CRISIS IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES
Displaced families, traumatized children and hatred:

"I am saddened by the displacement of peaceful families from their area, but sometimes this is the price we have to pay for long-term peace and order," Philippine media sources quoted President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as saying after another wave of displacement had erupted in the southern island of Mindanao. Thousands of residents from the island's central region have fled their homes due to renewed fighting between government and rebel forces. Social welfare officials place the number of displaced at more than 141,000. Most of them are living under cramped conditions in makeshift shelters and evacuation centers throughout four provinces affected by the military campaign. On February 11, 2003, the military launched its latest offensive against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) with the pretexts of quashing lawless elements believed to be under the wing of the MILF. Four days later, newspapers reported that government troops had captured the MILF stronghold in the Buliok Complex.

The price for the long-term solution in Mindanao sought by two successive administrations through the use of military force includes the case of a traumatized 11-year old boy. He had developed a speech impediment and had been traumatized by a bomb explosion near his boat during an aerial attack. The price referred to by President Macapagal-Arroyo includes the breeding of hatred between young, impressionable Christian and Moslem minds. After being asked whether he would treat a Moslem if he ever became a doctor, a Christian pupil expressed hatred, saying that he would even kill him. In response to the same question, a Moslem pupil faced his Christian classmate and said “Never. I will also kill you!” These cases of traumatized and unfortunate children are among those reported by the Balik Kalipay Program, one of the projects of the Psychosocial Trauma Program of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP-CIDS PST). Balik Kalipay (Return to Happiness) Program has been documenting the effects of psychosocial trauma among villagers, who have suffered much after decades of armed conflict. Dr. June Pagapatan Lopez, head of the project supported by the Danish government, the British relief agency Oxfam, and a local aid group composed of businessmen, said that the “displacement and disruption” have gravely affected the mental well-being of the villagers, especially children caught in the crossfire.

"When lives and properties are lost in wars, they are irretrievable. What should not be lost is the sense of hope that survivors, especially children, must have if they are to go on," said Lopez. Meanwhile, Social Welfare Secretary Corazon Soliman said that social workers and counselors are conducting play therapy for children in evacuation centers. "The main goal is to ensure that psychological trauma is not a lasting effect for children."

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Children and young people are the first to suffer in armed conflict situations. An television coverage of the plight of the displaced people in Pikit showed a teen-age Mindanao girl who said that she had grown accustomed to evacuating her village and living for months in the crowded evacuation centers. After recalling how her family evacuated their home during military offensives against the MILF in 2000 and 2001, she expressed wishes that her younger siblings did not have to witness war. She wished that they did not have to witness hardships like she had while living in the centers. While being interviewed, she was carrying her younger brother on her lap. Both were seated just outside their tent-like dwelling area that offered little privacy and comfort for her family. The children documented by the Balik Kilata Program and the media, are paying a heavy price in the government’s latest offensive against the MILF to achieve the elusive dream of lasting peace and order in Mindanao. Suffering from what Lopez called the “invisible wounds of the war,” they, their families, relatives, and members of their communities are suffering from deep emotional scars – the legacy of violence that will remain even after the last bullet had been fired. (MPP)

References: “War in southern Philippines leaves long-lasting emotional scars” 02.11.03. Oliver Times, AP (http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story6&u=20030211/bp_www_en_gvls_gm_phil), the ABS-CBN news coverage of the war in Mindanao aired 02.25.03, and the “MPC Statement on the Pikit Crisis” issued 02.10.03. Mindanao Peoples Caucus (http://idnet.org/pag/mindayki-crisis.html).

