

Child Soldiers in the Philippines*

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Caught in the Crossfire: Child Soldiers in the Philippines

“State parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into the armed forces ...” – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Art 38/3 The Government Forces

The Government Forces

The Philippines has a population of around 74.454 million, some 32.371 million of whom are under 18 years of age. Of the government's armed forces, there are around 110,500 active soldiers and 131,000 reserves. There are 70,000 personnel in the Army, 24,000 personnel in the Navy (which includes the Coast Guard), and 16,500 personnel in the Air Force. Around 42,500 personnel are in the paramilitary, the police 40,500 personnel, and the 60,000 members of the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGU).

National Recruitment Policy

Article II, Section 4 of the 1986 Constitution states that: “the Government may call upon the people to defend the state and, in the fulfillment thereof, all citizens may be required, under conditions provided by law, to render personal military or civil service.” Also, Article XVI, Section 4 of the Constitution provides that “the Armed Forces of the Philippines shall be composed of a citizen armed forces which shall undergo military training and serve, as may be provided by law. It shall keep a regular force necessary for the security of the State.”

Section 51 of the National Defense Act holds all Filipino liable for military service. Military service is also provided in the 1991 republic Act (RA) 7610 (An act providing for the Development, Administration, Organization, Training and Maintenance and Utilization of the Citizen Armed Forces of the Philippines). Its Section 14 provides for the compulsory registration of all men between 18 and 25 years of age.

The Philippine Constitution further “recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and shall promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual and social well-being.

The protection of children in situations of armed conflict is also stipulated in RA 7610. Article X (22) (b) provides that: “[c]hildren shall not be recruited to become members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines or its civilian units of other armed groups, not be

** An Excerpt of Chapter III of the Research "Child Soldiers in the Philippines"*

allowed to take part in the fighting, or used as guides, couriers, or spies." Children in this sense are "persons below 18 years of age of those over but are unable to fully take care of themselves or protect themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation or dissemination because of physical or mental disability or condition."

Further, Section 3 of the implementing rules and regulations of Article X of RA 7610 states that: "children shall not be recruited or employed by government forces to perform or engage in activities necessary to and in direct connection with an armed conflict either as soldier, guide, courier or in similar capacity which would result in his being identified as an active member of an organized group that is hostile to the government forces."

National Recruitment Practice

Although the National Defense Act provides for compulsory military training, in practice not all groups perform military service. In high school, basic military training (Citizen's Army Training) is compulsory for boys and girls. In college or university, male students are required to take military training. Known as the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), this takes two years and is a prerequisite for graduation. Trainees completing the ROTC become a reservists.

The CAFGU is a paramilitary unit, where members are subject to military laws and regulations, wear uniforms, and took military training. Recruitment into the CAFGU is voluntary, although forced recruitment into the CAFGU apparently occurred in early 1990s especially in areas suspected as heavily influenced with rebels. In the late 1980s, CAFGU recruits included children in their late teens. They volunteered not only because of economic reasons, but also out of the "fear of what happen under a communist regime."

The Armed Opposition Groups

For more than two decades, local armed groups have been fighting the Philippine Government. In Mindanao, Muslim groups have been fighting with the government to establish an independent Islamic government. The conflict is estimated to have claimed at least 50,000 dead. In the other parts of the country, the Philippine Government has been fighting against communist insurgents for more than 20 years. This conflict has reportedly claimed at least 40,000 lives. After the People Power revolution in 1986, local violence gradually declined with the government's peace efforts. However in recent years, the communist insurgents and the secessionist movements are again on the rise and including children in their ranks.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front

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As early as 1935, there were attempts by Filipino Muslim to secede from the Philippine Republic and form their independent Islamic state. In 1968, the separatist movement gained substance with the organization of Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM). Organized in mid-1969, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) initially served as the youth arm of the MIM. Eventually, the MNLF dissociated from the MIM claiming that the Muslim masses were exploited under the MIM's traditional Muslim leaders.

