

Regional Emergency



PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK

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REGIONAL EMERGENCY PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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Regional Emergency Psychosocial Support Network REGIONAL CONSULTATION WORKSHOP Kicks Off in August

From August 1 to 5, 2004, the Regional Emergency Psychosocial Support Network (REPSN) will conduct a consultation workshop in Tagaytay City, Cavite Province, Philippines. Twenty-eight participants from nine countries from East Asia and the Pacific Region are expected to become part of the workshop, conducted by the network secretariat, University of the Philippines' Program on Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights Program of the Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS PST), with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund – East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF-EAPRO).

The consultation workshop is the first of its kind in the region. It is part of the development of the capability of the East Asia and Pacific Region to provide rapid response in emergency cases. "The regional consultation workshop will focus on the interfacing between alternative healing and indigenous ways of local self-help and mutual support and traditional service delivery," says Dr. Elizabeth Protacio de Castro, Associate Professor and Convenor of the UP CIDS PST. According to her, "These local ways are very relevant, much more meaningful and helpful to the experience of the people of the region and the modules seek to draw out these alternative healing and indigenous ways to compliment traditional service delivery ways." Participants from countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Australia, East Timor, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Cambodia, Vietnam, and the Philippines will be

joining representatives from UNICEF-EAPRO, headed by Reiko Nishijima, Planning Officer – Emergency.

Entitled "Evolving Capacities in Emergency Psychosocial Support in the East Asia-Pacific Region," the five-day consultation workshop is a pre-test of the modules developed by psychosocial support network consultant and Australia-based INMA enabler Dr. Les Spence and the UP CIDS PST. The modules contain training materials, guidelines, methodologies and approaches to be used as reference by people and organizations involved in psychosocial care of children in emergencies. The consultation workshop covers themes ranging from strengthening and evolving culturally appropriate psychosocial support with the community, the assessment of local psychological wellness and resources, and care and support for caregivers. Dr. Les Spence and Mr. Ernie Cloma of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) are the resource persons/facilitators for the consultation workshop. PETA has supported psychosocial action in Mae Sot near the Thai-Burmese

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SPECIAL FEATURE

Refugees in Southeast Asia Protection or Persecution: Families on the receiving end of government reactions

The governments of Southeast Asia continue to face the issue of displacement, and their reactions include the repression or routine expulsion of refugees, migrant workers and asylum seekers. Already affected by displacement, the family is at the heart of these reactions. They may suffer even more in the case of repressive reactions or of inaction by the government of the host or home countries. For fear of being killed by the harsh regime in Burma, opponents of the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), even those identified as their supporters, are forced to stay across the border in India or Thailand. Living in uncertainty, they, like the Achenese refugees in Malaysia, are living with the reality of deportation to their home countries, where they face the possibility of summary execution, forced disappearance, torture, detention, or persecution.

Refugee families

While the international law and the international community call for the protection of refugee and internally displaced families, there are reports that Southeast Asian governments such as those of Thailand and Malaysia are using repressive measures against refugees and illegal aliens. In their report "Aceh Under Martial Law: Problems Faced by Acehnese Refugees in Malaysia", Human Rights Watch (HRW) documents the failure of Kuala Lumpur to offer protection and assistance to refugees from Aceh. The Malaysian government maintains that granting protection to asylum seekers from Aceh would open a floodgate of asylum seekers to the country. While in Malaysia, the Acehnese families face abuses and are routinely expelled to Indonesia. HRW reports that Malaysia's treatment of Acehnese refugees falls far short of internationally accepted standards for treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

Meanwhile, in its report entitled "Out of Sight, Out of Mind, Thai Policy Towards Burmese Refugees and Migrants", the HRW reports that similar repressive reactions are being undertaken by Bangkok. It reports that the Thai government is arresting and intimidating Burmese political activists living in the capital and along the Thai-Burmese border. Burmese human rights and humanitarian groups are being harassed and Burmese refugees and asylum seekers are being deported to Burma. HRW notes

that while Thailand has a long-standing reputation for its humanitarian stance towards refugees from other parts of Southeast Asia, the country's official stand to bar newly arriving asylum seekers and reduction of tolerance towards activities of Burmese exiles and activists would place thousands of Burmese at risk. Several of the actions undertaken by the Malaysian and Thai governments regarding the presence of refugee families in their territories, particularly those violating the internationally-recognized principle of non-refoulement (not to forcibly return refugees), do not appear to uphold the rights of refugee families.

