



**International Labour Organization
International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)**

**Philippines
Child Soldiers in Central and Western Mindanao:
A Rapid Assessment**

**By
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Preface

Unacceptable forms of exploitation of children at work exist and persist, but they are particularly difficult to research due to their hidden, sometimes illegal or even criminal nature. Slavery, debt bondage, trafficking, sexual exploitation, the use of children in the drug trade and in armed conflict, as well as hazardous work are all defined as Worst Forms of Child Labour. Promoting the Convention (No. 182) concerning the Prohibition and immediate action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999, is a high priority for the International Labour Organization (ILO). Recommendation (No. 190, Paragraph 5) accompanying the Convention states that “detailed information and statistical data on the nature and extent of child labour should be compiled and kept up to date to serve as a basis for determining priorities for national action for the abolition of child labour, in particular for the prohibition and elimination of its worst forms, as a matter of urgency.” Although there is a body of knowledge, data, and documentation on child labour, there are also still considerable gaps in understanding the variety of forms and conditions in which children work. This is especially true of the worst forms of child labour, which by their very nature are often hidden from public view and scrutiny.

Against this background the ILO, through IPEC/SIMPOC (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour/Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour) has carried out 38 rapid assessments of the worst forms of child labour in 19 countries and one border area. The investigations have been made using a new rapid assessment methodology on child labour, elaborated jointly by the ILO and UNICEF¹. The programme was funded by the United States Department of Labor.

The investigations on the worst forms of child labour have explored very sensitive areas including illegal, criminal or immoral activities. The forms of child labour and research locations were carefully chosen by IPEC staff in consultation with IPEC partners. The rapid assessment investigations focused on the following categories of worst forms of child labour: children in bondage; child domestic workers; child soldiers; child trafficking; drug trafficking; hazardous work in commercial agriculture, fishing, garbage dumps, mining and the urban environment; sexual exploitation; and working street children.

To the partners and IPEC colleagues who contributed, through their individual and collective efforts, to the realisation of this report I should like to express our gratitude. The responsibility for opinions expressed in this publication rests solely with the authors and does not imply endorsement by the ILO.

I am sure that the wealth of information contained in this series of reports on the situation of children engaged in the worst forms of child labour around the world will contribute to a deeper understanding and allow us to more clearly focus on the challenges that lie ahead. Most importantly, we hope that the studies will guide policy makers, community leaders, and practitioners to tackle the problem on the ground.



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Geneva, 2001

¹ Investigating Child Labour: Guidelines for Rapid Assessment - A Field Manual, January 2000, a draft to be finalized further to field tests, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/simpoc/guides/index.htm>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exploratory study investigating the phenomenon of child soldiers in Central and Western Mindanao, Philippines was conducted within a period of four months, from July to October, 2001. It was done using mainly a combination of techniques from the Rapid Assessment (RA) methodology prepared by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

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Above all, I am deeply appreciative of the help extended by the leadership of the MILF in allowing our survey team access to their camps and interviews with the child combatants there. The same level of gratitude is also extended to the NGOs, government line agency representatives and members of the Notre Dame Broadcasting Corporation (NDBC) in Kidapawan City, Cotabato province, for allowing us to conduct focus group discussions with them during office hours. This same gratitude is also due to all the 85 respondents, and more than 20 key informants who willingly lent us a few minutes of their time to talk to our team.

This study has allowed the team to have an extraordinary opportunity to be with children who are in very difficult circumstances and to have a glimpse of the kind of life child combatants lead. It was an experience of a lifetime, something that the RA team members are deeply thankful for.

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Abbreviations

ILO – International Labour Organization
IPEC – International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
SIMPOC – Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour
WFCL – Worst Forms of Child Labour
UNICEF - United Nations Children’s Fund
RAs – Rapid Assessments
MNLF – Moro National Liberation Front
NDF – National Democratic Front
MILF – Moro Islamic Liberation Front
AFP – Armed Forces of the Philippines
GRP – Government of the Republic of the Philippines
DPA – Deep-penetration agent
R – Respondents
ASG – Abu Sayyaf Group
NPA – New People’s Army
NDU-SERC – Notre Dame University –Socio-economic Research Center
NCR – National Capital Region
DOH – Department of Health
ARMM - Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
DPT – diptheria, pertussis and tetanus
RHUs – Rural Health Units
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
CPI – Consumer Price Index
CAFGUs – Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units
CVOs – Civilian Volunteer Organizations
PNP – Philippine National Police
ROTC – Reserve Officers’ Training Corps
PMA – Philippine Military Academy
DSWD – Department of Social Welfare and Development
MOA – Memorandum of Agreement
CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child
DOLE – Department of Labor and Employment
DECS – Department of Education, Culture and Sports
FFW – Federation of Free Workers
LITECHILD – Labor Initiatives Towards the Elimination of Child Labor
AHRC-AKAP – Ateneo de Manila Human Rights Center – Adhikain Para sa Karapatang Pambata
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
NGOs – Non-government Organizations
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization
CSAC – Children in Situations of Armed Conflict
DND – Department of National Defense
DILG – Department of Interior and Local Government

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Executive Summary

Background

Three major insurgent groups have waged armed struggle against the forces of the Philippine military since the 1960s. These are the Communist-oriented New People's Army, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and its breakaway faction, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The latter two groups were organized by Muslim revolutionary leaders, convinced that armed struggle is the only way to express the right to self-determination for the Bangsamoro Muslims in Mindanao.

In 1996, the Philippine government signed a Peace Agreement with the MNLF leadership, thus ending more than two decades of armed struggle. But the Philippine government is still engaged in armed conflict with the MNLF's breakaway faction, the MILF. The fertile river valleys of Central Mindanao are acknowledged to be the location of major MILF camps where children as young as 11 years old receive training in how to handle both long and short firearms in battle (*see Timonera, 1999*).

Late in the 1980s, a group of ragtag armed youth, mostly from the Yakan and Sama ethnic groups based on the island province of Basilan emerged to become the country's foremost bandit and kidnap-for-ransom group. The group, known as the Abu Sayyaf ("Bearer of the Sword") has lately been reported to have recruited several minors into their fold.

This first ever Rapid Assessment on the phenomenon of *child soldiers*¹ in some parts of South, Central and Western Mindanao attempted to scratch the surface, so to speak, of the magnitude, causes and consequences of the participation of children and minors in armed conflict.

The study used a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data gathering tools patterned after the RA techniques developed by the International Labour Organization/International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/IPEC) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The tools were aimed to obtain in-depth data within a short period of time (three months). These included a purposive survey among 85 child/minor respondents, key informant interviews among influential NGO, government and academic personalities in the three areas covered by the study, and focus group discussions among media practitioners, former NPA and MILF members and sympathizers. The study also benefited from gathering secondary information about socio-demographic, economic and political aspects of the coverage areas as well as from the limited number of

¹ The term *child soldiers* is used in this rapid assessment to refer not only to child combatants but also to children taking part in activities related to armed conflict situations such as foot patrol, guard/sentry posts, food preparation for combatants, and medical team duties.

existing studies on child labour in the region and on child soldiers. The materials on the latter are based largely on very limited case studies as there has been no survey done on child soldiers in the Philippines.

Estimates of child soldiers population in the Philippines

Data from both key informant interviews (*KI*= 23) and focus group discussions (*FGD with Media*, 2001, *N*=8) estimate that anywhere from 10 to 30 percent of the children in any given community influenced by either the NPA or MILF are drafted as soldiers. This is because their parents are combatants themselves and their children are raised within the armed group in the camps. If there are at least 2,000 people in each of the 10 MILF influenced municipalities in Maguindanao, there would be at least 2,000 to 6,000 children or minors who are considered child soldiers.

Background characteristics of child soldiers

- There are more males than females involved as child soldiers in the three armed groups now fighting against government forces in Mindanao. Eighty percent (68 out of 85 child soldiers interviewed for this study are boys. The majority of them belong to the MILF (80 respondents). The rest are Abu Sayyaf (4) and NPA (1).
- The majority of the child soldiers interviewed are Maguindanaon (52 or 61.2%). The rest are Iranun (28 or 32.9%), Sama (4 or 4.7%) and Zamboangueno (1 or 1.7%).
- They come from poor, economically marginalized families whose parents are involved in the armed struggle themselves. They live with them in communities influenced by the armed group. This is true for the MILF child soldiers interviewed for this study. Key informants also believe that this is true for the NPA which operates in Central, Northern and Western Mindanao.
- The majority of the children live in houses made of light materials, usually unfinished with little or no appliances at all.
- The majority of the child soldier respondents are 17 years old (58 or 68 %). The rest are 16 years old (15 or 17.6%); 15 years (nine or 10.64%); and the youngest respondents are 14 (3 or 3.53%). The mean age of respondents is 16.51 years old. Key informants and other literature, however, cite that children as young as 11 have been “drafted” as soldiers in both the NPA and the MILF.
- Child soldier respondents are highly literate in both English and Arabic (55 or 64.7%). Twenty-two respondents (25.9 %), however, said they can only read and write in English, which means they have never gone to a *madrasah* (Arabic school).
- Despite the children’s involvement in the armed group, many of them are still enrolled in formal education at different levels. This is true for 52 respondents (61.2%). Only 33 respondents have dropped out of school.

This includes four demobilized Abu Sayyaf combatants and one NPA child soldier.

Pathways to child soldiering or children's participation in armed conflict

- The earliest age of entry to being a child soldier is 11. This is also validated in the key informant interviews. The mean number of years spent as a soldier is 2.6 years; and mean age started as a soldier is 14.44 years old.
- A big number of respondents said they “voluntarily” joined or made their own personal decision to join the armed group (34 or 40%). This is followed by those who said they were invited to join by family members like parents, siblings and relatives (19 or 22.34%). Some respondents said they joined the group to fulfil one's religious duty/obligation to do “jihad” (16 or 18.82%). The rest mention the following manner of recruitment: invitation by rebel group leaders (7 or 8.24%); to take revenge against those who killed parents or relatives, and to fulfill one's duty for proselytization (*dawwah*) (1 respondent each).
- Children want to have access to firearms in order to arm and defend themselves and their families or communities in case of attacks.
- According to some key informants, children are fascinated and are proud of knowing how to carry and use a firearm at a young age.
- FGD participants point to the strategy of recruiting much younger children as a part of their long range strategic plan. In this way, the rebel group maximizes the “services” of young recruits.
- The participants also add that children of organized peasant groups and communities would easily join the armed struggle as an articulation of their communities' concerns and needs.

Tasks and environment of child soldiers

- The average number of hours a child is involved in soldier activities is 7.61 per day.
- Despite their involvement with the activities of the armed group where they belong, the children claim to sleep well, at an average of 7.90 hours a day.
- Among the common duties or responsibilities of child soldiers are the following: carry out foot patrol, guard/sentry, platoon/squad leader, combatant (28 or 33%); food preparation and combatants in rotation (25 or 29.4%); food preparation only (12 or 14.1%) and medical team member (11 or 12.9). The last assignment is specifically assigned to girls.
- Child soldiers claim to have good relationships with the adults around them (82 or 96.5%). The three remaining respondents did not answer.

- There is no difference in the child soldiers' assignments and those of the adult members of an armed group
- Because of their youth, child soldiers are given "special" treatment when they commit mistakes in their responsibilities. They are just admonished or scolded, the way parents do it with erring children. This is true of the MILF respondents.

Consequences of child soldiering

- Eighty-one respondents said they do not get paid for their services as child soldiers. This number includes the 80 MILF soldiers and the one NPA demobilized combatant. The latter claims he is given a meagre allowance but not a regular salary. The ASG members said they get paid in cash, but it is not a fixed amount, and the pay depends on the nature of their assignments.
- The respondents claim they do not get paid because they work on a "voluntary" basis. It is their contribution to the armed struggle against oppression and fulfils their obligation to do "*jihad*."
- Thirty respondents (35.3%) claim they do not fear anything in their job although they know it is hazardous and dangerous. They accept the danger and hazards as part of their job. Among the hazards include getting sick with diarrhoea, fever, and other ailments; getting wounded or killed in an encounter with the enemy; being tired after a long day of hiking or running in the mountainous areas.
- Eighty-three respondents (97.6%) said they do not feel sad in their work and in their place of work. This is because they feel that what they are doing is right, and it is in defence of their way of life (Islam).

Recommendations

No form of social interventions for the problems posed by the participation of children in armed conflict can succeed if some basic issues are not considered by government. These issues are related to the prevention of the emergence of armed conflict, or eliminating the circumstances or possible pathways to the participation of children as soldiers.

Recommendations for immediate action

- 1) Cessation of hostilities in Mindanao – this has to be discussed at length by the leaders of the insurgent groups and the Philippine government.
- 2) Conduct of massive relief and rehabilitation programmes for areas in Central and Western Mindanao badly affected by armed conflict last year (2000) and this year (2001).
- 3) Conduct of intensified education, information and communication (IEC) programmes through multimedia or other alternative means

to inform wider public of the plight of children involved in armed conflict.

- 4) Organization of a strong monitoring body that will look at the implementation of various legislations, MOAs and conventions relating to the welfare and protection of children, especially those involved in armed conflict.
- 5) Review of government education programs and policies and development of reformulated educational programs and policies that are relevant to regions affected by armed conflict. Such programs should emphasize affirmative action principles and strategies.
- 6) Conceptualization and implementation of culturally relevant and sensitive development programs for the members of the Muslim and indigenous communities in Mindanao. These programs may include income generating projects that utilize indigenous skills, abilities and resources of the people – e.g. cottage industries like handloom and backstrap weaving and the manufacturing of accessories from these handwoven materials; inland fishing. These projects should be conducted in tandem with a comprehensive functional literacy and numeracy program that will lead to the development of entrepreneurs among project partners.

