

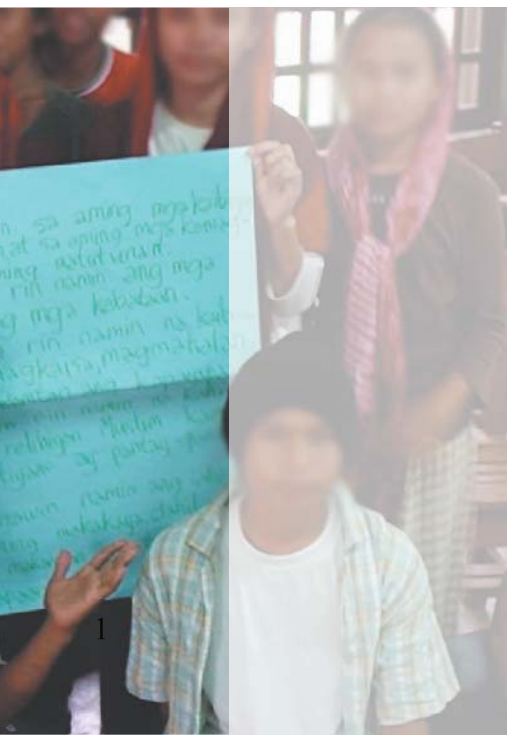


Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use  
of Child Soldiers  
and  
Philippine Coalition to Protect Children  
Involved in Armed Conflict

# PREVENTING CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT IN ARMED CONFLICTS IN THE PHILIPPINES: A MAPPING OF PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS



Published by the Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (SEASUCS) and the Philippine Coalition to Protect Children Involved in Armed Conflict (Protect CIAC)



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# ACRONYMS

AIDFI	Associates for Integral Development Foundation, Inc.
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
BIRTH-DEV	Balay Integrated Rehabilitation Center for Total Human Development Foundation
BJMP	Bureau of Jail Management and Penology
BUC	Bishop Ulama Conference
CAAC	Children and Armed Conflict
CAFGU	Citizen's Armed Forces Geographical Units
CCAGG	Concerned Citizens of Abra on Good Government
CCF	Christian Children's Fund
CHR	Commission for Human Rights
CIAC	Children Involved in Armed Conflict
CPP-NPA-NDFP	Communist Party of the Philippines – New People's Army – National Democratic Front of the Philippines
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
DILG	Department of Interior and Local Government
DND	Department of National Defense
DOH	Department of Health
DOJ	Department of Justice
DRR	Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
EO	Executive Order
GRP	Government of the Republic of the Philippines
IAC-CIAC	Inter-Agency Committee on Children Involved in Armed Conflict
IDP	Internally Displaced Peoples
IP	Indigenous Peoples
LGU	Local Government Unit
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NAHRA	Negros Alliance of Human Rights Advocates
NCIP	National Commission of Indigenous Peoples
NDFCAL-WED	Notre Dame Foundation for Charitable Activities, Inc. – Women in Enterprise Development
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NRDP	National Reconciliation and Development Program
NSAG	Non-State Armed Group
OEHR	Office for Empowerment and Human Rights
OPAPP	Office of the Presidential Adviser for the Peace Process
OSY	Out of School Youth
PAO	Public Attorney's Office
PIA	Philippine Information Agency
PCSUCS	Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers
PNP	Philippine National Police
PNRC	Philippine National Red Cross
PRMO	Poverty Reduction Management Office
PST CRRC	Psychosocial Support and Children's Rights Resource Center
PSWDO	Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office
RA	Republic Act
RPA-ABB-RPMP	Revolutionary Proletarian Army – Alex Boncayao Brigade – Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas
RRCY	Regional Rehabilitation Center for Youth
RTC	Regional Trial Court
RWTP	Recycle War Trash for Peace
SAC	Social Action Center
SEACSUCS	Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers
TFDP	Task Force Detainees of the Philippines
UCCP	United Church of Christ in the Philippines
UNYPAD	United Youth for Peace and Development



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- Social Action Center (SAC) of the Diocese of Legazpi
- United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) - Mindoro Conference
- United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD)

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Finally, we would like to dedicate this publication to a family of former combatants in Iloilo who gave up their guns but not their aspiration to change this world to a better and safer place for the children we serve.

*\* Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers (PCSUCS) changed its name to Philippine Coalition to Protect Children Involved in Armed Conflict (Protect CIAC) starting July 2007.*

For several decades, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) has been embroiled in armed conflict against two major armed groups: the New People's Army (NPA)<sup>1</sup> and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)<sup>2</sup>. These two fronts are among the most enduring in the Southeast Asia region. With their respective political and historical roots, the Communist and Moro fronts form the context of children's involvement in armed conflict in the Philippines.

The issue of child soldiers, or children involved in armed conflict (CIAC) as they are called in the Philippines, has been recognized by the Philippine government. National legal and policy frameworks have been developed and made operational to address the issue. However, effective solutions towards ending or preventing the involvement of children in the armed group remain elusive.

During the Mid-term Review of the Sixth Country Program for Children (CPC 6) conducted by the United Nations Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF) with partner organizations in Subic, Zambales province in March 2007, one key learning is that the global definitions and processes of demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) are inapplicable to the Philippine context<sup>3</sup>.

This key observation comes years after the inclusion of the Philippines in the list of parties that recruit or use children in situations of armed conflict. The October 2006 Report of the UN Secretary General on Children and armed conflict<sup>4</sup> highlights the difficulty in finding effective solutions to the CIAC issue. In particular, it poses questions about the effectiveness of existing programs in the Philippines for the prevention of the recruitment and use of children in areas experiencing armed conflict.

At the core of the issue of children's involvement in armed conflict is the absence of a national statistics to describe the extent of children's in-

volvement in armed conflict. At best, reports are on a regional level or are in the form of estimates<sup>5</sup>. National figures describing the extent of child demobilization are limited to reports issued by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). The department's Program Management Bureau (PMB) reports that it served only 124 children from 1998 to the first quarter of 2006.

Government has instituted significant policy measures to address the issue. These include:

- Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC);
- Ratification of International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labor;<sup>6</sup>
- Adoption of child protection laws; and
- Establishment of mechanisms such as the inter-agency committee on the issue of CIAC.

In the first quarter of 2007, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) initiated the review of the UN Resolution 1612 and its implications on Philippine policy on CIAC.

Likewise, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are actively working on the issue. With representatives of 31 NGOs and government agencies at the Second National Consultation Workshop on the Use of Children as Soldiers in the Philippines in November 2003, the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (PCSUCS) drafted the Eleven-Point Action Plan on the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) of Child Soldiers in the Philippines. The Action Plan was unanimously adopted during the consultation workshop. It became one of the bases in drafting the Philippine government's Comprehensive Framework on Children Involved in Armed Conflict. (For a copy of the Eleven-Point Action Plan, please see Annex One.)

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1 Formed in March 1969, the New People's Army (NPA) is the armed unit of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The CPP's political arm is the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP). NPA commands operate in many areas in the Philippines including in the group's traditional strongholds: Sierra Madre Mountains and the Bondoc Peninsula in Luzon, Negros, Samar and Leyte in the Visayas, and in various points in Mindanao. The NPA also maintains units in the National Capital Region (NCR) and other urban centers throughout the country.

# THE STUDY

## Research Objectives

Until today, there has been no attempt to systematically map organizations already working on the issue of children involved in armed conflict or organizations whose work touches on the issue and that may be willing to become more directly engaged. This is the first report conducted in the Philippines to map programs related to DRR of children involved in armed conflict (CIAC).

This report is intended to assist in the process of addressing these challenges. In particular, the research has the following objectives:

- a.) Provide a general picture of demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DRR) or DRR-related programs currently being implemented;
- b.) Identify entry points for organizations intending to pursue work on DRR in the varying contexts;
- c.) Facilitate information exchange and referral systems between organizations that are directly or indirectly providing support for CIAC.

This report (1) provides a geographic overview of children involved in armed conflict, (2) looks at the current status of peace talks, (3) outlines some of the measures instituted by the government to address the issue, (4) gives an overview of projects run by the organizations that participated in this study, and (5) summarizes the key findings.

## Limitations of the Study

This report is neither intended to be a comprehensive

survey of all programs related to DRR in the Philippines nor to identify best practices on the planning and implementation of DRR programs. It aims, however, to highlight some of the lessons learned by those individuals and organizations involved in implementing the programs which, it is hoped, will contribute to the ongoing discourse on issues related to CIAC in the Philippines.

## Methodology

### *a. Field visits and key informant interviews*

From February to March 2006, researchers from the Psychosocial Support and Children's Rights Resource Center (PST CRRC) and Balay Integrated Rehabilitation Center for Total Human Development (BIRTH-DEV) conducted field visits to eight selected provinces and one city throughout the Philippines where cases of child recruitment into state-backed security forces or non-state armed groups (NSAGs) have been documented and reported. The initial data gathering phase covered the provinces of Abra and Mindoro Oriental in Luzon; Bohol, Iloilo and Negros Occidental in Visayas; and Basilan, Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao, and Zamboanga City in Mindanao.<sup>7</sup>

During the initial phase, the researchers visited and interviewed 12 organizations: two based in Luzon, three in the Visayas and six in Mindanao. Three of the six Mindanao-based organizations each have an office in Cotabato City, serving the Central Mindanao provinces of Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Shariff Kabunsuan. Two are based in Basilan, while one in Zamboanga City.

The situation in other areas, such as parts of

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2 The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is a breakaway group of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The MILF's traditional strongholds include the provinces of Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Shariff Kabunsuan. The group is also present in many other provinces in Mindanao.

3 Result of the Workshop Activity with partner non-governmental and government organizations under Project Two of the Child Protection Unit of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)-Manila Office. The workshop was part of the Midterm Review of the Sixth Country Program for Children (CPC 6) Manila conducted from on 9-11 April 2007 at the Legenda Suites, Subic Bay Free Port, Subic, Zambales.

4 UN Doc: A/61/529-S/2006/826, 26 October 2006

5 In 2002, the International Labor Organization—International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) estimated that 10%-30% of children residing in a barangay (village) affected by armed conflict or under the influence of non-state armed groups may be drafted as soldiers.

6 The Philippine government ratified the Optional Protocol on 26 August 2003, the UN CRC on 20 September 1990, and ILO Convention No. 182 on 28 November 2000.

7 The Philippines is divided into three island groups: Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.



Davao City and the provinces of Sorsogon in Luzon, Eastern and Western Samar in the Visayas, and those that comprise the Caraga Region (Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur) were also included in the study after completing the initial data gathering phase in February 2006. These were done from May to December 2006 through interviews as incidences of children’s involvement in armed groups have been reported in these areas.

In early 2007, consultations and orientations on the involvement of children in armed conflict were also conducted with NGOs in the provinces of Abra, Eastern Samar, Western Samar and Antique. The data gathered during these activities added fresh information on the extent of children’s involvement in armed conflict.

### ***b. Risk mapping***

The information gathered from these other areas added more dimensions to the reported recruitment of children of indigenous and non-indigenous communities by NSAGs. The extent of children’s involvement in armed conflict in Sorsogon was not known or understood, while risk mapping was conducted in some areas. For example, it surfaced during discussions with social workers that most of the municipalities in the Caraga Region

engender factors – poor basic services and limited economic opportunities - that may contribute to children’s involvement in armed conflict. In a mapping exercise with the social workers, majority of the municipalities in four Caraga provinces were marked red – meaning that children living in these areas were “at risk” of becoming involved in armed conflict.<sup>8</sup>

### ***b. Review of Secondary Data***

In addition to interviews, secondary information was collected on legislation and policy and documentation from NGOs on their respective programs. Various other sources, such as media reports and updates from the various agencies of government and even NSAGs’ websites also provided vital information. No interviews were conducted with any child who had been involved in armed conflict.

### ***Key informants***

The organizations that participated in the study range from church-based organizations to NGOs working on women and children. A profile of each organization, briefly describing its history and operations, is included in **Annex Two**. These organizations were chosen either because they have either been involved in past projects with the Philippine Coalition or through engagement in its national networks. Other organizations, such as those based in Abra and Agusan del Norte, became involved as they are the key NGOs in the area.

