



Official Newsletter of the RBA-PORT Project of the Visayan Forum Foundation, Inc. (VF) and Plan Philippines

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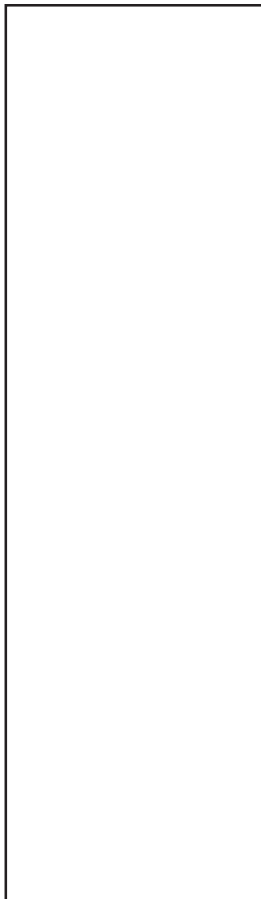
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First National Conference to End **TRAFFICKING** IN PERSONS

by: Ms Helen P. O'Reilly
VF Foreign Volunteer

Three years ago, the Republic of the Philippines passed a landmark legislation called the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 or Republic Act 9208 that institutes policies to end trafficking, especially of women and children. This law defines trafficking, penalizes acts of trafficking, puts in place the policies to eliminate trafficking, and establishes institutional mechanisms for the protection and support of trafficked persons. Thanks to RA 9208, trafficking is now considered a crime and is punishable by a maximum fine of P5 million and life imprisonment. However, there is a large gulf between identifying a problem and actually solving it. Effective and consistent implementation of the law is needed in order

to bridge this gap, and on September 20th 2006, the Philippines took a major step towards this goal with the 1st National Conference on Anti-Trafficking in Persons. This three-day conference held in the Manila Pavilion Hotel from September 20-22nd, was organized by the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT), the government body tasked with implementing RA 9208.

The Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking was established in Section 20 of RA 9208 to be the

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Vice-Pres. Noli de Castro delivering his Keynote Address during the Opening Ceremonies of the National Conference Against Trafficking in Persons

PPA and VF Extend Anti-trafficking Partnership to 2011

The partnership that has earned recognition as one of the international best practices¹ are up for more challenges and opportunities in combating trafficking as the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) and the Visayan Forum (VF) forged another five-year agreement last July 11, 2006 at the PPA Training Center.

This would mean reinforcing the already remarkable initiatives of the PPA and VF particularly its joint operation of the Bahay Silungan sa Daungan (BSD) program for women and children.

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Plan Philippines Anti-TIP Initiatives

by: Shirley P. Bastero
Project Coordinator Against Child Trafficking, Plan Philippines

One of the programs being implemented by Plan Philippines is **Child Protect-Protecting Children at Risk**. It aims to reduce the incidence of abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. The core intervention is to build unified and comprehensive mechanisms and systems for child protection among partners which include detection, reporting, referral, peer support, legal assistance and rehabilitation.

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Zamboanga gears up to send more traffickers to jail

by: *Arthur Necesito*
VF Regional Coordinator for Mindanao

Traffickers in Zamboanga City beware!

After scoring the first-ever conviction under the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, officials in this renowned hotspot vowed to bear down on its campaign, ever tightening the control in key areas to protect victims and bring more offenders to justice.

This is the sentiment shared by the organizers and participants during the **Training on Interception, Arrest, and Investigation of Trafficking in Persons Cases** initiated by the Visayan Forum last October 19 and 20 at the Grand Astoria Hotel.

In one of the largest gathering of agencies fighting trafficking in Zamboanga, more than 60

law enforcers, social workers, NGOs and local government officials set up new strategies to quickly respond to reported exploitation activities unfolding in ports, airports, clubs and other hotspots.

“The successful conviction should guide and inspire better handling of cases. We continue to face challenges as Zamboanga remains a strategic international importance in trafficking. Hundreds of potentially trafficked women pass through (this backdoor) and are subjected to intolerable abuses both in Malaysia and even in other Philippine urban centers,” according to Mayor Celso Lobregat, serving concurrently as the chief of the City Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT).

Atty. Darlene Pajarito of the Department of Justice also cited that the City IACAT teamed up

with the Visayan Forum Foundation for this training “to deepen frontline personnel’s understanding of RA 9208 as it applies during rescue and arrest, investigation, and evidence-gathering.”

VF national trainer, Jerome Alcantara, assessed that the training hopefully invigorated task force vanguards with cutting edge tactics drawn out from Visayan Forum’s extensive experiences in operating halfway houses. “Everyone has rich experiences in carrying out rescue and recovery as well as meticulous evidence-gathering, without sacrificing victims’ rights and gender dimensions,” he added.

IACAT Focal Person Mr. Fransisco Barredo of the City Social Welfare and Development noted that Zamboanga, being the jump-off point for recruits to Malaysia and Middle East, is also intricately linked to traditional trafficking source areas such as the Basilan and Tawi-Tawi. Recruiters also operate from as far as Davao, Cebu, and Manila, he added.

He deplored the lack of a halfway house in the area and mentioned that the presence of a one-stop-shop will help in the bid to effectively enforce the anti-trafficking law. ■

PPA and VF continued from page 1

The BSD or the port halfway houses in the North Harbor, Batangas, Matnog, and Davao provide 24-hour safety and catchment services for trafficking victims such as temporary shelter, help desk travel assistance, quick case referral and legal services and hotline counseling.

PPA General Manager Atty. Oscar Sevilla noted that their efforts at the ports have already transcended from merely helping stranded passengers to saving local migrants from the lures of trafficking.

As of December 2005, the four halfway houses have already served a total of 10,523 victims and potential victims of trafficking. The program also enabled the filing of cases in behalf of 57 trafficked persons intercepted at the ports.