The MNLF harnessed popular support during the Martial Law period (1972) when the government imposed the firearms ban. The Muslim view this as part of a government plan to "Christianize" Muslim Mindanao. Other grievances include the perceived threats to their culture and religion as a minority group, actual and perceived economic and political disadvantaged under the Christian leadership, and the government's neglect of Muslim Mindanao. Between 1970 and 1971, armed clashes broke out between the Christian immigrants to Mindanao and the Muslims. This eventually led to the Muslim rebellion of 1973.

In 1977, Hashim Salamat broke away from the MNLF over a leadership squabble with Chairman Nur Misuari and ideological differences. Salamat and his followers named themselves the "New MNLF" and in 1983, established the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The MILF has a current estimated strength of 15,000 with 11,000 high-powered firearms. Its strength grows by 21% annually since 1992 due to aggressive recruitment of disgruntled former MNLF members, highly impressionable minors, and is bolstered by foreign support. At present, the MILF has shortages of ammunition and other logistics. It covers the area of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, and Western Mindanao.

The Abu Sayyaf Group

Although the self-proclaimed as Muslim freedom fighters, the government views the Abu Sayyaf Group as criminal and terrorist organization.. The ASG asserts that it has political agenda but its actions belie its claims. It first gained notoriety with the raid and pillage of the town of Ipil, Zamboanga in 1995. its most recent high-profile activity is the kidnapping of guests from a resort in Sipadan, Malaysia. It was reportedly paid at least US \$ 5.4 million ransom money fro the hostages in addition to US \$ 25 million "development aid" from Libya.

From 120 members in 1993, it has grown to 1,200 by the first half of 2000.

The New People's Army

The Local Communist Movement (LCM) traces its beginnings to the 1930s and the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP), which came about because of the difficulties arising from the lack of social reforms and the world economic depression. Its armed group, the *Hukbong bayan Laban sa Hapon* (HUKBALAHAP or HUK) came about as an

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armed resistance against the Japanese. Dissatisfied with the state of PKP, in 1968, Jose Maria Sison founded the Communist Party of the Philippines. Its armed group, the New Peoples Army was established three months later.

From nine squads with 35 firearms, it gained a peak strength of 25,500 guerillas with 15,500 firearms in 1988. the military's Campaign Plan "Lambat Bitag" (Net Trap) drastically reduced the movement to 6,025 men with 5,290 firearms in 1995. However, since 1995, the LCM grew by almost 58 percent to 9,460 guerillas with 6,040 firearms in the first semester of 1999.

Children in Situations of Armed Conflict

In armed conflict, children were usually those most affected. In the Philippines, the lives of more than a million Filipinos has been filled with anguish and anxiety due to the internal armed conflict. Of this number, more than half are children below 18 years of age. In 1991, secretary of Health Dr. Alfredo Bengson noted that about 4.5 million Filipino children have been affected directly and indirectly by the armed conflict since 1972. From 1986 to 1988, about 209,703 children were affected by government's counterinsurgency program in the entire country. The Gabriela Commission on Children and Family, an organization of women categorized these children into those who:

- (1) were forced to evacuate to refuge camps;
- (2) had been killed during military operations;
- (3) were murdered and wounded in massacres;
- (4) were arrested, tortured and detained;
- (5) suffered from malaria/dysentery and other diseases; and
- (6) were victims of emotional/psychological stress from the trauma and effects of the total war [of the military] on families and communities

Dr. Bengson adds that:

... from 1988-199, an estimated 300 children have died, while 160,000 have suffered the severe hardship of internal displacement ... 700 are reported to have been arrested and detained, while 1,200 were subjected to physical and mental assault ... those suffering emotional trauma has yet to be determined.

From 1992 to 1994, the Citizens' Disaster Response Center reports nearly 30,000 displaced families, including 73,500 children over the continued fighting in Mindanao, the Cordillera region, and the CARAGA region.

The Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

The increasing number of children involved in armed conflict is due to a number of factors. They join the ranks because of: (1) psychological reasons (*i.e.*, thrill and excitement); (2) social tension (*i.e.*, peer pressure); propaganda; and (4) forced

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recruitment or abduction. Armed groups target the emotional, psychological, mental, or physical vulnerabilities of the children, as well as the situations in their families or communities.

Human Rights Watch further observes that children most likely to be recruited are: (1) poor; (2) separated from their families; (3) displaced from their homes; (4) living in a combat zone; and (5) with limited access to education. They also come from communities, which have inadequate social services.