Policy advocacy

- Intensified lobbying and campaigning for a law that will restructure annual Philippine government budgets to allocate substantial funds for basic social services, education and health.
- Engaging Bangsa Moro or Muslim civil society leaders in a series of talks on the root causes of Moro insurgencies: concept of self-determination, recognition of the “national” identity of the Bangsa Moro people; ancestral land and land ownership and how to elevate such issues to policy advocacy and planning at the national level.
- Create policies related to fair trade and market opportunities for small and micro entrepreneurs among marginalized populations in Central and Western Mindanao.
- Campaign for strong sanctions against violators of various legislations and charters protecting children’s welfare;
- Develop policies that will allow access to soft loans and other credit facilities for small and micro-entrepreneurs among project partners.

Further research and enhancement of the Rapid Assessment (RA) methodology

- 1) Further and more in-depth research on the phenomenon of child soldiers in the Philippines – this research should cover a much wider area (to include known rebel lairs in the Visayas and Luzon islands) using more in-depth strategies of gathering data.

- 2) These data gathering tools could be enhanced for children traumatized by their participation in armed conflict. Visual tools for eliciting data like drawings, Venn diagrams or a 24-hour time allocation diagramming could be introduced. Venn diagrams, for example, can tell us about people, organizations or institutions that children relate to in their duties as child soldiers.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The phenomenon of child soldiers (*defined in this study as children used in any activities related to armed conflict – see Executive Summary, footnote 1*) cannot be understood unless considered alongside the problem of abject poverty and marginalization of cultural minority groups in any given country. These children are part of the families and communities whose members have been convinced to undertake armed struggle as the only solution to this problem.

In the Philippines, armed insurgent movements express the following general convictions to address poverty and marginalization: self-determination and broader space for the aspirations of culturally distinct or minority groups in national development values and goals, as articulated by Muslim rebel fronts in Mindanao; and the establishment of a classless society, as articulated by leftist groups in Mindanao and in other economically depressed parts of the country.

The Philippines is one of the countries in Southeast Asia with a long, protracted history of armed conflict which has been a result of major insurgency movements spread throughout the archipelago of 7,100 islands. Insurgent groups include the New People's Army - the armed wing of the National Democratic Front (NDF) - a leftist political group that has been active for more than three decades. The NPA claims to have forces spread throughout the three major islands in the country, notably among its economically depressed areas. As of June 1999, government sources estimate their armed strength at 9,463 fighters, of which more than 10 percent are minors or children under 18 (*Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2000, p. 3*).

Armed conflicts started in the southern islands of Mindanao, Sulu, Tawi-tawi, and Basilan in 1971 between Philippine government forces and those of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The MNLF insurgency was the offshoot of the massacre of more than 30 Muslim youth off the coast of Corregidor Island in March, 1968. Prior to the massacre, more than one hundred youth were recruited by the Philippine military forces from the island of Sulu in southern Philippines. They were reportedly recruited to become the advanced party of a planned invasion of the Philippine military on the island of Sabah. Former Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos wanted to claim Sabah as part of the Philippine territory. The Muslim youth, many of whom belonged to the Tausug ethnolinguistic group, knew about this plan of the former president and decided to stage a mutiny to protest such a plan. This was because many of them had relatives living in Sabah, and they could not accept they

would be leading an armed invasion against their own relatives and brothers and sisters in their faith (Islam) in Sabah. Out of the public outcry against the massacre of the Muslim youth was born the Moro National Liberation Front led by former University of the Philippines professor Nur Misuari (*see Muslim and Cagoco-Guiam, 1999*).

After a series of fierce fighting between MNLF and the Philippine military forces in the early 70s, a series of talks took place in various places both within and outside the country. A split within the MNLF also happened late in that decade. This split eventually gave birth to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 1978. At the height of the MNLF-Philippine military armed encounters, it was acknowledged that the group had a formidable number of armed regulars, with conservative estimates at 20,000 – 30,000. The MNLF claimed to have a membership of around 75,000, although most observers believe that this number already includes civilian supporters in the communities where the front claims to have influence. As of March 1999, some 2,902 former MNLF fighters were integrated into the Armed Forces of the Philippines in fulfilment of one of the provisions of the Final Peace Agreement signed between the front and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP). In addition, another batch of 1,929 former MNLF cadres started their integration training with the Philippine military in April of 1999. This total of 4,832 fighters is considered to be only about 25% of the total number of “official” MNLF fighters (Muslim, 1999 and Tanggol, 1997).

A breakaway faction of the MNLF, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has engaged the forces of the Philippine military in intermittent guerilla warfare in many parts of Central and Southwestern and Western Mindanao since it was formally organized sometime in 1978. They started being active after the failure of government to implement pertinent provisions in the Tripoli Agreement signed between the MNLF and the GRP in December 1976.

Government sources place the MILF armed strength at 6,000 to 10,000 regular forces. This number, however, is often belied by those who are interviewed at length by various media groups as very conservative. According to many of the key informants interviewed for this study, there are as many MILF members as the number of people in the communities influenced by the front. For instance, at least eight towns in Maguindanao province are claimed to be under the control of the MILF. If the populations of these towns are combined, there are about 25,000 – 30,000 members of the front (*Interview with MILF Information Officer*).

In an interview with *Asiaweek* in 1998, Al Haj Murad, the MILF’s Vice Chairman for Military Affairs and Chief of Staff, claims a huge membership of about 120,000 fighters distributed in six “divisions,” many of whom are rotated through the front’s 13 major camps. Some key informants estimate at least 10-15 percent of this number are children or minors under age 18 who are actively involved in various activities relating to the goals of the MILF. They claim this is the case in some places

acknowledged to be under the influence of the front, like the mountainous barangays² of Matanog, Barira and Buldon in Maguindanao province.

The controversial Abu Sayyaf (literally meaning “Bearer of the Sword”) group started as a ragtag group of less than 200 in the early 1980s. According to various newspaper reports, they were not armed initially as their original intention was more of proselytization of communities to the Islamic faith. This changed drastically after an alleged government military deep-penetration agent (DPA) immersed himself in the group and taught them skills in armed guerilla warfare, including “revenue raising” through illegal activities like kidnapping for ransom. Reports of the group being trained by the military for the vested interests of some personalities in the government military organization have surfaced in many media accounts over the past few years. Government now considers the Abu Sayyaf as the country’s foremost bandit and kidnap-for-ransom group, overshadowing similar other armed groups within the Christian-dominated populations in the country. In 2000 and the early part of 2001, the group was successful in major hostage-taking incidents: one in the island of Sipadan (that belongs to Malaysia) and at another beach resort on the island of Palawan, Philippines. Government sources warn various communities in southern Philippines of the group’s intensive recruitment in many places in Mindanao, especially coastal communities. The government places their armed strength at around 500 regular fighters who are heavily armed and have access to substantial cash from their kidnapping-for-ransom activities. According to the key informants from Basilan who were interviewed for this study, about 15 to 30% of the children and minors in the communities influenced by the group have become active Abu Sayyaf members.

While ideologies of armed insurgent groups differ, they are one in their struggle to free themselves from the control of what they commonly perceive as an “unjust and repressive” government whose central authority is based in Metro Manila. In addition, these groups invariably involve the support or use of the capacities of highly vulnerable sectors of the population like women and children. Anecdotal reports and other narratives on the impact of war on children, including the effect of using the services of children as combatants or soldiers have been documented, albeit rather spottily and bereft of descriptions of the magnitude and scope of such a phenomenon in war-torn areas. For example, children are reported to have served as couriers for guerrillas thereby being exposed to physical danger, and children are trained at an early age how to handle or shoot a gun or even a long and powerful firearm.

From their early years until they grow up, children of rebels are conditioned to live in the same difficult situations that their parents are confronted with. Such difficult situations hamper their development as stable and balanced individuals. The trauma of war and its bloody consequences can spawn various personality disorders and other socially deviant behaviours. Psychologically, children of war grow up in atmospheres of intense animosity and require special healing therapies or other

² Barangay is the smallest political unit (community) in the Philippines.

similar processes to cleanse themselves of their hatred against those who they perceive to be “enemies.” Systemically, war can lead to the breakdown of social institutions, especially those that are mandated to deliver basic social services to children and other vulnerable groups in society. Moreover, the consequent lack of education or other skills arising from engagement of children in war traps them in the cycle of poverty.

This first ever Rapid Assessment (RA) on the phenomenon of child soldiers in some parts of South, Central and Western Mindanao has attempted to scratch the surface, so to speak, of the magnitude, causes and consequences of engaging children in armed conflict.

1.2 Objectives

The main objective in undertaking this exploratory study on child soldiers in Mindanao is to fill the data gaps in the knowledge and understanding of the magnitude, scope, causes, characteristics and consequences of the phenomenon of child soldiers in the Philippines, particularly in Cenral Mindanao where there is a significant presence of armed groups that have fought the forces of the Philippine government over the last three decades.

Specifically, this exploratory study aimed to:

- Produce both quantitative and qualitative data related to the extent of the phenomenon of child soldiers in the communities covered by the study;
- Describe the magnitude and scope, character, causes and consequences of the phenomenon of child soldiers in these areas;
- Recommend strategies for improving methodologies for studying the phenomenon in order to replicate the study in other similarly situated areas.

1.3 The Philippines context

The Philippines is one of the most populous countries in the world, and it has one of the highest population growth rates in Asia. Within a span of five years, the Philippine population grew by 10.3% - from 68.6 million in 1995 to 76.5 million people in the year 2000.

The 2000 census figures are ten times the Philippine population in 1903 which was posted at 7.535M people when the first census of the whole archipelago was undertaken. The density per square kilometer continues to increase as the population grows. The consequences of a steadily increasing population density have not been studied systematically, but social scientists in the country have been commenting on the deteriorating peace and order as a possible consequence of too many people occupying a very limited land area (*1995 Population Census and the 1999 Philippines Yearbook*).

REGION XII (CENTRAL MINDANAO)

REGION XII		
PROVINCES	CAPITALS	CITIES
1. LANAO DEL NORTE 499,010	ILIGAN CITY 188,266	ILIGAN CITY 188,266
2. LANAO DEL SUR 452,111	MARAWI CITY 59,244	MARAWI CITY 59,244
3. MAGUINDANAO 392,688	SULTAN KUDARAT 50,094	COTABATO CITY 97,989
4. NORTH COTABATO 634,202	KIDAPAWAN 60,331	
5. SULTAN KUDARAT 354,707	ISULAN 44,705	
FIGURES STAND FOR POPULATION		

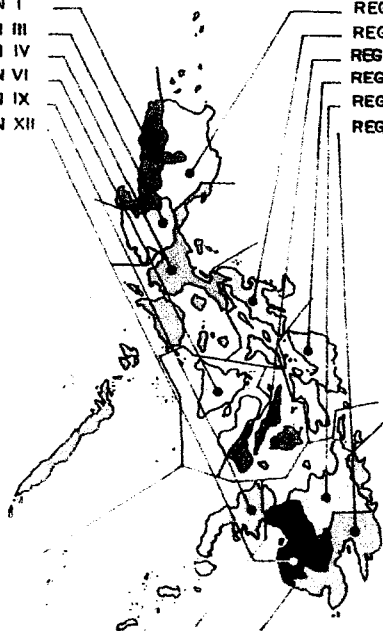
LEGEND

DAANG MAHARLIKA
 NATIONAL ROAD
 PROVINCIAL ROAD
 PROPOSED ROAD
 TRAIL
 REGIONAL BOUNDARY
 PROVINCIAL BOUNDARY
 CAPITAL CITY
 CITY
 PROVINCIAL CAPITAL
 TOWNS
 RIVERS / CREEKS
 MOUNTAINS

LOCATION MAP

REGION I
 REGION III
 REGION IV
 REGION VI
 REGION IX
 REGION XII

REGION II
 REGION V
 REGION VII
 REGION VIII
 REGION X
 REGION XI



Map 1: Central Mindanao

1.3.1 Economic situation

Since the 1960s up to the present, the Philippines continues to be economically underdeveloped. According to the IBON Foundation (a non-government research institution) through its facts and figures bulletin, approximately 76% of the total Philippine population is mired in poverty (*See Camacho, et al, p. 3*).

The United Nations Human Development Index in 2000 reported that the Philippines has moved up from its medium human development rank of 95 in 1995 to rank number 70. This increase in rank could have been brought about by the increase in Gross Domestic Product growth rate of 4.2% for the first nine months of the year 2000. This growth was caused by increases in sectoral growth like the services sector, at a 4.6% increase and the industry sector with an increase of 4.1%. The agriculture sector, which is the backbone of the country's economy, had a modest growth rate, at 3.3% during the same period last year.

However, this slow and modest growth was threatened by a rapid deterioration in the exchange rate of the Philippine peso to the US dollar. The mid-2000 exchange rate was P32 to 1 US \$; then dropped to P40.42 in the third quarter before plunging deeply to a P49.75 – P50.00 to one US dollar. In mid-January 2001, in the wake of the impeachment trial against President Joseph Estrada who stood accused of plunder and other crimes related to graft and corruption, the Philippine peso plunged to its lowest with a US \$ 1 to PhP 55.75 exchange rate.