Recommendations to governments

While the 1951 convention on the status of refugees does not contain a specific right to refugee family or family reunification, both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognize that the "family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state." Meanwhile, the Executive Committee of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has concluded that respect for family unity is a "minimum basic human standard".

In observance of the International Day of Families on May 15, Refugees International (RI) investigated the impact of armed conflict on families and also gave recommendations for their protection. Calling for the prioritization of the protection of refugee families, RI believes that the protection of refugee and other displaced families is not only in the best interest of refugees themselves, but also in the best interest of states. It recommended states and aid agencies to vigilantly uphold the rights of families to respect, protection, assistance, and support. It called upon them to respect the principle of unity of all families, including that of forcibly displaced families and to develop assistance programs that work within the frameworks of family and societal traditions. RI also recommends states and agencies to increase awareness of family kinship patterns and household structures, to facilitate timely communication

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Child Soldiers... (continued from page 3)

discuss the situation of child soldiers in Burma. The event, held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, was in preparation for the UNICEF-sponsored DDDR Workshop in Bangkok, also held in the same month. Participants raised several concerns, directed towards non-state and state actors in Burma. They noted the continued denial of the Burmese government over the existence of child soldiers in the Tatmadaw ranks and its reluctance to end the recruitment of children into the state forces. They also pointed out the difficulty faced by NGOs in dealing with both the SPDC and the NSAs. In partnership with organizations, the regional coalition is looking into the development of actual DDR programs using Burmese professionals and experts. Participants to the Chiang Mai workshop plan to conduct advocacy work with the Thai government to create a safe haven in close cooperation with UNICEF and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. The regional coalition is also at the forefront of plans to stage campaigns towards the ratification of the Optional Protocol by Burma, Indonesia, and Thailand.

As part of its two-year action plan, SEACSUCS has plans to strengthen its linkages with the national coalition in Japan, particularly for its assistance in lobbying work for the situation in Burma. Through its partners from the Philippines and Burma, the regional coalition also plans to conduct training on Human Rights Investigation and Child and Youth Advocacy during the first quarter of 2005. It also plans to conduct training on lobbying and dealing with non-state actors. With UPCIDS-PST, it is currently developing on-line resources. As the regional watchdog on the use of child soldiers in Southeast Asia, SEACSUCS is preparing for the regional and national launches of the global report on child soldiers, all slated for November 2004. (MPP) ■

For further reading: In 2003, Human Rights Watch issued a report on child soldiers in Burma entitled "My Gun Was as Tall As Me", which is online at <http://hrw.org/reports/2002/burma/>. Additional campaign materials against the use of child soldiers in Burma can be found at <http://hrw.org/campaigns/crp/burma/index.htm>. Meanwhile, for an overview of efforts on the demobilization of child soldiers in the Philippines, please see article "Demobilization of Child Soldiers: The Philippine Experience in the newsletter's Vol. 1 No.5 2003 issue. Please support the international campaign against the recruitment and use of child soldiers. For more information about the Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, please contact its Regional Coordinator Maria Glenda R. Ramirez at seacoordinatorchildsoldiers@yahoo.com.

Profile ■

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A world without torture and other forms of organized violence is the global vision of the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims (RCT). Its mandate is to examine and document torture on a health professional basis, through systematic examinations of torture survivors. Since its foundation in 1982, RCT has been one of the prime non-governmental organizations for the reduction of sufferings that torture inflicts on communities and individuals around the world. RCT runs a center for clinical research, treatment and rehabilitation of men, women, and children exposed to torture. While RCT is based in Denmark, its main focus and aspiration is to help improve the situation in developing countries. (MPP) ■

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Special Feature (continued from page 2)

between separated family members, and to provide psychological counseling for families of missing persons.

HRW meanwhile called upon the governments of Malaysia and Thailand to ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. It called upon both states not to refuse any asylum seeker or refugee to Indonesia or Burma. HRW called upon the Malaysian government to “recognize that in the light of ongoing armed conflict and widespread human rights violations taking place in Aceh, all Achenese in Malaysia should be treated as refugees and provided with protection and assistance. It called upon Kuala Lumpur to stop the deportation of Achenese to Indonesia, and to ensure that health, nutrition, and safety conditions in detention centers for undocumented persons and asylum seekers conform with international and domestic standards. Meanwhile, HRW called upon the Royal Thai government to abandon the current policy that only those fleeing armed conflict are entitled to protection and temporary stay in Thailand. It called upon the government to ensure that all Burmese refugees in the camps are provided with protection and assistance, including adequate health care, shelter, and educational opportunities. HRW also called upon the Indonesian and Burmese

governments to end the abuses that have forced asylum seekers to flee abroad.