Recruitment of children usually takes place in areas where there is less or no government presence at all. The adolescents are usual targets for recruitment as soldiers. They are trusting and innocent like a child, yet have the strength and stamina of adults. When they are in the movement, they are also impulsive and aggressive especially when their families have become victims of NPA liquidations or military aggressions. According to the military, an estimated 2,000 minors fight in the NPA and the MILF.

Child Soldiers in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front

In 1982, when the MILF established Camp Abubakar in Matanog, Maguindanao, children were trained for military preparedness. The training of children reportedly can be traced earlier than the Moro uprising in the 1960s, during the American colonization. General Leonard Wood, the first governor of the Moro province during the American occupation reported children being used as shields while troops charge. Prominent examples of children fighting the Americans are in the battles of “BudDajo” and “BudBagsak” in 1906 and 1913 respectively.

Profile

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) survey cites the use of children by MILF. A Muslim male teacher cites that 10 of his 35 elementary school students have been absent from class and were seen training in an MILF camp. MILF guerillas interviewed by the ICRC also admits having young fighters, some as young as 10 years old. However, they add that these children are reserve forces and confined in camps for their education.

Reportedly, MILF policy allows the training of children as young as 12 years old, training boys and girls in their “madrashas” (religious schools). One MILF leader claims that 300 to 500 women undergo training at Camp Bushra in any one year, between the ages of 10 to 16 years.

Why they Join

According to Kunesa Sekak, region 12 DSWD Director, there is strictly no extensive recruitment of children to join the Moro liberation movement. However, as soon as

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Muslim reach puberty, they have an obligation to observe and exercise Islamic teaching. Joining the fight for Muslim or “jihad” is part of this. Thus, upon reaching puberty, the parents usually volunteer their children to join the struggle for independence by undergoing training. The parents see this as a useful way of spending the children’s time rather than spending it with friends, or engaging in sports.

There are also instances where the young themselves volunteer to join due to the spiritual dimension that the struggle provides, which is a source of joy and pride. This is in view of their belief that one of the highest forms of death is by “sabir/sahid” (martyrdom). Further, they view themselves as “exercising the basic teachings of Islam, to carry on fighting not only for their life, rights and freedom, but for the whole of the Bangsa Moro people, the Mindanoans.” By displaying the children trainees who swears willingness to die in pursuit of their freedom, the MILF hopes to convey that they are determined to pursue their goal.

In addition to religious reasons, the recruits are promised a monthly salary, training and firearms. Those with relatives in the MILF are particularly vulnerable due to strong kinship ties. In most cases, minors are recruited into the movement by their relatives.

Moreover, the MILF uses the Muslim elder leaders to convince young Muslims, between the ages of 13-25, to join the movement . Muslim leaders receive a certain amount for every recruit. Muslim youth organizations, such as the Islamic Youth Council of the Philippines (IYCP) and the Bangsamoro Youth Federation also recruit Muslim students from schools, colleges and universities

In the province of Maguindanao, teachers admit that their male students are recruited to join MILF. In March 1999, Army Colonel Rafael Romero, the deputy chief of the Southern Command of the Philippine armed forces, claims that MILF conducted heavy recruitments in schools and colleges.

On recruit, A.M. claims to be 9 years old when recruited by MILF. Now, 18, he is not afraid to die in a battle since fighting for him “is the only way for the Bangsamoro people to stop being slaves to the Philippine government and its people.”

Tasks and Roles

MILF’s military spokesman, Al-Haj Murad claims that no one below 18 could join combat, but MILF leader Hashim Salamat asserts that:

“[W]e are planting the seeds of the struggle in the minds of young people so that future generations will be able to fight for freedom if it doesn’t come in our lifetime. We want to find peaceful solutions ... but we have to prepare ourselves to fight.”

Some youth are seen manning the checkpoints of the MILF’s main camp, Camp Abubakar dressed in oversized fatigues and carrying rocket launchers.

Also, the MILF reportedly use high school students from Cotabato City and Maguindanao to purchase and transport medicines intended for Muslim rebels who were wounded in the armed hostilities with the government forces. These children used as couriers are mostly third and fourth year high school students whose parents are regular MILF members.

