From July 31 to August 6, 2004, more than thirty participants from eleven countries throughout the East Asia and Pacific Region and representatives from the United Nations Children’s Fund - East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF-EAPRO) convened at Hotel Dominiique in Tagaytay City, Philippines for a consultative workshop aimed towards the formation of an emergency psychosocial response team for the region. Hosted by the Regional Emergency Psychosocial Support Network (RESPN) secretariat, the University of the Philippines’ Program on Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights Program of the Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP-CIDS PIST), the international six-day event highlighted regional cooperation, networking, and consolidation of resources as the cornerstones, the next steps towards the realization of the Regional Emergency Psychosocial Response Team (REPSRT).

Regional Cooperation, Networking, and Consolidation of Resources

Elizabeth Protacio-de Castro, Associate Professor and Convenor of the UP-CIDS PIST, during the opening day of the consultation workshop said that the workshop, entitled “Evolving Capacities in Emergency Psychosocial Support in the East Asia and the Pacific Region” had been the result of efforts by UNICEF and concerned organizations in capitalizing on local sources and building the capacities of the region in providing psychosocial support. The event is the latest development after the establishment of the RESPN during the Regional Experts’ Meeting on Psychosocial Response in Emergency convened by UNICEF-EAPRO in Bangkok, Thailand 2001. “It is almost like a dream come true for [those of] us who have been talking about this event for the last three years,” she said. “But this is just the first of many other steps.”

The consultation workshop served as a pre-test of the modules developed by former psychosocial support network consultant Dr. Les Spencre and the UP-CIDS PIST. Conceptualized and developed last year, the modules contain important training materials, guidelines, methodologies and approaches to be used as reference by people and organizations involved in psychosocial care in emergencies. Dr. Spencre and Mr. Ernie Olma of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) helped facilitate the activities. Based in the Manila, PETA is a people’s theater committed to social change and nurturing wellness, and has been an active partner of NGOs in the Philippines in therapy through conduct of art workshops.
The Blanco family massacre is one of the alleged atrocities committed by elements of the AFP against upland farming communities, not excluding Mangyan groups in Mindoro Occidental. The mechanism practiced by the PASAKAMI and its component organizations is evidence of both the strong non-interference policies of the respective Mangyan tribes in the affairs of the other tribes and the steadily growing influence of a pan-Mangyan approach in facing issues that concern the entire Mangyan community in Mindoro.

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Among the themes covered during the consultation workshop were care and support for caregivers, strengthening and evolving culturally appropriate psychosocial support with the community, and the assessment of local psychological well-being and resources.

During the session on care and support for caregivers, participants, representing NGOs and organizations from Thailand to Australia, Mongolia to East Timor, shared personal experiences and related how they managed to cope during emergency situations. Participants were also treated to film showings on varying themes, such as the struggle and hardships of indigenous peoples in West Papua (formerly Irian Jaya) in Indonesia, an Aboriginal woman demonstrating the art of cradling, and the popular Life Celebration conducted in the Australian bush.

Unique to the consultation workshop were the various experiential activities that helped the participants to touch base with their inner strengths as caregivers and their nurturing and creative roles as part of the larger natural world. At the start of the second, third, fourth days, participants were invited to join dawn ceremonies presided by members from team countries. Meanwhile, at the start of the plenary sessions, participants also volunteered to share simple helpful practices. One of them was a simple “standing meditation” which was presided by a delegate from Cambodia. On the fourth day of the consultation workshop, Dr. Edru Abraham of Kontra Gapi, and his team of students from the University of the Philippines-Diliman, performed traditional and not-so-traditional but engaging and powerful music and dance performances for the participants. Afterwards, the foreign and local delegates and members of the secretariat were provided an opportunity to try their hand with the indigenous musical heritage of the Philippines.

On the last day of the consultation workshop, participants discussed issues relevant to the formation of the REPRT such as membership, structure, role and function, process, fund sources, accountability and transparency. Participants suggested that membership to the REPRT would be open, either on an individual or organizational basis, and that it would include community-based or grassroots levels and follow a code of principles, shared vision, and a guiding framework. While no definitive decision was arrived at as to the structure of the REPRT – whether it would be formal or informal and whether it would be based on one country and revolve around within a given time span – the participants agreed that it would have to be centered on the secretariat. It was however agreed that the UCIDS-UPST would still act as the network’s secretariat for three more years.