While it is true that GDPs have increased over the five-year inter-censal period, the situation in both urban and rural areas in the country still shows that poverty is rampant. The growth did not translate into better living conditions for the majority of the country's population (*Vital Signs, IBON Facts and Figures, 15-30 December, 2000*). In the urban areas which are the centers of economic development, there is a high in-migration, thus spawning crowded slum enclaves. For instance, hundreds of thousands of squatter families live in 276 slum communities in Metro Manila alone (*Vital Signs, ibid*).

In the urban areas, wages from employment is the main source of income of residents, but their wages are not enough to meet the day to day increases in the costs of living. According to IBON, the daily cost of living for a family of six members in Metro Manila is P495.43 (US \$9.545 at current exchange rates), but the legislated minimum daily wage is only P250.00 (US \$5.00). In the rural areas and in most provinces in Mindanao, the daily cost of living for the same number of family members is about P380.22 (US \$7.33) for agriculture workers and P400.04 (US\$ 7.71) for non-agricultural workers. In reality, however, the prevailing minimum wage in many places in Mindanao, both urban and rural is pegged at P220.00 (US\$ 4.20) (for most government casual and rank and file workers) and this amount is even less for commercial establishments. In General Santos City, the prevailing daily minimum wage for a fish canning factory worker is from P150.00 to P200.00 only (*from interviews with local labour officials*).

Another problem that aggravates the poverty situation is the unequal distribution of income. This has been acknowledged as one of the major causes of poverty for the majority of the country's poor and poorest of the poor. Even some government officials acknowledge that in the Philippines, there is a concentration of wealth and power among a few individuals and foreigners. Jose Almonte, former national security adviser of the Ramos administration describes this disparity as follows:

- The top 5.5% of all the landowning families own 44% of all the arable land in the country;
- The richest 15% of all families account for 52.5% of all the nation's income;
- In 1991, only 10 corporations accounted for 26% of all revenues; 40% of all net income; and 34% of the assets of the top 1000 corporations;
- Only 60 to 100 political clans control all elective positions at the national level. (*Camacho, et. al, ibid*).

A slow economic growth, and a steadily depreciating peso led to the closure of several businesses in the country. By August, 2000, a total of 322 firms had shut down, while 1,248 were forced to reduce their workforce – thus easing out 48,235 Filipinos from their jobs. In mid 2000, around 3.5 million Filipinos were unemployed while some 6.01 million workers – mostly from the rural areas – were underemployed as of July 2000 (*BLES data included in Human Rights Situation 2000 report*).

1.4 Profile of study areas

All three of the major data gathering tools used for this rapid assessment were conducted in three provinces in Central and Western Mindanao, i.e. Maguindanao, Cotabato and Basilan. A brief profile of each province follows.

1.4.1 Maguindanao

Maguindanao Province is one of the four provinces included in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). It used to be a part of the once biggest province in the entire country, the Empire Province of Cotabato until its creation as a separate province on November 23, 1973. The late President Ferdinand E. Marcos issued Presidential Decree No. 341 creating three separate provinces from the Empire Province, namely: Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat and Cotabato.

By virtue of the passage of the Organic Act for the ARMM (Republic Act 6734), Maguindanao became a part of the new autonomous region. Its inclusion was made official through a plebiscite held on November 19, 1986, under the administration of former President Corazon Aquino.

Maguindanao is bounded on the North by Lanao del Sur; on the east by North Cotabato, on the south by Sultan Kudarat, and on the west by the Moro Gulf. The

province is accessible by air through the Awang Airport, and by sea through the two ports in Parang town.

With a total land area of 5,425.03 square kilometers, Maguindanao province is one of the smallest provinces in Central Mindanao. It has a predominantly flat terrain, with undulating hills and mountains. Its climate is suited largely for agriculture, and its main crops are rice and corn.

The province is composed of 21 municipalities and 600 barangays (mostly rural).

Table 1.1: Educational levels, Maguindanao, based on 1995 National Statistics Data (by percentage to total household population)

Educational level	Percentage to total HH Population
No grade completed (never went to school)	32.7
Elementary education only	41.9
Completed high school	23.3
Academic degree holders	2.1
Total	100

The table shows the low educational levels of Maguindanaons. One explanation for this is the prevalent attitude among older Maguindanaon parents towards a Western-oriented education. Some parents are apprehensive that their children may become more “Christian” in their orientation after going to school in the country’s educational institutions, many of which are run by Christian missionary groups.

Maguindanao is one of 20 provinces included in the country’s “Club 20,” the country’s poorest provinces. All of its 21 towns are classified rural, with very low revenues. The dominant political families in the province are members of the Maguindanaon royal families who trace their ancestry to the sultans who ruled the once glorious sultanates in the Empire Province of Cotabato before the Spaniards or Americans ruled the Philippines.

The province of Maguindanao was, and still is, one of the hardest hit by armed encounters and bombardment between the forces of the Philippine military and the MILF. According to the *ECDFC Monitor*, from January to April of 2000, a total of 10,398 families have been displaced from various upland towns in Maguindanao due to heavy fighting between the MILF and the Philippine military forces. At an average of six members per family, this number translates to roughly 62,388 individuals. But most families in Maguindanao are extended, i.e. they are composed of not only the members of the immediate, nuclear family, but also relatives from either the husband or wife’s families. This could mean that more than 100,000 people have been transported away from their dwellings. They are still in the crowded various

evacuation centers setup in collaboration between the DSWD and some relief and rehabilitation NGOs like the Episcopal Commission for Displaced Families and Communities (ECDFC) and concerned citizens.

1.4.2 Cotabato Province

The province of Cotabato lies on the eastern part of Region XII and is strategically located in the central part of Mindanao. This province was carved out of the huge Empire Province of Cotabato, which used to be the biggest province in the country during the American regime. It is bordered on the north by the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Bukidnon; on the east by Davao City; on the southeast by Davao del Sur; on the west by Maguindanao Province and on the southwest by the province of Sultan Kudarat.

The land area of the province covers 656,590 hectares, about ¼ of the original size of the Empire Province of Cotabato before its division into several provinces. This land area represents about 45.06 of the total area of Region XII.

Seventeen municipalities and one component city (Kidapawan) compose the province with the latter as the provincial capital. The province has 544 barangays (communities).

The total population of Cotabato Province in the 2000 population census is 958,643 persons, an increase of 95,977 persons over a period of five years from the 1995 census of 862,666.

Table 1. 2: Teacher to pupil/classroom ratio in the public elementary and secondary, 1998-1999

	Enrolees	Teacher	Ratio	No. of classrooms	Ratio
Public elementary	167, 869	4, 089	1:41	4, 353	1:39
Secondary	54, 716	1,521	1:36	884	1:62

*Source: Cotabato Socio-Economic Profile, 2000(PPDO)
No. of Schools 868*

PROVINCE OF MAGUINDANAO

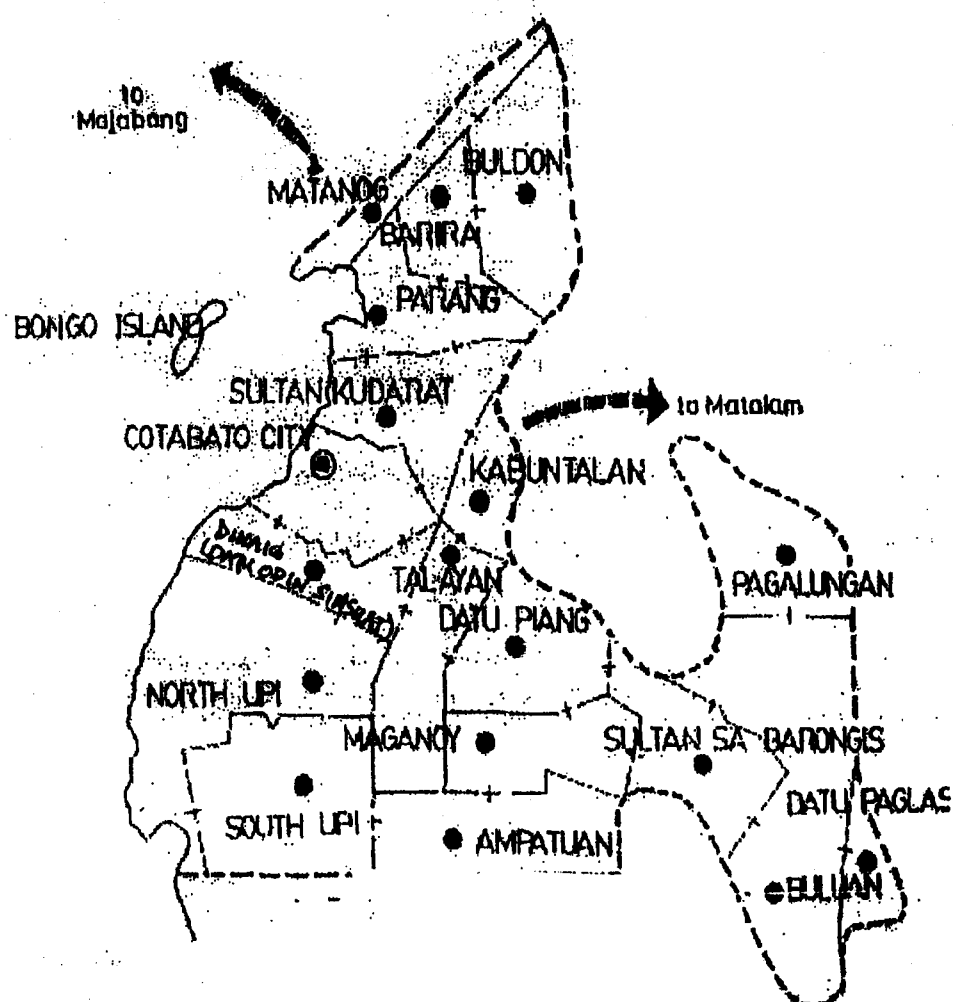


Table 1.3: Educational levels by percentage to total population 7 years and older in Cotabato province, 1998-1999

Educational level	Percentage
Elementary	64
High school	24
Tertiary	12
Total	100

Source: Cotabato Socio-economic Profile, 2000

1.4.3 Basilan

Basilan, a province in Region IX, is located across the southern tip of the Zamboanga Peninsula. It is bordered by the Basilan Strait to the north, Moro Gulf on the east, Sulu Sea on the west and Celebes Sea to the south. Towards the southwest is the cluster of islands of Sulu and Tawi-tawi. The province has a total land area of 1,379 square kilometers or 137,900 hectares. It is approximately a little more than double the size of Metro Manila.

Formerly a part of Zamboanga del Sur, Basilan became a separate province on 27 December 1973 by virtue of Presidential Decree No. 356. The province is composed of 255 barangays; distributed among seven municipalities, namely: Isabela, Lamitan, Lantawan, Maluso, Sumisip, Tipo-tipo, and Tuburan. (*Source: DILG-Provincial Operations Office*). On the basis of its municipalities' income Basilan has been classified as a fourth class province as of 1996. Isabela serves as the capital of the Province. It is a third class municipality (*Source: MPDO*).

As of September 1, 1995, the total population of the province was recorded at 295,565 persons. This was an increase of 57,257 over the 1990 census figure, based on an average annual growth rate of 4.12 percent.

Of the seven municipalities of the province, the municipality of Isabela, the capital town has the largest population size with 23.2 percent of the total provincial population. This is followed by Lamitan (18.4 percent) and Tipo-tipo, at 15.9 percent. Average household size is 5.4 members, with a population density of 280 persons per square kilometer.

The Yakans, an indigenous Islamized group compose the largest ethnic group in the province, representing 36 percent of the total population. The others are Tausugs, who are originally from Sulu archipelago; with a sprinkling of Chavacanos (from Zamboanga), Sama and Cebuano migrants. By sex, there are more males (50.4 percent) than females, at 49.6 percent.

Living standards in the province are very much below the regional and national standards. The percentage of households using safe water supply for drinking is only 30.9 percent. This is less than half the national percentage of 64.9 and below the regional percentage of 41.8. The majority of the houses in the province are made of light materials like cogon (*Imperata cylindrica*), nipa and anahaw (varieties of palm) thatch roofing. Houses like these comprise 60.9 of the total dwellings in the province. Only about 23.05 percent use galvanized iron sheets for roofing.

Average family income in Basilan is recorded at P48,323 per annum (US \$931.08 at the current exchange rate of PhP 51.90 to one US dollar). Because the province has no major industries and factories, most of its consumer products are "imported" from Zamboanga and Metro Manila (*Data source: 1996 Basilan Socio-economic Profile prepared by Basilan PPDO*).

In 1997, the province had a total of six functional hospitals (both public and private) spread out over the different municipalities. Four of these are found in Isabelita with a combined 135 bed capacity; and two in Lamitan with a combined 46 bed capacity. The towns of Sumisip and Tipo-tipo had constructed one district hospital each but until now these are not functional due to the lack of funds and the volatile peace and order situation in these towns (*Basilan Profile, ibid.*) These areas are known to be the hotbeds of the notorious Abu Sayyaf group.

Education has not received much attention in the province. Only 27 secondary schools, 250 elementary schools and three tertiary education institutions provide the educational needs of the population. The teacher-student ratio is placed at 1:40 for both elementary and secondary schools. Student to classroom ratio is 40:1. Literacy rate is among the lowest in the country at 72.80 percent; functional literacy is much lower, at 48.08 percent.