PPA Assistant General Manager Aida Dizon emphasized this as one of the PPA’s concrete ways of living up to its social responsibility of caring for its port users and of valuing the dignity of human person especially women and children.

“Our partnership with PPA has transformed many ports from being a playground of traffickers into a vibrant catchment network against heartless traffickers,” said VF President Ma. Cecilia Flores-Oebanda.

Dizon and Oebanda also cited the efforts of other port partners like the Philippine Coast Guard, Maritime Police, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Social Welfare and Development, and private shipping companies, who have been instrumental in this unique partnership.

“USAID is proud to be your partner,” said Deputy Mission Director of USAID Mr. Francis Aloysius Donovan in his keynote message. He also commended everyone’s efforts as “anti-trafficking champions.”

Symbolically capping the event was the presentation of art works to PPA and USAID from the children-beneficiaries of the BSP program. The children themselves made these art works that creatively expressed their sentiments and feelings as surviving victims of trafficking. ■

Notes

¹ In the 2005 US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, the unique partnership of the Philippine government, NGOs and private shipping companies, particularly, the Anti-Trafficking Task Force at the Port composed of the PPA, VF, Philippine Coast Guard, Maritime Police and private shipping companies like the Aboitiz Transport System, was cited as among the international best practices.

NAIA TAKES OFF WITH NEW HALFWAY HOUSE

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to the protection of women and children from being transited into exploitation such as prostitution and household slavery.

Taking off from its expertise and experience in managing similar halfway houses established by the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA), VF recognizes that trafficking is alive and well and is pervasive at the Manila airport. It recognizes the potential of the Bahay Silungan sa Daungan as nerve center for advocacy and training of airport personnel. Thus, VF is posed to work closely with airport authorities to tighten the noose against traffickers who profit hefty sums by slipping victims into the international foreign destinations.

Now joining hands with the MIAA in its anti-human trafficking drive, the Visayan Forum aims: (1) to operate a state-of-the-art halfway house providing immediately accessible services such as temporary shelter, counseling, legal services, and other psychosocial interventions; (2) to contribute to the strengthening of capacities and shared coordination of expertise among airport stakeholders including but not limited to law enforcers, immigration officials, ground technical staff and airline crew; and (3) to develop research-based advocacy materials to increase the awareness of transit passengers on the issue of trafficking.

The Philippines remains to be one of the main sources of human trafficking for Filipinos destined to Malaysia, Hongkong, Brunei, Japan, Korea, the Middle East, Europe and the United States. Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) reported that a total of 224 Filipino trafficking victims overseas have been repatriated between 2003 and 2005. ■

NAIA takes off with new halfway house for trafficking victims

The Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA) has signed last July 14, 2006 a memorandum of agreement with the Visayan Forum Foundation to build a halfway house for trafficked women and children at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA).

The Agreement mandates the MIAA to provide a physical structure for the *Bahay Silungan sa Paliparan* (Shelter at the Airport) to help victims of trafficking. It has earmarked its gender and development funds for the construction of the shelter which will be built at the 510-square meter lot at the NAIA complex.

The MIAA has also committed itself with VF and other social partners in enforcing international agreements and domestic laws and regulations for the protection women and children passing through this international and domestic hub. In effect, the agreement poses to



MIAA-AGM Alfonso G. Cusi and VF President Ma. Cecilia Flores-Oebanda signing the MOA, while MIAA-AGM Herminia D. Castillo, ILO-SEAP Director Linda Wirth, US-Embassy Political Counselor Scott Douglas Bellard, DOJ-IACAT Focal Person Atty. Severino H. Gafia, Jr. and VF Dep. Director Roland Pacis serve as witnesses

strengthen the MIAA’s role in helping implement Republic Act 9208, known as the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003. No less than the airport’s manager, Alfonso Cusi, acknowledges their strong contribution

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FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE TO END TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

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children from the grasp of traffickers. In addition to sharing best practices and ideas for improvement, all 180 participants brought a diversity of experience from a wide array of professional fields to the table. Ideas for change and improvement on the grassroots, local, national, and international level imbued each participant with a sense of hope and a purpose for

re-doubling efforts against trafficking in the Philippines. Building on the success of this 1st conference to create measurable progress in prevention, protection and prosecution will be the standard by which we are judged when we convene again to assess out progress as the 2nd National conference. The world is watching and waiting. ■

THE PHILIPPINES: EMPHASIZING... continued from page 12

forced labor. It also noted that the Department of Justice has tripled the number of prosecutors, resulting in a four-fold increase in cases presented for prosecution. The government established arrangements with NGOs and Philippines embassies in destination countries to provide overseas workers who had been exploited with temporary shelter,

counseling, and medical assistance. It also continued to provide a range of protective services to trafficking victims, including temporary residency status, relief from deportation, shelter, and access to legal, medical, and counseling services.

This is a positive sign that all initiatives are on the right track. However, the report is more

concerned about law enforcement and prosecution of traffickers. It does not fully recognize efforts taken by government, non-government organizations and faith-based groups to raise awareness and understanding at the community level in order to prevent trafficking in persons. The report should also show the state of service delivery for victims and survivors of trafficking. ■

FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE TO END TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

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Ambassador extolled the efforts of the Philippines to improve the condition of women and children who fall prey to traffickers in an attempt to escape poverty, while also challenging participants to step up their efforts. Closely following her remarks, Second Secretary of the Embassy of the United States, Mr. Barry Fullerton, presented a summary of the 2006 Trafficking in Person (TIP) Report - a yearly report by the government of the United States on foreign governments' efforts to eliminate severe forms of trafficking in persons. An indication of the modest but significant progress made by the Philippines, the country was recently upgraded to Tier 2 Classification over the 2005 classification on the Tier 2 Watch-List. Alternating between English and Tagalog, Mr. Fullerton explained that the Philippines was upgraded to Tier 2 as a result of progress in the prosecution, prevention, and prevention of trafficking. According to the 2006 TIP report, "The Government of the Philippines does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. Over the last year, the Philippine

Government stepped up efforts to implement its anti-trafficking law and made initial progress in implementing strategies to combat trafficking in persons, particularly in prosecuting human traffickers." Vice-Pres. Noli de Castro reiterated that the Philippines is taking its commitment to combat trafficking seriously, "Our removal from the watch-list classification is a positive indication that while the country has not yet fully complied with the minimum international standards, significant efforts to do so are being actively pursued."

