

Written by Luis G. Jalandoni

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President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo will be in New York on 23 September 2008 to address the United Nations General Assembly. Her executive secretary, (retired) General Eduardo Ermita, reveals that she will also report to the UN Security Council on the alleged use of child soldiers by the Moro Islamic Liberation Movement (MILF) and the New People's Army (NPA).

Editor's Note: The author, Luis G. Jalandoni, is the chairperson of the NDFP Negotiating Panel. Mrs. Macapagal-Arroyo has no shame! The Macapagal-Arroyo regime is today the number-one violator of the rights of children in the Philippines.

Regardless of the armed conflict, at least 90 percent of Filipino children suffers gross human-rights violations, together with their worker and peasant parents, under the semi-colonial and semi-feudal ruling system. They are exploited and oppressed by foreign monopolies and by such local reactionaries as the big compradors, landlords and corrupt bureaucrats. They live in appalling poverty. They are grossly malnourished and constantly hungry. They are deprived of health care and of adequate and full education.

They are forced into hard labor in urban slums and in the countryside to help their parents eke out subsistence living. They are pushed to live in the streets in the urban centers to beg and engage in petty crimes. They are often pushed to drug use and prostitution and are jailed and abused by criminals while in prison. They become victims of summary execution in so-called police drives against thieves, drugs and criminals; and are trafficked for sex, human organs and illegal adoption.

The daily violence against Filipino children is occurring in the context of the exploitative society and the Arroyo regime's subservience to the imperialist policies of liberalization, privatization and deregulation. These policies have deeply aggravated the already miserable conditions of poverty and deprivation of the people. The Arroyo regime is the principal instrument of the foreign and local exploiters in committing violations of human rights against the masses of workers and peasants and their children.

In the areas of armed conflict, the Macapagal-Arroyo regime, under Oplan Bantay Laya, has unleashed extremely brutal campaigns of suppression against the people, especially the children. It has manufactured so-called cases of alleged use of child soldiers by the NPA in order to provide license to its armed forces and police to kill, arrest, torture, detain and wantonly abuse the rights of children in military operations against communities alleged to be influenced or under the control of the revolutionary forces.

The indiscriminate aerial-and-artillery bombardments and the random gunfire and strafing of civilian houses have not only led to deaths and destruction of crops but also to massive displacement of people into unhealthy makeshift evacuation centers where children, women

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and the elderly suffer from lack of food and clothing causing deaths due to lung diseases and diarrhea.

These human-rights violations against children by the Arroyo regime are amply documented in fact-finding reports of independent human rights groups such as Amnesty International, as well as in numerous complaints submitted to the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) under the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

Even the United Nations Secretary General, given his partiality to State members, in his first report to the UN Security Council on 24 April 2008 on the situation of children in armed conflict in the Philippines, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and covering the period from 1 July 2005 to 30 November 2007, had to acknowledge that most of the violations against children were committed by security forces of the GRP.

These include not only killings, maiming, abductions and illegal arrest, detention and torture, but also the recruitment of child soldiers for the paramilitary forces; false labeling of children as NPA because they are suspected to be children of NPA members or sympathizers; torturing them to inform on their parents or act as guides in military operations; detaining them in military camps with the girls being turned into sex slaves and the boys into domestic helpers before being turned over to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). The most well known case of false accusation being labeled against a child as NPA is the killing of 9-year old Grecil Buya in Compostela Valley on 31 March 2007.

The findings of the UN Secretary General was further reinforced by the 30 May 2008 report of the UN Committee of Experts on the Rights of the Child which found the GRP armed forces to be recruiting child soldiers for their paramilitary groups and holding military training of children in schools in accordance with GRP laws.

All the above reports expose the lies of Mrs. Macapagal-Arroyo, her cohorts in the cabinet cluster for national security and the entire corps of military propagandists on their false accusations against the NPA. Their attempts to continue repeating such false accusations will only further expose them to the international community as shameless liars and scoundrels whose corruption, greed and mendacity know no bounds.

As everyone knows, as early as 1988, the Political Bureau (PB) of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has already adopted a definite policy prohibiting the recruitment of those below 18 years as regular members or armed fighters of combat units of the New People's Army. This has been reiterated on 15 October 1999 by the Executive Committee (EC) of the CPP with the corresponding amendment to Point 1 of Principle III of the Basic Rules of the NPA.

As the UNICEF-commissioned study on the implementation of these CPP directives has shown, the NPA has religiously been complying with the prohibition on the recruitment of children below 18 years old as regular members or armed fighters or combatants of the NPA, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law, specifically the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the

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Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. In fact, the CPP beats the US which allows the recruitment of children as soldiers who are below 18 years old.

We are calling on the UN Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict not to be taken in by the lies of Mrs. Gloria M. Arroyo. We ask for the sake of fairness and due process that the NDFP be given the opportunity to present its side on any issue to be raised by the Arroyo government on the alleged use by the NPA of children below 18 years old as combatants. In accordance with the report of UN Secretary General, we ask that an interface dialogue between the NDFP Negotiating Panel and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Children in Armed Conflict be held at the earliest time in Utrecht, The Netherlands.

REFERENCE:

Ruth de Leon

Executive Director

NDFP International Information Office

Tel.+31-30-2310431

Fax +31-84-7589930

Email: ndf@casema.nl

www.ndfp.net

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