With the public outrage over the children including girls wearing military uniforms and training in MILF camps, the MILF claims that these children are not regulars in the army, but were trained for self-defense.

Child Soldiers in the Abu Sayyaf Group

Profile

The use of minors by the ASG, mainly between the ages of 13-16, has been confirmed by military reports in their encounters with the group.

Why They Join

The ASG uses Islamic religion to draw minors into the movement. The recruitment is conducted during religious festivities. The recruits, mostly high school students, are promised a salary after training, firearms, and even scholarship abroad.

Tasks and Roles

In Basilan, Mindanao, the ASG members not only recruit minors for combat, but use them as human shields and hostages.

Child Soldiers in the New People's Army

"Anyone who is physically fit, regardless of age, sex, race, nationality or religion and has the capacity to fight and ready to participate in a protracted armed struggle against the reactionary state power, may be a member of a fighting unit of the New Peoples Army."
– Point 1 of Principle III of the Basic Rules of the NPA (1969)

Profile

In the 1990s, when NPA suffered a dramatic setback in membership, an intense recruitment of children began. As of October 2000, at least 86 child combatants, between 14 and 17 have been captured or surrendered to the government since 1999. By June 2000, the military has documented the recruitment of some 123 minors. The most celebrated case was the capture of a 16-years old in an encounter with rebels in

April 1999. this provided strong evidence of the NPA's recruitment of children as combatants as a matter of policy.

According to military estimates, about 3 percent of the 9,000 to 10,000 regular fighters are children. In addition, around 20 to 25 percent of the new NPA recruits are children. In particular regions, the percentage may be higher. In Region 10 for instance, 14 percent of the combatants are children.

In 1998, the ICRC attested to the recruitment of children by the NPA (and the MILF) for combat purpose. Muslim guerillas, teachers, relief workers, government militiamen, and farmers interviewed by the ICRC confirmed the presence of 13 to 17 year old fighters within the NPA carrying pistols or rifles.

Former child soldiers also recruited children during their stay with the NPA. Dory, a 26-year old former communist insurgent who had been a guerilla since she was 9 years old became a recruiter of children until they surrender to the government in 1999. children, she says, "are the ones who are still strong .. are idealistic ... and are easy to convince." Another former child soldier, 12 years old K.A. has been involved in organizing and recruiting children between 13 to 15 years old, and has taken part in at least 12 ambushes.

The NPA is said to recruit high school students in certain parts of the country. In a raid conducted by the NPA of a Philippine national Police headquarters in Batuan, Bohol, 14 of the estimated communist guerillas were children. Albeit unarmed, they joined the operation to act as a reserve force.

Those child combatants either captured or surrendering to government sources are mostly children of farmers and elementary undergraduates. They were recruited by a group of armed communist rebels while they were farming.

According to the military, the children prior to undergoing activities related to the operations of the NPA go through the initial phases of recruitment, initial propaganda, and social investigation. In their propaganda campaign, the communist insurgents "exploit local and national socio-economic and political issues to agitate 'interest' from the children."

During their training with the communist guerillas, they were taught Marxism Leninism and Maoism. After training, exposure to the movement, and CPP/NPA education, the teenagers eventually become regular members of the NPA. Subsequently, they were given firearms to familiarize themselves with their use although they were not aware of the organizational structure, operations, or plans of their respective units. While in the movement, the child soldiers have thought of surrendering prior to their eventual capture or surrender due to homesickness and loneliness.

Why They Join

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The NPA prefers the youth sector as a target for recruitment. An August 30, 1999 statement of the military commission of the Communist Party of the Philippines' (CPP) Central Committee, claims that "youth must be organized and mobilized for the revolution" as they are also "victims of the feudal and colonial system that breeds poverty." Southern Mindanao spokesperson Rubi del Mundo defends the presence of minors in their ranks and blames the "oppressive state" which "forced" children to join the armed struggle.

Poverty is one motivation. According to Satur Ocampo, the former spokesperson for the National Democratic Front (NDF) [the political arm of the NPA], the parents volunteer their children for the underground movement. The parents are too poor to support their children hence they ask the NPA to take care of their children as well as teach and train them. In some instances, the children themselves volunteer, particularly, when orphaned. The NPA says that these youngsters are "taken in but only to care for" citing guidelines in treating them.