As far as its roles and functions were concerned, the REPRT would conduct advocacy work, training and workshops, networking, assessment and resource mobilization. Participants and organizers reiterated the role of network and the REPRT as an information exchange conduit and a means to help member organizations enhance their capacities in doing psychosocial work in their respective areas. As far as processes were concerned, participants noted that there should be some protocols and agreements to be followed. However, the terms of actual operations remains to be open for discussion. Several suggestions were also forwarded regarding funding, and these ranged from the collection of a membership fee, the sale of manual and other products developed by the network, the provision of counterpart funds from member organizations, and advocacy work to raise money, which would augment funding support by the UNICEF-EAPRO.

The workshop was a great opportunity for UNICEF-EAPRO representatives to meet with members from grassroots organizations and exchange views on providing psychosocial support and recognizing the importance of local healing ways, said Dr. Sprece in an interview during the consultation workshop. He described the regional consultation workshop as a venue for sharing and building on micro- and macro-experiences on providing psychosocial support, which is important in the region that had seen many natural and man-made calamities. Dr. Protacio-de Castro, meanwhile, emphasized that the consultation workshop stressed the importance of caring and support for caregivers, assessing contexts, and providing gentle respect and support. These three principles, she said, punctuated during the consultation workshop as the participants, through the activities, identified local psychosocial support systems, and people in the local cultural context jointly supporting the psychosocial needs of the community.

The consultation workshop in Tagaytay City was the first of two major activities planned by the REPSN for 2004 towards the formation of the REPRT. With the support from UNICEF-EAPRO, the network secretariat hopes to conduct before the end of the year the second workshop, which is a pre-test on the implementation of guidelines during an emergency psychosocial response. (MPP)
The Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) Human rights training slated for February 2005 in East Timor

From February 7 to 25, 2005, the Diplomacy Training Program, an affiliate of the Faculty of Law, University of New South Wales, Australia, is calling for applications for the 15th Annual Human Rights and People’s Diplomacy Training for Human Rights Defenders from the Asia-Pacific Region and Indigenous Australia. In cooperation with the Peace and Development Foundation in East Timor, the training program is primarily for non-government and community-based organizations relevant to human rights and people’s diplomacy. The training provides knowledge of international human rights laws and the operations of the United Nations and other inter-governmental systems. Also included in the program is as training in strategic advocacy and “people’s diplomacy” and skills in working with the media and the Internet. Applications close on November 12, 2004.

Among others, the 15th Annual Training will include sessions on the following topics: economic, social and cultural rights, civil and political rights; a human rights-based approach to development; developing advocacy strategies; reconciliation and transitional justice; an introduction to human rights fact-finding and investigation; and children’s rights, women’s rights and rights of migrant workers. The Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization providing human rights training in the Asia-Pacific region. Professor Jose Ramos-Horta, the 1996 Nobel Peace Laureate and representative of East Timor at the United Nations for over a decade founded the DTP in 1989. Since January 1992, the DTP has been conducting regional training sessions in the Asia Pacific region, including India and Sri Lanka. For more information about the East Timor training program, please visit http://www.dtp.unsw.edu.au. The brochure and application form are also available in Word document form from dtp@unsw.edu.au (MPP).

SEA Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers

Filipino youth appointed as new regional coordinator

Our going Southeast Asian Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (SEAUCCSS) Regional Coordinator Glenni Ramirez announced in late September 2004, the appointment of the Ryan Silverto of Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights) as the organization’s new regional coordinator.

