

FREE

The Big Mouth — an AUT Journalism publication

No 17, June 2007



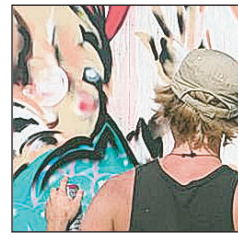
Health protests
Groups march against natural medicines bill

p20



Fishing dangers
Rock fishing safety concerns west coast

p19



Tagging or art?
Differences between vandalism and art form

p31



PHOTO: BELINDA MOORE

Filipino unionist sceptical after death threats

PM's office assured activist can return home safely. Activist not so sure.

By Joseph Barratt

A Filipino trade unionist who took part in recent human rights protests in New Zealand has been promised safety on his return home after intervention by the Prime Minister's office.

However, Dennis Maga remains sceptical about the assurances, after earlier warnings that he was likely to face imprisonment or even death when he returned to the Philippines.

The threats arose after he took part in protests at the recent interfaith talks at Waitangi.

Maga says he came to New Zealand to raise awareness of human rights abuses in the Philippines.

The Waitangi talks were sponsored in part by the Philippines Government.

Maga had earlier locked himself in a cage outside Parliament in Wellington to raise awareness of his cause.

Since 2001, 837 people have been killed in extra-judicial killings in his homeland, he claims.

His high-profile protests resulted in him being warned he would be arrested on arrival back in the Philippines.

"I called my family because it was my son's

first birthday. Then my father came on the line and told me that it is not safe to return." Maga believed he would be either arrested on arrival or taken away and killed.

However, Helen Clark's office has now given him assurances there is no danger waiting for him.

A spokesperson for the Prime Minister told online news site *Scoop*: "New Zealand's ambassador to the Philippines sought clarification from senior Philippines officials and was told there are no charges pending against Mr Maga and no warrant has been issued for his arrest."

Shortly afterwards, Crispin "Ka Bel" Beltran, a 74-year-old Filipino congressman in prison in the Philippines, was released. Human right groups say he was imprisoned unconstitutionally last year using manufactured evidence.

Maga, who is also a spokesperson for the Free Ka Bel movement, said the political detainee's release encouraged him.

But he says he remains sceptical over the assurances obtained by Clark's office and is spending another week in New Zealand looking further at the issue before he risks travelling home.

Recent reports by both the United Nations

continued on page 7...

Take another look at eye surgery risks, urges sore patient

By Angela Norton

A woman who suffers from severe "dry eye" after undergoing laser surgery is urging other patients to ensure they know the procedure's possible complications and side effects.

Since having a \$5000 operation in 2004, Ruawai resident Dorothy Simpson's short-sightedness has been corrected, but she now suffers from sore and inflamed eyes.

She says it often feels like she has a foreign object in her eye, her night vision has become blurry and she has difficulty keeping her eyes open.

Dry eye happens when the eye's natural ability to produce tears is reduced or lost. While it is rarely sight-threatening, it

can be very uncomfortable.

Simpson says her eyes felt normal before the laser surgery, more commonly known in New Zealand as Lasik.

She now needs gel-like eye drops and wrap-around glasses to provide relief. Although she knew she would still need reading glasses, she didn't think she would end up with another pair to combat dry eye.

"If you have to wear wrap-around glasses, you're back to where you were before the operation," she says.

Simpson says despite all the Lasik success stories, patients need to pay close attention to complications and side effects.

"You only get one set of eyes and I think it's not a decision to be taken lightly."

Auckland Eye Institute dry

eye specialist Dr Trevor Gray, who does Lasik procedures but did not perform Simpson's surgery, says he tells all Lasik patients they will have dry eyes to some extent following surgery.

"Everyone's eyes are slightly drier after the laser treatment because of the way the nerves are cut," he says.

"The vast majority, 95 per cent, will settle down within three months, wean off the drops and then be happy. Only a minority will develop ongoing issues."

He says some patients are more susceptible to dry eye following Lasik, including older people, females, those taking certain medications such as birth control pills and anti-depressants, and those undergoing hormone replacement therapy.



PHOTO: ANGELA NORTON

DOROTHY SIMPSON

Simpson says she was not warned of her increased risk, which existed because of her age, gender and post-menopausal state.

Dr Gray says he definitely warns patients of these risks in pre-surgery consultations.

His colleague, Dr Peter Ring, performed Simpson's surgery.

He says if she came to him for Lasik today with the same pre-existing circumstances, he would still not give her specific warning for chronic dry eye risk because he believes her results to be unique.

Simpson says she is surprised dry eye is not properly tested for before the operation.

Dr Gray says dry eye is not routinely checked because the tests have proved to be unpredictable in identifying people with a significant problem.

"You can do [the tests] but most people regard them as so variable they have little role," he says.

continued on page 2...

