

This is the story of Andrea Rosal, who was arrested on 27 March while 7 months pregnant. She delivered a baby girl, Diona on 17 May, who tragically passed away a day later due to respiratory problems. I had the chance to interview her not even 24 hours later, and this article is the result of this interview. Also included is a small interview with Dr. Beng Rivera-Reyes, who was one of Andrea's attending doctors during her imprisonment.



I think that for the non-Filipino readers it's important to give a bit of context on the person of Andrea Rosal, 31 years old. She's (in)famous for being the daughter of Gregorio 'Ka Roger' Rosal, the late spokesperson of the NPA (New People's Army), who avoided being captured by the government until he passed away. As a child, at only 5 years old, she was kidnapped by government forces to put pressure on her father to surrender the armed struggle. However, she herself has never been proven as a member of the NPA or CPP (Communist Party of the Philippines). This didn't stop the NBI (National Bureau of Investigation) and the ISAF (Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces) to enforce her arrest on 27 March on the grounds of murder and kidnapping.

During the arrest, at 7 AM in the morning, she was in the company of a friend and the house owner of her temporary residence. Both were also arrested, even though she was the only one named on the arrest warrant. The agents, composed of both NBI and ISAF agents, were 20 in number and dressed in full battle gear. The entrances to her residence were barricaded by vehicles and agents stormed in the house. Even though the agents were in superior numbers and equipped with state of the art gear, she (remember: 7 months pregnant) was told to 'not fight back'. She describes the experience as being akin to a kidnapping, being completely overwhelmed and taken away to a temporary detention cell. Once locked up, she never got a formal interrogation. She was not even allowed to read the full arrest warrant before it was grabbed away from her. The agents were, at first, very kind for her. This was their tactic to convince her to 'join their side': she was asked nicely to divulge information on her assumed fellow NPA-CPP leaders, despite the complete lack of evidence that she is a member of these organizations. After their attempts turned up with nothing, the treatment changed. The agents showed surveillance pictures of her, some of them months old,

showing that they could have arrested her earlier if they would've wanted. The reason for this was, according to the agents, that there were sure that she would lead them to high-ranked members of the armed rebels. When asked about her arrest, the agents plainly said that it was for political reasons. She was told "It's because you look like your father." The original accusations of murder and kidnapping are vague at best, and most likely false.

She got the (obligatory) tests for pregnant women, including a blood test and an ultrasound, done at the Manila Medical Center and was afterwards thrown into a shared detention cell at the NBI. This cell was shared with 30 other inmates. She filed a demand to the court for immediate hospitalization at Philippine General Hospital, with the help of Human Rights groups such as Karapatan and Health Action for Human Rights, but this was denied for unclear reasons. The need for solid medical attention could be assumed to be very logical, but not so in the case of Andrea Rosal. After a week of detention, she was told to pack her belongings. While it was hinted that she would be transferred to a hospital, she actually got moved to the prison facility of Camp Bagong Diwa in Bitucan, Taguig City (Metro Manila).

Here, the real trouble started. This prison is already a hard place to live in for regular prisoners, but for a pregnant woman it was a living hell. Just about everything was unsuitable for her condition. 31 women, some of them political prisoners but some of them also regular criminals, had to share a small cell intended for 24 inhabitants. The three-storied bunk beds proved to be too uncomfortable for Andrea to sleep on: the sheet metal base of the beds was warped and bended, leaving her no room for her belly. It was actually preferable to sleep on the ground because of this. A problem without such a solution came in the form of food. While it was sufficient, the quality of the food lacked. The staple diet was fish with rice, and usually the fish was undercooked or so poor in quality that it made Andrea (and the other inmates) sick. Fearing the health of her unborn child, she often made it through the day on only rice. The same problem came with water: the water (called 'criminal water' by the inmates) was not potable and very polluted. Even though she boiled the water, diarrhea was unavoidable. Furthermore, the cell was on the 4th floor, was blisteringly hot and had a serious lack of ventilation. Andrea was refused the right to buy an extra fan to cool herself down. The 31 women had to share 2 bathrooms.