Undersecretary Alicia R. Bala, Acting Co-Chair of IACAT, presented the National Strategic Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons (2004-2010) and fielded questions from the conference participants. Following her presentation, the Acting Chair of IACAT, Chief State Counsel Ricardo V. Paras, III gave a detailed analysis on the progress that has been made to increase prosecutions under RA 9208. After laying out current progress and challenges, conference participants broke up into working groups for thematic presentations and brainstorming.

Conference working groups were organized around three main themes: 1) Good Practices on Prevention 2) Protecting Trafficked Persons and 3) Recovery and Reintegration of Trafficked Persons. Each of the various breakout sessions was attended by close to fifty people and the recommendations that emerged from these will be used to chart the country's plan of action for the next four years with the National Strategic Action Plan as the framework. In addition to sharing what works, emerging from each breakout session were ideas about what needs to be done differently or better if the intent of RA 9208 is going to translate into measurable reform. The prevention breakout group highlighted the need to

innovate outreach efforts that will utilize multi-media tools such as websites, e-newsletters, and e-mailing lists. Additionally, strengthening weak local structures, especially the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children, and fully mobilizing religious groups, schools, and other non-traditional groups is of vital importance for the prevention of trafficking.

In the protection breakout session, Visayan Forum Executive Director and President, Ms. Ma. Cecil Flores-Oebanda presented best practices for protecting victims of trafficking through the Bahay Silungan sa Daungan (Port Halfway House), Anti-Trafficking Task Forces and other multi-sectoral alliances at the ports and trafficking chokepoints. Limiting the reach of current efforts to protect victims, however, is the lack of any overarching structure to map out, support and link local efforts around the country. Greater inter-agency coordination, especially among local IACATs, is needed as well as more political will to support existing protection and prevention mechanisms. To date, although there are a variety of trainings on best practices to prevent and protect victims of trafficking, weak documentation and assessment of the quality and practicability of trainings undermine their usefulness and make improvement difficult.

The 1st National Conference Against Trafficking in Persons ended with a strong commitment by all participants to work harder and smarter in the fight to protect our women and

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The rights-based principles in dealing with trafficked persons include: best interest of the child; non-discrimination; right to information; right to confidentiality; right to self-determination; and right to protection.

Many of these principles are already integral components of the programs and services of task force partners. Those who have undergone RBA training are most likely applying these principles now. For instance, RBA-trained law enforcers understand their role is to rescue trafficked persons, not to arrest them. Likewise, they are expected to treat these trafficked persons not as criminals

but as victims in need of protection and other psychosocial services. It is also a policeman's duty to inform the victims about his or her situation every step of the way.

Social workers, on the other hand, honor the trafficked persons' right to privacy and protect their identity, especially the children, from the prying media. As for lawyers, they normally do not resort to arm-twisting just to compel the victims to press charges. They explain the advantages and disadvantages of filing a case in detail and allow the victims to make their own decisions.

All told, anti-trafficking campaigners in the Philippines are facing a stiff challenge to consciously

adopt RBA in their day-to-day function, continue to build awareness and sensitize more service providers on the rights-based principles and eventually institutionalize good practices. ■

Sources:

International Save the Children Alliance, *Child Rights Programming: How to Apply Rights-Based Approaches in Programming*, pp. 13-28, 2002. Elaine Pearson, *Human Traffic, human rights: redefining victim protection*, pp. 31-37, 2002. UNICEF, DSWD and UP CIDS-PST, *Handbook for Social Workers on Basic Bio-Physical help for Children in Need of Special Protection*, pp. 52-56.

EDITORIAL

One-Stop Shop

There is a sprouting of local InterAgency Councils Against Trafficking (IACAT) and port task forces across the country, especially in hotspot areas where Visayan Forum is present. This is already good indication of the strong political commitment generated through dialogues.

Indeed no single institution can solve the complex problem of human trafficking. Partners bonding together to face a deeply-rooted problem is key requisite to success.

To effectively sustain these beginnings, partners must find a way to make convergence work. There must be a clear understanding of how to effectively share expertise and resources. There is no denying that victims often fall into the cracks of coordination. Institutional firewalls stall genuine efforts in the ground. Bureaucratic roadblocks continue to test the creativity of frontline personnel.

Globally, the One-Stop Shop approach is a strongly emerging approach to provide comprehensive set of services to trafficked persons.

Simply put, this approach is "trying to meet various needs in one place." It is like operating a mall where people from all walks of life can shop and dine, watch movies and buy grocery, visit a dentist as well as book airline tickets.

We can similarly adopt such effective business principle in our fight for social justice.

With limited time and resources, Task Force and IACAT members can be a force to reckon with only if they share common responsibilities. They can start to proactively share the burden of effective investigation, rights-sensitive counseling and safekeeping victims in custody.

Experience teaches us that helping trafficking victims is a difficult job. They don't easily cooperate because they don't trust the authorities. During the initial contact, victims usually tend to be distrustful, disengaged, rebellious, aggressive, and competitive.

Safely sheltered under one roof such as halfway houses, victims may take on decisions about their life without being coerced. It takes time to gain trust and confidence. It takes exceptional courage for a victim to pursue a legal case against the superior power and connections of traffickers.

Under one safe roof, victims begin to deal law enforcers in a different light. Friendly investigation techniques save victims from having to relive the trauma during run-about interviews by different agencies.

By doing things together in one place, partners can save time and effort. Everyone involved in interviews can easily compare notes. There is also a synergy of information helpful in building a strong legal case. Because every case is unique, finding solutions to problems and threats brings out the best from each others' expertise.