## **Key Conclusions and Recommendations**

### ***a. Dearth of CIAC data hinders the deeper understanding of the issue.***

At present, factors including the consistent denial by NSAGs of the existence of children within their ranks make it difficult to gain a clear picture of the number of children involved in armed conflict. Nevertheless, if organizations, whether governmental or NGO, are to be able to effectively identify and address the needs of CIAC, more research and documentation of cases is necessary. The information gathered should be systematized,

<sup>8</sup> Situational Analysis during the Training on Handling and Treatment of Children Involved in Armed Conflict (CIAC) Among Direct Service Providers of Caraga. Said training was conducted by the Inter-Agency Committee on Children Involved in Armed Conflict (IAC-CIAC) in cooperation with UNICEF-Manila at the Almont Inland Resort, Butuan City, Agusan del Norte on 18-20 April 2006.

analyzed to determine emerging trends, reviewed and shared among all interested parties. The limitations encountered by BIRTH-DEV researchers on the CIAC issue in Lanao del Norte may well best describe the general situation in the country as far as information on children's involvement in armed conflict is concerned:

*“Absence of the needed data and the difficulty of access to the CIAC in the province lead to an undetermined scope of the CIAC issue and limit the formulation and implementation programs that help CIAC cope with their situation and regain their childhood.”<sup>9</sup>*

***b. NGOs need to enhance the skills of their staff in responding to CIAC concerns.***

Capacity building on the basic concepts on CIAC and national and legal frameworks on the issue is vital if NGOs and others intending to work on DRR processes for children are to be able to effectively respond to the needs of CIAC. Staff working in local organizations requires specialized training to be able to identify, support and refer cases of children who need attention. Specialized training in child protection is also required to ensure children are protected against abuse and exploitation.

***c. NGOs play critical roles in addressing the CIAC issue.***

Many of the NGOs that already working with government agencies, the armed forces and NSAG members, have the potential to play an important role in ensuring that DRR processes for children

are a key element in peace-building initiatives. They can also play an important role in monitoring reporting on the compliance of government agencies with the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on the Handling and Treatment of Children Involved in Armed Conflict and the effectiveness of government programs and policies established under the Comprehensive Program Framework for Children in Armed Conflict.

***d. NGOs' existing child-focused education programs are excellent avenues for integrating awareness about the CIAC issue.***

A number of NGOs in the study have education and awareness-raising programs which could integrate information relevant to the issue of CIAC. General information relating to children's rights and child protection principles as well as specific information about CIAC in the Philippines and DRR processes should be included. Materials should be integrated into formal and informal education programs and take account of the cultural context.

***e. DRR is multistakeholder responsibility.***

To facilitate the integration of children formerly involved in armed conflict into the community, DRR processes should involve community leaders and structures as well as families at every stage of the process. Public education work to counter possible stigmatization of children should be coordinated and engage the whole community.

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<sup>9</sup> Balay Integrated Rehabilitation Center for Total Human Development (BIRTH-DEV), "Research Report on Strengthening Protection of Children Involved in Armed Conflict: Implementation of the 11-Point Program of the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers (PCSUCS)", (draft) in Lanao Del Norte "Strengthening Protection of Children Involved in Armed Conflict: Implementation of the 11-point Program of the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers", 24 January 2007.

In the Philippines, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DRR) is used in preference to disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR). The de-emphasis of ‘disarmament’ responds to the perceptions of armed groups that disarmament is a process often carried out by force or which takes place in the absence of a political settlement and has connotations of surrendering one’s arms. Meanwhile, government agencies such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) use the terms “rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration”.

## **Rescue, Rehabilitation and Reintegration**

Rescue. This shall provide for the recovery, either voluntary or involuntary, of children from armed groups. This shall also call for the provision by the government of legal and physical security to children involved in armed conflict. This sub-component shall involve services like family tracing.

Rehabilitation. This shall facilitate the normal development of children victims in their post-conflict phase. It shall provide services like therapeutic counseling, security and protection, educational assistance and livelihood opportunities.

Reintegration. This shall bring children back to their families/communities whenever possible. This shall involve services like provision of alternative parental care. Trainings aimed to enhance community readiness in the reintegration of these children shall also be undertaken. Whenever possible, interventions to the child shall be done with respect to his/her opinion. Interventions for IP children shall be conducted in recognition of the traditional structures and institutions of their communities.

(From the Comprehensive Program for Children in Armed Conflict of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process [OPAPP])

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## CHILDREN INVOLVED IN ARMED CONFLICT IN THE PHILIPPINES

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The term *children involved in armed conflict* (CIAC) is used in this report rather than the term *child soldiers*. The term is considered by the PCSUCS to be more appropriate and recognizes that not all children who become members of armed groups are combatants but nonetheless all are exposed to extreme risks. However, the meaning of CIAC is understood to be the same as the definition of *child soldiers* contained in the Cape Town Principle (1997)<sup>10</sup> and *children associated with an armed group or armed force in the Paris Principles* (2007).<sup>11</sup>

The term *non-state armed group* is used rather than terms such as ‘rebel group’ to reflect the non-confrontational position of the PCSUCS in positively engaging with these groups.

Before 2007, there were no national statistics on the extent of recruitment of children into armed groups in the Philippines. Reports that are on a regional basis are merely estimates. In 2002, the International Labor Organization–International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) estimated that 10 to 30 percent of children residing in a barangay (village) affected by armed conflict or under the influence of NSAGs become involved in armed conflict. National statistics describing the extent of child demobilization are limited to reports issued by the Program Management Bureau (PMB) of the DSWD, which reports that it served only 124 children from 1998 to the first quarter of 2006.

In June 2007, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) reported a total of 259 CIAC cases since 1989. This number includes the 226 reported cases based from the reconciled data on the DSWD and the Department of National Defense (DND) and the 33 cases reported by the government from 2005 to 2007 that are documented in this study.

All these cases, including those reported by the PMB refer to CIAC that have been rescued, recovered, arrested, captured or surrendered.<sup>12</sup>

Several studies on the involvement of children in armed conflict in the Philippines have identified a number of reasons why children join an armed group, including extreme poverty and marginalization, the absence or lack of basic services, cultural and religious influences, and heightened militarization.<sup>13</sup> Many of the children join voluntarily, some are invited by family members to join, others are forcibly recruited, join after witnessing government acts of aggression or because of family conflict. Children involved in the Muslim secessionist struggle in Mindanao have joined armed groups in response to calls by certain religious and political leaders to “*jihad*” or holy war.

Daily duties vary and can include patrolling and guard h training and exposure to fighting for them to be prepared if they come under attack.

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10 The Cape Town Principles defines a “child soldier” as “any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.”

11 On the other hand, the Paris Principles uses the term “child associated with an armed force or armed group” defined as “any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.”

12 Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), “Breakdown of Reported CIAC Cases (2005 to 1st Quarter 2007), 13 June 2007

13 Various researches of the Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights) and the Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights Program of the Center for Integrative and Development Studies of the University of the Philippines (UP-CIDS PST).

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## ARMED GROUPS REPORTED TO HAVE RECRUITED AND USED CHILDREN

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There are continuing reports of children joining the MILF, NPA, and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). There are also unconfirmed reports of children joining NSAGs that have signed peace accords with the government, namely the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF),<sup>14</sup> the Cordillera Peoples' Liberation Army (CPLA)<sup>15</sup> and the Revolutionary Proletarian Army – Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPA-ABB).<sup>16</sup> In addition, government paramilitary forces, such as the Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVOs)<sup>17</sup> and the Citizen's Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGU)<sup>18</sup> are also known to recruit and use children.

Most NSAGs have reaffirmed their internal policies concerning the minimum age of recruits. In the 1999 Memorandum by the Military Commission of the CPP Central Committee, the Point 1 of Principle III of the Basic Rules of the NPA was amended to read:

*“Any person, who is at least 18 years of age and is physically and mentally fit, regardless of sex, race, nationality or religion, has the capacity to fight and is ready to participate in armed struggle against the reactionary state power, may become a combatant or a member of a fighting unit of the New People’s Army.”<sup>19</sup>*

The CPP has publicly announced that it unequivocally prohibits the recruitment of under-18s into the NPA. It has committed itself to take action against NPA members who disregard the policy and to demobilize children found within NPA ranks:

*“The CPP requires the NPA to strictly comply with the policy and allows no exceptions to it. In applying the policy, NPA Red fighters discovered to have failed to meet the new age requirement are discharged from the NPA and reassigned to various other non-combat and non-hazardous tasks as civilian activists or else sent home to support family production or continue their schooling.”<sup>19</sup>*

The CCP, however, has also noted that “units are confronted on a daily basis by youthful volunteers who wish to join the people’s army but fail to meet the minimum age requirement.” The CPP urges its units to be “circumspect in their recruitment efforts or in accepting volunteers”.<sup>20</sup> The 1999 Memorandum issued by the Military Commission of the CPP Central Committee states that “any person, not less than 15 years of age, may be admitted as a trainee or apprentice of the New People’s Army and may be assigned to self-defense, militia and other non-combat units and tasks.”

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14 The predominantly Tausug and secular MNLF inked a peace agreement in 1996 with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) under the presidency of Fidel V. Ramos (1992-1998). In April 2007, the Armed Forces of the Philippines clashed with units of the MNLF demanding more benefits under the 1996 peace accord.

15 The Cordillera Peoples' Liberation Army (CPLA) and its political wing, the Cordillera Bodong Administration (CBA), were formed when Cordillera leaders broke away from the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA). Fighting for autonomy, the CPLA signed the Mount Data Accord in 1986 with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) under the presidency of Corazon C. Aquino (1986-1992).

16 The Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPA-ABB) is the armed wing of the Rebolusyong Partido ng Mangagawa ng Pilipinas (RPM-P), one of the breakaway groups from the CPP-NPA. It operates mainly in Western Visayas and Manila. In December 2000, it signed an interim peace agreement with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) under the presidency of Joseph E. Estrada (1998-2001).

17 The Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVOs) were originally set up as unarmed civilian self-help groups established primarily for self-defense and protection. In 2006, the Macapagal-Arroyo government issued Executive Order (EO) No. 546 empowering local officials to draw up internal security plans in their respective localities. It deputizes the CVOs as police auxiliaries with firearms issued to them in performance of their official duties. Prior to the issuance of EO No. 546, however, the CVOs in Central Mindanao have already been armed as documented in a 2003 research of the UP-CIDS PST). See report at [www.coav.br](http://www.coav.br).

18 The Citizen's Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGU) is a paramilitary organization tasked to assist frontline elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). It became notorious for human rights violations in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The CAFGU were revitalized and used as part of the military offensive carried out by the Estrada government against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2000.

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20 Communist Party of the Philippines, “The NPA does not allow below-18 recruits”, 19 November 2005, <http://www.philippinerevolution.net/cgi-bin/statements/releases.pl?refer=kr;date=051119;language=eng>.

Ibid.

The MILF also has a general policy not to recruit children for combat, but accepts that children may join as auxiliaries. The MILF emphasizes the “*right of everybody including children to self-defense especially when communities or villages are under indiscriminate military actions by the enemy.*”<sup>21</sup>

Following Sec. 22(b), Article X of the Special Protection of Children against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act or Republic Act (RA) No. 7610, the Armed Forces of the Philippines strictly adheres to the non-recruitment of children into its units or its civilian units. Government paramilitary groups, notably the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGU) and the Civilian Volunteer Organization (CVO), and other military-backed vigilante groups however, also continue recruiting children despite policies prohibiting the practice. In some communities in the Bicol provinces of Albay and Camarines Sur, for example, the CAFGU use captured or rescued CIAC as assets in their operations.<sup>22</sup> During field visits to Bohol and Negros Occidental, partner organizations said that recruitment of children by the CAFGU continues in hinterland villages, although further validation of cases is required.

Meanwhile, vigilante groups in Mindanao formed by the military as village defense systems, including the CVOs, have recruited children from indigenous communities despite the explicit prohibition under Section 22, Chapter V of the Indigenous People’s Rights Act (IPRA) otherwise known as Republic Act 8371.<sup>23</sup>

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21 Moro Islamic Liberation Front, “MILF reiterates policy on child soldiers”, Maradika, Vol.XXVI No. 5

22 Social Action Center (SAC) of the Diocese of Legazpi, “The Situation of Children Involved in Armed Conflict in Bicol: A Research to A company the Implementation of the 11-Point Program of the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers (PCSUCS)”, draft, in “Strengthening Protection of Children Involved in Armed Conflict: Implementation of the 11-point Program of the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers”, 15 January 2007

23 Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997 (RA 8371) Sec. 22. “Rights during Armed Conflict.- ... The State shall observe international standards, in particular, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, for the protection of civilian populations in circumstances of emergency and armed conflict, and shall ...not recruit children of ICCs/IPs [indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples] into the armed force under any circumstance...”

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## A GEOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN INVOLVED IN ARMED CONFLICT

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During the conduct of the research, the incidences of recruitment and use of CIAC have reportedly taken place in the following regions:

### Luzon

Cordillera Administrative Region  
Region IV –A (CALABARZON)  
Region IV-B (MIMAROPA)  
Region V (Bicol Region)

### Visayas

Region VI (Western Visayas)  
Region VII (Central Visayas)  
Region VIII (Eastern Visayas)

### Mindanao

Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)  
Region IX (Zamboanga Peninsula Region)  
Region X (Northern Mindanao)  
Region XI (Davao Region)  
Region XIII (CARAGA Region)

## Recruitment and Use of CIAC in Luzon

### *Cordillera Administrative Region*

In Abra and Kalinga, the CPP-NPA continues to operate in several of the highland municipalities such as Malibcong, Tayum, Tubo, and Salapadan.<sup>24</sup> The precise number is difficult if not impossible to ascertain. Armed conflict in the area stems from the impending of entry of extractive industries sanctioned under the Mining Act of 1995. The NPA resists the entry of large-scale mining companies that threaten to displace communities and degrade the environment. The NPA described its offensive on the Agustin Bernalen Command in Barangay Tiempo in the municipal-

ity of Tubo, Abra, in June 2005 as the “response of the people and the NPA in the Cordillera to the intensifying militarization connected with the successive incursions of several foreign mining companies in the Cordillera.”<sup>25</sup>

Children are reported to be in the ranks of the NPA in Abra province,<sup>26</sup> where the highest record of incidents of insurgency has been reported – 81 separate incidents in 2005 alone. One of them is a 17-year old boy from the Maeng tribe who was returned to his family after he had been found to be mentally and emotionally unfit for training.<sup>27</sup> Villagers, however, assert that the child’s unstable mental and emotional condition were never the result of his involvement with the NPA but rather *kasigudan* or “congenital” in nature.