Table 1.4: Educational attainment of Basilan population seven years and above

Highest grade completed	Percentage
No education at all	32
Elementary	40.4
Secondary education	19
Some college education	4.5
Academic degree holders	4.1
Total	100

The province has one of the highest poverty rates, at 58.4 per cent or around 28,985 families. This is much higher than the national average which is placed at 40.7 percent in 1995. Among the most impoverished groups in the province are agricultural workers, marginal fishers and farmers. A fourth group, the sea gypsies, have been added due to the unique needs of these people for intervention programs.

High poverty levels in the province, despite its various potentials for agricultural and economic growth are attributed to the following major problems confronting its constituents: 1) volatile peace and order conditions; 2) lack of access to affordable credit; 3) weak market linkages; and 4) distance from social services and facilities.

Moreover, recent developments involving hostage taking incidents and kidnap victims being brought to the province have created massive displacement and fear among the ordinary citizens in Basilan. Military operations have intensified since the Sipadan hostage taking incident last year. The Abu Sayyaf continues to hold their hostages in their mountain lairs in the province. These have further pushed the province into abject poverty.



Map 3: Western Mindanao (including Basilan)



REGION I
REGION IV
REGION IV
REGION VI
REGION IX
REGION IX

REGION II
REGION V
REGION V
REGION VII
REGION VII
REGION X
REGION X

LEGEND

DANGS WANAHLIKA
 NATIONAL ROAD
 PROVINCIAL ROAD
 PROPOSED ROAD
 TRAIL
 REGIONAL BOUNDARY
 PROVINCIAL BOUNDARY
 CAPITAL CITY
 CITY
 PROVINCIAL CAPITAL
 TOWNS
 RIVERS / CREEKS
 MOUNTAINS

1.5 Definitions

1.5.1 The ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182)

This exploratory study on the situation of child soldiers in the Philippines is one of 38 rapid assessments of the project to investigate worst forms of child labour undertaken by IPEC/SIMPOC. The studies are being carried out in 19 countries and one border area under the framework of the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) 1999. Topics investigated include sexual exploitation, working street children, drug trafficking, *child soldiers*, child domestic workers, children in bondage, child trafficking, and hazardous child labour in selected commercial agriculture, fishing, garbage dumps, and urban environments. It should be noted that the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) does not use the term “child soldiers” and defines worst forms of child labour as including “forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.”

Recommendation 190, which accompanies Convention 182 states in Article 5 that *“detailed information and statistical data on the nature and extent of child labour should be compiled and kept up to date as a basis for determining the priorities for national action for the abolition of child labour, in particular for the prohibition and elimination of its worst forms as a matter of urgency.”*

This rapid assessment covers children and minors below 18 who are engaged in various activities related to armed conflict. In this study, such activities include attending military training in the camps of rebel groups, food preparation and other related activities for the benefit of the older members of the armed force where the child is a member, being part of the group’s “elements” as members of the foot patrol, sentry group, blocking force, armed escorts of older officials, etc., or participating as part of the para-medical team, propaganda unit or member of the urban “hit” squad of the armed group. This definition also includes the activities of children who are used as decoys, spies or couriers of older rebels.

Children and minors under 18 who are involved in the above listed activities are covered by this study, even if they are not paid, like the majority of the respondents.

The research team conducted purposive survey interviews of eighty (80) MILF children and minors below 18 in four municipalities in the province of Maguindanao, in Central Mindanao. In addition, four Abu Sayyaf youth were interviewed in Zamboanga City. A lone demobilized NPA child combatant was also interviewed for the survey at the Center for the Rehabilitation of Drug Dependents in Panacan, Davao City.

In addition, a total of 23 key informants were interviewed for this study. Of this number, 12 were interviewed from various communities in Basilan province and 11 from different municipalities in Maguindanao. Three focus group discussions were

also held: one among media practitioners (radio reporters and print journalists) from Kidapawan City in Cotabato province; one among ten former NPA sympathizers in Malapatan, Sarangani province and one among former MILF youth in Cotabato City.

1.5.2 On child labour

Child labour is a prevalent phenomenon all over the Philippines. According to the primer on child labour prepared by the Department of Labour and Employment, Region XII, most Filipino parents do not consider work among children as wrong. As part of a child's socialization, he or she is being taught the work ethic at his or her early years in life. According to some parents, this can promote the value of sharing and cooperation among family members, which is an important factor in the child's development. However, there are cases when parents consider child labour to be objectionable. These are when the following conditions are present:

1. the work is hazardous to the health and morals of the child;
2. the condition of the work is exploitative; and
3. the work prevents the child from obtaining an education.

In the first ever survey on working children (aged 5-17) done by the National Statistics Office (NSO) countrywide, it was learned that an estimated 3.6 million children worked at anytime between August 1994 to July 1995.

One in 10 of these working children reported to have engaged in heavy physical work. Most of the working children surveyed were boys.

There were also children who reported being exhausted at work. Some 17 percent of the working children reported that they always come home from work exhausted. Children engaged in construction and fishing were the ones who usually come home from work exhausted.

Needless to say, the education of these children is affected. When the child enters the working world, he or she has to forego classes in favour of long hours of work. Even if a child continues to attend school while working, the strains of putting up with two concerns like working and schooling will eventually take a toll on the child's young life. According to the survey, 28 percent of the children reported that their work affected their studies. Of those who were affected, 32 percent had difficulty catching up with their lessons and 41 percent reported that these circumstances manifested in low grades.

A Rapid Appraisal and Incidence Survey on Child Labour in selected areas in Region 12 in 1990 showed that child labour is relatively high in the areas selected for the rapid appraisal. These areas included four barangays in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat province, the barangays in the island of Bongo, Parang, Maguindanao and one urban barangay in Iligan City. Child workers were found in almost all sectors of the economy: as agricultural workers, domestic helpers, market or street vendors, shell

gatherers, “loose fruiterers” in the case of the child workers at an African palm oil plantation in Kenram, and even as fisherfolks.

The study concluded that all of them were forced to work at an early age because of poverty. In many cases, parents themselves involve their children in their economic activities to generate additional income for the family. This practice was found to be common among parents with low literacy levels. Child labour in the region persists despite existing laws prohibiting the engagement of children aged 14 and below. This is because of severe economic pressure among the children’s families.

Another study on child labour showed that children who worked continued to be in school (84% compared to only 16% of those who reported that they were out of school) (Tan, et al, 1991). They were also involved in about the same type of work, like vending/selling, collecting loose fruits in the palm oil plantation, and fishing. Most of the working children are males. All of the working children included in the study came from very poor families with a high dependency ratio and with members in low paying jobs. Parents encouraged their children to work to help augment their meagre family incomes.

The following were the common working conditions of working children:

- Most child workers do not have written contracts for the work they do. This is especially true for agricultural child workers.
- On the average, working children in Region XII spend an average of four hours daily, except Saturday and Sunday when they work almost the whole day.
- About 75% of the children surveyed reported a daily income of PhP 20.00 (US \$.40) and below. The average income is less than this amount, ranging from PhP 10.00 to PhP17.39 a day (US \$.05 to US \$.35)
- Child workers are exposed to many hazards: exposure to poisonous snakes in the African palm oil plantation, violence in the streets for street vendors, and exposure to the elements for those who are employed in fishing boats.

The phenomenon persists because the Philippine government is not capable of strict enforcement of child labour laws. Government policies also do not discourage commercial firms from employing of children. Working children are not monitored efficiently by government agencies, thus they are left on their own.

1.5.3 On child soldiers

There are many reasons for the growing trend of the use of children in armed conflict. Among them are abject poverty in many countries in Asia and Africa, avenging of atrocities committed by government authorities against the children’s parents, and alienation and discrimination (true to most minority groups).

The Global Report on Child Soldiers (Coalition to stop the use of Child Soldiers, 2001) cites that the recent technological advancements allowing the use of more lightweight weapons in combat is partly responsible for the growing number of child combatants. Small arms have made semi-automatic rifles light enough to be used and simple enough to be stripped and reassembled by a child of 10 years. The proliferation of this type of weapon have made these arms easily available and cheap.

In its first issue for 2001, the Radda Barnen newsletter reports that “the war between rebel groups and the Philippine government over control of Mindanao, the southern region of this country, is dragging more and more children into the line of fire. It is believed thousands of Filipino children are innocently sucked into the Mindanao war.” It noted that if the two major groups, the NPA and the MILF, each contain at least 10 percent children, this would mean a total number of child soldiers in these two groups of at least 1,600 children under 18 years old.

A 1999 article included in the Philippine Human Rights Forum describes the training of children in MILF camps. Written by journalist Bobby Timonera, the article, “The Warrior is a Girl Child,” details life in the MILF camp for young girls from age 11 to 17 who are given military training for at least three months. The girls are taught the basics of handling guns, from short arms to long, much more powerful firearms like the AK-47 or an M-16 Armalite. The writer notes that the girls are “experts” in handling the guns, even if some of them are as tall as an M-16 Armalite. All of them are willing to die for the cause of “jihad,” or struggle against what they perceive as an oppressive central government.

In February 2001, the Center for Integrative and Development Studies (CIDS) at the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City provided a case study report on child soldiers in the New People’s Army (NPA). The report concludes that the following are factors in the plight of child soldiers:

- Grinding poverty and destitution that cause entire families and communities to support a cause that promises a better life, even if it entails participation in an armed struggle;
- Intensive militarization of the countryside that forces families and children to “protect” themselves by participation in the armed struggle;
- Cultural factors that view children differently: they are perceived to mature earlier, e.g. 14 year old girls are expected to marry and children are involved in the means of production at an early age;
- Both parents are combatants and as such their children are raised within the armed group;
- Peer groups influence one another in their idealism or adventurism;
- Inaccessibility to basic government services, e.g. education, social services and health; and

- Poor monitoring and weak political will on the implementation of the CPP and NPA's rule of not recruiting children as combatants in the field.

Though the situation of child soldiers in the Philippines has been described in snapshot images in the literature reviewed above, details of their environment in the camps and in their work places have not been explored. The present study attempts to provide more details about the situation of child soldiers among a leading Moro rebel group, the MILF; and those from the acknowledged leading kidnap-for-ransom and bandit group in Southern Philippines, the Abu Sayyaf and about a few cases of NPA child soldiers.



Plate 1: MILF cadres assembling long firearms in Camp Abubakar in Maguindanao province. Note children at the right observing the process (From Asiaweek, April 3, 1998 issue).

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

2.1 On Rapid Assessments as a methodology

Rapid Assessments (RAs) are quite suited for eliciting information about children in difficult circumstances, like child soldiers. However, as it has been widely acknowledged, there are limitations to the nature of generalizations that can be made from the data gathered using the tools generally specified for RAs. Moreover, it is difficult to come up with sample surveys for child soldiers as normally there are no exact figures of the total number of children involved or engaged as soldiers. This is especially true for rebel armed forces. The exact number of their full-fledged members could not be ascertained since this is a highly confidential matter. Expectedly, key informants from the rebel groups are not willing to divulge the exact number of their card-carrying members for many strategic reasons, one of which is the maintenance of their own security.

This study describes the situation of child soldiers in three provinces in Central and Western Mindanao. It is based on fieldwork undertaken within two months in mountain areas in Maguindanao province where there is a substantial number of important camps of the MILF. An additional two weeks were spent carrying out key informant interviews and a purposive survey in Zamboanga City and Basilan province on the Abu Sayyaf group. Another month was spent on the background and literature search for the study.

2.2 Methods adopted for this study

Field research for this study was conducted in four mountainous barangays in Maguindanao province, particularly in the towns of Barira, Matanog, Datu Odin Sinsuat (formerly Dinaig) (see map on p. 10) and Parang. This was for the survey of 80 MILF child soldiers. Because of the sensitive nature of subject of this study, the respondents strongly urged the research team not to do a field mapping of survey sites. They feared this information would somehow find its way to the military and be used to capture them. In addition, fieldwork was undertaken in Isabela, Basilan, for the key informant interviews of 12 individuals who have substantial knowledge of the Abu Sayyaf phenomenon in the province. This was done within a two week period. Four minors of the Abu Sayyaf who had been captured by the military before the conduct of this study were also interviewed for the survey portion of this study. This was done in one week at the Zamboanga City Jail where the minors are currently detained. Regarding NPA child soldiers, secondary data from the documents provided by the DSWD- Region XI in Davao City proved to be valuable as well as

key informant interviews with DSWD officials. Moreover, one NPA “surrenderee” was interviewed for the survey.

The national consultant for this study served as leader of the RA team composed of three research associates, one researcher/statistician, one facilitator/researcher, six enumerators (four in Maguindanao province and two in Basilan) and one administrative assistant. The three research associates used a combination of both quantitative (purposive survey) and qualitative data gathering methods (key informant interviews, focus group discussions) to gather data in their respective areas of assignment (see report annexes for survey questionnaires and KI interview schedule). In addition, a researcher conducted a literature search and reviewed all materials relevant to providing the background and context for this study.

In order to accomplish the difficult task of gathering data from a reclusive group such as child soldiers like the MILF respondents in this study, the research team coordinated with both their individual contacts and network organizations. These individuals and groups facilitated the grant of permission for the survey team to enter the mountain camps of the MILF. It also helped that the survey enumerators were natives to the areas where they did fieldwork. This was important to lessen suspicion on the part of the respondents and to establish immediate rapport among them. Moreover, the research associates are experienced professionals doing both research and development work in the areas where they come from. As such, they have already established good relationships with various groups in their respective areas, including those from the rebel communities.