The law enforcer, who is sensitive to victims' trauma, acts as part social worker. The social worker, who prepares and counsels victims, also acts as part lawyer. The lawyer, who investigates evidentiary documents, also acts as part law enforcer.

The anti-trafficking law is a very young law just recently enacted three years ago. There are no defined shortcuts to successful prosecution.

Together we can make the one-stop approach work. ■

The Philippines: Emphasizing Need for Anti-Trafficking in Persons' Task Forces at Local Levels

by: Julio T. Flauta, VF Projects Officer

The United States removed the Philippines from its human trafficking watch list due to the country's progress in fighting modern day slavery, including forced prostitution, sex trafficking and child labor.

The US Department of State annual "Trafficking in Persons" report, released by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons on June 5, 2006, moves the Philippines up a tier — from its Tier 2 Watch List of problem nations, to Tier 2 that is making significant efforts to combat trafficking. The report's ranking system, "Tier 1" countries fully



comply with minimum international standards while those in "Tier 2", including the Philippines, do not fully comply but are making significant efforts to combat the problem. "Tier 3" countries are the worst offenders and could face restrictions on US government assistance

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Cebu and Dumaguete forms task forces by: Vicente Alan Abadesco VF Regional Coordinator for Visayas

Region 7 recently added two new port-based response teams to the growing local networks against trafficking across the country.

Cebu as economic powerhouse and destination set up last October 30, 2006 the Task Force at the Seaports through the leadership of the secretariat of the Regional Sub-Committee on Gender, Anti-trafficking and Violence against Women & Children (RSC-GATV).

Just across the island, Oriental Negros is also brewing a similar initiative. The Provincial Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking (PIACAT) held a crucial organizational meeting last November 6, 2006 towards the formation of a Task Force at the Port of Sibulan.

Sibulan Mayor Antonio D. Renacia welcomed the move during a municipal meeting which led to the recommendation to set up a help desk at the terminal.

Various stakeholders in Central Visayas enthusiastically led these significant steps after attending a series of task force building seminars by the Visayan Forum.

Oriental Negros is traditionally a rich source of trafficked women and children, mostly recruited under the pretense to work as domestics. Around 15 out of 100 cases rescued by the Visayan Forum especially in Manila come from municipalities in this island. Here, the Philippine Port Authority manages Sibulan Port, a strategic link because of its proximity and connection to land routes.

Cebu is also a long-standing migration melting pot in the Visayas and as far as Mindanao. There are six docking stations at the Cebu port, linking inter-island routes as well as to Manila.

“Forming the task force is really long-overdue,” Mayette Latonio, local DSWD representative in Cebu, said during the

preparation meetings. Various officials of barangays such as Carreta, Tejero and Tinago also welcomed and supported the move, citing efforts in the past when they coordinated with port officials for the interception of victims after receiving reports through the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPCs).

Partners in Cebu include representatives from Brgys. Carreta, Tinago & Tejeros, the DSWD Crisis Intervention Unit, Cebu Port Authority Port Police, MARINA, Aboitiz Shipping Lines, associations of vendors, trisikad drivers and haulers, and other NGOs.

LGU representatives in the Municipality of Sibulan are also supported by the local Philippine Ports Authority, Municipal Port Terminal Coordinator, Vendors and Tricycle Drivers Association, Pumpboat Operators, MSWD, PNP, DOLE, DILG, Church groups and the G-Wave Foundation.

VF PUBLISHES STORIES OF DOMESTIC WORKERS TRAFFICKED INTO FORCED LABOR

Elena was just 15 years old when her parents traded her for P500 to a recruiter in Misamis Oriental and sent her to work in Manila.

“I refused to go to Manila with the recruiter but my mother said she had already spent the money. I was crying because I had no choice,” Elena says.

“It was 12 midnight, I was sleeping in my room when he (her male employer) knocked, saying I must iron his police uniform. Then when I opened the door, he got in and locked it right away. He pointed a gun at me. He also [later] held a pair of scissors. I tried to fight back but he was a huge man and he threatened to kill me. I pleaded and even knelt in front of him. When it was over, I cried and begged him to ‘Please bring me back to the recruitment agency. I will not tell anyone.’” In response, he cut strands of Elena’s hair to prove his power over her.

Unfortunately, it was not the last time that Elena was violated. Instead, the sexual abuse continued for quite some time. Elena was eventually brought back to the recruitment agency. She immediately told the agency owner everything that had happened to her. But when she asked for help, she was told that since she was no longer a virgin, she might as well be a “sex worker.”

Elena escaped and was found aimlessly roaming the Manila pier.

Elena’s experience is one of the 17 real-life stories presented in the book, **“Trafficked into Forced Labor: Selected Case Studies of Domestic Workers in the Philippines,”** the latest publication of Visayan Forum with support from the International Labour Organization (ILO) Manila - Domestic Work Project.

The case studies put a human face to the struggles of domestic workers caught in the nexus of two inter-connected social phenomena – trafficking for exploitation, and exploitation in forced labor. They show how domestic workers were trapped in the cycle of trafficking for forced labor and how they have shown their personal courage to survive and empower themselves despite the odds.

The book hopes to challenge and inspire its varied readers who have important roles to play in addressing the issues and struggles of the domestic work sector.

“Trafficked into Forced Labor: Selected Case Studies of Domestic Workers in the Philippines”, was produced through the collaborative efforts of the VF staff led by Roland Pacis, International Campaigns Officer. It may be also accessed online at the VF website: <http://www.visayanforum.org>.

Region 6 forms RIACAT team

Western Visayas activated its Inter-agency Council Against Trafficking in response to the growing number of human trafficking cases, the Department of Foreign Affairs announced recently.

Last August 8, 2006, representatives convened the Regional Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking in Region 6, now officially chaired by the DOJ Office of the Regional State Prosecutor (ORSP) and co-chaired by the Department of Social Services and Development.