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24 Situational Analysis, Training on Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law and Children Involved in Armed Conflict conducted by the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers (PCSUCS) in cooperation with the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) on March 20, 2007 at the ADTEMPCO in Bangued, Abra

25 Cordillera People’s Democratic Front, On NPA raid in Tubo, Abra, 5 June 2005, [http://prwc.siteburg.com/cgi-bin/statements/statements.pl?a\\_uthor=sfn;date=050605;language=eng](http://prwc.siteburg.com/cgi-bin/statements/statements.pl?a_uthor=sfn;date=050605;language=eng)

26 Manila Times, Army suspects infiltrators among former rebel integreees, 8 September 2005, <http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2005/sept/08/yehey/prov/20050908pro1.html>

27 UNICEF-funded research on the coping behavior of indigenous children in armed conflict areas, August 2006

The government's Commission on Human Rights (CHR) reports that a 16-year old girl, a member of the NPA, surrendered to the Philippine National Police in the municipality of Pinukpuk in the province of Kalinga in 2005.<sup>28</sup> The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) documented the case of 15-year old twin girls belonging to the Kalinga tribe that surrendered to the 501st Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army in Pinukpuk.<sup>29</sup>

***Region IV-A (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Quezon – collectively referred to as CALABARZON)***

On June 7, 2006, the military captured three 15-year old boys after an encounter with NPA units in Lopez, Quezon province. They were detained in jail for a day and subsequently released to the custody of their respective parents.<sup>30</sup>

***Region IV-B (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, Palawan – collectively referred to as MIMAROPA)***

In Mindoro Oriental, the NPA suffered from an offensive launched by the army in 2004. Prior to this setback, however, local partners from faith-based and indigenous peoples organizations in both Mindoro Oriental and Mindoro Occidental provinces observed that children from the lowland Christian and upland indigenous Mangyan have indeed joined the armed group. The Mindoro Oriental Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office (PSWDO) reported in 2004 that one CIAC was killed in an encounter in Del Pilar, Naujan.

In the same year, two others were killed in Sabang, Pinalamalayan. Both children belong to the Mangyan indigenous community.

Despite the reported decline in their recruitment, children are still considered to be 'at risk' of joining the rebel group in all of the municipalities of Mindoro Oriental, with the children in the towns

of Bulalacao, Bongabong, Naujan, Roxas, and Victoria at greater risk.

This assessment is based on findings of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP)-Mindoro Conference using reports by the Philippine National Police Provincial Command saying that most of the so-called 'rebel returnees' come from these towns.<sup>31</sup> These municipalities are mainly remote, agricultural and with little or limited access to basic social services. Their geographical location – linked by various mountain passes – make them ideal for the NPA's encampment and other activities.<sup>32</sup> In 2003, the UCCP-Mindoro Conference aided the demobilization and rehabilitation of a 15-year old boy from the Sablayan area.

The UCCP-Mindoro Conference identified children in the municipalities of Sablayan and Calintaan in Mindoro Occidental as 'at risk' of becoming CIAC.

The DSWD reports that the military in Palawan province rescued from the NPA three boys, two of whom were 14 years old and one was 16 at the time.<sup>33</sup> According to a news account, the three boys surrendered to the Western Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) rather than carry out a mission to liquidate a former NPA member in San Vicente municipality, Palawan.<sup>34</sup>

***Region V (Bicol Region)***

Although government sources claim that there have been no reported cases of CIAC in the provinces of Albay and Camarines Sur since 1998, there are reports that children, particularly those out of school have joined the NPA.<sup>35</sup> An interview with the head of one of the religious centers in Iriga City in Camarines Sur said that poor families from remote barangays in the municipality of Buhi have been sending their children to the faith-based center to prevent their involvement in the armed group.<sup>36</sup>

28 Chaiperson Purificacion C. Valera-Quisumbing, Commission on Human Rights, "National Situation: Implementation of IHL in the Philippines," paper presented during the First International Humanitarian Law (IHL) National Consultative Conference, 22-23 November 2005, Manila.

29 National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Cordillera Administrative Region, "Status Report – Project: IEC Workshop on the Documentation of IP Children Involved in Armed Conflict", n.d.

30 Department of Social Welfare and Development-Program Management Bureau, 5 July 2006

31 UCCP-Mindoro Conference, draft, Report Research on Children Involved in Armed Conflict, 2007

32 *ibid.*

33 PMB- DSWD, Report on Children Involved in Armed Conflict – As of January 2007

34 Sun Star Manila, 3 teenage rebels nabbed by soldiers, 29 August 2006, <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/static/man/2006/08/29/news/3.teenage.rebels.nabbed.by.soldiers.html>

35 SAC Legazpi, *op.cit*

36 Interview with the head of a religious-run center in Iriga City, Camarines Sur in September 2006

Aside from Buhi, the other municipalities in Camarines Sur where children are 'at risk' of becoming CIAC are Balatan, Presentacion, and Ragay. In the province of Albay, children in the municipalities of Jovellar, Libon and Tiwi were identified as 'at risk' due to the presence of the CPP-NPA. The mountainous terrain and access to waterways such as the Ragay Gulf make these areas ideal for NPA encampment and activities. Poor families in these areas consider becoming a member of the Communist front as the best option for survival from lack of access to basic resources such as health and education services.<sup>37</sup>

Located in the southernmost tip of the Bicol Peninsula, Sorsogon province is the seat of the NPA's Regional Command. The recruitment of children is reportedly province-wide. Children in the municipalities of Bacon, Castilla, and Gubat and hinterland portions of Sorsogon City are considered 'at high-risk' to becoming CIAC because of the considerable support given by the local communities to the CPP-NPA.<sup>38</sup> Not only that, children are also being recruited into the CAFGU and CVOs in these municipalities, particularly Castilla.<sup>39</sup>

The military ambushed NPA units in Gubat, Sorsogon, in February 2001. In retaliation, the NPA attacked the municipal police headquarters, killing four policemen and two children who happened to be at the police station. Days after the attack, three children age 13-15 and two others in their 20s, were arrested from an alleged NPA hideout in Barangay Marinas, Sorsogon City. The group claimed that they have only been playing basketball. Two of the children reached legal age while in jail and all three were discharged only in December 2005 after murder charges were dropped and after several attempts, even by the OPAPP, failed to secure their release.<sup>40</sup>

## Recruitment and Use of CIAC in the Visayas

### *Region VI (Western Visayas)*

CPP-NPA units in Negros Occidental province have allegedly intensified recruitment especially during the last quarter of 2005 in the northern area of the province where the NPA and one of its splinter groups, the RPM-P/RPA-ABB, have been engaged in armed confrontation. Affected areas include the municipalities of Cauayan, Murcia, Calatrava, Escalante and the cities of Sipalay and Cadiz.<sup>41</sup>

According to the Negros Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (NAHRA), a raid in November 2005 conducted by the CPP-NPA against the RPA-ABB involved children.<sup>42</sup>

NAHRA identified children in the municipalities of Calatrava, Toboso and Don Salvador Benedicto in Negros Occidental as 'at risk' of becoming CIAC. NAHRA reports the increase in number of encounters from July to October 2006 between the military and the CPP-NPA and the CPP-NPA against the RPA-ABB. Within the said three month period, 10 children were captured, five of whom were from Tuboso, three from Calatrava, and two from Don Toboso Salvador Benedicto.<sup>43</sup> In August 2006, the Philippine National Police reported the capture of two individuals, age 17 and 18, after an encounter with the NPA in Barangay Bagong Silang, Don Salvador Benedicto municipality.<sup>44</sup>

In 2005, recruitment of children into the CAF-GUs was reported in Murcia and in Kabankalan City, both in Negros Occidental. The Region VI (Western Visayas) Office of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) learned that two children were recruited into the CAFGU in Murcia. The CHR immediately informed the military com-

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37 SAC Legazpi, op.cit.

38 Situational Analysis, Training on the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) conducted by Sulong CARHRIHL at the Diocesan Pastoral Center in Sorsogon City on 19-23 April 2007

39 Ibid.

40 Interview with a former employee of the SAC Sorsogon, 7 June 2006

41 Negros Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (NAHRA) in PCSUCS op. cit

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Philippine National Police-Salvador Benedicto Police Station, Negros Occidental, Special Report, 10 August 2006

45 Provincial Philippine Information Agency (PIA) Office, Tagbilaran City, "Major Insurgency-Related Events in the Province – 1999 to March 2003"

46 Interview with Dennis Calunia, Operations Manager, SAC Tagbilaran, February 2006.

47 Ibid.

48 Gov. Erico B. Aumentado, "Poverty Reduction Program for Peace and Development: The Bohol Experience" n.d.

mander of the 12th Infantry Battalion who sent the recruits home. No action, however, appeared to have been taken against the military commander for the violation.

### *Region VII (Central Visayas)*

During a 2002 attack on a CPP-NPA camp by military troops of the 802nd Brigade in Sitio Diis, Kauswagan, Trinidad, Bohol province, a child was among the eight CPP-NPA casualties.<sup>45</sup> At the time, child recruitment in the province was reportedly high. But as a result of the reactivation in 2003 of a local peace forum set up by the Bohol Provincial Government, recruitment of children by the CPP-NPA is reportedly declining.<sup>46</sup> The municipalities of Bilar, Dimiao, Lila, Sagbayan, Sevilla, Carmen, and Balilihan were among those identified as former strongholds of the NPA.<sup>47</sup> In 2000 and 2001, two of the boys captured by the military were from the towns of Sagbayan and Balilihan.

The Provincial Government of Bohol credits the reactivated peace forum for the decrease in number of CPP-NPA armed fronts from four in 2002 to just one in 2006. Likewise, the number of barangays or villages influenced by the CPP-NPA dramatically dropped from 305 to only 46.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, the Government Peace Negotiating Panel dealing with the CPP-NPA-NDF (GPNP-CNN) reported three CIAC cases in Bohol in June 2005.

The Social Action Center of the Diocese of Tagbilaran documented the case of a 17-year old girl who surrendered to the 15th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army in May 2006. The girl, whose father was a member of a militant farmer's group, joined the underground movement in September 2003 at the age of 14. She served in the NPA as courier and guide.<sup>49</sup>

In January 2006 in Mabinay, Negros Oriental province, it was reported that teenage girls

disguised as students were actually lookouts in the assassination of Revolutionary Proletarian Army–Alex Boncayao Brigade–Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Pilipinas (RPA-ABB or RPM-P) leader Rogelio “Ka Malvar” Magbato.<sup>50</sup>

### *Region VIII (Eastern Visayas)*

The Armed Forces of the Philippines intensified its campaign against the NPA in the islands of Leyte and Samar in 2004 and 2005.

The March 2007 Report on Children Involved in Armed Conflict by the Program Management Bureau (PMB) of the DSWD reports 12 CIAC cases in Leyte and Samar. Four of the CIAC are girls, with the youngest at age 11. These include the case of two ‘child warriors’,<sup>51</sup> ages 13 and 16, reported to have been rescued by the 14th Infantry Battalion of the 8th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army in Barangay 4 Poblacion, San Jose de Buan, Western Samar in October 2006. Earlier in the month, the 34th Infantry Battalion reported that it rescued two female ‘child warriors’ in Barangay Tuturingon, Catbalogan, Western Samar.<sup>52</sup> One of the girls is age 12, a native of Catbalogan, Samar, while the other, age 16, is from San Jorge, Samar. Children in the municipalities of Basey, Calbiga, Catbalogan and San Jose de Buan in Western Samar were identified as ‘at risk’ of becoming CIAC.<sup>53</sup>

Children in the following municipalities of Eastern Samar are considered ‘at risk’ of becoming CIAC: Balangkayan, Can-avid, General MacArthur, Giporlos, Hernani, Jipapad, Lawaan, Maslog, Maydolong, Oras, Quinapondan and San Policarpio. Children living in the interior barangays of the provincial capital Borongan were also identified as ‘at risk’.<sup>54</sup>

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49 SAC Tagbilaran in PCSUCS study op. cit.

50 The CPP-NPA accuses the RPA-ABB of protecting powerful politicians to enforce projects that threaten to dislodge farmers and consolidate control over areas under their jurisdiction. Interview with Negros Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (NAHRA) Chairperson Flor Arranguez, Bacolod, February 2006.