2.3 Some notes on the respondents

With the exception of one respondent, the minors interviewed for this study are Muslims of different ethnolinguistic groups. The 80 MILF children and minors were interviewed in their homes in the upland barangays of four towns in Maguindanao province. Four male enumerators were sent to the survey areas during the weeks of August 6–29, 2001. They stayed in the area until they were able to finish the interviews for the purposive survey component of this study. They were supervised by one research associate.

Four of the six enumerators are from the municipalities in Maguindanao which were selected as the survey areas. These areas were selected because some camps of the MILF forces are located there. The barangays and towns near these areas are known to be under the influence of the rebel group. Being from the areas themselves, the enumerators were not suspected of having some other covert agenda in doing the interviews. However, it took sometime for the team to get the necessary permission from the “responsible person” who was authorized by the MILF leadership to issue a written “permission” for the RA team to interview the children/minors. Before the survey, the team leader had to establish contact with the MILF leadership’s official contact person in order to secure an explicit permission.

Many of the respondent minors and children live with their respective families, thus it was not really difficult to talk to them, but going to their mountainous barangays was quite an ordeal since there are many modes of transportation to be used before reaching these areas. The survey period coincided with the first month of the heavy rainy season in the Central Mindanao area; this presented another difficulty since the access roads were muddy and impassable. Two enumerators had to hire a horse and then a non-motorized small boat (with no outriggers) to reach areas separated by a river from the nearest town center.

Generally, the children and minors were quite responsive and open to the interviews, except that a few of them were a little bit apprehensive that the interview would be used as a way to bring their names to the attention of the Philippine military. They expressed their bad experiences in the past of being betrayed by outsiders who have talked to them.

Since many of the children respondents are more comfortable with the vernacular Maguindanaon dialect, the questionnaire reproduced for use in the survey was translated to Maguindanaon (*see annexes for a copy of both the English and Maguindanaon versions*). The survey for the four Abu Sayyaf respondents was conducted in the national language of the Philippines (Filipino). The lone NPA former combatant was interviewed in the Cebuano Visayan language.

Another group that provided primary data for this study are the key informants. There are 24 key informants for this study and one special KI interviewee (*see textbox 1 article*). Key informants included the following individuals:

- 1 from Davao City (DSWD Region XI Director);
- 12 from Basilan province (1 parish priest, 3 community organizers, 2 ustadz³, 2 NGO officials, 1 barangay captain, 1 barangay councilman, 1 former Abu Sayyaf sympathizer, 1 school teacher);
- 4 from Cotabato City (1 NGO official, 2 academicians, 1 relief and rehabilitation NGO official);
- 7 from Maguindanao province (2 barangay captains, 1 high school principal, 1 MILF official, 2 ustadz, and 1 school teacher).

The team also conducted focus group discussions with three distinct groups with substantial knowledge on the phenomenon of child soldiers in their respective communities. One FGD was conducted among a group of media practitioners in Kidapawan City, Cotabato province (seven radio and one radio and print journalist and one NGO worker). This group discussed the situation and other circumstances leading to the phenomenon of child soldiers among the New People's Army (NPA) which they claim to have substantial presence in Cotabato province. Another FGD

³ An Arabic teacher who may or may not be trained in the madrasah; generally thought to be learned and knowledgeable in the Qur'an and in Arabic.

was conducted among 10 former NPA child combatants and sympathizers who used to operate in the mountain barangays of Malapatan, Sarangani province. The third FGD was conducted among six former MILF youth who are now in mainstream society in Cotabato City.

2.4 Data processing and analysis

Quantitative information gathered for this study was first edited and translated back to English. A coding system was established for the information from the survey questionnaires. All these data were logged using the SPSS for Windows software. Analysis of quantitative data are in simple frequencies, mean and cross tabulations, wherever they are required. On the other hand, qualitative data from both the key informant interviews and focus group discussions were synthesized and clustered according to common issues and concerns raised during the conduct of the interviews and discussions. Two text boxes are presented as special cases: one on the implementation of a MOA among various agencies tasked to take care of child soldiers either captured or surrendered to government, and another on the travails of one child “surrenderee.”

2.5 Problems encountered and lessons learned

Any research undertaking has its concomitant problems, but not as much as when the topic for such an undertaking is on children who have become members of an outlawed rebel or “bandit” group. One major problem was securing the permission of the responsible person of the MILF for the team to conduct the interviews with their child soldiers. The conduct of the survey coincided with the resumption of the peace talks between the Philippine government and the MILF. The survey enumerators had to wait for sometime before an explicit permission was granted in the form of a letter addressed to MILF commanders in the field. Another problem cropped up when the survey respondents and the commanders themselves questioned the technique of mapping the location of the households where surveys were conducted. The MILF had already had a bad experience after they allowed some people to sketch the maps of their major camps. According to the MILF Information Officer, this led to the assault of their camps by the forces of the Philippine military. Consequently, the survey team abandoned the idea of mapping households where there were respondents. This was done with the approval of the ILO-IPEC focal person in Manila.

Studying child soldiers provided the members of the RA team the rare opportunity to interact with children and minors in especially difficult situations. Moreover, it was an awesome experience to see how children at their very young and seemingly gullible status have reached such a high level of commitment for a cause that is greater than themselves. To the enumerators, although they may not share in the children’s sentiments, it was an eye opener to see how determined the child respondents were in maintaining their commitment and dedication as well as their physique to prepare them for battle.

Other lessons learned included the following:

- While children and minors are heavily involved in an armed conflict, they are still enrolled in mainstream Catholic or non-sectarian state universities and colleges;
- MILF camps, unlike most military camps of the government forces are ordinary communities with their own satellite market, madrasah/madaris and other community structures like solar driers, etc.
- Children and minors who become members of a rebel group become mature and highly attuned to the harsh realities of life in a rebel/military camp or in the battlefield. Consequently, they feel that their job is “more or less” dangerous. But they still prefer to work in this type of job because of the belief, especially among Muslims, that it is their duty to “struggle in the way of Allah.”

2.6 Revisions within duration of the study

In the original proposal for this study, only MILF and NPA soldiers were to be covered for the survey and other qualitative data gathering methods. But as the study progressed, newspapers all over the country reported on the capture of several child and minor combatants allegedly belonging to the notorious Abu Sayyaf group in Basilan.

A total of 16 minors, ages ranging from 14 to 17, were in detention at the Zamboanga City jail. While the Abu Sayyaf were not mentioned as part of the subjects for study, the national consultant felt it was necessary to get some information on the minors captured. Unfortunately, only four of these minors were interviewed because their fellow detainees have already been sent to Manila a few days before. The national consultant dispatched a local team (from the Western Mindanao State University – WMSU- in Zamboanga City) to conduct interviews with the captured minors and key informant interviews in nearby Basilan province. Also, at this time, a series of public hearings were conducted by the Philippine Legislative Branch (the Senate and House of Representatives) in Isabela, Basilan regarding the allegation of a parish priest there that some military officials are conniving with the Abu Sayyaf. It was an opportune time to conduct key informant interviews with many of those called to the witness stand in the public hearings.

Moreover, field mapping was to be used for plotting out the location of the respondents’ communities and places of work. But this was not permitted by the leadership of the MILF due to security reasons. As mentioned earlier, they cited some problems in the past which led to the Philippine military assault on their camps. Thus, the team decided to forego the mapping, with the consent of the ILO-IPEC Geneva headquarters focal persons for the child soldiers study.

Key informant interviews proved to be useful in eliciting reasonable estimates of child soldier populations in communities known to be influenced by some rebel groups. Originally, the question that would elicit this information was to be asked to the child respondents themselves, but this was transferred to the key informant interviewees. They are more knowledgeable about the phenomenon since many of them were child combatants themselves in their youth.

CHAPTER III

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILD SOLDIERS

This chapter describes the socio-economic characteristics of the child soldiers enumerated in the purposive survey. Some information from the key informant interviews as well as the focus group discussions are also added, where applicable. The discussions include age, sex, ethnic group, family size and composition as well as the socio-economic situation of child soldiers.

3.1 Estimates of child soldiers

As already cited earlier, it is difficult, and probably impossible, to get the exact numbers of the universe of child soldiers in Central and Western Mindanao. Thus, a purposive rather than a sample survey was conducted among some individuals whom the members of the RA team knew to be involved in the armed groups. Purposive sampling is usually done when it is impossible to determine the exact number of individual cases in a target population, like that of rebel group members.

The majority of the 23 key informants said the estimates of children in their respective communities is about 10-30 per cent of the household population. For example, if there is a population of 1,000 to 1,500 in hard to reach barangays, the number of child soldiers in that community is most likely around 100–450 children. If ten out of the 21 municipalities in the province of Maguindanao have similar populations, then there would be a total of 4,500 child soldiers in the province of Maguindanao alone.

These figures are estimates, and because of the nature of the “work” of soldiering, especially for rebel or outlawed groups like the MILF or the Abu Sayyaf, it is impossible to get the exact membership numbers.

3.2 Places of origin of child soldiers

Table 3.1: Birthplace of respondents

R's birthplace	Frequency	%
Maguindanao	73	85.9
Sultan Kudarat	5	5.9
Basilan	3	3.5
Malaysia	1	1.2
Bongo Island	1	1.2
Zamboanga del Sur	1	1.2
Total	85	100

An overwhelming majority of the survey respondents claim that they were born in various towns in Maguindanao province (73 or 85.9 percent). Five respondents or 5.9 percent were born in the province of Sultan Kudarat. The three Sama respondents said they were born in Basilan province. One Abu Sayyaf child soldier said he was born in Malaysia but was brought to Basilan by his grandfather. One MILF respondent was born on the island of Bongo, which is situated across the seaport town of Parang, province of Maguindanao. The lone NPA child respondent was born in the province of Zamboanga del Sur.

According to key informants and the participants in the FGDs, most child soldiers come from rural, usually mountainous barangays (barrios) in any province. They come from very poor and marginalized farmers or fisherfolk communities in these barangays. Informants add that those who do the recruitment in these barangays, especially for the New People's Army, are very good "propaganda" workers who immerse themselves in the barangay first, then entice the people about the "benefits" of joining the movement.

3.3 Age, sex, and ethnolinguistic group of child soldiers

Out of 85 respondents in the survey, only 17 were females (20%) in contrast to 68 males (80%). This is an indication that girls are less involved in child soldiering than boys. One explanation is the cultural value placed on the welfare of girls, especially among the Maguindanaon and Iranun, from which groups most of the child soldiers come from. Girls are socialized early in life to undertake domestic chores and other nurturing tasks rather than given instructions on the defense of the homeland or the community. This is considered by most Maguindanaon and Iranun to be the domain of the males in the family or the community.

Key informants and the participants in the FGDs also downplay the role of young female children in armed conflict. They say girls are normally not trained to become warriors, although for those who are interested, the MILF provides rigid military training to them (*see Textbox article "The Warrior is a Girl Child"*).

The majority of the respondents are 17 years old. Fifty-eight children or 68% of the total survey respondents are this age. The rest are 16 years old (15 or 17.6%), 15 (nine or 10.64%) and 14 (3 or 3.53%). The mean age is 16.51 years old.

Maguindanaons comprise the majority of the child soldier respondents at 52 or 61.2 percent. They also comprise the second largest of the three most numerous Muslim ethnolinguistic groups in southern Philippines. The word Maguindanaon is derived from the vernacular phrase which translates to "people of the flooded plains." The homeland of these people is the vast Cotabato River Basin which is always inundated when the Rio Grande river overflows during the rainy season.

The Iranun traditionally occupy the border municipalities of Buldon, Barira and Matanog. These towns are adjacent to the mountainous towns of Lanao del Sur province, which is populated by the Maranaws, or “people of the lake.” The Iranun speak a language which is a combination of Maranaw and Maguindanaon words. Twenty-eight youth of the MILF were interviewed for this study in their communities in Barira town.

Sama are the people who originally come from any of the group of islands in the province of Tawi-tawi. The Sama are a seafaring group and have migrated to nearby and more populous islands and to some parts of the Mindanao mainland, like Zamboanga City. The four Abu Sayyaf minors interviewed for this study belong to the Sama group.

The lone Christian respondent of this study is a Zamboangueno from Zamboanga del Sur province. He is a demobilized NPA child combatant.

Table 3.2: Age distribution of survey respondents

Age	Frequency	%
14	3	3.53
15	9	10.60
16	15	17.64
17	58	68.23
Total	85	100

Table 3.3: Survey respondents by sex

Sex	Frequency	%
Male	68	80
Female	17	20
Total	85	100

Table 3.4: Ethnolinguistic group of survey respondents

Ethnolinguistic group	Frequency	%
Sama	4	4.7
Maguindanaon	52	61.2
Iranun	28	32.9
Zamboangueno	1	1.2
Total	85	100

3.4 Literacy levels of respondents

Table 3.5: Distribution of survey respondents on whether they can read or write and the language used

Response	Frequency	%
English only	22	25.9
Arabic only	5	5.9
Both English and Arabic	55	64.7
No, neither English nor Arabic	3	3.5
TOTAL	85	100.0

The survey respondents are highly literate in both English (western educational system) and Arabic (55 or 64.7 percent). Twenty-two respondents (25.9 percent) said they can only read and write in English, which means that they have never gone to a *madrasah* (Arabic school).