Myra Macla of the Kabiba Children Alliance, a children's rights advocacy group opines that the problem of child combatants "was rooted in the basic problems of poverty, exploitation and development aggression, especially in farming and 'lumad' (native) communities in remote areas.

Family influence is also a factor. For example, a 12-year old boy apprehended by the military joined the movement because his parents are both high ranking rebel leaders and his sister is a youth organizer.

In some instances, the children are particularly vulnerable when parents – the farmer husband and the housekeeper wife – have been recruited into the CPP's basic organizing groups for the farmer and the women sectors. The communist movement also employs special organizing groups aimed at the youth. This is part of the plan to secure influence in the village.

It is seldom for teenagers to join the communist movement because of the political ideas of the group. In most instances, teenagers get involved out of curiosity and the promise of an adventurous life. Some teenagers also join due to "family problems, tedious peasant jobs, lack of social and economic opportunities, and the general feeling of apathy within the community." From accounts of child combatants, it seems that the communist movement work on the vulnerabilities and weaknesses of the prospective recruits.

One 17-year old J.D. was recruited in the movement when she was 15 years old. As member of the Mamanua tribe, she was forced into a marriage, a traditional tribal custom arranged by her mother. In the movement, she became a "lecturer." She captured the nation's attention, when she was photographed wounded amidst dead comrades from an encounter with government troops. A 14-year-old E.A. was

convinced she could fulfill her dream of becoming a nurse by being a medical personnel in the movement. As a young boy, J.B. was fond of toy guns. He was promised a real gun by the NPA if he joins them. He eventually got wounded in an encounter with military men. In another case, one boy, L.L. was not aware of the circumstances. He was simply asked by his cousin to accompany a friend going to a nearby village. He eventually stayed in the movement for two years, until he was captured wounded in an encounter with the military.

Tasks and Roles

Although they encourage the children's participation in the struggle, the CCP says that "those of tender age" are not to perform combat or military duties. Those below 18 are not allowed to take in medical teams and non-combat operations. This is because the movement says they observe international laws and Conventions that prohibit the recruitment of children below 15 years of age as combatants. Also, the NDF, the political arm of NPA, admits the continuation of recruitment of 15-year-olds but insist that they will only be fielded to combat when they reach 18. However, newspaper reports cite various instances where the children are used for combat.

Children in the NPA serve various capacities: as officer (liaison officer, commanding officer, squadron leader, platoon leader, etc.), a combatant, or in support capacity (cook, messenger, spy, etc.). In Bicol, a journalist met a 14-year old NPA platoon leader. A 16-year old, Rolly heads a "Sparrow" unit, the liquidation squad of the NPA. In addition, the Human Rights Task Force in Surigao that investigated the massacre of some 49 soldiers by the NPA comrades alleged that children aged 15 and above were active participants.

In the battlefield, the NPA use the children as shields to deter military attacks. They also act as "scavengers" or those who recover weapons from dead soldiers in the battlefield. For example, in the late 1980s, a 12-year old child carrying a sack of rifle grenades was captured by the military.

In local areas, the NPA use the children in a courier system known as "Pasa Bilis" (literally Pass Fast). The children are given pieces of paper with scribbled messages and orders. The children then run to the next really station, where another child runs to the next post until the message has reached its destination. Although a supportive role, it can get dangerous as the children get caught in the crossfire. They are also used to collect "revolutionary taxes" in the village.

In addition, there are reports of children guarding camps. In February 2000, Brigadier General Victor Obillo and Army captain Eduardo Montealto while being held hostage by the NPA, claimed that 40 percent of their 140 NPA guards were minors between ages of 14 and 17.

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The NPA asserts its adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law. It amended Point 1 of Principle III to limit combatants or membership in the fighting unit of the NPA to those “who are at least 18 years of age and is physically and mentally fit ...” Children not below 15 years of age “may be admitted as a trainee or apprentice in the NPA and may be assigned to self-defense, militia and other non-combatant units and tasks.” NPA spokesperson Jorge Madlos also announced that they would no longer recruit children.