MINDANAO WAR AND THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS: Filipino youth sues for peace

“We regret that while the world – and our leaders in Manila – are focused on the impending war in the Middle East, war has again virtually broken out in our beloved Mindanao,” reads the statement by the grassroots organization Mindanao Peoples Caucus urging the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to end the war raging in the Central Mindanao region. The conflict came at the time when the world faces the threat of a global war as a result of the tension between Iraq and the United States. The war erupted in the town of Pikit in North Cotabato, a day after President Joseph Estrada has appealed to world leaders to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Still unable to recover from the destructive secessionist war that erupted in the early 1970s, many areas in Central Mindanao became the scenes of tense fighting between the government and MILF rebels in 1997, 2000, and 2001. During the “all-out war” waged by then-President Joseph Estrada in 2000, tens of thousands of refugees swamped the town center of Pikit, North Cotabato province. The situation created nearly impossible demands for food and sanitation. A statement by the grassroots umbrella Mindanao Peoples Caucus reads: “That nightmare is back in Pikit nearly two years later.” Strongly calling upon the government and the MILF to stop the war, the MPC reminded both parties “that the biggest victims in the 2000 war were not your combatants, but the civilians who lost family members, farm animals and crops, houses and properties, the innocence of our children.”

During her several years of practice in multicultural Manhattan, a German-American psychotherapist born after World War II by the name of Dr. Margret Ruefller earned valuable deep insights into the psyches of clients of various nationalities including Jews and people of European descent, including the children of Holocaust survivors. In one of her therapy sessions, she came in touch with her “inherently unconscious German national heritage” of World War II and the Holocaust through a young Jewish man whose father came from Germany. “Exploring this,” Dr. Rueffler said, “I found that my personal German heritage moved me deeply. For several years I struggled to accept my previously unacknowledged and unknown guilt and embarrassment of being German.” According to Dr. Rueffler, the recognition and personal experience of that inherited psychological pattern allowed her to “understand the influence of collective patterns and trauma on the individual as well as the reciprocal influence each individual experiences, via thoughts and actions, on the collective,” with the influence being either positive or negative.

The awareness and recognition of deep wounds in the soul of a nation as a result of the trauma of war gave the German-American transpersonal psychologist the opportunity to view the behavior of a nation from a different perspective. Her profession allowed her to research and to explore behavioral and international patterns, prevention and the healing of national traumata, and to understand national collective processes. From these, came her “The Psychology of Nations,” which she described as a holistic model that views the individual as an intrinsic part of an collective.

As a wider framework for multiple applications, she explains that “The Psychology of Nations” is “based on the inner attitude of honoring the “Self” with its inherent developmental and evolutionary potential as the center and depth of an individual as well as of nations.” This allows the healthy integration of individuals into their respective nations. She says that this “inner awareness can and inevitably transform deeply rooted national patterns, leading to changes in the quality of life for both the individual and the collective. “A nation’s psychological heritage, individual as well as collective, is lived and expressed in the nation’s current concerns, activities, and choices,” says Dr. Rueffler. She maintains that an understanding of the interconnection between the individual and the collective and the power of individuals to influence the latter are basic to the transformation of the unconscious of the national collective. “This very understanding,” she explains, “brings with it an appreciation of the importance of individual choice and the assessment of the laws and principles that govern a nation’s development.”

Dr. Rueffler says that “The Psychology of Nations” researches the national psyche as a living system, its development, psychological history, collective trauma and national consciousness as a whole. It emphasizes the prevention of violence, assessment of multi-ethnic tensions, their mechanisms and manner of development. Her Psycho-Political Peace Institute and Foundation, which works internationally in community training for positive transformation in pre-crisis cultures and areas of tension, conducts seminars that familiarize participants with the values of compassion, empowerment, choice and self-help – the four values psychological principles outlined by “The Psychology of Nations”. In cooperation with individuals and with sponsoring organizations, the Psycho-Political Peace Institute and Foundation has been conducting projects working in location with multi-ethnic groups for the prevention and treatment of violence and collective trauma based on these four values. It has held projects in the Republic of Georgia and in Indonesia. Dr. Rueffler, who has published several books in different languages, is currently working in Bali, Indonesia to support the local people in the aftermath of the October 12 bombing in the tourist district of Kuta. (MPP)