Visayan Forum is chosen as NGO representative as well as a member of the Committees on Training, Advocacy and Rescue.

DFA 6 Consular office head Liza Jane Estalilla said its office spearheaded this move as a response to the recommendations made during the Multi-Sectoral Consultation on Child Trafficking and Exploitation held last July 18-19,

2006 at the Grand Regal Hotel in Bacolod City.

Organized by the Visayan Forum, the consultation was attended by 35 partner-agencies representing government, NGOs, as well as civic and groups based in Negros Occidental and Iloilo provinces.

“We recognize the need for the joint effort of both the government and the NGOs to closely monitor cases, effectively rescue trafficked victims and prosecute the perpetrators in the region,” Estalilla said of their meeting with VF and other organizations in Negros Occidental.

Western Visayas, particularly Negros Occidental, is one the regions in the Philippines with a rising number of women and children being trafficked for work and sexual exploitation.

RIACAT 6 members now plan to form of similar IACAT coordination mechanisms at the provincial, city and municipal levels.

“Partners in the region currently face tough challenges in this work,” according to Visayan Forum, which facilitated the consultations. “There is as need for clear database. Communities are not aware of the law and where to report complaints. When in the future efforts to intercept victims will be needed, clearer roles and coordination can spell chances of success. Many local judges and prosecutors also still need to be familiar with RA 9208,” Atty. Joaquin Garayray, VF chairperson said.

In response, VF recently conducted the “Training on Effective Prosecution of Trafficking in Persons Cases” for around 30 partners last September 27 – 28, 2006 at the Iloilo Grand Hotel with the help of Atty. Deanna Perez, DOJ Senior State Prosecutor.

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BOOSTING A HELP DESK

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“Everything was arranged by their recruiter beforehand so we did not have to pay anything during their travel,” said one of the victims.

“We wanted to gain experience in working in Manila, so that when we are old enough in the future we can go there on our own,” another victim explained, as they were not aware of any laws and regulations prohibiting the employment of minors in dangerous work.

Future steps

Further recommendations came out from partners during a breakthrough validation meeting held at the PPA in Lilo-an last July 3,

2006. Some of the important suggestions included, but were not limited to the following:

- intensify advocacy to drive information down to schools and communities
- intensify coordination of law enforcers and prosecutors
- propose specific functions of task force members based on a definitive manual
- organize DOLE quick action teams to investigate child labor and illegal recruitment complaints
- start running campaign videos at terminals and ferry boats
- distribute contact list and directory of task force members
- conduct dialogues with AIR Task Force and Association of Barangay Captains of Surigao City

- involve Social Action Centers and Parish Pastoral Councils in developing economic alternatives
- explore the establishment of an operation task force in Lipata Port
- strictly monitor ages and destination of passengers in each vessel as stated in passenger manifest
- mobilize bus companies operating in Mindanao towards advocacy among passengers and reporting of suspicious movements of traffickers

Partners also strongly recommended the establishment of a full-blown halfway house in Lipata, since partners can more effectively detect possible victims. There is more time available in scanning of passengers before they are allowed to embark on the ferries.

Visayan Forum is now taking serious steps in weighing the costs and benefits of this advice. ■

HEAR THEIR CRIES... HEED THEIR DREAMS...

Youth's Advocacy Against Child Trafficking

by: Dr. Joselito L. Umali, Technical Officer for Southern Leyte, Plan Philippines

Teatro Kabataan sa Southern Leyte is a provincial children's theater group organized on November 2001, with a mission of raising awareness on child's issues towards a vision of a child friendly province. In more than four years of its existence, with seven member theater organizations and having more than 400 individual members, they have already produced theater presentations on various child's issues; child trafficking, children in disaster situation, drug and substance abuse, domestic violence and child labor. Advocacy campaigns on the rights and responsibilities of a child, child protection, child health and hygiene, early childhood care and development and education are also done thru theater presentations.

Their presentations depict the current situation of children in their communities, on how their lives are affected by these, and how they could participate in addressing these issues. One such issue is built on the concern that stems from their community being the gateway from the Mindanao provinces to the rest of the country, hence it's high risk for child trafficking.

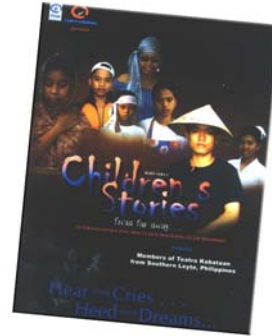
The Theater Group has performed from the remotest areas of the villages of the Panaon Island, to mainland Leyte, in several municipalities and cities, in various venues in Manila, and last May

2006, the group represented the Philippines to the Netherlands to perform at the Mundial Festival.

Mundial Festival is a huge multicultural event held annually in and around Tilburg, the Netherlands, that features "world music" and various cultural performances from different countries. The festival aims to promote a better understanding and appreciation among different cultures. More importantly over the past years, they embarked on increasing awareness on the issues facing the children, particularly in developing countries.

The "*Teatro Kabataan sa Southern Leyte*," composed of seven children from this province, prepared theatrical presentations depicting the current issues affecting children in their communities, i.e., disastrous situations, and child trafficking. They performed in various venues like schools, social gatherings, and stage shows, together with the children from Ecuador and Africa.

Eileen, 15 years old, a member of *Teatro Kabataan*, expressed her deepest gratitude for being able to go to other places, interact with children of other cultures, and become active participant in the advocacy campaign against child trafficking. She's glad that thru their presentations, they're able to



increase awareness of peers on their rights as a child, namely: children should not be made to work against their will, that parents should not force their children to work at young age, that they all should be given the opportunity to finish their studies for a good quality job in the future, and not to engage in hazardous work (as domestic helps, child labour) or be sexually exploited.