Further, in the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Human Rights Law, the Philippine Government and the NDF agreed to: “provide special attention to women and children and to ensure their physical and moral integrity” and “children shall not be allowed to take part in hostilities.”

Yet, while it purports to have a policy of non-recruitment of children below 18 years of age as regular members or combatants, child soldiers are still found in the ranks. Those who were already recruited before also remain actual combatants. In addition, children involved in supposedly medical and non-combat operations are still hazardous situations as in direct combat.

Consequences of the Conflict

Due to their participation in the conflict, children generally end up with physical disabilities or dead, as well as experience psychological trauma (sleeplessness, illness), fear, illiteracy, and the destruction of their livelihood and property.

In addition, children aged from 7 to 15 exposed to armed conflict suffer “multiple symptoms of mental disturbance and mental morbidity.” Families and individuals are also affected psychologically given their feeling of “lack of sense of control and responsibility” over their lives.

There are also documented cases of children undergoing torture and detention on suspicion of being combatants. Of the documented cases of torture from 1976 to 1995, 326 out of the 415 victims or 79 percent were 15 to 18 years of age. They were suspected combatants of the NPA and supporters/sympathizers of the CPP.

Of these torture victims, 85% were males, while 15% are females. At the time of their arrest or detention, children were agricultural workers, either as farmhands (61% or 250 cases) or farmers (17% or 70 cases). Fifteen percent (60) of the children were enrolled in schools.

The infantry units of the military and paramilitary forces, the Civilian Home Defense Unit and the Lost Command, allegedly torture children. They were reportedly tortured to obtain information, force a confession, incriminate others, take revenge, sow fear in the community, and destroy a personality. This is done through interrogation, threats and

harassments to arrest and detention, manhandling, being inflicted with physical pain, rap and indiscriminate firing. Children experiencing torture suffer physical and psychological consequences. The physical effects are pain and injury, scars, permanent damage to bodily movements or functions, and deterioration of health. On the other hand, the psychological effects are fear and anxiety, helplessness and apathy, sudden changes in behavior and difficulties in social interaction, learning difficulties, loss of self-esteem and other psychological consequences, including mental disorder.

Children affected by conflict regard their predicament as the “work of older persons.” Being children, they do not possess the strength to end this and feel helpless and tired of the situation.

Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Social Integration

The task of demobilizing and integrating children into society is difficult as they are already used to “wielding the power of a gun.” They are not easily convinced about relinquishing weapons and need to be educated that violence is not the way to settle differences.

However, it is possible for the children to recover and be socially reintegrated. Dr. Elizabeth Protacio, former head of the CRC cites the minimum conditions of: (1) safe environment; (2) secure economic base; (3) community resilience enhanced by traditional support networks; (4) mechanisms for protection, including the monitoring of human rights violations and the enforcement of laws. Family participation is also important in reconstructing support systems and relations in the child’s healing and recovery.

Some Filipino psychologists recognize the role of traditional values, aspects of local belief systems, or religious systems to hasten the healing process. They also use a holistic approach that “takes into account the whole person or child in the context of the family, community and society.”

In rehabilitating the child, counseling further helps. It is a vital part in “redirecting the children’s beliefs and perspectives in life.” Play is also important as it “explains, evoke and emphasize issues from the perspectives of the child.” Group therapy and counseling also facilitate the child’s and the family’s recovery in terms of socialization.

The recovery of the child hastens, if she is integrated with children with similar experiences. As such, the child learns that she is not alone, as well as gain support and strength from the group.

When children are captured by or have surrendered to the military, they are turned over to the DSWD. The Department then returns them to their parents, or in the cases of those orphaned, to foster homes. Dalmin Faith Iganian, coordinator for the Therapy Center admits to difficulty in finding the right homes for the children. Some parents

admit that they cannot ensure that the children will not go back to the communist movement because of the strong influence of the NPA in their areas. In some cases, parents bring their children to live with relatives elsewhere, in areas not influenced by the NPA.

The DSWD also assumes responsibility for the child until he or she reaches the legal age of 18. They enroll in training schools which equip them with knowledge and skills to assist them in finding jobs once released from custody. On occasion, the child herself opts to stay with the DSWD, where scholarship grants are provided to finish their education.