respected, he also has defended the importation of Tadtad cultists from Davao del Sur to Davao.¹⁰⁶

Having held forth Alsa Masa as the "model" for other vigilante groups, the national government might have been expected to take special care to ensure that the group scrupulously adhered to the guidelines embodying official policy. Instead, however, the government has tolerated a wide divergence between practice and policy.

103. See Testimony of Lt. Col. Franco Calida Before Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights, January 13, 1988.

104. See Section D, above.

105. Guidelines, Art. IV.D.3.

106. Both assertions were made during Lt. Col. Calida's Senate testimony in January 1988.