It is interesting to note that while there is only one respondent who claims that he has never attended any kind of school, three respondents said they could not read or write in either English or Arabic. One possible reason for this is the reality that exists in many mountainous barangays, not only in Maguindanao but also in most parts of Mindanao. Schools in hard-to-reach, mountainous barangays do not provide adequate teaching. The teachers here instruct multi-grade classes, that is, one teacher is assigned to at least two classes everyday at the same time. Aside from multi-grade teaching, the teachers do not report for work until the middle of the week, as it takes them some time to travel to these barangays. The pupils therefore do not receive adequate instruction to enable literacy. They are just passed at the end of the year on a mass promotion basis, without a real assessment by the teachers as to whether they have achieved a certain level of literacy in the language they are taught.

The high literacy levels of child soldiers in the Mindanao context are validated by the key informants and the participants in the FGDs. Even if the children or minors are serving as soldiers for the MILF, they do not drop out of school. They just incur absences during the times when they are called for duty whenever there is a military “operation.”

A large majority of the respondents are still in school, despite their participation in the activities of an armed group. Fifty-two respondents (61.2 percent) claim they are still enrolled while being actively involved with the MILF. Only 33 respondents (38.8 percent) are out of school. This number includes the four demobilized Abu Sayyaf combatants and the lone NPA child soldier.

The MILF child members who are out of school said they do not really feel like they are out of school because they attend military trainings and Arabic lessons in the camp. They are only out of the western style of schooling which is basically taught in English in the public elementary or high schools.

Table 3.6: Distribution of survey respondents by school attendance

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	52	61.2
No	33	38.8
Total	85	100

Table 3.7: Current grade levels of those who are still in school (52 Respondents)

Grade Level	Frequency	Percentage
Elementary	9	17.3
High School	25	48.1
College	17	32.7
Not stated	1	1.9
Total	52	100

Twenty-five (48.1 percent) of the 52 respondents who are currently in school are in high school while 17 (32.7 percent) are in college. The college students are enrolled in the tertiary education institutions in Cotabato City. These respondents claim they take a leave of absence when it is their turn to report for duty in the MILF camps, or when there is a call for them to go to the camps. The call is usually relayed through an intermediary who lives in the city. This person is responsible for informing those who have earlier registered or signed up to “volunteer” for MILF military duty. Usually, each “tour of duty” lasts from one week to 10 days, and in some cases up to three months. Some children eventually drop out of school when they are told their training and tour of duty will last this long. This information was confirmed by one key informant, who is the head of the information bureau of the MILF. A few respondents are still in elementary grade levels (nine or 17.3 percent).

Table 3.8: Age of out-of-school respondents (33) when they stopped schooling by sex

Age	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total
Sex								
Male	3	4	5	4	10	2	3	31
%	9.1	12.12	15.15	12.12	30.30	6.06	9.09	93.94
Female						1	1	2
						3.03	3.03	6.06
Total	3	4	5	4	10	3	4	33
% to Total	9.1	12.12	15.15	12.12	30.30	9.09	12.12	100

Of the 33 respondents who have stopped attending school, 31 or 93.94 percent are males while only two are females (6.06 percent). One female respondent said she stopped attending school when she was 16 and another said she stopped going to school recently, when she turned 17. She is now 17.25 years old. For the male respondents, the youngest age that they stopped attending school is 11 (three respondents or 9.09 percent) and the oldest age is 17 (three respondents). These respondents stopped schooling a few months prior to the conduct of the survey, when they turned 17. They are 17 years and three months old.

Table 3.9: Reasons why R stopped schooling

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	1	3.00
Convinced by Janjalani	3	9.09
Financial constraint	14	42.50
Farming	2	6.10
Got into a fight at school	1	3.00
Encouraged by friends	2	6.10
To work full time for “jihad”	1	3.00
Bombardment	4	12.10
Memorizing the Qurán (go into Arabic/Islamic studies)	1	3.00
Laziness	4	12.10
TOTAL	33	100

Among the respondents who stopped attending school, 14 (42.5 percent) said they did so because of financial constraints. Four respondents said they were motivated to become soldiers despite their young age because they witnessed their homes and villages being bombarded by the Philippine military forces. Three Abu Sayyaf soldiers said they were convinced by Abdulrajak Janjalani, the acknowledged founder and foremost leader of the group to abandon school and join him. One respondent said he decided to stop attending school because he needed to work full time for the benefit of the armed struggle, and in a way fulfil the call for “jihad” by the leaders of the MILF. Another said he preferred to be studying the Qurán or Arabic rather than going to the western style school in the public school system. Four respondents said they stopped attending school because of laziness.

3.5 Family situation of child soldiers

Seventy-one respondents or 83.5 percent said their parents are literate. Twelve respondents (14.1 percent) said their parents are illiterate because they were never able to attend school. Two respondents did not state whether their parents are literate or not.

In the past, most Maguindanaon and Iranun parents did not send their children to public school for fear that their children will lose their “being Muslim.” This is based on the perception that the western educational system implemented in the Philippine public school system will orient them to western, “Christian” ways. According to one key informant, who is the principal of a public high school, this perception is still present among older Muslims in Central Mindanao. He said further that this perception is based on the reality that the system followed by the public school is based on nationally mandated school days and hours, which are largely based on the “Christian” schedule of holidays and days of worship. For instance, the public school system in the Philippines starts their weekdays on a Monday and ends the school week on Friday. Saturdays and Sundays are the week-ends. For Muslims, Friday is the holy day of congregational prayer in the mosque. The Muslims do not celebrate Christmas, yet the school break every year is scheduled during the Christmas vacation.

The majority of the respondents (48 or 56.5 percent) said their parents are farmers. Farming is the major source of their family income. Eight respondents (9.4 percent) said their parents earn salaries as office workers (but are just rank and file office workers). Three respondents said their parents operate a small business, buying and selling agricultural products. All others are engaged in blue collar occupations like carpentry, driving, peddling, fishing, thatch making, and as labourers. One respondent said his parents are out of work, and do not have a regular income. Only one respondent said his mother is an Overseas Contract Worker (OCW). An OCW is a Filipino who is working abroad, usually doing menial jobs like serving as domestic help in some Middle Eastern countries.

The homes visited by the enumerators did not have television sets. In the mountainous barangays, televisions are not common because these areas have not been reached by electricity. The four Abu Sayyaf and one NPA respondents did not have access to television as they were in detention at the time of the interview.

In terms of their dwellings, many respondents live in very simple houses made of light materials, with the barest minimum of appliances. During fieldwork, the enumerators observed one ubiquitous “appliance” the households have. It is a handheld radio set. This is important for the communications system of the MILF members. They connect the set to a car battery because they have no access to any electrical connection.

Table 3.10: Types of dwellings of child soldiers

Type of house	Frequency	%
Not stated	5	5.9
<i>Type A:</i> small, unfinished, made of light materials, with little or no appliances at all	38	44.70
<i>Type B:</i> medium-size, finished, made of wood and concrete with GI roofing, with a few appliances	26	30.58
<i>Type C:</i> big, finished, concrete houses, GI roofing with several appliances	16	18.82
Total	85	100

Five respondents did not say anything about the type of house they have. Four of them are members of the Abu Sayyaf who are now detained at the Zamboanga City Jail, a place which is not their “normal” dwelling place. One is a demobilized NPA soldier who is still detained at the Regional Center for Drug Dependents (RCDD).

In terms of how the respondents assess their family’s socio-economic status since they joined the armed movement, the majority of them said their status is just the same as before. This was the view of 56 respondents (65.9 percent). On the other hand, 27 respondents (31.8 percent) said they are now poorer than they used to be. Only one respondent said his family has become richer than before.

Most respondents live in the same locality as where they were born (82 or 96.5 percent). One respondent said he used to live with his parents before he was brought by his grandfather to Basilan. Two said they used to live in the mountain lairs of the Abu Sayyaf group in Basilan before they were captured by the Philippine military.

Table 3.11: With whom respondents live

With whom R lives	Frequency	%
With R’s family	73	85.88
With relatives	7	8.24
With other people	5	5.88
Total	85	100

A big number of the respondents live with their families, that is, with their parents and siblings (73 or 85.88 percent). Seven respondents said they are currently living with relatives other than their immediate families. Five respondents said they are currently living with other people. Four Abu Sayyaf respondents are currently detained at the Zamboanga City jail, living with people who are not family nor relatives.

The lone NPA respondent lives with drug dependents in the Regional Center for Drug Dependents (RCDD) in Davao City. Since his capture by the military several months ago, the respondent has not been turned over to either his immediate family or to the DSWD. (*Refer to text box after this chapter.*)

Since most parents of respondents, particularly of the MILF youth, are supporters of the movements themselves, they do not receive any subsidy from government. They rely mainly on whatever source of income they have, which is mostly from farming.

3.6 Summary and conclusions

An estimated 10 to 30 percent of the population in any rebel-influenced area in Maguindanao and other places in Mindanao are children believed to be participating in activities directly related to the armed conflict on the island. This could mean about 50 to 100 child soldiers in a barangay of 1,000 individuals. In communities considered part of MILF camps, the number of children involved could be three times more, or about 300.

The majority of the respondents in the survey are from the province of Maguindanao (73 or 85.9 %). In terms of ethnolinguistic groups, the majority are also Maguindanaons, at 52 or 61.2%. They come from rural (mostly mountainous) barangays. Most of them are highly literate, both in English and Arabic. English is the medium of instruction in the formal, western-oriented Philippine educational system. Arabic is used in the *madrassah* (Arabic school) which teaches not only the Arabic alphabet but also how to read the Qurán and recite the obligatory prayers for Muslims. Children who join the armed rebel groups do not stop schooling except when they are asked to serve the group (especially the MILF) for long periods of time. Each “tour of duty” for MILF child soldiers lasts from one week to 10 days to three months at the most.

Sixty-eight respondents (80%) are males. This could be explained by the predominant cultural practice of limiting girls’ social life to domestic chores while males are socialized to become defenders of their communities.

Most respondents claim to have lived with their families since birth. This fact contributes to the relative ease by which the children are “drafted” into the armed rebel group because their fathers, older male relatives and others in the family are either full-fledged members or sympathizers of the rebel group.

Families of child soldier respondents are generally poor and marginalized with dwellings made of simple materials and with the barest minimum of household appliances. Their parents are literate like they are.

Textbox 1:

*Notes on Interview with Ruel Lucentales, Director, DSWD Southern Mindanao
10 September 2001*

On turnover within 24 hours

1. Since the signing on March 21, 2000 of a “Memorandum of Agreement on the handling and treatment of children involved in armed conflict” by the Department of Social Welfare (DSWD), Commission on Human Rights (CHR), Department of National Defense (DND), Department of Health (DOH), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), National Program for Unification and Development Council (NPUDC), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), and the Philippine National Police (PNP), the DSWD in southern Mindanao has yet to have a child involved in armed conflict who was arrested by the military turned over to the DSWD in 24 hours.

The MOA mandates that when the military rescues and/or facilitates the surrender of children involved in armed conflict, it shall report within 24 hours to the DSWD field office and/or local chief executive and again, within 24 hours, transfer the rescued or surrendered child for protective custody to the DSWD field office or local chief executive “under normal conditions” and within 72 hours “when the situation does not warrant the turnover of the child within the prescribed period.”

“We still have no case turned over to us within 24 hours,” Lucentales said, adding that if the situation continues, there might as well be a review of the MOA if, indeed, the parties can abide by the MOA.

On media exposure

2. The same MOA mandates that the child must be protected from exposure to media, except when such is justified by compelling national security interest as determined by the Secretary of National Defense or AFP Chief of Staff. “This exposure to media shall, however, be conducted not more than once and in consultation with the Secretary of the DSWD.”

For the military, however, this provision is observed more in the breach than in practice. Lucentales says for the military, presenting the child to the media is a “big thing for them.”

Recently, two children already turned over to the DSWD were “borrowed” by the military to grace a special event in their camp. The DSWD turned down the request. The next day, however, the children were fetched by soldiers from the schools they were enrolled in. That same afternoon and the next day, DSWD personnel were shocked to see the children, *tubaos* on their forehead, posing as surrenderers on TV and print media

Johnny Baliqueg, one of the interviewees in the survey, recalls that from the hospital, he was whisked off to Camp Panacan in Davao City supposed to recuperate but was instead brought to ABS-CBN for interview and yet another interview and yet another interview.

Living with drug dependents and youth offenders

3. From January to December 1999, 21 cases of children in armed conflict were rescued and surrendered within the area of jurisdiction of the DSWD in Southern Mindanao. Of this number, only five remain with them, the rest have since been turned over to their parents or guardians.

The DSWD, however, has no separate center for children in situations of armed conflict so they are brought to the DSWD's regional centers for drug dependents or center for youth offenders where they are thrown in with the drug dependents.

This, of course, is not an ideal place. Lucentales said they tried getting foster parents for these children but foster homes "do not welcome child combatants for fear their homes would be exposed to unnecessary threats."

The DSWD regional office has been negotiating with an NGO to help them provide shelter for these children. Lucentales said it is likely the NGO will consider.

What the DSD offers

4. Children are given psychosocial intervention to ensure they do not manifest trauma. Their parents or guardians are called in.

Children are made to participate in group activities. Those who want to go to school are enrolled in school.

In special cases like Baliqueg, whose grandmother would rather not have him back in Baganga, Davao Oriental, he is enrolled in a high school near the Regional Center for Drug Dependents, where he is presently housed, and is given P10 allowance every day for fare and snacks. His school needs are also provided for.

- Carol O. Arguillas, MindaNews

CHAPTER IV

LIFESTYLE CONDITIONS OF CHILD SOLDIERS

This chapter describes the nature and conditions of soldiering activities, services and tasks related to being members of an armed rebel group among the 85 child respondents and similarly situated children in the three coverage areas of this study.