51 Felix M. Mangayao (INF) PA, Army rescues more child warriors in Samar, Samarnews, 15 October 2006

[http://www.samarnews.com/news\\_clips5/news89.htm](http://www.samarnews.com/news_clips5/news89.htm)

52 *ibid.*

53 Situational Analysis, Training on the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL), Diocesan Pastoral Center in Calbayog City, 19- 23 April 2007.

54 Situational Analysis, Consultation Workshop on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in the Province of Eastern Samar, 28 March 2007

55 Joey A. Gabieta, “Alleged teen NPA rebel nabbed in Leyte”, Visayas Bureau – Inquirer News Service, 28 May 2007, [http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/regions/view\\_article.php?article\\_id=68317](http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/regions/view_article.php?article_id=68317)

In May 2007, the 19th Infantry Battalion in Leyte arrested on charges of rebellion a 16-year old girl suspected of being a member of the NPA's Northern Leyte Front Command.<sup>55</sup> Earlier in the month, a 17-year old boy surrendered. He was allegedly a member of the NPA in the municipality of Albuera, Leyte.

## **Recruitment and Use of CIAC in Mindanao**

### *Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao-ARMM*

There are no available government reports on the capture, surrender or arrest of children involved with the MILF. Despite the absence of government data, local accounts and researches report that children have joined the MILF in the provinces of Maguindanao, Shariff Kabunsuan and Lanao del Sur. Five years earlier, a 2002 study by the International Labour Organization estimated that 10 to 15 percent of MILF members were below 18 years old.<sup>56</sup>

A research on CIAC in 2006 by the Community Resource Development Center (CRDC) indicated that social welfare offices of the study areas in Maguindanao did not handle any CIAC case.<sup>57</sup> A parallel research conducted by BIRTH-DEV in Lanao del Sur in 2006 produced a similar report.<sup>58</sup>

The CRDC and BIRTH-DEV studies documented cases of adults who joined the MILF during their adolescent years. The CRDC documented the case of a 21-year old man who joined the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) at age 14 and saw action during the 2000 AFP offensive on Camp Abubakar As-Siddique, the main camp of the MILF in Maguindanao. BIRTH-DEV documented the case in Lanao del Sur of a 19-year old girl, already two years out of active duty at the time of interview in 2006. The girl joined the MILF at 13 but did not serve combat duty.

Anecdotal accounts suggest that children from the municipalities of Datu Piang and Datu Saudi Ampatuan, both in Maguindanao, enter the MILF.<sup>59</sup> On account of the presence of MILF camps, the CRDC identifies children in the municipalities of Sultan Kudarat, Pagalungan and Datu Odin Sinsuat as 'at risk' of becoming CIAC. BIRTH-DEV classifies as 'at risk' children in Masiu, Lumbayanague, Balindong and Kapatagan in Lanao del Sur.<sup>60</sup>

### *Region IX (Zamboanga Peninsula Region)*

The CPP-NPA is thought to have camps and bases in these provinces. There are unverified reports about insurgents recruiting children through so-called "teach-ins" at the barangay level.<sup>61</sup>

### *Region X (Northern Mindanao)*

The situation in Lanao del Norte is unique in that the province straddles areas where both the NPA and MILF operate. The provincial AFP and the PSWDO have no data on the recruitment and demobilization of CIAC. Interview respondents to a study by BIRTH-DEV, however, mention of recruitment of children in Kauswagan, Munai, Poona Piagapo and Tangkal municipalities.<sup>62</sup> According to the study:

"...MILF military commanders recruit Muslim Maranao children by approaching the parents and relatives who support the group by encouraging children as young as 11 or 13 years old to engage into combat training and eventually become MILF members."<sup>63</sup>

### *Region XIII (Caraga Region)*

Eight years following the capture of 12-year old Jelyn Dayong after an encounter between NPA and government forces in the town of Alegria in Surigao del Norte province in 1999, children in majority of the municipalities of the four prov-

56 Rufa Cagoco-Guiam, Child soldiers in Central and Western Mindanao: A rapid assessment, International Labour Organization (ILO), February 2002

57 Community Resource Development Center (CRDC) in PCSUCS study op. cit.

58 Balay Integrated Rehabilitation Center for Total Human Development (BIRTH-DEV) in PCSUCS study op. cit.

59 CRDC in PCSUCS study op. cit.

60 BIRTH-DEV in PCSUCS study op. cit.

61 Purificacion C. Valera-Quisumbing, "National Situation: Implementation of IHL in the Philippines", a paper presented by Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines during the First International Humanitarian Law (IHL) National Consultative Conference (22-23 November 2005, Traders Hotel, Manila).

62 *ibid.*

63 *Ibid.*

inces of Caraga Region remain ‘at risk’.<sup>64</sup> These areas include all but one of the 11 municipalities of Agusan del Norte, namely: Buenavista, Cabadbaran, Carmen, Jabonga, Kitcharao, Las Nieves, Nasipit, Remedios T. Romualdez, Santiago and Tubay. Twelve out of the 13 municipalities of Agusan del Sur are included, namely: Bunawan, Esperanza, La Paz, Loreto, Prosperidad, Rosario, San Luis, Sibagat, Talacogon, Trento and Sibagat.

Social workers identified seven out of the 20 municipalities in Surigao del Norte, all located in the Mindanao mainland, namely: Alegria, Bacuag, Claver, Gigaquit, Mainit, Malimono and Sison. Children in 15 out of the 17 municipalities and two cities of Surigao del Sur are considered ‘at risk’: Bislig and Tandag and the municipalities of Barobo, Cagwait, Cantilan, Carmen, Carrascal, Cortes, Hinatuan, Lanuza, Lianga, Lingig, Madrid, San Agustin, San Miguel, Tagbina, and Tago.

In March 2007, the 4th Infantry (Diamond) Division of the Philippine Army reported it had captured ‘minor NPA combatants’ from the North Eastern Mindanao Regional Committee in Barangay Laperian, Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur. Three of those captured are children, two of whom were 17 and the youngest 14 years old at the time.<sup>65</sup>

In a March 2007 briefing, the AFP said that the CPP-NPA is requiring each family, particularly in the Caraga region, to ‘offer’ a member of the family when they reach the age of 14 or 15. According to the report, the children caught in the encounter in Prosperidad said that the NPA enticed them to join by telling them stories about military atrocities and promises of land once the NPA overthrows the government.<sup>66</sup>

#### *Region XI (Davao Region)*

Children belonging to the Bagobo, Mandaya, Ata-Manobo, Higaonon and their ethno-linguistic subgroups in Davao City are reportedly being recruited into the Alamara and other vigilante groups such as the Bagobo Warriors. These vigilante groups were said to have been created by the Philippine military in the early 2000s as a village defence system to support the counter-insurgency effort of the military command in Southern Mindanao against the CPP-NPA. These groups are reported to have committed human rights violations against the communities they are supposed to protect. In 2004, the human rights group Karapatan reported the forced recruitment of minors in Talaingod, Davao del Norte.<sup>67</sup>

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64 Situational Analysis, Training on Handling and Treatment of Children Involved in Armed Conflict (CIAC) Among Direct Service Providers of Caraga, IAC-CIAC, 2006

65 Actual terminology found in the Press Release dated 26 March 2007 and issued by Major Samuel C. Sagun (INF) Philippine Army, Chief, Division Public Affairs Office, 4th Infantry (Diamond) Division, Philippine Army, Camp Evangelista, Patag, Cagayan de Oro City,

66 Fernando Carias, NPA using child warriors, People’s Journal 29 March 2007, <http://trafficking.org.ph/v5/content/view/1506/56/>

67 Tyrone Velez and Grace S. Uddin, “Regime’s Torture, Other Rights Violations Decried”, *Bulatlat* (vol. IV, no. 46 19-25 December 2004), <http://www.bulatlat.com/news/4-46/4-46-torture.html>.

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## STATUS OF CONFLICTS/PROGRESS TOWARDS PEACE

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The issue of children involved in armed conflict is inextricably linked to other issues, particularly the status of the peace processes between the government and the various non-state armed groups.

### ***PEACE AGREEMENTS AND NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE STATE AND NSAGs***

**A. Peace agreement with the MNLF:** In 1996, the government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) signed a peace agreement. In recent years, the MNLF has criticized the government for failing to implement the 1996 Peace Agreement, but such problems may have arisen as a result of inadequacies in the agreement itself. The 1996 peace agreement lacks, for example, any provision on CIAC.

**B. Negotiations with the MILF:** Negotiations with the MILF continue to evolve after both parties have signed the “Agreement on Peace Between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front” otherwise known as the GRP-MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001. The agreement called for the discussions on three issues: security, rehabilitation and development of conflict affected areas, and ancestral domain.

In August 2001, the GRP and the MILF signed the “Implementing Guidelines on the Security Aspect of the GRP-MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001”. This agreement reinforced previous ceasefire agreements between the two parties by calling for the activation of Local Monitoring Teams (LMT) composed of representatives from local government units, the MILF, the religious sector and nongovernmental organizations nominated by both parties. The LMTs are mandated to monitor the implementation of ceasefire agreements in conflict-affected areas.

In May 2002, the GRP and the MILF signed the “Implementing Guidelines on the Humanitarian, Rehabilitation and Development Aspects of the GRP-MILF Agreement on Peace of 2001.” Under Article IV of this agreement, both parties shall

ensure the observance of international humanitarian law, internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms through the following: cooperation with ICRC in undertaking its mandate, cooperation in the investigation and prosecution of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, provision of access to human rights organizations in monitoring violations in conflict areas, and the sharing of information concerning missing persons.

Under Article V of the aforementioned agreement, both parties shall cooperate in the implementation of relief, rehabilitation and development projects in conflict-affected areas. In doing so, the MILF was tasked to establish a project implementing body that would have the power and function to receive and disburse private and government funds. This requirement led to the development of the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA).

One important outcome of the 2001 Tripoli Agreement was the creation of an International Monitoring Team (IMT) composed of representatives of the following countries: Brunei Darussalam, Japan, Libya and Malaysia. The IMT’s operations started in 2004, and the group was mandated to:

- Observe and monitor the implementation of the security and socioeconomic development aspects of the GRP-MILF agreements;
- Assess and determine the validity of the reports, protests and complaints concerning violations of ceasefire agreements;
- Verify and validate reports on violations in coordination with the GRP and the MILF Coordinating Committees on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) and the Local Monitoring Teams;
- Report to the GRP and the MILF peace panels the findings of its reports.<sup>68</sup>

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68 Abubakar, A., 2005, “KEEPING THE PEACE: The International Monitoring Team (IMT) Mission in Mindanao,” The SEACSN Bulletin, January-June, [http://www.seacsn.net/publications/bulletin/jan\\_june2005/mindanao1.asp](http://www.seacsn.net/publications/bulletin/jan_june2005/mindanao1.asp)

In January 2007, both the GRP and the MILF signed an agreement to reinforce the existing monitoring mechanisms and to look into the implementation of ceasefire agreements.<sup>69</sup> The agreement mandated the creation of two mechanisms. First was the Joint Monitoring and Assistance Team (JMAT) composed of representatives of the GRP and MILF CCCH, the IMT and Bantay Ceasefire, which is a network of local civil society groups in Mindanao. Second was the Tripartite Fact-finding Committee tasked to verify the causes of violation of the ceasefire agreements and to preclude repeated violations.

None of these MILF-GRP agreements, however, contains CIAC-related provisions. Even if majority of these agreements were made prior to the ratification of the OP-CRC-AC, the government should have made it a point to advocate the inclusion of child protection provisions in accordance with national laws and policies chief among which is R.A. 7610.

**C. Collapse of peace talks with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP):** Formal peace talks between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), the political arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) have not resumed since 2004. The government tagged the CPP-NPA-NDFP a 'terrorist' organization and refused to persuade the United States and European Union member states to delist it as a terrorist group. In 2006, the AFP intensified its campaigns against the NPA that claimed responsibility for attacks on military and government establishments.

One of the salient outcomes of the peace process between the government and the CPP-NPA-NDF is the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL). Both parties signed the document in The Hague in March 16, 1998. The CARHRIHL is the only document signed among the four envisioned agreements pertaining to Economic and Social Reforms; Political and Constitutional Reforms; and the End of

Hostilities and Disposition of Forces.

The CAHRIHL does have specific provisions related to the protection of children affected by armed conflict. Pertaining to principles related to human rights protection, Part III, Art. 2, Par. 24 upholds "the right of children and the disabled to protection, care, and a home, especially against physical and mental abuse, prostitution, drugs, forced labor, homelessness, and other similar forms of oppression and exploitation."<sup>70</sup>

With regard to the provisions related to the respect and adherence to principles of International Humanitarian Law, Part IV, Art. 10 of the CARHRIHL obliges both the CPP-NPA-NDF and the Philippine Government to "provide special attention to women and children to ensure their physical and moral integrity." The same provision requires both parties to ensure that "children shall not be allowed to take part in hostilities."<sup>71</sup>

**D. Peace agreement with the RPA-ABB:** In December 2000, the Rebolusyong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (RPM-P) and its armed wing, the Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPA-ABB), a breakaway faction of the CPP-NPA-NDF, entered into a peace agreement with the government. Armed clashes between the RPA-ABB and the CPP-NPA have been reported since.