Protecting the refugee family

Protection expert Kate Jastram maintains that families are entitled to respect, protection, assistance and support. She adds that the right to family unity is inherent in recognizing the family as a group unit. She suggests that family unity in the refugee context means granting refugee or a similar secure status to family members accompanying a recognized refugee. Countries of asylum, such as Malaysia and Thailand, must likewise provide for family reunification, at least of close family members. This is because the refugee cannot by definition return to the country of origin to enjoy reunification there. In host and resettlement countries, family unity enhances self-sufficiency, and helps reduce the long-term social and economic costs. In addition, the support that family members can give to one another multiplies the efforts of external actors such as aid agencies. Extended family contacts are vital when decisions are made about returning home. (MPP) ■

References: <http://hrw.org/reports/2004/malaysia0404/6.htm>, <http://hrw.org/reports/2004/thailand0204/8.htm>, and “Reducing the Impact of Armed Conflict on Families (05.14.2004) – Refugees International.

Annotated bibliographies of recent and not-so-recent publications, studies, reports and other documents on psychosocial trauma, child soldiers, IDPs, and related issues. Please visit www.psychosocialnetwork.org/online_resources.htm. Works featured in this section are available for reference use at the PST Library.

revolve in the belief that education is a powerful tool for social change and development. In the making of the modules, consultation work was done with children, parents, and teachers – the end users of the publications. Close collaboration work was conducted with educators, and the various political, religious, and cultural differences of the people involved in the making of the manual were greatly taken into consideration.

The Teaching and Training Manuals are divided into six modules covering the following topics: personal peace, structural violence as a hurdle to peace, human rights, looking back to the past to find peace, peaceful means of dealing with conflict, and nature and peace. For each of the modules, both manuals present suggested activities and provides thematic and integrated approaches in teaching or learning about peace. The Teaching Manual also provide suggested lesson plans that incorporate the concepts discussed in the elementary and high school curriculum (MPP) ■



Teaching Peace, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution (Teaching Manual)

Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights Program, UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS PST)/ British Embassy - Manila/ NDU
 Published in 2003
 ISBN: 971-742-089-0
 E-mail: pstcids@edsamail.com.ph

Teaching Peace, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution (Training Manual)

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Described as a “testament to the collaboration and partnership of different groups united in the vision of a Culture of Peace in Mindanao and the Philippines,” the Teaching and Training Manuals of the Teaching Peace, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution

Child Soldiers- Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (SEACSUCS) Two contrasting cases and a regional coalition in action

The experiences of Burma and the Philippines present two contrasting cases in a government’s position and reaction towards the use of children as soldiers. As the arena for the recruitment of child soldiers, the conflicts in Southeast Asia are notably geographically localized and of low intensity. Often, such conflicts receive little attention in the international community. Awareness about the issue of child soldiers is low among the affected communities in these two nations. At the forefront of the issue in the region is the Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (SEACSUCS), which was formed in October 2002. Its establishment came after the conduct of national consultation workshops in the Philippines, Indonesia and Thai-Burmese border in the early part of 2002.

Two contrasting cases

The continued recruitment of the *Tatmadaw* or the Burmese army, of large numbers of children into its ranks is appalling as it is inhuman. HRW estimated that 70,000 of the country’s 350,000 soldiers are below 18 years of age. The use and recruitment by the Tatmadaw is in violation of its own laws which specifies the enlistment age for military service as 18 years of age and provides for imprisonment of persons who abuse or torture children or employ them in hazardous work. The international human rights organization documented the forcible recruitment of children as young as eleven, the inhuman treatment they received in the training camps, their separation from their families and direct involvement in armed conflict. The repressive policies of the Tatmadaw and the widely reported cases of abduction of children for their recruitment into the national army brings into mind the untold suffering experienced by the child recruits and their parents. Separated from their families, the child recruits feel alone and unprotected. For the parents and family members, not knowing the fate of a loved one, especially a child, can be unbearable.