References: The Psychology of Nations handout given during a forum held on February 10, 2003 in Quason City, Philippines and in cooperation with the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP-CIDS) and Center for Health and Creative Arts (CHARCA). For more information about the seminars under “The Psychology of Nations” approach and the Psycho-Political Peace Foundation, please visit the webpage: http://www.pcpp.net or send an e-mail to found@cppp.net.
BURMA:
One of the world’s worst places for boys

Burma enjoys the hideous distinction of having the largest number of child soldiers on the planet. Although the military and opposition groups of this Southeast Asian country are excluded from the infamous list of 20 state and non-state actors annexed to the UN Secretary General’s report on child soldiers, With twenty percent or more of its estimated 350,000 soldiers may be under-18s, the Burmese army has been known to forcibly recruit children as young as eleven. Opposition groups operating in the country like the United Wa State Army, Shan State Army (South), Karen National Liberation Army, and the Karen Army have also been known to recruit children as soldiers. Human Rights Watch estimates the number of child soldiers in Burma to be as high as 70,000. Although party to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, Burma has yet to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol, “Burma has a poor human rights record, and its record on child soldiers is the worst in the world,” says the Children’s Rights Division of Human Rights Watch.

The country is undoubtedly one of the world’s worst places for children, boys in particular. “To be a boy in Burma today means facing the constant risk of being picked up off the street, forced to commit atrocities against villagers, and never seeing your family again,” said Jo Becker of the Children’s Rights Division. Frightening public places and with its services reportedly paid in cash or rice, recruiters for the armed forces often forcibly take boys and send them to camps for training. With no hope to contact their families, many of the recruits face torture and even death if they dared to run away. Testimonies of former child soldiers contained in the Human Rights Watch report “My Gun Was As Tall As Me” attest to the severe hardships and human rights abuses that surround the lives of the children recruited by the state and non-state players in Burma. Based on interviews with more than 36 former and current child soldiers, the report, released in October last year, attests to the totally unacceptable situation in Burma.

One of the Burmese boys recalled how he and around 60 other young recruits were stripped naked and huddled in a tiny room and subjected to routine beating and inhuman living conditions. Ten of the children were only 13 years old. A younger child recounted how by one of the armed groups recalled his experiences in the battlefield where he saw three of his companions killed. Under international laws, the recruitment of children into the national armies or armed forces is recognized as a war crime. Condemned to be one of the worst forms of child labor, the recruitment of under-18s into the Burmese armed forces and the 19 multi-ethnic opposition groups remains unabated. The international community and human rights groups such as the Human Rights Watch have repeatedly issued calls upon Rangoon and the armed opposition groups for an immediate end to the recruitment of children into their ranks and desbalization. The Burmese government has meanwhile persistently denied the forcible recruitment and use of child soldiers. It has dismissed the alarming report issued by the Human Rights Watch, referring to the findings as “preposterous,” “unsubstantiated,” and “malicious.” Nonetheless, the child recruits of Burma are still being subjected to the deplorable conditions and are forced to commit atrocities against civilians.

A top-level military official told a leading Philippine newspaper that it would be difficult to spare, much less rescue, children involved in the fighting that has erupted between government troops and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the southern island of Mindanao. Armed Forces of the Philippines Southern Command chief Lt. Gen. Narciso Abaya told the Inquirer that some of the MILF rebels were guilty of violating a peace-accord signed in December. A government spokesman has meanwhile denied the allegation. The explosion comes after peace monitors in Aceh reported that both the Indonesian military and Aceh separatists were guilty of violating a peace-accord signed in December. A government spokesman has meanwhile denied the allegation. The explosion comes after peace monitors in Aceh reported that both the Indonesian military and Aceh separatists were guilty of violating a peace-accord signed in December.