The RPM-P and its armed wing, the RPA-ABB, declared as a matter of policy on 11 February 2005, its "utmost objection in the use of children as soldiers."<sup>72</sup> The RPM-P/RPA-ABB believes that "recruiting and utilization of children for combat and non-combat activities are condemnable. It further believes that utilizing children as soldiers is the worst form of child labor practice."<sup>73</sup>

Among the RPA-ABB's efforts to implement its declaration include the following:

- After the signing of the declaration, the RPA has issued memoranda to its field commands

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69 GRP-MILF Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities, Joint Resolution, 28 January 2007, <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=65>

70 GRP Monitoring Committee, "Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines," <http://www.grpmc-jmc.org/CARHRIHL.html>

71 Ibid.

72 PhilRights, op.cit.

73 Ibid.

to reinforce their awareness about the policy of non-recruitment of minors;

- Responded to reports of NGOs and the Commission on Human Rights concerning alleged involvement of minors in the group;

- Conducted IHL and human rights education sessions with its armed forces and political units;

- Ensured the implementation of recruitment criteria, i.e. minimum age, recommendation of community, recommendation from relevant squad or platoon, participation in political education, and absence of “criminal record.”

- Advocated for the non-participation of sons and daughters of fighters but rather to ensure that they enrolled in schools or are equipped with relevant skills for productive work<sup>74</sup>

Government efforts to root out the ASG: The Philippine government has stepped up efforts to root out the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in their stronghold in Sulu, suspecting it to have links with international terrorist organizations such as the Al-Qaeda. In December 2006 and January 2007, the Armed Forces of the Philippines announced that it had killed two of the ASG’s senior leaders. Operations against the armed group continue in the Sulu Archipelago.

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## GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE ON CIAC

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### *A. Landmark laws*

The Philippine Government is a state party to CRC and the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OP-CRC-AC). Prior to the ratification of the OP-CRC-AC, the Philippines already adopted in 1992 Republic Act 7610 otherwise known as Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act.

Article X, Sec. 22(B) of the said law prohibits the recruitment of children to become members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, its armed civilian units, and of non-state armed opposition groups. Nor are children to be allowed to take part in skirmishes, used as guides, couriers and spies.

On the plus side, R.A. 7610 is has a higher standard compared to the OP-CRC-AC in that the said law does not discriminate according to armed group classification when it comes to minimum age requirement. All armed forces – whether state or non-state – are prohibited from recruiting voluntarily or forcibly children individuals younger than 18 years old.

On the minus side, while outlawing the recruitment of children into the armed forces, R.A. 7610 does not specify penalties for violators. The absence of this crucial provision compromises the

potential of the law as deterrent to the armed forces’ practice of recruiting children.

Article X, Sec. 25 of R.A. 7610 guarantees the following rights of children arrested for reasons related to armed conflict: separate detention from adults except where families are accommodated as family units, free legal assistance, immediate notification of parents or legal guardians concerning the arrest of the child, and release on recognizance of the child within 24 hours to any social welfare agency, parents or legal guardians as determined by the court.

Sec. 22 of the same law declares children as “Zones of Peace” stating that: “It shall be the responsibility of the State and all other sectors concerned to resolve armed conflicts in order to promote the goal of children as zones of peace. To attain this objective, the following policies shall be observed:

- 1) Children shall not be the object of attack and shall be entitled to special respect. They shall be protected from any form of threat, assault, torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment;
- 2) Children shall not be recruited to become members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines of its civilian units or other armed groups, nor be allowed to take part in the

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74 Meeting with RPA-ABB represented by Mr. Carapali Luwalhati, National Commander, 14 June 2007

- fighting, or used as guides, couriers, or spies;
- 3) Delivery of basic social services such as education, primary health and emergency relief services shall be kept unhampered;
  - 4) The safety and protection of those who provide services including those involved in fact-finding missions from both government and non-government institutions shall be ensured. They shall not be subjected to undue harassment in the performance of their work;
  - 5) Public infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and rural health units shall not be utilized for military purposes such as command posts, barracks, detachments, and supply depots; and
  - 6) All appropriate steps shall be taken to facilitate the reunion of families temporarily separated due to armed conflict.”<sup>75</sup>

It also provides for the care and humane treatment of rescued or surrendered child soldiers, for the immediate notification of the rescue of the child soldier to his or her parents and guardians and for the release of the child within 24 hours to the custody of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD or any responsible member of the community determined by the courts. The DSWD is the lead government agency in the rehabilitation/reintegration of child soldiers and other children and young people in difficult situations and the ensuring their social adjustment, growth and development.

Eighteen years prior to the enactment of R.A. 7610, the Philippine government passed into law the Child and Youth Welfare Code (1974) which sets out the nation’s legislative framework on children.

Pertinent to the prohibition of the recruitment and involvement of children from indigenous peoples’ communities in all circumstances, the Indigenous People’s Rights Act of 1997 (R.A. 8371) is an applicable national law.

Aside from these three laws, the Government has enacted a wide range of national executive orders and laws to promote and protect the rights of children.

While these legal safeguards and other related

laws provide an important structural framework, they have frequently not been effectively implemented. *Deadly Playgrounds: The Phenomenon of Child Soldiers in the Philippines*, a 2005 study by the Philippine Human Rights Information Center, aptly observes that there are gaps in the implementation of some of these policies and programs due largely to the difficulty of implementing laws in conflict areas as more immediate and pressing concerns stemming from the conflict take precedence.<sup>76</sup>

### ***B. The Inter-agency Committee on Children Involved in Armed Conflict (IAC-CIAC)***

In November 2001, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo signed Executive Order No. 56 adopting the Comprehensive Program Framework for Children Involved in Armed Conflict (CPF-CIAC). At the same time, E.O. 56 approved the creation of an inter-agency body called the Inter-agency Committee on Children Involved in Armed Conflict (IAC-CIAC) composed of line government agencies mandated to develop plans and programs consistent with the implementation of the CPF-CIAC. The Executive Order was issued to fulfill the commitment of the Philippine Government to international human rights standards that aim to protect the rights of children in armed conflict situations, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the CRC on children involved in armed conflict.

The CPF-CIAC has three components:

- 1) Prevention of recruitment and involvement of children through the development of appropriate infrastructures and basic social services in the poorest areas of the country.
- 2) Advocacy and mobilization involving faith-based organizations, grassroots and people’s organizations, NGO’s, youth groups and media to carry the advocacy agenda of non-recruitment of child soldiers.
- 3) Rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of CIAC. This program component intends to strengthen the delivery of appropriate services to

75 Republic Act (RA) 7610 Sec. 22 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), and (f)

76 Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRight), *Deadly Playgrounds – The Phenomenon of Child Soldiers in the Philippines*, 2005

ensure the secured release, recovery and reintegration of a CIAC into civilian life.

The CPF-CIAC has led to the development of further plans and frameworks of action that guide the development of relevant programs of government agencies. Government agencies that form part of the IAC-CIAC have prepared memoranda and circulars aiming to localize the implementation of relevant programs down to their respective field offices.

One major outcome of the CPF-CIAC is the development of the inter-agency guidelines in handling and treatment of child soldiers. These guidelines are based on R.A. 7610 instructing the turnover of demobilized CIAC to civilian custody within 24 hours upon surrender or rescue. The guidelines stipulate the functions of relevant government agency in each step or part of the process from surrender or rescue to the rehabilitation or reintegration of child.

While IAC-CIAC is a good start towards stronger protection measures for children involved in armed conflict, these challenges need to be addressed:<sup>77</sup>

a.) *Weak dissemination of the guidelines down to*

*the field offices.* While there have been circulars and memoranda issued by national offices, these have not been mainstreamed in the field offices at the provincial, municipal and city levels. Lack of political will of some government officials and the prevailing tendency of abdicating responsibility by pointing at other agencies to fulfill specific mandates compound the situation.

b.) *The CIAC phenomenon in the Philippines is intricately related to the overall insurgency problem.* Addressing the CIAC issue requires consensus by all parties to the conflict. At present the issue has not been raised formally in the agenda of the peace talks. Other political priorities dominate negotiations. The CIAC issue is considered as a highly sensitive issue that could paralyze peace talks.

c.) *In relation to the above, NSAGs may view IAC-CIAC initiatives as counter-insurgency measures.*<sup>78</sup> Although most NSAG's in the country deny the existence of child soldiers in their ranks, some of their leaders have also defended the position of children's involvement as children's right to self-defense.

d.) *Difficulty of contacting CIAC.* Getting to CIAC pose serious threats to the security of civilian personnel such as social workers.

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77 Silverio, Ryan, Assessment of the Philippine Government's Obligations as State Party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPCRC-AC), unpublished document, 2007

78 The Armed Forces of the Philippines through Gen. Esperon issued a statement in 21 December 2006 calling for stronger counter-terrorism measures against the CPP-NPA-NDF on grounds including the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

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## PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF GOVERNMENT DRR INITIATIVES

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NGOs, including the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and the Psychosocial Support and Children's Rights Resource Center (PST CRRC), have been involved in the process of designing a training program for government agencies on the issue of CIAC. For example, the PCSUCS participated in a planning workshop with the IAC-CIAC in August 2005 assisted the agency in the development of a module to make the CIAC issue more widely known among government agencies at the municipal and provincial levels. The module was pilot tested among social workers and police officers in Butuan City, Agusan del Norte in April 2006.

Throughout 2006, the Philippine Coalition, as a member of the Sub-Committee on Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement (SC CAACD) of the government's Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC)<sup>79</sup> also participated in the nationwide conduct of the Training Series on the Action on the Rights of Children Involved in Armed Conflict.

At the local level, inter-agency mechanisms involving both government and civil society actors exist, although they are not directly responsible for working on the issue. One such example is the revitalization of the Bohol Peace Forum in 2003. It is a multi-sector network chaired by the Catholic bishop and that aims at revitalizing discussions about the peace agenda with local communities and NGOs and exploring avenues for peace talks with local NPA units.<sup>80</sup> The Social Action Center of the Diocese of Tagbilaran, a member of the Bohol Peace Forum, helped in the referral of the case of the girl CIAC it had documented as part of the PCSUCS study to the PSWDO.

### FATE OF CAPTURED OR DEMOBILIZED CHILDREN

As the previous section on government policy and practice demonstrates, the absence of adequate protection mechanisms for captured children exposes them to abuse. In addition, the lack of support or assistance for children who return to their communities hinders their reintegration, leaving them fearful for their safety.

Of the five cases of children that have been reported by the Bohol PSWDO since 2000, two were girls. One of the girls, age 16, was captured in Sevilla in 2002 and charged with rebellion. She was sent to the Regional Rehabilitation Center for Youth (RRCY) in Argao in the province of Cebu to await the court decision on her case.<sup>81</sup> After two years, the girl escaped and reportedly returned to the ranks of the CPP-NPA where she became pregnant. In 2005, she was reported to have returned to her community but subsequently left again leaving her child behind. A warrant was issued for her arrest.

A boy who was captured in Sagbayan, Bohol in 2001 and whose case was resolved two years later refused to return to his home town for fear for his life. Another boy, captured in Balilihan also in Bohol in 2000, was returned to his parents on release on recognizance but the boy refused to go back to school and chose instead to relocate with a sibling in Bulacan near Manila to work in a furniture shop.<sup>82</sup>

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79 CWC is the focal government agency for children's protection, welfare and development in the Philippines. Its mandate includes coordination of the enforcement of laws related to children and preparation of policies and programs for the development of children, and monitor and evaluate the implementation. Formally organized on 08 February 2006, the Sub-Committee on Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement (SC CAACD) is the merger of former CWC sub-task forces on Indigenous Peoples, Muslim, and Displaced Children.

80 United Nations Development Program, Philippine Human Development Report 2005: Peace, Human Security and Human Development in the Philippines (Manila: HDN, UNDP and NZAID, 2005), p.49.

The March 2007 report of the DSWD on CIAC describes the status of the 18 children that the agency served since 2006:

- 1) Only one of the three CIAC cases from Quezon managed to return to school. The other two arrived in the province in October 2006 from an NGO in Manila and are waiting for their court hearing.
- 2) The three CIAC from Palawan are officially under the custody of the military with the PSWDO providing stress debriefing services to the children. Charges have been filed against the children at the Palawan Prosecutor's Office.
- 3) Of the 12 cases reported from Samar and Leyte, three (one girl and two boys) are under the custody of the respective social welfare and development offices for foster care. Three others, all girls, are housed at an institution, but one of them is facing murder charges. Four others (all boys), two of whom are brothers, have been discharged to their respective families. One of the girls is under the custody of her sister, and alternative placement for a girl CIAC is being explored as relatives are not willing to take custody.