"I have a close friend, who was forced by her parents to work in Manila. She now works there as a dancer at one of the bars, and she'd sometimes call me that she doesn't like it there anymore, and would really like to come home and continue her studies. I feel sorry for her," recounts Eileen. Asked if given the financial resource, what she would do?, "I would put up a foundation for children and the youth to have somewhere to go when they have problems, and probably I would even give them money if they really need it, so that they wouldn't have to go to Manila or other places and engaged in hazardous work."

In ending, questioned if what she would do if she was asked by her parents to work in Manila? To this she replied, with tears in her eyes, "I would really be confused on what I should do, I know that our family is poor, and we really need the money..., if that moment comes that my parents would ask me, I would go to Manila to work, and help my family..."

Eileen (*not real name*), the eldest in a brood of three, would like to pursue college and finish a computer-related course so that she could help her family later on. ■

THE PHILIPPINES: EMPHASIZING...

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The report congratulated the Philippines for last year's improvements, saying the government "has stepped up efforts to implement its anti-trafficking law and made initial progress in implementing strategies to combat trafficking in persons, particularly in prosecuting human traffickers"

"The city of Zamboanga for instance formed a local version of the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) that mirrors the national council. The body brings together local government units involved with trafficking to foster close coordination in pursuing TIP cases. During 2005, local police, prosecutors, and social workers effectively cooperated in order to achieve the first conviction in the country under the 2003 anti-trafficking law. After the victim in the case came forward, the city's Social Welfare and Development Office worked with police to help investigate the case. Police also worked

closely with the prosecutor's office. Finally, the court made this trafficking case a priority, which allowed the case to be concluded in a record five months. The mayor's office set an outstanding example by making known to local government agencies its commitment to fighting human trafficking." (Source: <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2006/65984.htm>)

However, the report says that Philippines still does not fully comply with minimum standards and remains a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children trafficked for sex trade or

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A Community-Based Support System for Abused and Trafficked Children



Plan Australia Program Manager Kate Ramsay as Guest of Honor during the Inauguration

by: Emily Lagrimas-Mantilla
Project Coordinator for Child Protection (Visayas)
Plan Philippines

avenue wherein victims shall be provided child friendly services on investigation, medical examination, social and psychological interventions and legal concerns can be appropriately addressed. The CPU has an interview and playroom located in the LGU building, and an examination room located in the community hospital that is basically equipped with facilities. The CPU is manned by trained Multi-Disciplinary Team composed of Doctor, Social Worker and WCCD Officer. They have been trained in partnership with the PGH-WCPU and a regular member of CPU-Network. Their role is to provide the specialty services to children in need of special protection.

On its 1st two (2) weeks of operation, it has already served six (6) children sexually and physically abused and will continuously served cases of child abuse coming from communities and outside of the municipality with the direct support from LGU, Plan and CPU-Net.

The community based Child Protection Unit (CPU) also provides the necessary services to trafficked victims and potential victims of trafficking particularly, the intercepted victims at the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Help Desk in Liloan Ferry Terminal through the Alliance of Networks for Strandedees (ANGKAS). However, for temporary shelter or safe custody of the victims, they were transferred to the Crisis Center for Women and Children located in Maasin City, Southern Leyte. ■

The incidence on abused children are growing each day. These clearly depict the immense hardship which Filipino children are subjected to. Unfortunately, the family that is supposedly the primary source of the children's sense of trust and security is itself beleaguered. In most instances, it can no longer adequately provide even the children's most basic needs like food, education, housing, and an atmosphere of love, affection and nurturance. Its capacity to protect the children and enhance their development and participation rights is likewise affected. (www.childprotection.org)

Hence, the project "Community-Based Child Protection" is being implemented by Plan Philippines in partnership with the Local Government of Liloan through the grant Fund from AusAid.

It aims to establish a community-based mechanism towards the reduction or prevention of the incidence of child abuse cases. The project is in line with Plan Philippines' Country Strategic Plan (CSP) of pursuing the Protection of Children at Risk, that aims to reduce, if not eliminate, the incidence of abuse, neglect and exploitation of children, including differently-abled or special children through Child-Centered Community Development (CCCD) approach.

One of the main strategy of the project is the setting-up of the community-based child protection unit in Liloan, Southern Leyte. The CPU caters to children who are in need of special protection (CNSP), specifically those who are sexually and physically abused. It provides an



Plan Staff getting experience on CPU Audio-Video Documentation

Various projects are implemented under this program and one of the projects is the **Rights-Based Approach in Protecting and Organizing Responsive Tasks Forces Against Trafficking (RBA-PORT)** which is implemented in Plan covered provinces in the Visayas, particularly in Northern, Eastern and Western Samar, Southern Leyte and Cebu and implemented in partnership with Visayan Forum Foundation, Inc., a local NGO.

After a year of project implementation, significant achievements towards meeting project objectives has been accomplished and these include the following, namely:

A. Protection

- Establishment and continuous operation of the halfway house in the port of Matnog, Sorsogon which provides temporary shelter, counseling, repatriation and legal services to trafficked victims and potential victims of trafficking. For the past fiscal year, there were 1,808 victims and potential victims of trafficking (children and young adults) who were intercepted and

provided with services like temporary shelter, counseling, repatriation and legal services.

- Operation and management of the safe house in Manila that ensures confidentiality of victims' whereabouts and protects them from possible harassment and retaliation while undergoing litigation process against their traffickers. For the past fiscal year, there were 17 victims who filed cases against their traffickers.
- Operation of help desks in Allen and Liloan Ports in partnership with the Local Gov't Units (LGUs) and Phil. Ports Authority (PPA) to quickly report and act on trafficking cases and refer them to halfway house in Matnog for possible interception and protection in Matnog Port.
- Operation of a 24-hour cellphone hotline to quickly respond to reports of partners and for victims trying to escape from exploitative conditions.
- Regular pier roundings or outreaches at port terminals during ship embarkation and disembarkation by trained volunteers and staff



The First Orientation on Policies to Eliminate Trafficking in Persons conducted by PLAN Philippines in partnership with the Department of the Interior & Local Government

of VF to assist the Social Workers in the documentation and processing of cases.