The biggest problem for Andrea during her detention however, was the lack of medical attention. Even though she was due for the 3rd or 4th week of May, the medical checkups by the prison doctor were limited to measuring her blood pressure and asking "How do you feel?". The only real medical help came from Health Action for Human Rights, which provides health care to political detainees. Dr. Rivera-Reyes, who looked after Andrea's general wellbeing and Dr. Cruz, who provided obstetric and gynecological aid, would visit her as often as possible. Their work was limited by the prison equipment: no specific tools to examine her pregnancy were available, and they were lucky if basic equipment such as a stethoscope was allowed to be brought in. Andrea suffered from a weak stomach and was affected by rashes. While medication was prescribed, the prison's nurses actually refused to give it as they told her she was 'lying' and she had caused it herself, or that it would go away without medication.

On the 15th of May, after 6 weeks of detention, a judge finally approved her request for hospitalization as she had begun to experience contractions. In the evening, she was transferred to the Philippines General Hospital in Manila. There, she was told that she didn't have records in the hospital and that she could thus not be admitted. They arranged laboratory tests and an ultrasound, which is the standard operating procedure. Afterwards, she was taken back to jail, only to be

brought back to the hospital the following day. At 11PM in the evening, she went into labor. It was difficult delivery, as it took 8 hours for the baby to be born. At 7 AM on May 17, Diona was born.

As I didn't want to ask Andrea details about the daughter she just lost, I later contacted Dr. Beng Rivera-Reyes. While she did not treat Diona, she could share some of the complications that happened after her birth. The baby was delivered not breathing and not moving, although there was a heartbeat. The baby was resuscitated, connected to a respirator and taken to the intensive care unit. However, the lack of oxygen had caused too much damage, and Diona's condition further worsened over the following hours. In the morning of the 18th, the hypoxemia had caused her to start seizing, implying brain damage. By the early afternoon, the heart stopped beating and after attempts to resuscitate, she was declared dead just past 4PM.

When asked about the correlation between the conditions in which Andrea had been suffering the last 7 weeks and the condition of the baby upon birth, Dr. Rivera-Reyes could not say with certainty that it had caused the baby's death. However, she stated "Even if the baby was delivered healthy, the conditions in which Andrea Rosal had to live have been a disgrace. She was not in the proper environment for a pregnant woman, she did not get the necessary nutrition. And without a doubt, the unreasonable delay after her request for hospitalization at the beginning of April and the unacceptable requirements that were imposed to finally allow her to be brought to a hospital, have not improved her situation. The AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) says they are innocent concerning the death of Diona, but at the very least they are responsible for the condition of Andrea and the environment she was put in."

Even during the interview with Andrea, we were under the watchful eye of her prison guards. A full rotation of 8 guards, 2 of them armed with submachine guns, makes sure that this woman, who just lost her baby, doesn't leave her room. After Diona was delivered, she was taken to the Intensive Care Unit. Andrea had to request her guards to let her visit her baby, so she could at least see her. Following Diona's passing, she once again had to request to be able to see her daughter before she was taken to the morgue. She asked that a picture be taken with her daughter, their first and last since the baby was born. Both times she was handcuffed to walk the short distance and accompanied by all 8 members of the team. There's always at least 1 guard present in the room, often more as the room is equipped with air conditioning and they find this a good place to rest from their duties. The night following her loss, all 8 guards were in her room talking loudly or playing with their cellphones, disrupting her sleep and making it unable to grieve in private.

Diona's wake will be at the Iglesia Filipina Independiente across the Philippine General Hospital where Andrea is confined. Andrea through her lawyers at the National Union of People's Lawyers has asked the court to allow her to attend the wake and burial of her daughter. At the same time, the Free Andrea Rosal Movement will be pushing for her release in what they call a mockery of human rights. When I asked Andrea how she sees the future, she seemed to get a boost of energy and sat upright. "I will continue the struggle. And I will do it for the baby I lost, until I have done all I can in her memory."