In all the aforementioned cases, it was the social welfare and development offices that facilitated the return of these children to their families. As for the other cases mentioned in this study, the twin girls from Pinukpuk, Kalinga; the boy caught in Don Salvador Benedicto in Negros Occidental; and the boy from Abra have also returned to their families.

#### **EXPLOITATION OF CIAC ISSUE AS COUNTER-INSURGENCY PROPAGANDA**

In April 2007, Philippine daily newspapers reported that a 12-year old child had been killed in an encounter between the AFP and NPA units in a village in New Bataan in the province of Compostela Valley in Southern Mindanao. The military initially claimed that the 12-year old child, who was later identified as a nine-year old girl, was a 'child warrior' of the NPA. A CHR resolution,

however, concluded that the young girl was killed in the crossfire between the army soldiers and the NPA. In their affidavit submitted to the CHR, the child's parents and neighbors denied that their young daughter was a member of the NPA.<sup>83</sup>

The capture and surrender of two children allegedly NPA members in Leyte in May 2007 were charged as proof by the military that the NPA is "still using minors in their campaign against the government."<sup>84</sup> The NDF-Eastern Visayas however dismissed this claim, saying that the military "keeps on taking minors into custody and using them as helpless and unwilling props for the worn-out deception that the NPA is recruiting minors. In glaring violation of their rights, these minors are essentially hostages because they are forced to remain under the custody of the military and the conniving civilian agencies for use as a tactic in propaganda."<sup>85</sup>

In June 2007, the PCSUCS formally submitted to the IAC-CIAC and the AFP a letter to bring to the attention of concerned agencies about violations to the media guidelines in the handling of sensitive cases involving children. It particularly brought to the attention of the committee the disregard by the media officers of the AFP in safeguarding the identities of former CIAC. The most serious of the articles which appeared over the internet is a press release issued by the Chief Division Public Affairs of the 4th Infantry Division, Philippine Army, on March 26, 2007. In the article, pictures of the children and young people captured in Prosperidad are displayed in a degrading manner. Depicted as criminals, they are pictured with display cards bearing their ages and names and they are made to pose in front of the items that have reportedly been in their possession.

#### **PROGRAMS IN FOCUS**

Most of the organizations that participated in the study have been running projects for victims of armed conflict in general. Some organizations have projects catering specifically to women and children affected by armed conflict. The Kadtun-

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83 Commission on Human Rights, CHR Case No. XI-07-2984 CV RE; Case of Galacio, Greil Buya vs. Elements of the 67th IB, PA

84 Gabieta, op. cit.

85 Fr. Santiago Salas, NDFP Spokesperson in Eastern Visayas, Fascist Lies Further Highlight that it is Not the NPA but the Military that Takes Advantage of Minors in Warfare, 29 May 2007 <http://www.philippinerevolution.net/cgi-bin/statements/statements.pl?author=sss;date=070529;language=eng>

taya Foundation Inc (KFI),<sup>86</sup> based in Cotabato City, for example, addresses the issue of children's rights through its advocacy of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and provides a scholarship program for children in areas affected by armed conflict. Others – such as Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) in the Cordilleras and Notre Dame Foundation for Charitable Activities, Inc.–Women in Enterprise Development (NDFCAI-WED) – provide services to indigenous people. All the programs seek to provide disadvantaged communities with culturally-relevant education and employment, as alternatives to becoming involved in armed conflict. These organizations are not categorically dedicated to CIAC but circumstances compel them to respond to the CIAC issue.

In the course of their work, however, organizations come across children currently involved or formerly involved in armed conflict. For example, in 2003, the UCCP-Mindoro Conference aided the demobilization and reintegration of a 15-year old boy from the Sablayan area. He was placed under pastoral care but had to be transferred to another area for safety.

Balay Integrated Rehabilitation Center for Total Human Development (BIRTH-DEV) based in Iligan City in the province of Lanao del Norte, Mindanao, is the only organization in this study with programs and services specifically dedicated to children involved in armed conflict. From 2005 to 2006, BIRTH-DEV implemented the project “Strengthening Protection of Children Involved in Armed Conflict: Implementation of the 11-point Program of the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers”, supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

The following section provides a description of programs and projects that have been or are being undertaken by the organizations that took part in this study.<sup>87</sup> These projects could easily integrate activities aimed at preventing the recruitment of children. The integration of demobilization and reintegration programs would require specific training on handling and treatment of CIAC cases or at the very least the establishment of an effective and efficient referral system with the various levels of the DSWD. Indeed, with the

exception of BIRTH-DEV and the Social Action Center of Tagbilaran, none of the organizations surveyed have handled CIAC cases or referred such cases to the DSWD. Nonetheless, some of the programs surveyed have the potential to offer psychosocial counseling, education and skills training to demobilized CIAC.

#### **Community-Based Biodiversity Conservation of Buasao Watershed and Mount Poswey**

Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG)

CCAGG works with the Maeng (I-maeng) indigenous community, whose homeland, a forested area rich in flora and fauna is in the Buasao Watershed and Mount Poswey in the Boliney municipality on the eastern side of the province of Abra. Gold deposits have reportedly been found in the nearby disputed area of Baya-osen, and mining companies are trying to win concessions to begin mining activities. With little government provision of basic services, the impoverished communities have hitherto been dependent on the forest.

The CCAGG introduces alternative sources of food production and income with the aim of reducing the dependence of the community on the forest. CCAGG also helps in the conservation of the unique plant and animal life of the area. The project was developed in close consultation and cooperation with the communities and other civil society actors. Communities contributed funds and resources to the project, fostering a sense of shared ownership. A multi-sector committee composed of community members was formed to assess the implementation of the conservation project, to plan activities and pave the way for the eventual transfer of management of the project from the project proponent to partner indigenous communities with whom they work.

In view of the effect that mining companies entering indigenous areas in Abra have had on the recruitment of children of indigenous communities into armed groups, this project has the potential to play a role in alleviating the social factors that contribute to the issue of CIAC.

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86 See BIRTH-DEV, 2006.

87 Not all the NGOs who took part in the survey feature as case studies.

### ***Bahay Kalinga Para sa Mga Bata (A Home for the Welfare of Children)***<sup>88</sup>

United Church of Christ in the Philippines  
(UCCP) – Mindoro Conference

In 2000, the province of Mindoro Oriental became the setting of intense military operations conducted by the army against units of the CPP-NPA lodged in the mountainous interior of the island. Local churches of the UCCP-Mindoro Conference were situated in communities experiencing massive military operations against the CPP-NPA. The situation compelled the church to create a structure wherein local churches as sanctuaries of peace promoted the welfare and protection of children, became centres for education, training, information and counselling. They also coordinated and conducted relief and medical operations. The project seeks to build on community strength and networks of the UCCP-Mindoro Conference, including the indigenous Mangyan communities it serves, and draws on experience gained from existing youth programs.

In May 2006, as part of its education program, UCCP-Mindoro Conference conducted its Summer Youth Camp — an awareness-raising activity about children involved in armed conflict. More than 180 children participated in the activity.

Civil society organizations and individuals are involved in the project. However, it operates primarily within the church structure. The UCCP-Mindoro Conference maintains close ties with the Mindoro Oriental Provincial Social Work and Development Office (PSWDO) and the Psychosocial Support and Children's Rights Resource Center (PST CRRC). The project may have possible links to DRR, particularly in the areas of prevention and provision of education as well as providing psychosocial support and temporary shelter for demobilized children.

### **Advocacy Program on Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) and Anti-Trafficking of Persons**<sup>89</sup>

(Social Action Center-Diocese of Tagbilaran)

The Social Action Center of the Diocese of Tagbilaran responded to high levels of violence against women and children, including domestic violence, prostitution and child trafficking, in Bohol province by developing a corresponding education and advocacy program. The project aims to educate parishioners in seven municipalities<sup>90</sup> about the Anti-Violence against Women and Children Act (Republic Act 9262) and the Anti-Trafficking of Persons Act (Republic Act 9208), increase their understanding of issues related to the rights of women and children, and evolve a common vision and strategy towards achieving gender equality.<sup>91</sup>

The project includes monitoring, evaluation and networking components. It is envisioned that other civil society actors will be involved even if the program will be run principally under the auspices of the church. As an active member of the Local Peace Forum, the Diocese of Tagbilaran enjoys strong partnership with the provincial government of Bohol and can easily link up with the Bohol Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office (PSWDO) that attends to cases involving children.

### **Legal Assistance Program of the Negros Alliance of Human Rights Advocates**

Negros Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (NAHRA)

The program provides legal assistance to marginalized groups involved in agrarian or labor disputes and to political prisoners by documenting cases and preparing legal petitions.

The final peace agreement between the Government of the Philippines and the Revolutionary Proletarian Army – Alex Boncayao Brigade - Rebolusyonyong Partido ng Manggagawa-Pilipinas (RPA-ABB-RPM-P) signed in December 2000 included provisions for the release of 35 political prisoners and the subsequent processing for release of 144 political prisoners. The two parties agreed that NAHRA would help identify the beneficiaries and provide records. It does not provide assistance to children of political prisoners but in 1999 assisted in the release of a 17-year old boy alleged to be a member of the RPA-ABB

88 UCCP-Mindoro Conference, *Bahay Kalinga Para sa Mga Bata (A Home for the Welfare of Children)*, project proposal, n.d.

89 Social Action Center of the Diocese of Tagbilaran, *Advocacy Program on Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC)*, project proposal, February 2006

90 The municipalities, administered under the Parish of St. Peter are Loay, Loboc, Conception, Quinoguitan, Bilar, Batuan, and Sevilla.

91 SAC Tagbilaran, op. cit.

and subsequently charged of a criminal offence in the municipality of Enrique B. Magalona.

NAHRA reports good cooperation with government agencies, including the Commission on Human Rights, with other NGOs, including Task Force Detainees of the Philippines that provides food and transportation for families of detainees and scholarships for their children, and with the Medical Action Group. It has contacts with the PSWDO, municipal social workers as well as with the RPA-ABB.

### **Community-Managed Peace and Development Program<sup>92</sup>**

Grupo Paghidaet

In the upland and lowland areas of the municipality of Leon in Iloilo on Panay Island, a locally-developed peace-building initiative has slowly developed into a community-managed peace and development program. The agricultural town of Leon was one of the major conflict areas in the hostilities between the CPP-NPA and the government. Socio-cultural and economic factors made Leon a stronghold for the insurgency. Economic, physical and social dislocation brought about by the armed conflict forced people to relocate and resulted in a culture of violence. As the situation began to change in the 1990s, Grupo Paghidaet became a main partner in the development initiatives of Leon's religious leaders, under the Parish of St. Catherine of Alexandria.

By 2001, as former members of the armed groups and local church members demanded a more proactive role in the development process, community members replaced Grupo Paghidaet's non-resident volunteers in implementing the program. Projects run by the community include 16 early childhood and childcare project sites. The improved situation in the landlocked municipality has also resulted in the establishment of community-based peoples' organizations, farmers groups and vendors cooperatives. Grupo Paghidaet continues to provide technical support whenever requested.

### **Strengthening Protection of Children Involved in Armed Conflict: Implementation of the 11-point Program of the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers<sup>93</sup>**

Balay Integrated Rehabilitation Center for Total Human Development (BIRTH-DEV)

The project carried out by BIRTH-DEV on behalf of the PCSUCS initially sought to complement the government's efforts towards establishing a systematic monitoring and reporting mechanism on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

The project covered eight provinces: Albay, Bohol, Camarines Sur, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Mindoro Oriental and Negros Occidental. Three of the organizations profiled in this report, the UCCP-Mindoro Conference, the SAC-Diocese of Tagbilaran, and NAHRA are among the project's local partners.

The research phase of the project had three key areas:

- 1) A description of the knowledge of the interviewees on the Memorandum of Agreement on the Handling and Treatment of CIAC;
- 2) A description of the trends and local issues regarding CIAC in the municipalities in the provinces covered by the study. The description includes the local profile of the armed groups present in the country and latest reports of child recruitment and demobilization.
- 3) Identification of three priority municipalities per province and six priority barangays in each of the selected municipality. They would be the basis for future projects of the PCSUCS.

The project involved the following activities and outcomes:

- 1) School forums under the CIDA-BUILD project reached 16 schools and

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92 Dator-Bercilla, Attempts Toward a Community-based Peace and Development Program: Peace Initiatives through Convergence in Leon, Ilo-ilo, 2002, paper presented during 1st National Peace Research Conference in Manila, Philippines, 27 to 29 November 2002.

93 Balay Integrated Rehabilitation Center for Total Human Development (BIRTH-DEV), "Project Performance Report", submitted to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), February 2007.

two community groups. These included five national high schools, four private Catholic and one Islamic academies and five high schools in integrated universities. In two of the forums conducted in Oriental Mindoro, the forums were featured in the respective newsletters/official student publications, namely *The Monitor* (Macatoc National High School) and *The College Tumbler* (Mindoro State College of Agriculture and Technology). The 18 forums reached a combined population of 3,509 students, teachers and community members.