UNICEF/UP-CIDS-PST Children Caught in Conflicts Project: National Workshop on Protection Issues Held in Quezon City

From September 17 to 19, 2004, the University of the Philippines’ Program on Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights Program of the Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP-CIDS-PST) conducted the National Workshop on Protection Issues at the Ramon Magsaysay Hall, Quezon City. Participants to the event were UP-CIDS-PST’s research partners in the UNICEF-EAPRO-funded “Children Caught in Conflicts Project: The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children”, which started in 2003. Participants were field researchers, partner non-governmental organizations and government organizations, and child survivors from the Mindoro, Lanao del Norte, Cotabato, and Basilan, areas that are experiencing armed conflict. The national workshop was the next step after a data gathering on the impact of armed conflict on children. It aimed to draft recommendations and strategies that will holistically protect children in times of armed conflict and during recovery and reintegration. During the three-day event, UP-CIDS-PST researchers presented a summary of their research findings and workshop participants were conducted on the following themes: access to basic services, psychosocial impact of armed conflict, and protection issues and legal policies and responses. For a related article, please see Special News Feature Article, Children Caught in Conflicts Project: Child evacuees voices out on protection issues, provision of basic services, and the psychosocial effects of the war. For a backgrounder on the Children Caught in Conflicts Project, please see (MPP).

Regional perspective of peace education in the school curriculum and church activities

Understanding Contexts... (continued from page 2)

not use any member of the tribes as a guide nor use force and intimidation in dealing with them. They also stressed that the soldiers or military units should respect the indigenous culture and not to stay long in the tribal areas. For their part, the Mangyan tribes and grassroots organizations promised to try their best not to be influenced by the leftist groups.

An appreciation of the distinct cultures of each of the Mangyan groups is important in understanding the psychosocial effects of the military campaigns against the CPP-NPA units. According to members of the Tau-budd Mangyan, the mere presence of armed men in their territory, let alone the occurrence of atrocities and unfortunate events like the massacre in Magaysay, is enough to send hapless villagers to flee quickly to the forests or other areas. They decry the desecration of sacred areas like the pagay or places where harvested crops are stored, the disrespect of the military towards the community not excluding the highly revered ulangan or council of elders and the katuntunan or hereditary traditional healer-leaders, and the theft of precious farm animals such as chickens and pigs by soldiers. These demands reflect the general Mangyan worldview, which is distinctly marked by a divide between the Mangyan and the non-Mangyan, the members of one tribe and their counterparts from other Mangyan groups, and the members of one tribe living in Mindoro Occidental and their counterparts from the Mindoro Occidental area. For example, the Hamunoo Mangyan term damuong refers to all non-Mangyan peoples, and to all outsiders. Used by Hamunoo mothers to hush up their crying babies, the term is defined early on some kind of bogeyman or threat-object among the Hamunoo. The word brystiano is also used as a synonym, suggesting an image that the Mangyan groups have of their Christian neighbors.

Like among other Mangyan tribes, there is still the practice among Tau-budd Mangyan families to abandon their thatch houses after the death of a family member, whether by natural or other causes. This period had passed since the death of their loved one and any member of the surviving family is still experiencing grief, he or she is sent to relatives or to far-flung villages. Again, there is the indigenous practice of separating them from the locality where the death occurred, and this is said to help facilitate healing and prevent any haunting by the dead. They are advised to return to their new home only after three months that has passed from the death of their loved one. The council of elders of the tribe to which the Blanco family belonged also conducted these interventions to help the family of the victims.

It is apparent that the Mangyan tribes, through their respective organizations like the HAGURA and the PASAKAMI or the council of elders and traditional healers, have a range of responses based on their worldview and experience in interacting with people from other communities. They began creating spaces in healing the social wounds of armed conflict and political violence and are using indigenous knowledge, traditions and values to bring together organizations and church groups to restore peace and stability in their communities. A lesson might be learned from the Mangyans. (MPP)

Concerning the psychosocial effects of armed conflict and violence, the youth envos noted the occurrence of trauma among the younger members of the affected population. They observed that children and young people who have experienced armed conflict had lost self-esteem and felt very helpless. The youth envos particularly noted the cases of children and young people who were separated from their parents due to the war. Proving that they already have an understanding of their circumstances, they also noticed the lack of disaster preparedness of the communities and the local government units. The youth envos strongly recommended the conduct of recreational activities and workshops that would allow the children and young people to express their thoughts and feelings about what is happening around them. They particularly noted games that would help them gain confidence and leadership skills, the organization of children’s dance, theater, and choir groups. Also important is locating the children who were separated from their families and loved ones and reuniting them. The youth envos also recommended the conduct of peace education in the school curriculum and church activities. (MPP)