In the Philippines, there are no indications that children are being formally recruited into the Armed Forces of the

Philippines (AFP). However, there have been reports of children being recruited into government-backed paramilitary groups like the Citizen’s Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGU). The government also reported that younger children have been joining armed opposition groups, particularly those included in the U.S. State Department’s list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs). These include the extremist group Abu Sayyaf, the New People’s Army, the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The Philippines had already ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts in 2003. Nine government agencies signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on the handling and treatment of children involved in armed conflict in 2001.

While the Philippine government deserves credit in its efforts to tackle the issue of child soldiers, the problem lies in implementation, particularly providing support to former child combatants. Some of the provisions of the children in armed conflict MOA are not being followed to the letter. Children, including possible child soldiers, have been killed during military operations to crush members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Abu Sayyaf. Former child soldiers do not always undergo the formal demobilization, reintegration, and rehabilitation (DDRR) process. Already a target by their former comrades in the armed group as a result of their surrender, former child soldiers are sometimes forced or pressured by the military or government officials to act as “assets” or informers in counter-intelligence operations. This intensifies the ire of their former comrades, who are also targeting the child’s immediate relatives and other members of the extended family.

The regional coalition and partners – plans and actions

In March 2004, SEACSUCS, the Human Rights Institute in Burma, and the Asian Regional Resource Center organized a workshop to

Sowing seeds, changing the landscape of Mindanao

Schools and children towards peace and healing from WAR

This article features the pivotal role of schools and children in working for peace and healing from war. The organizations and the people behind the programs and projects featured in this special feature article are only a few of the many others who are working for peace in the southern Philippines.

For much in its history, multi-ethnic Mindanao has seen the viciousness of war. People of Mindanao have witnessed a cycle of armed conflict. Roots of the conflict are deep, and can be traced back even before the Spanish attempted to subjugate the island region under their rule. Centuries of war between the Christians and Moslems and neglect by the Philippine government resulted in bitterness and mistrust between the Christian and Moslem communities, and the indigenous peoples (IP) who are caught in between. But cracks are beginning to appear in the bitterness and mistrust among these three groups. Within their respective mandates and geographical areas, various non-governmental organizations, interfaith and church-based groups, people's organizations, the academe, and other groups from the region have begun a journey to work for peace in Mindanao.

Christian Children's Fund Basilan The Puhmalin Children's Peace Festival

Children and youth dressed in traditional clothing of the Yakan and Tausug cultural communities competed with Western-style marching bands in coloring a gym in one corner of Isabela City, Basilan in Mindanao. Waving balloons of green and yellow, they cheered and shouted the word "peace" in the different dialects spoken in the province. One youth leader led the congregation of children and adults as they sang and danced to a song of peace. "Peace!" he shouted, and the children replied, waving their hands in the air. "Puhmalin! Puhmalin! Puhmalin!" everyone shouted, echoing hopes and dreams for genuine peace in their island home.

The sixth Puhmalin Children's Peace Festival, sponsored by the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) Basilan, was held from May 29 to 30, 2004 in the provincial capital, Isabela City. Some 1,000 children from throughout the island province gathered together in two days of talent and skills exposition, dance and music competitions, and sharing about their experiences. The name Puhmalin was coined

from the name of the three projects being undertaken by CCF Basilan, Puhnukubung, Maluso, and Inspiracion.

The two-day event certainly provided a different image of the multi-ethnic island province of Basilan, which has become synonymous to the dreaded militant group Abu Sayyaf. Ranked second in the U.S. State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTO), the Abu Sayyaf is notorious for its campaign of bloodshed, kidnapping, and extortion. The group is also known to recruit children as young as 13 into their ranks. However, even before the Abu Sayyaf came into being, Basilan has always been in the cycle of war and violence. In the 1970s when the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) fought the Philippine government for autonomy, Basilan was sucked into a war that polarized and divided the Christian and Moslem communities of Mindanao. The war remains fresh in the mind of many people in Basilan and its effects continue to be felt even by those who were born after the 1970s.