2) During the National Presentation of Research Results, the representatives of the DSWD noted the timeliness of the research presentation as it would help in the scheduled annual planning and assessment. The DILG meanwhile, committed to act on the findings that the MOA on CIAC is not known at the municipal levels. The DILG representative from the National Barangay Operations Office (NBOO) said that the DILG shall issue an Administrative Order instructing regional, provincial and municipals officers to review the MOA on CIAC. The National Coordinator also presented the research results during the first bimonthly meeting of the 27th IHL National Committee Meeting. A representative of the Armed Forces of the Philippines took interest in the report from Bicol that former CIAC were being used in the counter-insurgency measures of the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGU). In an email dated March 2, 2007, the AFP requested a copy of the research to guide the formulation of policy and directive specifically to AFP units that might have violated rules of engagement

3) From January 9-12, 2007, the PCSUCS, spearheaded by the Project Holder conducted the Interfaith Workshop and Dialogue on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict at the Gardenia Ca-

tering Services in Cagayan de Oro City. Twenty-four participants from different faith-based organizations and NGOs throughout the country attended the three-day event. The resource speakers provided the participants insights on the CIAC issue, including national and international legal frameworks on children involved in armed conflict (CIAC) and international humanitarian law (IHL). On the final day of the three-day event, participants were asked to fill up a worksheet to explore possibilities of working with the PCSUCS in future projects. The responses resulted in the compilation of a directory of partners, including a description of the services. The result of the Interfaith Workshop is opening a line with influential groups such as the Bishop Ulama Conference<sup>94</sup> in an effort to address the root causes of the voluntary or involuntary recruitment of children into the ranks of armed groups and paramilitary organizations.

#### **Recycling War Trash for Peace (RWTP)<sup>95</sup> Nagdilaab Foundation, Inc.**

The Nagdilaab Foundation and the Ateneo Research Center of the Ateneo de Zamboanga University set up a creative arts project to teach young Muslims and Christians how to transform the visible remnants of armed conflict - such as bullet shells and mortar capsules - into functional and decorative products. Working with young people who were mostly victims of armed conflict and who were not in school, the project aimed to foster a process of healing and to promote peace-building values and mutual respect among the participants and the wider community. Healing, rather than income generation, was a key objective. Families were also encouraged to take part in the process. The RWTP provided a venue for the young people and the proceeds went to the individuals, their families and the community. The local government units of Basilan are supportive and other civil society actors, particularly the imams and church leaders, have been involved.

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94 Established on July 16, 1996, the Bishop Ulama Forum (BUF) and its Bishop Ulama Conference (BUC) are the leading elements in inter-religious dialogue in Mindanao. Composed of bishops from the Catholic and Protestant churches in Mindanao and the ulama from the Ulama League of the Philippines, the BUF began when the leaders of these denominations wrote to their respective constituents regarding the creation of the controversial Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) that covered 14 provinces in Mindanao.

95 Nagdilaab Foundation, Inc., Recycling War Trash for Peace (RWTP) profile

Experience gained from the project might provide a useful basis for extending psychosocial and capacity-building initiatives as a component of a DRR program.

**Inspiracion delos Pobres<sup>96</sup>  
Christian Children's Fund (CCF)–Basilan**

In its twelfth year, the Inspiracion delos Pobres Project provides services to Christian and Muslim communities in 10 impoverished barangays in Isabela City and 17 in Lamitan. The project focuses on children from birth to 14 years old and aims to improve the quality of life of families; enable them to provide a better future for their children by enhancing their physical, social, mental and spiritual development; promote positive family relationships; and build a healthy and peaceful community. There are seven areas of work: education, primary healthcare, nutrition, potable water, family promotion, capacity building, and Enhanced Rapid Improvement of Community Health (En-RICH). The local government units of Basilan are supportive. There is cooperation with other civil society actors, particularly the imams and church leaders. Improving family and community relationships and tackling issues relating to the provision of essential services may help prevent children joining armed groups.

**Make a Connection (MAC): Nurturing Future Leaders  
Notre Dame Foundation for Charitable Activities, Inc.–Women in Enterprise Development (NDF-CAI-WED)**

Extreme poverty prevents many children and young people from the Teduray, Maguindanao, and Iranun communities in Cotabato City from going to school. The two-year leadership training program of NDFCAI-WED<sup>97</sup> enabled about 50 15 to 24-year old Teduray, Maguindanao, Iranun and other youth from impoverished villages in Cotabato City to participate in a special project set up by NGOs and the private sector. The Consuelo Foundation and telecommunications company Nokia provided funds for the initial capital awarded to graduates of the training program to start their own businesses. The project, which concluded in 2005, provided indigenous and Muslim youth skills training, including leadership skills, as well as micro-lending and credit assistance.

The project sought to foster a sense of self respect and an appreciation of cultural diversity among its participants. After the end of the training program, participants took part in various projects for the benefit of the individual and the community. Young Tedurays, Maguindanao and Iranun Muslims from the villages in Pansacala, Bucana, and Kidpo in Cotabato City have started businesses such as baking, silkscreen, making frames, fish vending, and crab farming.

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96 CCF-Basilan, Inspiracion delos Pobres profile

97 NDFCAI-WED, Make a Connection: Nurturing Future Leaders Project profile

Addressing the Philippines' CIAC issue at the local, regional and national levels has become ever more pressing given that there remains no end to the conflict between the GRP and the Communist and Bangsamoro fronts.

The socio-economic, cultural, and historical contexts of the study areas define the phenomenon of children involved in armed conflict. The nature of the armed conflicts in Abra, Negros Occidental and the Central Mindanao provinces are quite different from one another and each conflict presents different challenges which any DRR-related process or child recruitment prevention programs must take into consideration.

This section summarizes some of the survey's key findings, providing an overview of some of the experiences and challenges faced by organizations that have been working in areas of armed conflict.

### **Working with the authorities and the armed forces**

Many of the organizations work with different levels of government, from the *barangay* to the national level. Some organizations are working with the authorities and armed forces to promote dialogue between the different parties or to assist victims of armed conflict. For example, the UCCP-Mindoro Conference has been actively involved in sponsoring dialogue between the military, the provincial government and NGOs particularly between 2002 and 2004 when military operations against the CPP-NPA were at their most intense.

During this period, civil society organizations, including faith-based organizations were alienated as there was a tendency of the military to lump all organizations as supporters of the Communist front. Meanwhile, the United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD) has worked with government agencies in delivering relief, medical and other assistance to Internally Displaced Persons and other victims of the armed conflict in Central Mindanao.

Organizations, however, expressed varying levels of cooperation and support on the part of the authorities. The CCAGG, for example, enjoys steady support at the municipal level but observes lack

of support from the Abra provincial government. A former member of an armed group and head of a people's organization in Leon, Iloilo, observed that lack of government support forced some former members of the armed group to rearm or ally themselves with politicians.

During the term of the late Executive Director Elisa del Puerto, the CCF-Basilan forged an informal partnership with local army units in Basilan to teach soldiers and members of paramilitary groups how to manage and resolve conflicts. The CAFGU in Basilan were thereafter described as having displayed more peaceable social attitudes in their orientation towards civilian.<sup>98</sup>

In 2004, the organization invited a representative of the PCSUCS and the regional coordinator of the Southeast Asian Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (SEASUCS) to serve as resource persons for two of its activities. One was a Symposium on the Peace Process and Child Soldiers held at the 18th Infantry Battalion Training Grounds in Lamitan, Basilan, with more than 100 soldiers and CAFGU trainees in attendance. The other was a similar symposium for high school students at one of the leading learning institutions in Isabela City.

### **Gaining access to children involved or formerly involved in armed conflict.**

The lack of national statistics on numbers of children involved or formerly involved in armed conflict, the consistent denial by non-state armed groups of the existence of children within their ranks, and security and geographical difficulties make it difficult to obtain an accurate picture of the extent of the problem or to gain access to the children. At present, access to children who have been informally demobilized is largely incidental and there are no programs or initiatives to support their needs. PhilRights reports that out of the 79 demobilized CIAC for a survey in 2005, a significant 60.8 percent did not undergo the formal rehabilitation process before reintegration into their communities. Of this number, 14.6 percent said that they were not aware of existing rehabilitation programs for CIAC.<sup>99</sup>

98 Human Development Network (HDN), Philippine Human Development Report 2005, p. 48,

99 Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights), *Deadly Playgrounds – The Phenomenon of Child Soldiers in the Philippines*, p. 92, 2005

As far as information or gaining access to children involved or formerly involved in armed conflict, the situation in Lanao del Norte perhaps best describes the situation in many other areas in the Philippines where cases of CIAC have been reported or are known or suspected to occur. The absence of needed data and the difficulty to contact CIAC in Lanao del Norte may mean that there is an undetermined scope of the CIAC issue. These difficulties also limit the formulation and implementation programs that help CIAC cope with their situation and regain their childhood.”<sup>100</sup>

The several cases of captured or demobilized children, from those captured in Bohol in the early 2000s to those in Samar in 2006 demonstrates the importance of prompt and effective action in cases of children in detention or rehabilitation centres. The vulnerability of children formerly involved in armed conflict returning to the community and the absence of reintegration programs, especially if their parents are members of a non-state armed group are questions that need to be addressed.

#### **Working with communities and community structures**

The organizations identified the importance of involving community leaders and structures in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects and ensuring the entire community was involved in the process. The CCAGG emphasized the importance of involving traditional social structures such as the *dap-ay* (council of elders) and the *lapat* (indigenous resource management system), and the need to respect traditional ways of life. In promoting the active involvement of community members in the planning and implementation of the project/s and in sharing materials and responsibilities, the NGO encouraged a sense of ownership and responsibility for the project among the communities involved.

Grupo Paghidaet noted the sensitivity of local residents and former members of the armed group to the organization’s volunteers working in Leon. Perceived as outsiders, the group moved

from a framework that was community-based to one that was community managed. Through its peace-building initiatives, the organization has promoted a consultative mode of governance that allows stakeholders to participate in decision-making processes particularly in those that relate to local development.<sup>101</sup>

However, promoting coordination and cooperation between communities and different sectors of civil society remains difficult. In Bohol, for example, some communities wait for projects to come to their areas rather than take the initiative.<sup>102</sup> In some cases, however, the non-cooperation of community members stems from lack of management skills and confidence in dealing with NGOs, especially in local initiatives or businesses. Such has been the experience of former members of the armed groups in the upland areas of Leon, Iloilo, whose small scale businesses have failed due to conflict with established traders in the town center.<sup>103</sup>

#### **Working with NSAGs and members’ families**

The Nagdilaab Foundation has worked with non-state armed groups as convener in peace talks with the government. The NDFCAI-WED provides training and education to the wives of MILF commanders. However, there is a tendency to only work with the leadership and as such, coordination work and securing clearances may have taken longer than expected. There have also been problems in the distribution of funds from the government to who are commonly referred to as rebel returnees - former members of the armed group.<sup>104</sup> It was noted that in order to avoid creating resentment between former members of the armed group and the rest of the community, “efforts at reintegration should be done through local community development rather than focusing on rebel returnees as target beneficiaries or partners of development.”<sup>105</sup> Key to this approach is what the former members of the armed group and Grupo Paghidaet referred to as *nilagpang* diplomacy – a simple approach based on local knowledge and resources that creates a sense of ownership.<sup>106</sup>

100 BIRTH-DEV, op. cit.

101 Dator-Bercilla, op. cit.

102 Interview with Mr. Dennis Calunia, op. cit.

103 Interview with a former member of the armed group and head of a people’s organization in Leon, Iloilo, 2006.

104 Dator-Bercilla, op. cit.

105 *ibid.*

106 An Ilonggo specialty, *nilagpang* is an inexpensive but delectable soup made from roast chicken, and coconut milk flavored with leeks, garlic and lemon grass.

## Developing culturally-sensitive approaches

Organizations have developed approaches that are culturally-sensitive to the communities they work with. For example, given the sensitive issue of children's involvement in armed conflict, the NDFCAI-WED does not label as CIAC those children they have served<sup>107</sup> so as not to antagonize community members.

In its involvement in the Bohol Peace Forum, the SAC-Diocese of Tagbilaran, sought to brief the military about local cultural beliefs in the conflict-affected areas.<sup>108</sup> This helped the military units become more aware and appreciative of approaches that would not be offensive to civilians in carrying out their operations, such as routine checkpoints. These approaches made the military less antagonistic in the eyes of the community that formerly comprised the mass base of the NPA in Bohol.

Cultural or religious beliefs sometimes present difficulties to those attempting to address the CIAC issue. For example, the Bangsamoro people in Mindanao view the involvement of young people as a religious undertaking and consider DRR processes to be contrary to their culture. In addition, although the age of majority in the Philippines is 18, Muslim customary law establishes that a child reaches the age of majority when he reaches puberty, which is between 13 and 17 years old. Various indigenous groups have similar beliefs. The high premium placed on gun ownership among the Bangsamoro also presents a challenge to culture of peace advocates.<sup>109</sup>

The importance of transparency and ensuring that the provision of services is not based on any religious and ethno-linguistic affiliation, gender or socioeconomic considerations remains a core value for the organizations surveyed in this study.