4.1 Duties and other activities of child soldiers

According to key informants (KI interviews= 24), and the participants of the FGDs (with 10 former NPAs and six former MILF youth) children are mainly utilized as auxiliary forces assigned to do the following chores:

- Bring food, water and medicines/medical supplies
- Cook food and clean up the camp
- Run errands for the older members of the armed group
- Act as local guides for visiting members of the armed group in their locality
- Conduct foot patrol together with older members within the vicinity of the camp
- Operate radio communications
- Take care of firearms and other accessories used in armed operations
- Help assemble locally made firearms in the case of MILF
- Act as decoy
- Do propaganda work, if they are capable (if the child recruit is articulate and has skills in oral and written communication)

These assignments are largely based on the children's levels of knowledge, skills and capabilities to serve the front, either on a full-time or part-time basis. According to the MILF official key informant, seldom and only when absolutely necessary are children sent to join military operations against the enemy forces (the Philippine military).

In the survey of 85 respondents (80 MILF; 4 ASG and 1 NPA), similar duties and responsibilities are given to the child soldiers (*see Table 4.1 below*).

Table 4.1: Specific assignment of child soldiers by sex

	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Specific duties/responsibilities						
Not stated	2	2.4			2	2.4
Medical team member			11		11	12.9
Food preparation	6	14.1	6	14.1	12	14.1
Elements (foot patrol, guard/sentry, platoon/squad leader, combatant)	28	32.9			28	33
Rotation (sometimes food preparation and sometimes on field as combatants)	25	29.4			25	29.4
Urban hit squad	3	3.5			3	3.5
Personal escort	3	3.5			3	3.5
Lecturer/propaganda unit member	1	1.2			1	1.2
Total	68	80%	17	20%	85	100%

The table above shows a glaring difference in the assignment of male and female child soldiers. Only female members of the MILF are given assignments as members of the camp or group medical team (11 of them or 12.9 percent of the total number of child soldier respondents). Six female child soldiers are assigned to do tasks related to food preparation like washing and preparing utensils for cooking, cooking meals for the combatants and other related activities. This is confirmed by several key informants in the communities where the child soldiers come from. While girls are also given military training like the boys but will “never see action as a combatant,” as the key informants said, this does not mean the girls are not prepared for battle. The MILF leadership sees to it that the girls are trained well in marksmanship, handling and dismantling firearms and in other forms of self-defense and martial arts. *(See details of this in the text box article, “The Warrior is a Girl Child,” an article written by Bobby Timonera for a Human Rights Forum quarterly in 1999.)*

On the other hand, a big number of male child soldiers are assigned to duties related to actual soldiering, not just as auxiliaries. Twenty-eight boys said they are assigned as “elements” a catch-all word to refer to duties like foot patrolling, guarding, acting as part of the defensive blocking forces in the peripheries of the camp, guarding the camp, etc. In addition, 25 (29.4 percent) respondents said they work on rotation, i.e. sometimes, they may be asked to help in food preparation and other auxiliary jobs like being a courier or bearer of ammunitions for the grown up soldiers, but they also

do duties similar to those of the “elements.” In other words, if they are given the latter tasks, this means that more male children are really working as combatants, and not just as auxiliaries of the armed group.

Three Abu Sayyaf members said they are members of the group’s “urban hit squad,” assigned in Isabela City, Basilan province. Needless to say, this means the boys are issued firearms to carry out their “hit” missions.

One demobilized NPA child soldier said he used to be a member of the propaganda unit of the group, thus his assignment was to conduct lectures among rural and far-flung communities in Davao del Sur and Cotabato provinces or wherever he was deployed. The lectures are aimed to “conscienticize” or raise the levels of consciousness of the rural folk about what the group perceives as the basic problems plaguing the country and to justify armed struggle against the government.

Three respondents (coming from the MILF group) said they are assigned as “personal escorts” or guards of their fathers who are full-fledged members of the armed group.

4.2 Pathways to becoming child soldiers

4.2.1 Age of entry as soldier

Table 4.2. Age started as a soldier and years spent as a soldier

# of years as soldier	less than 1 year	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Age started	Frequency						
11						2	2
12				1	2		3
13	1	4	3	6	3		17
14	5	4	5	5			19
15	5	4	9				18
16	3	14					17
17	4						4
Total	18	26	17	12	5	2	80*

**Five missing cases: five respondents did not answer this question.*

Mean age started as a soldier: 14.44 years old

The youngest age at which the child entered the “service” as member of the group is 11 and the oldest is 17. A big number of respondents said they spent at least two years as a member of the armed group (26). The mean age for starting as a soldier is

14.44 years old. Eighteen respondents said they have been with the armed forces for less than one year.

4.2.2 Manner and circumstances of recruitment

Table 4.3: Manner and circumstances of recruitment

Manner of recruitment	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
No answer	1	1.18
Invitation by family members (parents, siblings, relatives)	19	22.34
Invitation by community and rebel group leaders	7	8.24
Personal decision/voluntary	34	40.00
To fulfil one's duty to do "jihad"	16	18.82
Oppression by dominant government	6	7.06
To fulfil one's duty to do "dawah"	1	1.18
Revenge for the death of parents, relatives	1	1.18
TOTAL	85	100

A good number of respondents said it was their personal decision to join the armed forces of the rebel group (34 or 40 percent). They claim it was voluntary on their part, and nobody forced them to join the armed group. This number is followed by those who said they were invited by family members to join the group (19 or 22.34 percent). These family members are themselves "*mujahideens*" (Muslim freedom fighters).

Sixteen respondents said they have to join the group because it is part of their religious and moral obligation to do "*jihad*" or holy struggle to attain liberation for the Bangsa Moro masses who they perceive are oppressed by the dominant government in Metro Manila. One respondent said he joined the MILF in order to spread the word that Islam is the path to liberation. He perceives the armed struggle of the MILF as a way to proselytize other Muslims to follow the "righteous path."

One respondent, whose parents were victims of government military atrocities, said he joined the rebel group (NPA) as a way to take revenge against the soldiers.

For the key informants, children join the armed struggle for the following reasons:

- The children understand the importance of the armed struggle (which they equate as "jihad") as an expression to serve God (Allah);
- They help the adults in the community seek solutions to social injustice (e.g. retaliation among children whose parents had been tortured or summarily executed by government military agents or forces);

- They want to have access to firearms in order to arm and defend themselves and their families or communities in case of attacks;
- They are fascinated and are proud of knowing how to carry and use firearms at a young age. One Tausug official (*please refer to textbox article at end of this report*) claims that bearing arms has become part of their culture in the province of Sulu. This is because of a long tradition of being engaged in the struggle to defend the Tausug homeland (the Sulu archipelago).

For the participants in the FGDs, they know of some children who had been abducted along with possible others for recruitment into the NPA. But they said this was true for very few cases. The media practitioners confirmed they have heard of abduction cases in areas where the NPA operates in Cotabato province. But they could not ascertain whether such abductions led to the recruitment of the children to the rebel group.

The FGD participants also mentioned the process of indoctrination carried out in rural areas where agrarian reform and land tenure and ownership disputes run high. These sessions are usually led by highly articulate young college students who attract minors in the rural areas to join the NPA. Then the leadership of the group check on the class history of the prospective member before he or she is finally accepted as a new recruit.

When asked why the rebel groups, especially the NPA, are now intensifying recruitment of minors to their fold, the FGD participants presented the following possible answers:

- The factionalized NPA (RJ – reject Joma and RA- re-affirm Joma)* has learned from what they call “recovery operations” and they are now fueled with more idealism learned from past experiences. The youth share with them this brand of idealism.
- The current strategy requires a long drawn-out struggle, thus it makes good sense to start recruiting at a younger age thereby maximizing the services of the youthful entrants.
- It is more difficult to recruit older and more economically stable individuals because of the current economic crisis; moreover, these people have different priorities;
- Organized peasant groups and families have children who would easily join the struggle as an articulation of their communities’ concerns and needs.*

* Joma is Jose Ma. Sison, acknowledged to be one of the founding members of the National Democratic Front, whose military arm is the New People’s Army (NPA). Sison now lives in exile in the Netherlands. In the late 80s, the NDF went through a painful process of being divided against itself, and the split in the movement gave rise to two factions, one loyal to Joma (RA) and another that rejected him (RJ).

4.2.3 Reasons why R perform soldiering duties and assignments

Table 4.4: Why respondents perform soldiering duties

Reasons	Frequency	%
Related to one's duty as a Muslim: in obedience to God; defense of our way of life; to pursue jihad, to liberate Muslims from oppressive government and pursue our right to self-determination; to become a martyr in defense of Islam and go to paradise	76	89.41
Father works here, so I like to spend my time here	4	4.71
Revenge against soldiers who killed father	1	1.18
To stop government oppression	3	3.53
No answer	1	1.17
Total	85	100

Seventy-six respondents (89.41 percent), all MILF child soldiers, said they do tasks as a soldier because it is related to their duties as Muslims. These are their reasons: doing the training and becoming a member of the front is in obedience to Allah because it is our contribution to help defend our way of life; this is one way to pursue "jihad," which is obligatory to all Muslims; through this group, we can help in the liberation of our fellow Muslims from an oppressive government, and therefore pursue our inherent right to self-determination; and the possibility of going to paradise in our life after death if we become martyrs in the defense of Islam.

Four MILF child soldiers claim their fathers are full-fledged members of the front so they also like to spend their time in their place of duty, i.e. the camp which looks like any other ordinary community or village.

One respondent, an Abu Sayyaf member, said he was convinced to join the group because he wants to take revenge against the soldiers who killed his father in Basilan.

The three other Abu Sayyaf respondents reasoned it is a way to stop the oppression of a predominant government in Metro Manila. The lone NPA respondent did not answer.

4.2.4 Child soldiers' preferences and reasons regarding their activities

Table 4.5. R's preference if given a choice, and reason

Answer and reason	Frequency	%
Yes, because it is the way to "jihad"	72	84.71
No, I wantba better life.	1	1.17
No, I prefer to be in school	8	9.42
No, I prefer to work on the farm	2	2.35
No, I prefer to earn a living by driving a "trisikad"*	2	2.35
Total	85	100

Consistent with their previous answers on why they chose to perform duties as soldiers for the MILF, 72 respondents said they prefer soldiering activities because they like doing anything that will lead them to the right path, to do "jihad" in defense of their way of life. The lone NPA respondent said he wanted to find a better life for himself. Two of the Abu Sayyaf respondents said they would like to earn income by driving a "trisikad" (*a tricycle without an engine, called so because the act of using the feet to push the pedals is "sikad" in Cebuano Visayan, the lingua franca in many parts in Mindanao*). Eight MILF child respondents said they would have liked to be in a regular school, but since this is their duty, they have to stay in the camp. Two others said they would have liked to earn a living through farming.

4.3 Child soldier situation and hours spent in activities as child soldiers

For the key informants, particularly those who have extensive knowledge of the situation in the MILF camps, they claim that while children are in the camps, they receive instruction in Arabic and in the Qurán. They are taught the basic precepts of Islam, especially in reciting Quránic verses and in reciting prayers properly. Thus, for some of them, this is not really sen as work in the traditional sense. Even if the children spend long hours in the camps for their military and other type of training, the parents of these children feel confident and "happy" that their children are in "good" hands, and that they will become self-disciplined and free from the influence of western excesses like drug or alcohol addiction, gambling and free sex.

4.3.1 Common places of duty

A big number of the respondents are assigned most often to their respective posts either in the camps, at guard posts or at headquarters of the group (40 or 47%). Twenty-nine respondents (34%) are assigned in "defensive" areas. These are the peripheries of the camps where soldiers are assigned to "block" the enemy force to prevent them from entering or attacking the camps. Ten respondents said they are assigned mostly to do kitchen duties. One respondent said he is assigned in the "barrio." This was defined by the respondent as a mountainous, far-flung barangay where he was assigned to do propaganda duties for the NPA. Three Abu Sayyaf

members said they were assigned in the urban area as part of the group's "hit squad."

Table 4.6. Common places of assignment

Place of assignment	Frequency	%
Kitchen	10	11.8
Guardpost/field/camp/headquarters	40	47
Defensive/blocking areas (peripheries of camp)	29	34
Safety area	2	2.4
Barrio (mountainous, far-flung communities)	1	1.2
Urban areas	3	3.6
Total	85	100

According to key informants, a child soldier's assignment depends largely on his or her level of knowledge and capabilities. Normally, children are not assigned to actual combat duty. One MILF high official said that only when it is "absolutely necessary" are children sent to join military operations against the enemy forces (usually the members of the Philippine government military forces). Most of the time they are assigned to do foot patrol.

Among the NPAs, minors below 18 are assigned usually as members of hit squads, propaganda units, or as spies and decoys. For Abu Sayyaf, even young members become members of urban hit squads or urban guerilla units if they show the "capability" to become such.

Key informants also add that children are given rigid physical and military training that includes the use and firing of firearms with accuracy. This is to ensure that they are really prepared, if and when it is necessary to include them in any armed combat operations.

4.3.2 Child soldiers' assignment and responsibilities vis-à-vis adult members

Eighty-four of the 85 respondents said there is practically no difference in their tasks and responsibilities as compared to those of adults, as they are treated like adults by the leadership of their group. Only one respondent, the member of the Abu Sayyaf detained at the Zamboanga City jail, did not reply

This lack of differentiation between the tasks of children and adults is perhaps because most of the respondents are strong enough to handle most of the work assigned to adults. Perhaps the only difference is in how the older and younger soldiers interact. According to a key informant (MILF leader), the older soldiers are quite patient with the child soldiers on account of their youth. Most of them just get a reprimand for failing to do something or when they make a mistake.