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Meanwhile, a week after the encounter, MILF Chair Hashim Salamat, in a taped radio message told followers with firearms to fight to the end. “We are pushed to the wall, we have to fight back,” said Salamat. “All who have firearms must fight till death.” Despite a previous pronouncement by the MILF that it was not enlisting individuals below 18 year old into their ranks, there have been many reports that the secessionist group was training young combatants. These included young girls. After running over the MILF stronghold in Pilik, North Cotabato, government troops found photographs of children in uniform and brandishing guns. The MILF leader’s appeal throws further doubt on the fate of the child combatants in Central Mindanao.

Social Welfare Secretary Corazon Soliman urged the military to rescue child soldiers of the MILF instead of engaging them in battle. She told them to undertake rescue operations to take children out of the situation. She also appealed to the MILF to stop using children in the war that has displaced thousands of agricultural families in Central Mindanao. Soliman said that she would raise the issue of child soldiers with the government and the MILF in the peace negotiations. The DSWD secretary also said that she would lead the filing of cases against the MILF if it were found that the group was using child combatants. The raging conflict in Central Mindanao is a test to the Philippines’ adherence to the national and international instruments for the release or rescue, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. This includes the adherence to the Optional Protocol, ratified by Philippine Senate in April 2003, as well as the faithful implementation of an inter-agency Memorandum of Agreement signed in March 2000 between the military, police, and other government agencies including the DSWD for the handling and treatment of child soldiers. (MPP)

Amid appeal for the rescue of child soldiers

Military admits difficulty in sparing child combatants, Rebel chief calls followers to “fight till death”

A top-level military official told a leading Philippine newspaper that it would be difficult to spare, much less rescue, children involved in the fighting that has erupted between government troops and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the southern island of Mindanao. Armed Forces of the Philippines Southern Command chief Lt. Gen. Narciso Abaya told the Inquirer that some of the MILF rebels were guilty of violating a peace-accord signed in December. A government spokesman has meanwhile denied the allegation. The explosion comes after peace monitors in Aceh reported that both the Indonesian military and Aceh separatists were guilty of violating a peace-accord signed in December. A government spokesman has meanwhile denied the allegation. The explosion comes after peace monitors in Aceh reported that both the Indonesian military and Aceh separatists were guilty of violating a peace-accord signed in December.

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North Korean refugees in

Between a hungry homeland or an unsafe future across the border

Two years ago, a gaunt 60-year old North Korean woman risked her life to cross a frozen river in the forbidden mountains into China, only to die in the relentless cold. A Chinese professor who authored a paper on North Korea, fleeing worsening food shortages and repression in the Stalinist regime said that the woman wore clothing that gave her little protection from the cold. She was one of the thousands of subjects of the Hermit Kingdom who risked crossing the unforgiving border to China. Two years ago, aid workers estimated that some 200,000 North Koreans had illegally migrated to northern China but Beijing has imposed stricter measures to prevent their neighbors from the peninsula from entering its borders. That number is estimated to have dwindled to 20,000. In January, Chinese police arrested almost 50 North Koreans attempting to flee to South Korea and Japan by bordering the port city of Van Tien. They have also arrested two South Koreans on suspicions of organized smuggling: Worries over the alleged existence of weapons of mass destruction in North Korea have overshadowed the plight of North Korean refugees in China.

For many North Koreans living in China, the price of getting caught, either by the Chinese authorities or the underground North Korean operatives means certain deportation: International human rights watchdogs, condemned Beijing’s moves to crackdown on North Korean migrants. They said that the North Koreans deserved special protection under international treaties such as the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees. China meanwhile insists that these North Koreans are illegal aliens. Western and local thinkers believe that the measures being undertaken by Beijing stem from worries of a mass exodus of North Koreans into country in the event of the disintegration of the Pyongyang government. Despite the risks involved in crossing the border and facing an unsafe fate in China,Criterion: North Korea border