## Networking and coordination of initiatives

Networking enables NGOs to share skills and information, as well as monitor and evaluate joint

efforts. The NDFCAI-WED, for example, subcontracts its literacy programs for OSY and materials to local NGOs and people's organizations that, in turn, train local communities. Through joint efforts with NGOs, the Kadtuntaya Foundation Incorporated (KFI) gets technical and financial support from other civil society groups.

In some of the organizations, the existence of an active local network monitoring system has been very helpful. For example, the UCCP-Mindoro Conference benefits from the strong links between the more than 60 indigenous and non-indigenous peoples' churches in its network.<sup>110</sup>

The general experience of NGOs in the Philippines that work directly or indirectly on the issue, however, points to the need for increased cooperation and coordination of initiatives as to avoid duplication of efforts and to maximize skills, resources, and to make information sharing or referral systems more effective. Furthermore, how to bring in other influential sectors to address the root causes of the voluntary or involuntary recruitment of children into the ranks of armed groups and paramilitary organizations remains a serious challenge.

In July 2004 a number of NGOs and businesses set up a consortium in Zamboanga City called Pagtabangan BaSulTa to try to promote a culture of peace and prosperity and to address some of the problems facing communities in the provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi.<sup>111</sup>

The consortium aims to collaborate with other organizations in the region.<sup>112</sup> As a matter of strategy, it is common for NGOs in a given locality to form such groups, making it easier to work in terms of advocacy and coordination of activities. Such network groups, with broad coverage and constituent member organizations, would be strategic in doing advocacy work in the issue of CIAC.

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107 BIRTH-DEV, op. cit.

108 Interview with Mr. Dennis Calunia, op. cit.

109 BIRTH-DEV, "A Research on DDR Mapping of the Organizations Having Interventions to Children in Armed Conflict in Cotabato Provinces and Basilan", 2006.

110 Ibid.

111 The 10 organizations that formed Pagtabangan BaSulTa are: AIM-Mirant Center for Bridging Societal Divides, Consuelo Foundation, Philippines-Canada Local Government Support Program (LGSP), Mirant Corporate Foundation, Peace and Equity Foundation, Philippine Business for Social Progress, Philippine Development Assistance Program, Petron Foundation, Inc., Tabang Mindanaw, and WWF-Philippines. Ibid.

### **Need for neutrality/objectivity**

It is also important for the organizations to avoid being too closely linked with one party or another. For example, the UCCP-Mindoro Conference was very aware of the need to exercise caution to avoid being seen as “military informants” by the CPP-NPA or as “supporters” of armed groups by the military authorities.<sup>113</sup>

### **Capacity building**

The experiences of NGOs working in the study areas point to the importance of building the capacities of individuals, institutions, and communities as a valuable step in addressing the CIAC issue. The PCSUCS, for example, has brought the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) into schools to talk about international humanitarian law.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Rev. Pastor Romulo Mari, 2006.

## *Eleven-Point Plan of Action*

The participants to the Second National Consultation Workshop unanimously agreed in the adoption of a eleven-point action plan, the result of three-days of workshops and lectures. At the time of its adoption in 2003, the term “child soldiers” was still being used by the PCSUCS.

1) To develop a standard framework on the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) of child soldiers for inter-agency cooperation, and develop, expand the coverage and replicate DDRR programs in areas where child soldiers are identified to exist. To conduct training of personnel, and ensure the active involvement of children, youth and their communities in the development of the DDRR framework and programs, providing alternatives for former child soldiers (linked to #9).

2) To conduct research and documentation for the creation of a national database on child soldiers, on cultural and religious traditions (i.e. Qu’ranic verses) related to the protection of children, and on the experience of organizations which are engaged in work with armed groups. To map out and conduct an inventory of researches on child soldiers.

3) To lobby for the inclusion of child soldiers’ issue and DDRR concerns in the peace talks and negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and armed opposition groups or non-state actors (NSAs).

4) To lobby for the review and amendment of pertinent laws, policies and guidelines applicable to child soldiers, i.e. relevant sections and provisions of Republic Act 7610 (Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act). To push for clarifications on the issue of amnesty as well as the arrest of child soldiers by authorities.

5) To foster close inter-agency cooperation between members of the coalition (network) and between various sectors and stakeholders (including children) involved in the prevention, protection and DDRR programs (linked to #1) through the conduct of capacity building measures, information exchange, and sharing of experiences. This effort will take into consideration the various stakeholders’ perception on the issue of child soldiers in order to respond appropriately to the needs of children and youth.

6) To engage NSAs in the coalition’s efforts to stop the use of child soldiers in the country, calling for more dialogues and the adoption of a “deed of commitment” from NSAs to secure their cooperation in DDRR interventions, in the monitoring of its compliance, and commitment against the recruitment and re-recruitment of children as soldiers. To study and develop strategies in engaging NSAs, and collect and compare the experiences of other countries.

7) To work for capacity building and the protection of children at the community level, with programs geared towards the empowerment of family and individuals, and the strengthening of peace ties (norms) among Christians, Moslems, and Indigenous Peoples communities.

8) To intensify public awareness and advocacy on the issue of child soldiers through information dissemination. To lobby for budget allocations to DDRR programs and for the inclusion of child soldier concerns in the development programs of government agencies.

9) To expand the coverage and replicate peace education programs through the strategic use of formal educational institutions and non-formal systems in reaching communities, in recognition of the role of education and culture in preventing children from joining armed groups. To inte-

grate human rights education in peace education activities, and to include peace and human rights education in the curriculum.

10) To translate international and national legal frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the Use of Children as Soldiers, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the International Labour Organisation Convention No. 182, into concrete and sustainable activities through the assistance of traditional and local structures (i.e. ulamas). To call for the stronger and multi-level implementation and enforcement of MOAs/MOUs on the protection of child soldiers.

11) To call on the government to affirm and operationalize its commitment to international standards on the protection of children involved in armed conflict and set up a system to monitor compliance with its obligations to stop the use and recruitment of child soldiers, in cooperation with various stakeholders, in the light of reported recruitment of children by government-supported paramilitary groups.

## Profile of Participating Organizations

### **Concerned Citizens of Abra on Good Government (CCAGG), Abra**

Formed in 1986, CCAGG monitors government infrastructure projects. In addition, CCAGG is implementing in cooperation and close consultation with indigenous people's organizations biodiversity protection and conservation projects in Abra and Kalinga provinces. The organization is also helping indigenous communities to formulate their ancestral domain sustainable development and protection plan.<sup>114</sup>

### **United Church of Christ of the Philippines (UCCP)-Mindoro Conference, Oriental Mindoro**

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP)-Mindoro Conference has been in existence since 1948. It is part of the Southern Luzon Jurisdiction of the UCCP and is made up of sixty local churches and four congregations. The UCCP-Mindoro Conference performs various aspects of the ministry through dedicated church workers.<sup>115</sup> The UCCP-Mindoro Conference was the research partner for the CIDA-funded research of the PCSUCS. Under this project, research work and awareness-raising activities were conducted by the UCCP-Mindoro Conference in coordination with the project holder BIRTH-DEV.

### **Social Action Center (SAC) of the Diocese of Tagbilaran, Bohol**

Formed in 1974, the SAC works among poor and disadvantaged populations to build self-sustaining ecclesiastical communities in the Diocese of Tagbilaran, which covers half of the island province of Bohol. It was under the CIDA-funded project of the PCSUCS that the SAC became a partner of the PCSUCS and SAC Tagbilaran carried out the research and awareness-raising components of the project.

### **Grupo Paghidaet, Iloilo**

Grupo Paghidaet was an informal group working for peace until late 2000 when it became an NGO. Its community-based livelihood and training projects are based in the municipality of Leon, Iloilo.

### **Negros Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (NAHRA), Negros**

Based in Bacolod City, NAHRA was established in 1995 to organize and unite human rights advocates, progressive forces and the general public around human rights issues in the province of Negros Occidental. Its work includes human rights education and advocacy for workers, peasants and farmers, urban poor, women, fisherfolk, and young people. NAHRA has a legal assistance program that mainly provides support in agrarian and labor disputes.<sup>116</sup> NAHRA was one of the research partners of the Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights) for the data gathering phase of its national research on the phenomenon of children's involvement in armed conflict from 2002 to 2005. The PCSUCS tapped NAHRA as its project partner in Negros for the CIDA-funded research and the organization conducted awareness-raising activities and the research phase of the project.

### **Christian Children's Fund (CCF) – Basilan, Basilan**

CCF, a nonprofit, non-sectarian NGO has been working in the Philippines since 1954. It has community health, nutrition, sanitation, micro-enterprise, education and early childhood development programs and is one of the leading organizations working on children's issues in Basilan. Serving both Christian and Muslim communities, CCF-Basilan runs programs on infant and maternal health, tuberculosis treatment, child and youth participation in social reform, grassroots leadership development and community empowerment.<sup>117</sup>

114 CCAGG, *Barug! Pilipino*, n.d.

115 UCCP-Mindoro Conference, "Bahay Kalinga Para sa Mga Bata" (A Home for the Welfare of Children), n.d.

116 Negros Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (NAHRA), *Accomplishment Report and Constitution and By-Laws*, n.d.

117 BIRTH-DEV(2), *ibid.*

## **Nagdilaab Foundation**

Nagdilaab Foundation aims to improve the capacity of rural and urban communities to become active partners in the development of Basilan. It implements inter-religious activities as part of its initiatives on peace and development.

## **Katilingban Para sa Kalambuan, Inc. (Building Empowered Communities), Zamboanga City**

Katilingban Para sa Kalambuan is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 to help poor and marginalized communities cope with growing socioeconomic problems in Zamboanga City. It aims to empower communities, regardless of race or religion and is committed to strengthening community organization and enhancing livelihood opportunities.

## **United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD), Maguindanao Province**

UNYPAD was formed to help alleviate the situation of marginalized people in Mindanao. It advocates peace and development in conflict-affected areas and works for greater access to social, economic, cultural, health and educational services.

## **Kadtuntaya Foundation, Inc. (KFI), Maguindanao Province**

In its early years in the late 1980s, the Kadtuntaya Foundation, Inc. (KFI) sought to bridge the gap between Christians and Muslims in Central Mindanao whose relationship had been strained by decades of conflict. It is committed to improving the situation of the Bangsamoro community, increasing the participation and involvement of men and women at the grassroots level in decision-making and development activities through awareness building, leadership, capacity building and gender advocacy.

## **Notre Dame Foundation for Charitable Activities, Inc. – Women in Enterprise Development (NDFCAI-WED), Maguindanao Province**

NDFCAI-WED was established in 1984 as the community arm of the College of Commerce of

Notre Dame University in Cotabato City. The Catholic church-based organization expanded its operations over the years and now includes literacy and enterprise development for marginalized and unemployed women and out-of-school youth in the city and municipalities of Maguindanao province. The NGO aims to empower women through programs on functional literacy, adult education, and entrepreneurship training.

## **Balay Integrated Rehabilitation Center for Total Human Development (BIRTH-DEV), Lanao del Norte**

BIRTH-DEV initially worked with children of political detainees and the relatives, including children, of other victims of human rights violations who had been referred to them by the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP). Its work has expanded since then and has included participation in medical and fact-finding missions among internally displaced people in Cotabato in the late 1990s. BIRTH-DEV also works on issues of women in armed conflict and has participated in a Quaker-led research project on girl soldiers through the invitation of the campaign group End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT). BIRTH-DEV actively participates in the activities of the PCSUCS and became a member of its Steering Committee in 2002.

## **Associates for Integral Development Foundation, Inc. (AIDFI), Agusan del Norte**

AID is a private social development agency based in Butuan City. Established in 1983, it is a founding member of the Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PHILDHARRA). It serves individuals, groups and communities in the Caraga Region in northeastern Mindanao. Its mission is to develop and strengthen partnership with different stakeholders in the delivery of socio-economic development, resource management and advocacy, technical assistance and reproductive health services.<sup>118</sup>

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118 Associates for Integral Development Foundation, Inc. (AIDFI) brochure, n.d.

## **The Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers**

The PCSUCS maintains partnerships with around 40 NGOs throughout the country as well as with the national and regional offices of international organizations such as UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). It is an active member of the National Committee on International Humanitarian Law, chaired by the Philippine National Red Cross, and the Sub-Committee on Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement. It works closely with the IAC-CIAC and is one of the members of the Steering Committee of Sulong CARHRIHL, a network of organizations advocating for the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL).<sup>119</sup>

The PCSUCS recognizes the need to enhance inter-agency cooperation and to involve influential groups such as the Bishop-Ulama Conference (BUC) in the search to end the involvement of children in armed conflict.

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119 The Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) is the only substantive agreement signed by the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines. It was signed on March 18, 1998 in The Hague, The Netherlands.