



BABU GIVES THANKS



The fighting between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) intensified in late April 2000. Heavily armed men were seen moving into position on the outskirts of a small village in North Cotabato. There was talk of guns being readied, bombs prepared. Some spoke of boldly fighting to the death. Others talked of fleeing. Most—especially the women and children—silently worried about loved ones getting caught in the crossfire.

On the second of May, the worst nightmares became reality. Government planes flew overhead and dropped bombs throughout this small village in an attempt to dislodge the MILF. The MILF fought back.

The fighting was fierce, the results horrific.

The simple homes—most made of bamboo and thatch—were soon aflame. The local mosque was destroyed, the wells that provided the community with water, broken. Bodies littered the ground. Children, women, and men cried, prayed for mercy, begged for an end to the violence. Their village destroyed and their hearts broken, 59 families (290 persons) set out on foot for the nearest safe haven, the municipality of Carmen, North Cotabato.



Twenty of these badly frightened and tired families—almost 100 persons—took refuge in a one room Day Care Center. Constructed of hollow blocks and cement with a galvanized iron roof, it was terribly crowded but far safer than the shelter provided by the small trees along the road. Three generations of one family—led by an emaciated, but strong, old woman affectionately referred to as “Babu”—settled in one corner of the Day Care Center, their meagre belongings scattered around them.

“I first met Babu in mid-June 2000 in the context of a rapid assessment of the needs of Filipinos displaced by the war,” says Steven Muncy, Executive Director of Community and Family Services International (CFSI). “She stood out from all the others in that crowded, smelly room. I was struck by her dignified bearing in the midst of complete misery. She seemed determined to somehow rise above her desperate circumstances. I wanted to hear what she had to say.”

Working through a local interpreter, Muncy learned that Babu and most of the others in the Day Care Center had been displaced on previous occasions, owing to thirty years of conflict in Mindanao that has resulted

in the death of more than 120,000 persons. But Babu’s story was even more surprising. She was first displaced when the Japanese invaded the Philippines.

“Babu and I talked for some while. I learned a lot from and about her. She was upset that her community had been bombed and made it clear that much damage had been done. She was forthright about the needs of her family and the other people in that Day Care Center. She never had the opportunity to learn to read and write, but Babu did not reflect a ‘poor me’ attitude. Further, she made it clear that she had every intention of going back home when the security situation allowed it. She indicated that they would need help to rebuild their homes and community facilities. They would have to plow and re-plant their fields. But, they would go home. Babu was sure about it.”

CFSI has now worked with Babu, her family, and almost 34,000 others affected by the war in Mindanao for the better part of two years. Many of them—including Babu and her family—are now back home. This is due, in part, to the concern and extraordinary generosity of people from all walks of life from all over the globe.

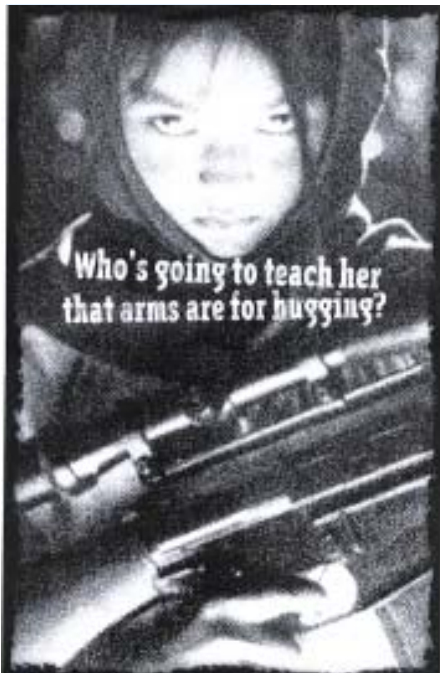
For example, a church in the United States donated the funds needed to purchase the materials required to construct one home for one displaced family in Mindanao. The community provided the counterpart contribution of labour. The net effect is one family—previously traumatized and displaced by war—now home with the knowledge that people abroad—as well as in the local community—do, in fact, care.

“I visited Babu at her home in late July 2002. She was full of joy and jokes, despite her advancing age and a stomach problem. We held hands and talked of her seven children, her newly built home, and the backyard garden. I gave her some pictures taken earlier of her and I. She had a hard time seeing them because of her bad eyes. She tried very hard though and seemed delighted to receive them. Her grandson Benjie served as my interpreter and reminded me that he now serves as a Volunteer with CFSI in this community.

Near the end of our talk, Babu turned to me and said: “Take care of Benjie. He’s your brother now.”

I was moved; others were stunned. I knew exactly what Babu meant, but I did not know what to say. I just continued to hold her hand and look into her clouded eyes. Finally, I thanked Babu for the privilege of being part of her family and left, once again reminded of the power of a grateful heart.”





ARMS ARE FOR HUGGING: Back to school for displaced children and youth in Mindanao, Philippines

CFSI will help 500 out-of-school children exercise their right to basic education for at least one academic year beginning in June 2002. These children come from impoverished communities displaced by war in Mindanao. Within their communities, illiteracy rates are high and the level of education low. Special efforts are required if these children are to finish primary school.

CFSI hopes to construct a six-room school building. Immunizations will be provided for those children who have not been immunized and a halal school lunch programme as well as nutritional education will be organized for the 100 most nutritionally vulnerable children.

Effort will be made to achieve the effective integration of the main features of the public school system and the Madrasah system. The curriculum will be enhanced with components on child rights, basic public health, psychosocial care, as well as peace and reconciliation. Emphasis will be placed on teaching children that “arms are for hugging” with the aim of promoting a culture of peace.

This project will include an income-generation component that will result in community-produced uniforms and school bags for the students as well as increases in family incomes and vocational skills.

CFSI will work with civil society, the business community, government, and others to establish sustainable mechanisms that will ensure these children and others can continue to access basic education after this fourteen month project is completed.

Donations in any amount will be well received. These can be in the form of checks made out to CFSI or bank transfers to: CFSI Account 6734-01-92-81 at BPI Family Bank, Legazpi-Amorsolo Branch, 104 Amorsolo Street, Makati City, Philippines.

\$25/month = 1 child in school for 1 year
for 12 months

\$50/month = 1 Community Extension Worker
for 12 months = employed for 1 year

\$100/month = Books/supplies for 25 students
for 12 months = for 1 year

\$500/month = 1 Teacher employed for 1 year
for 12 months

\$1000/month = 2 Classrooms constructed
for 12 months

For more information, please contact the Executive Director at headquarters@cfsi.ph or MCC-PO Box 2733, Makati, Metro Manila, Philippines



CFSI Director for Child and Family Welfare awarded Outstanding Professional of the Year 2002

Manila, Philippines—The Philippine Professional Regulatory Commission (PRC) has awarded the Outstanding Professional of the Year 2002 in the field of

Social Work to Ms. Erlinda A. Cordero, CFSI Director for Child and Family Welfare.

Ms. Cordero was honored for her notable contributions in upgrading the practice of social work in the Philippines. She pioneered the preparation of the Rules and Standards for Social Work Education and published indigenous books and teaching materials during her term as President of the National Association of Social Work Educators, Inc. (NASWEI). She championed the cause of children

and women through her involvement in social welfare programmes and research on various social issues. She served as Chairperson of the Editorial Board of the Philippine Encyclopaedia of Social Work (2000 edition), and represented the country in international foras, conferences, seminars, and observation trips on social welfare and development in agencies and schools abroad.

Ms. Cordero is one of the founding Members of the CFSI Board of Trustees. She is also an alumna and former dean of the Philippine School of Social Work at the Philippine Women's University.

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