The children and youth planning to fight

planned development of US troops to another AIG sanctuary, the Sulu Archipelago, particularly on the island of Jolo. On the same day of the large peace rally in Manila, young people in the main town of Jolo demonstrated against the planned deployment of American troops into their island. They held up placards bearing the names of frightful and bloody battles waged by the American colonial forces against their forebears during the first decade of the 1900s, joining hands with adults, they expressed fears that a US troop deployment in Jolo would spark old but bitter memories among the natives. Although they were not even born during the US colonial military campaigns to quell all local opposition to foreign rule, the people still had painful collective memories of a protracted war that began in the 1970s between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Manila.

On March 6, the Balik Kayal Project, which has been doing trauma-healing activities for the war victims of Central Mindanao, spearheaded a different kind of protest action in Pikit. In a psychosocial workshop, children-exaves were given materials and taught how to fly kites for peace. Organizers of the “Fly a Kite for Peace” hoped that all communities of Mindanao would eventually join them in their form of protest that “even the fighter-pilots and the warring men on the field” will see the kites begging for peace. The protest actions in Manila, Jolo and Pikit demonstrated the Filipino children and youth’s strong rejection of war and clamor for peace. More than just protest actions, they were reminders that the children and young people have a right to be heard and a right to determine their future. Through peaceful marches, songs, kids, dances, and the flying of colorful kites, the children and youth sent a compelling message to Bush, Macapagal-Arroyo, and government troops and rebels in Mindanao: No one really stands to gain anything in war. (MPP)

References: “NPC Statement on the Pikit Crisis” issued 02.10.03 Mindanao Peoples Caucus (http://ldnet.org/ewmda/pikit-crisis.htm) "Kite for Peace in Mindanao” 03.03.03 Rony Eliasu TODAY ABS-CBN (http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/abs_news_body.asp?section=Provincial&oid=17395)

On March 5, 2003 bombing of the international airport in the southern Philippine city of Davao. Hamsiraji Sali even issued an apology to the victims of the blast, which had claimed 21 lives and injured 134 others. Sali explained that an ASG operative had failed to enter the airport and placed the bomb at a crowded waiting area. The injured included an undetermined number of children. Survivors of the blast and medical personnel rushing to the scene described the blast as “flooded with blood.” Media sources also reported that the injured included three Americans, one of them a 30-month old baby.

Military authorities meanwhile doubted the claims issued by the ASG and tagged the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as the real culprits of the calamity and cowardly attack, the latest and the worst in a series of explosions to hit the island of Mindanao in recent months. The attack comes after a full in the fighting between government troops and the MILF, which has denied responsibility for the attack. (MPP)

Refereces: “Abus own Davao blast but govt’s blast MILF” 03.06.03 Inquirer News Service (http://www.inq7.net/). “Blood flowed; kids screamed” 03.06.03 Inquirer Mindanao Bureau (http://www.inq7.net/mai/2003/06/03/inquirer_Mindanao_leads_3_1.htm)

Reefugee Studies Centre International Summer School in Forced Migration set for July 2003

The Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford in England announces the holding of the International Summer School in Forced Migration to be held at the University of Oxford on 9-13 July 2003. The school will address the pressing problems of the current global refugee crisis and international developments in the field of refugee law and policy. The school will provide a multidisciplinary forum for a group of 30 students to consider the latest trends in forced migration and refugee studies. The school will explain the latest developments in the field, analyse the current international efforts and the possibility of future developments, and provide students with the necessary tools to be able to conduct independent research.

This school is open to students of all nationalities, and is aimed at advanced undergraduate and early postgraduate students. The school attracts a highly international student body, making it an ideal opportunity for students to network. Students will present their own research in progress in the final week of the school. A limited number of grants are available to cover the cost of the course for those who would otherwise be unable to attend. Applications for the course should be made before 24 May 2003. Further information is available from the RSC website (http://www.oxfordsoc.org/summer_school/).