On the first day of the Puhmalin Children's Peace Festival, the children gathered at the Bishop Querexeta Formation Center in Isabela City for the Symposium on the Peace Process and Child Soldiers to hear human rights and child rights workers talk about the importance of peace and the issue of child soldiers, a phenomenon not alien to many in Basilan. Southeast Asia Coalition Against the Use of Child Soldiers Regional Coordinator Glenda Ramirez and Ms. Agnes Camacho, Program Coordinator of the University of the Philippines' Program on Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights Program of the Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP-CIDS PST) were the main speakers for the symposium. "What do I do if I have a friend who's being recruited? I'll tell him not to join," shared one of the child participants. The second day, the highlight of the annual event, exploded with colorful costumes, music, and dance. The peace festival ended with many of the children bringing

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home many fond memories and the strength that they were not alone or voiceless in their clamor for peace in Basilan.

"The event is part of the debriefing of the children, many of whom have witnessed armed conflict," Eliza del Puerto, Program Director of the Christian Children's Fund." I would like to think that the Puhmalin Children's Peace Festival is part of healing. Basilan is still in the healing stage." Ms. Del Puerto said that it was the first time that they had child participants from the predominantly Moslem, remote municipalities of Sumisip, Tipo-Tipo, and Tuburan. "At first, it was not easy to convince people to let their children have a day of fun and celebration of peace. But through this annual peace festival, we are changing the landscape of Basilan, even a little." (MPP)

Notre Dame University of Cotabato, UP CIDSPST Books for Peace

"Sharing resources to construct peace knowledge is a strategy for strengthening partner organizations. This is a way of asserting peace, a way of saying that peace building should not be left to chance," reads the report on donations of some 2,000 peace-related books to pilot schools under the Teaching Peace, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Project of the University of the Philippines' Program on Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights Program of the Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS PST). With the support of the British Embassy - Manila and in partnership with the Notre Dame University (NDU) Alumni and Continuing Education and Peace Center, based in Cotabato City, the project reached out to schools in the Central Mindanao area.

Still unable to recover from a destructive secessionist war that erupted in the early 1970s, many areas in Central Mindanao became the scene of tense fighting between the government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (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, Cotabato province. In 2003, the military launched an offensive against the MILF with the pretense of quashing lawless elements believed to be under the wing of the armed group. "The conflict here comes in a cycle. It's like it erupts every two years," says an NGO worker based in Pikit.

Children and young people are the first to suffer in armed conflict situations, and the wounds of war include the breeding of hatred between young, impressionable Christian

and Moslem minds. This hatred remains as one of the deep emotional scars brought about by war – a legacy of violence that threatens remain even after the last bullet had been fired. It is a hatred that these children will pass on to their friends, and to their own children in the future. The Teaching Peace Project taps the classrooms, which are places of learning and social development and venues for developing the values, morals, and ideals that are the next generation will practice and uphold. The project came up with publication of teaching modules that would guide teachers on how to discuss the concepts of peace, human rights and conflict resolution in their classes.

On June 8 and 9, 2004, a team of volunteers from the Peace Center distributed copies of Teaching and Training Modules of the Teaching Peace, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution and peace-related books to schools in Cotabato City and in the towns of Pagangan, Aleosan, Midsayap and Pikit. OMI. In a land that has seen so many wars, the path to peace proves to be difficult, if not a daunting task. However, with 1,200 copies of the Teaching and Training Modules distributed to schools in Central Mindanao, there is the renewed hope that communities, particularly children and young adults, would become eventually inspired to work for peace. "I am hopeful that these modules will continue to be enriched in the future by the learning experience that will take place soon in classrooms and other venues, and by the changing circumstances of the world in which we live," runs the message of NDU President Fr. Ramon Bernabe. The satisfaction of teaching peace ultimately comes from the appreciation expressed by the children, their realization that peace means a better life and achieving it is very possible. (MPP) ■

Please see Typescript for a brief description of the Teaching Peace, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Teaching and Training Manuals.

Regional Psychosocial Network (continued from page 1)

border, in East Timor, in Australian Aboriginal communities in Darwin and Alice Springs, as well as in Nepal and Japan.

The consultation workshop in Tagaytay City is the first of two workshops planned by the REPSN for 2004 towards the formation of the Regional Emergency Psychosocial Response Team (REPRIT). The second workshop, slated for October 2004, is envisioned to be a simulation of an actual training done in the field during an emergency situation. "A strong proactive network of organizations that could deliver rapid psychosocial care in times of emergencies such as the REPRIT would be a great help to countries throughout the East Asia and Pacific Region," Dr. Protacio de Castro added. (MPP) ■