- Installation and management of a computerized database of reached out and assisted victims for trafficking at the Halfway House in Matnog, Sorsogon.
- Integration of Anti-trafficking activities/initiatives in the Municipal and Barangay Development Plans of LCPCs. (Municipal and Barangay Levels).

B. Prevention

- Continuous Basic Awareness Orientation Seminars (BAOS) among port partners such as members of the Philippine National Police (PNP), Local Government Units (LGUs), service providers and coast guards on trafficking issues, laws and relevant halfway house guidelines which resulted to increased number of intercepted and assisted victims and potential victims of trafficking.
- Policy advocacy activities, such as networking meetings, leading to the passage of new local ordinances, especially in source areas such as Samar, Southern Leyte and Cebu.
- Publication and distribution of newsletter, "The Anti-Trafficking Board" to propagate latest news and developments, both in print and electronically uploaded in the website.
- Maintain a special section on Anti-Trafficking initiatives in VF's website (www.visayanforum.org) and linked it to Plan website. (www.plan-international.org)

- Continuous info. dissemination and advocacy, especially the production, and distribution of information, education and communication (IEC) materials and airing of radio infomercials, which contributed much to the mass awareness on the issue of trafficking, especially in far flung areas not usually reached by modern communication facilities.

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Orientation of Plan Staff on the services provided at the CPU

C. Prosecution

- Development of a Handbook on Rights-Based Approaches and standards in handling victims of trafficking to help practitioners improve actions in managing psycho-social cases, conducting investigation of trafficking cases, sustaining education and livelihood opportunities and improving task force approaches.
- Para-legal Orientation Seminars among port partners, members of the National Police, Local Gov't Units and service providers to familiarize them with the intricacies of the anti-trafficking law and how they can use the implementing rules and guidelines in reporting cases.

To ensure sustainability of the above initiatives and hasten the implementation of the anti-trafficking law, structures at various levels were also organized such as the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (regional, provincial, city and municipal levels), and formation of Multisectoral Network Against Trafficking in Persons (MSNAT) and Anti-Trafficking Tasks Forces at the Ports.

In addition to the above initiatives/ achievements, Plan Philippines has started replicating the activities on Anti-Trafficking in its covered provinces in Luzon, particularly in Occidental Mindoro, Isabela and Masbate. Initial activities conducted were as follows:

- Involvement of children in advocacy campaign against trafficking through theater arts presentation;
- Provision of necessary services to trafficked victims through the established Child Protection Unit in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, Liloan, Southern Leyte and Crisis Center for Women and Children in Maasin City, Southern Leyte;
- Orientation of law enforces in Masbate particularly, PNP, coast guards and service providers on RA-9208 or the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003;
- Formulation of Barangay Ordinances to protect children against traffickers through the organized Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPCs); and
- Distribution of IEC materials on Anti-Trafficking.

Plan has New Director and New Office

Plan is pleased to announce the assumption into office of Michael Diamond, new Country Director. Mr. Diamond joined Plan Philippines on July 1, 2006 and succeeded former Country Director Supriyanto, whose post is now Plan Mali in West Africa.

Mr. Diamond is not new to the country as he has worked before in Mindanao, Bicol and Makati for a number of years. Before joining Plan Philippines, he was Regional Director for Plan Asia and provided leadership in the country operations of 12 covered countries in the region. He also provided leadership in the management and response to the disasters that hit covered areas in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia and India and the earthquake that struck Pakistan in 2005.

Mr. Diamond holds office at Plan's new address at 7F Salustiana D. Ty Tower, 104 Paseo de Roxas corner Perea Street, Legaspi Village, Makati City.

Given the current problem on human trafficking, we are optimistic that through the above initiatives we could contribute in combating trafficking in persons not only in the project areas but also at the National level in collaboration with other Non-Governmental Organizations who are involved in the implementation of RA-9208 or Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003. ■

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Provincial and Municipal IACAT Organized in North Samar

Cora Obra, Technical Officer for Learning, Plan Philippines, Northern Samar Program Unit

The organization of Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) can be counted as one of the small victories of Plan Northern Samar Program Unit and the Department of Interior and Local Government provincial office last fiscal year.

It came about out of the shared dream between the two implementers of coming up with a realistic and effective inter-agency coordination and program against trafficking in persons. The problem on trafficking in persons in the province of Northern Samar proved to be alarming when 69 trafficked victims, coming from the municipalities of Allen, Mapanas, Catubig and Las Navas and mostly 13 to 16 years old, were rescued at the help-desk of the Alliance of Network Assistance for Strandeers (ANGKAS)

Center which is under the RBA-PORT project of Plan Philippines in partnership with the Visayan Forum Foundation Inc. and the Local Government Unit of Allen, Northern Samar.

A consultative and orientation conference on RA-9208 otherwise known as the “Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003” was then conducted by the provincial office of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) in collaboration with Plan Philippines. The conference was conducted in two separate days, November 18, 2005 for the provincial stakeholders and November 22, 2005 for the municipal implementers at the Hobayan Hall, DCC, Catarman, Northern Samar.

The primary objective of the conference was to organize the IACAT at the provincial and municipal levels. The activity also provided venue to determine

the status of the implementation of RA 9208 and reviewed the roles and responsibilities of respective agencies and organizations as mandated by the law. Program and plan of activities for 2006 was as well prepared during the conference.

A total of 43 participants consisting of 1 municipal mayor, 4 vice-mayors, 18 Sangguniang Bayan members, 5 PNP officers, 3 NGO/PO representatives, 1 PPDO and 6 media men attended the provincial orientation. In the municipal conference, there were 63 participants that included 1 local chief executive, 26 PNP officers, 13 MSWDOs and 23 MLGOOs.

Allen municipal IACAT group proved to be functional with their monthly meetings, updated reports and regular coordination with ANGKAS Center. However, the provincial and other municipal IACAT groups had to be revitalized per report of the DILG provincial office.

Functional IACAT, the body created by law to coordinate and monitor the implementation of RA 9208, remains to be a challenge in the province of Northern Samar in this fiscal year. ■

PPA, City IACAT urges smoother coordination in Davao

by: Arthur Necesito, VF Regional Coordinator for Mindanao

Work together efficiently. Go beyond traditional mandates and still make a difference.

Ms. Aida Dizon thus challenged front line personnel in Sasa Port as well as members of the Davao City Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking during a two-day seminar on effective coordination and support mechanisms in protecting victims of trafficking.

Dizon, the Assistant General Manager for Administration and Finance of the Philippine Ports Authority, also recently announced the five-year renewal of PPA’s partnership with Visayan Forum (VF).

With support from USAID, VF gathered various stakeholders within and outside the Sasa Port last October 3, 2006 at the PPA District Office to “assess the impact of initiatives and

existing challenges to synergize efforts in the implementation of RA 9208 and other related laws.”

“The second structure that PPA built after North Habor, the halfway house here has been in existence for more than four years now. It is a place that one can call a home, however temporary it may be,” says Dizon.

“The value of the halfway houses is the commendable partnership not only between with PPA, a government agency, and the Visayan Forum, but the collective partnership between a number of government agencies, a number of companies from private sectors and NGO’s. This partnership has shown that for a very good cause, these three sectors can not only work together but work together efficiently. This partnership has shown us that for a very good cause, we can go beyond our traditional

mandates and still make difference,” she added.

Councilor Angela Librado Trinidad, also graced the event by presenting updates from the 1st National Conference of the IACAT. With Mayor Duterte’s concrete support of budget allotment, Davao has set up its own IACAT closely coordinated under the Committee on Children and Women’s Concern.

“Partners here can base other recommendations in account of IACAT developments nationally. So far, we have filed several prosecution cases with the support of LGUs and law enforcers, and we intend to do more,” the councilor added.

Partners who attended the meeting vowed to continuously monitor these cases, as well as to continue identifying recruiters’ licensing and actual operations. Major plans through 2007 also includes: strengthening coordination mechanisms, continued operation of shelters, and campaigning down to baranggay and school levels. ■

Upholding the Rights of Trafficked Persons

by: Marieta Culibao, VF Advocacy Officer

Picture this situation: Two teenaged girls from Mindanao named Mara and Alexa were recruited to work as salesladies in Manila. Although the girls’ parents were initially reluctant to let them go, they relented when the recruiter assured them that they will be in good hands, that their earnings would boost the family income. Upon reaching their destination though, Mara and Alexa found out that they would be serving drinks and entertaining customers in a videoke bar together with some other minors. Unable to escape, the girls were forced to work there against their will.

Months passed before one of the girls managed to escape and report the plight of her co-workers in the bar to the local police. In response, the police immediately prepared a raid. A gaggle of reporters, who were hungry for a scoop, tagged along with the team. When the policemen barged into the bar, however, the owner had already slipped out. The girls were startled and with all the cameras trained on them, they felt like criminals who were being captured. Then they were brought to the police station for questioning.

The girls were still in shock when they got to the precinct. After a brief introduction, the police investigators fired away with the questions on their recruitment and the bar’s operation but hardly anyone of the girls gave intelligible answers. Even when a social worker came over to counsel and process their feelings and a lawyer explained their right to legal redress, the girls refused to open up. After a brief stay at a temporary shelter, Mara, Alexa and their companions opted not to press any charges and simply go home to their provinces.

This story is not based on actual people or events, but variations of such situation confront

law enforcers and service providers every day. Any experienced anti-trafficking campaigner can also tell the costly missteps in the case. It illustrates how the victims’ basic rights are sometimes unknowingly sidestepped in the desire of the law enforcers and service providers to fulfill their duties.

The basis for RBA

According to Save the Children’s *Child Rights Programming* handbook, “Human rights are universal legal guarantees protecting individuals and group against actions and omissions (failures) that affect their freedoms and human dignity.” Human rights, especially of the vulnerable and the marginalized, are the bedrock of all anti-trafficking initiatives or any social development initiative for that matter. There is no question that trafficking in persons is both an illegal and immoral act, a transgression of every man and woman’s dignity and fundamental rights. That is why national and regional anti-trafficking task forces have been set up, and more and more institutions and organizations are joining hands to eradicate this crime.

The upholding of human rights are mandated by the *UN Human Rights Convention*, the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*. Republic Act 9208 or the Anti-Trafficking Act of 2003 also stipulates the rights of trafficked persons to legal protection, mandatory services as well as rehabilitation and integration.

In recent years, governments, donors, UN agencies, companies and NGOs around the world

have adopted a human rights approach in their programming because it contributes in the pursuit of good governance, sustainability and poverty eradication (Save the Children, 2002).

In addition, the results of a recent study commissioned by the Anti-Slavery International (ASI) show that “law enforcement officials have tended to be the most successful in securing convictions when trafficked persons’ rights have been respected rather than disregarded” (Pearson, 2002).

For its part, Visayan Forum has started conducting a series of training-workshops on the rights-based approach (RBA) in handling trafficking this year for law enforcers, lawyers, social workers and other service providers. It’s the initial step toward the goal of integrating the approach in all stages of the anti-trafficking framework of intervention.

Basic principles of RBA

Unlike the traditional or social welfare approach, the RBA is a more developmental, holistic framework that recognizes “all rights as intrinsic to the human dignity” and champions the universality, inalienability, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights (UNICEF et al).

Moreover, it ensures that all the needs for the trafficked persons’ well-being are met, and their capacity to form their own opinions and right to be heard are recognized. There is also an inter-generational dimension to it, which means the approach takes into consideration that the child will become future parents of the next generation.

Lastly, it involves community participation and empowerment.

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