4.3.3 Duty hours

Table 4.7: Daily duty hours of respondents

No. of hours rendered	Frequency	%
1-2	5	5.9
3	15	17.6
4	25	29.4
5	2	2.4
6	1	1.2
8	8	9.4
13	2	2.4
14	17	20.0
15	10	11.8
Total	85	100

A big number of survey respondents claim they perform duties as soldiers for four hours a day (25 or 29.4%). Ten respondents (11.8%) claim they do their respective assignments for as long as 15 hours a day while only five respondents claim they only perform their duties between 1 to 2 hours. Seventeen respondents claim to be on duty for as long as 14 hours.

The average number of hours that a child soldier performs his or her duties is 7.61.

Despite their involvement in MILF military activities, the majority of the respondents said they sleep fairly regularly, with 65 of them saying that they sleep at least eight hours a day. Seven respondents said they sleep for about 10 hours a day, while four said they sleep at least nine hours a day. Six respondents said they put in only about five to six hours a day of sleep, while one said he gets to sleep for almost 12 hours.

4.3.4 Time of day R reports for duty

Table 4.8: Time of day R reports for soldiering duties

Time of day	Frequency	%
Morning	17	20
Evening	21	24.7
“Rotation”	47	55.3
Total	85	100

The table above shows that more respondents work during the evening than the morning, but the majority of them work on a rotation basis, which means that they

could be working either in the morning or evening, depending on the need of their specific assignments. This is especially true with child soldiers who are assigned to defend the peripheries or to guard the camp in the evenings.

4.3.5 Number of days soldiers report for duty in a week or month

Table 4.9: Number of days of soldiers report for duty in a week or month by sex of R

No. of days	Frequency		%		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	%
One day/week	1	1	1.17	1.17	2.35
Two days/week	8	3	9.4	3.5	12.9
Three days/week	5	4	5.88	4.70	10.58
Four days/week	3	1	3.5	1.17	4.67
Seven days/week	28	-	33	-	33
It depends*	22	6	25.88	7	33
10 days/month	-	2	-	2.35	2.35
Every four months**	1	-	1.2	-	1.17
Total	68	17	80	20	100***

***Sum of percentage may exceed 100 because of rounding off of numbers.

Male child respondents report for duty the greatest number of days, at seven days per week. There is also a considerable number who reported that the number of days they work depends on their assignment. Two female respondents said they spend at least 10 days per month in the camp. These are of those children who continue to go to school while engaged by the armed group.

4.4 Summary and conclusions

Child soldiers are mostly utilized as auxiliary forces, depending on their knowledge and skills and “capability” levels. Female child soldiers are assigned as members of the para-medical team while the boy soldiers are assigned duties related to actual soldiering like foot patrol, guarding, blocking the peripheries of the camps, radio or communications operators, etc.. Again, this is a reinforcement of the predominant “macho-oriented” culture which limits girls’ domain of tasks and responsibilities. Among the MILF, while girls are given rigid military training, including shooting with the use of long firearms, they will never see actual combat or do foot patrolling work together with their male counterparts.

On the average, children start performing soldiering duties at 14.4 years of age. However, some respondents claimed to have started as early as 11.

Forty percent of the respondents claim it was their personal and therefore voluntary decision to join the armed rebel group (MILF) while 22.34% said they were invited to join by their family members. The others said they joined the MILF because it is their duty to do “*jihad*” (18.82%); invited by rebel group and community leaders (8.24%); they want to seek redress from oppression by a dominant government (7.06%); to fulfill one’s duty for proselytization “*dawwah*”; and to seek revenge for death of parents and relatives (1.18% each). One respondent did not answer.

The process of recruitment is through indoctrination usually led by articulate college students in rural areas where issues regarding land tenure run high. This is true especially for NPAs. (KI-23; FGD- 20) The current trend among them is to recruit much younger children to maximize their services in the long-drawn out struggle and capitalize on their youthful idealism. Some KI interviewees also mentioned that children are led to soldiering because of the fascination of knowing how to handle/use a firearm.

While the ideologies of the three armed groups differ, there seems to be a common denominator to the pathways and circumstances of recruitment as child soldiers.

These are the following:

- Personal or voluntary decision of the recruit after having been “indocrinated,” “conditioned” and “socialized” in the common perception of being oppressed and marginalized by a dominant government;
- Lack or absence of government services or structures in the areas where the armed groups operate. This implies that the armed group leadership becomes the *de facto* government in the areas they operate.

CHAPTER V

CONSEQUENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF DUTIES AS CHILD SOLDIERS

All the key informants and the participants in the FGDs believe that children should not be used as soldiers or participate in any actual armed confrontations with the forces of the Philippine military. But they also say that circumstances force them and their families to send their children to training camps (as has been discussed earlier).

They believe that there are serious consequences of trauma and other personality disorders when children are involved in a war which, they say, are not of their own making. These perceptions were also validated during the research utilization workshop held to present the initial findings of this study.

Key informants talked about the joys and other experiences of childhood that child soldiers miss because they are involved in something that is “beyond their years.” An inside look at the MILF training camp for girls reveal that the children who go through military training have a “wistful” look about them, perhaps an expression of how much they would have liked to have the life of a “normal” child.

The majority of the survey respondents do not get any material reward or remuneration for services they render as child soldiers.

5.1 Payment or income earned for services rendered

Table 5.1: Does R get paid for services rendered?

Answer	Frequency	%
Yes	3	3.5
No	81	95.3
No answer	1	1.2
Total	85	100

The child soldiers surveyed for this study do not receive any material rewards. Almost all respondents claim they do not get paid for their services because they do their duties on a “voluntary” basis. This is true for the 80 MILF respondents as well as for the lone NPA respondent. The latter claims that he is given enough money or provisions for his living allowance, but does not get any salary. One Abu Sayyaf respondent did not reply to this question. His three other companions said they do get

paid in cash, but it is not a fixed amount, and depends on the nature of the duties or assignments (“missions”) given to them.

The following reasons are given by the respondents as to why they are not paid for their services with the MILF: their role as child soldiers is in defense of Islam; it is a way to pursue “jihad,” their services will lead to the liberation of oppressed Muslims so they can establish a government of their own; that it is part of God/Allah’s commandment and a way towards him, so payment is not needed and not important.

5.2 What happens to child soldiers’ income, if any?

The three respondents who answered that they get paid in cash for their services said they give the money to their mothers to buy food and other necessities for their respective families. Another one said he used the money to send his sister to school. In this sense, child soldiering is just another income generating task that they can carry out in order to augment their families’ meager incomes.

5.3 Punishment for refusal to perform soldiering duties

The majority of the child soldiers surveyed for this study said they do not receive any punishment at all because their soldiering duties are done on a “voluntary” basis. Fifty-three respondents (62.35%) said nothing is done to them if they refuse to perform tasks related to soldiering, but usually they do not refuse to perform their duties because they are motivated by the very profound desire to follow the “right way” as taught by their elders or their parents. This is especially true for the MILF child soldier respondents (*see table below for details*).

Table 5.2: What happens if R refuses to perform soldiering duties?

Action done on R	Frequency	%
Admonition/Reprimand	10	11.76
Disciplinary action/punishment	18	21.17
Demerits imposed/R gets bad record	1	1.18
Nothing, since this job is voluntary	53	62.35
R does not refuse to work	2	2.36
No answer	1	1.18
Total	85	100

According to the MILF Information Officer who was one of the key informants for this study, the youth who volunteer for their type of military training are not forced to do anything they do not want to do. Another MILF sympathizer, who once served actively in the front’s political arm said, “... no one is forced to do anything because even in our way of life in Islam, there is no compulsion...”

The lone respondent who did not answer is one of the four Abu Sayyaf child soldier who are now detained in Zamboanga City Jail.

Two respondents said they do not refuse any assignment given to them and have never had the experience of refusing the command of their leaders.

For the respondents who said they would be reprimanded or admonished, they said the kind of admonishment is just like what a father would do to his son when the latter refuses to carry out requested errands. They thus do not think it is really a punishment.

Among those who said they would be punished, the “punishment” is not very harsh, according to the respondents. Most of the time the punishment is just additional push-ups during the military drills to remind the respondents of their “obligation.”

The same responses as outlined above held true when the respondents were asked what happens to them if and when they commit a mistake. According to the respondents, this also applied to other children in their group whenever they make a mistake or refuse to do something.

On the other hand, a few key informants believe that in the case of the NPA, there are certain “disciplinary” actions meted on those who refuse to work, especially if the assignment entails a very sensitive and critical mission. According to the former NPA members who participated in one FGD, one such DA (this is the NPA code name for disciplinary action) is “isolation” for a certain period of time. Punishments of minors are less serious compared to punishments of older members. Some informants talk of “summary execution” or “liquidation.”

5.4 Perceptions regarding being a child soldier

Table 5.3: R’s perception of the nature of their activities by sex

Does R think work is dangerous	Male	%	Female	%	Total	
Yes	41	48.2			41	48.2
No	26	30.6	17	20	43	50.6
No answer	1	1.2			1	1.2
Total	68	80	17	20	85	100

Forty-three respondents (26 males and 17 females) think their life in soldiering is not dangerous because they think it is part of their sacrifice as members of the armed group (MILF). In other words, they have accepted their fate. They believe that dangers and hazards associated with being members of the front are a “natural” course of things.

On the other hand, 41 respondents (48.2), all males, think soldiering activities are, by nature, dangerous and hazardous. Still they continue with them since it is part of their commitment as members of the armed organization. Only one did not answer since he has become demobilized (the lone NPA respondent).

Among the dangers the 41 respondents mentioned are getting sick due to excessive exposure to the elements, such as getting the flu while on duty; and being afflicted with skin diseases and diarrhoea. Another kind of danger is the threat of being attacked by the enemy and therefore the possibility that they will be injured, or worse, get killed in an encounter. The respondents also mentioned the danger of being caught by the military since they fear being tortured.

5.5 Fears

The life of a soldier is filled with dangers, hazards and uncertainties. For the child soldiers surveyed in this study, Table 5.4 presents what they fear most in their dangerous and hazardous life.

Table 5.4 What does R fear most?

Answer	Frequency	%
None, I am not afraid of anything, except Allah	30	35.3
A full scale war	1	1.17
Get sick in enemy camp	1	1.17
Encounter with the enemy	17	20
Violate MILF rules	1	1.17
If objective or mission is not attained	9	10.59
If I cannot do my duties or responsibilities	7	8.25
Lose the fight	3	3.53
When someone betrays me	5	5.88
If my comrade dies beside me in battle	2	2.36
If the oppression of Bangsa Moro continues	8	9.41
Be ignorant of Islam	1	1.17
Total	85	100

Thirty respondents (35.3 percent) claimed they do not have any fears at all, and that they are not afraid of anything, except the wrath of God. This is based on the Islamic precept of completely submitting oneself to God, and therefore, there is nothing to be afraid of if one decides to leave everything to God.

On the other hand, some respondents fear the following: encounters with their enemies (17); if their mission or objective is not attained (9); if the oppression of the Bangsamoro continues, and there will be more war; (8); or when someone betrays them (5). A handful are scared of the prospect of losing the battle they fought or when a comrade dies beside them during an encounter. One is scared to violate the rules of the MILF and another said he fears becoming ignorant about Islam the most.

The children were also asked whether they feel sad about being a child soldier and why.

Table 5.5: Does R feel sad in his/her assignment as child soldier?

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	1	1.17
No	83	97.6
No answer	1	1.17
Total	85	100

An overwhelming majority of the respondents said they never feel sad in their duties and location where they carry out child soldiering duties (83 or 97.6 percent). Only one said he was sad, and this was the lone NPA respondent. Another respondent (an Abu Sayyaf member) did not answer this question.

For the 83 respondents who said they did not feel sad in their activities, the following reasons are given:

- What we are doing is in defense of Islam, this is therefore our obligation as good Muslims, to struggle in the way of Allah, to pursue “jihad” – 58 respondents (68.24 percent)
- It is our work to contribute to the goal of the Bangsa Moro people to attain self-determination and liberation – 13 respondents (15.29 percent)
- I like to do this, I would even like to do it again – 5 respondents (5.88 percent)
- My father is with me so I don’t feel sad – 3 respondents (3.53 percent)
- I started this so I’ll finish this job – 2 respondents (2.35 percent)
- The situation demands that we do this work, so I should not feel sad – 2 respondent (2.35 percent).

5.6 Aspirations in life

Like all other children, child soldiers have their own fears and aspirations. They may be different from children who have never known the trauma and the dangers of soldiering, but there are nonetheless things they would like to have happen in their lives.

In the survey, the child respondents were asked what they would like to do or to become when they get older. Their responses are shown in Table 5.6.

5.7 Respondents' wishes when older

Table 5.6: What R wants to do when he/she gets older

Response	Frequency	%
To work to achieve peace, to have a peaceful life, peace of mind	23	27.06
To have own family	4	4.71
To continue to work or help in pursuing "jihad"	27	31.76
To work for an independent Islamic State in Mindanao	16	18.82
To teach and share knowledge to the youth	11	12.94
To become an Imam (Islamic religious functionary)	1	1.18
To be a good leader	1	1.18
To be a lawyer	1	1.18
No answer	1	1.18
Total	85	100

Twenty-seven respondents (31.76 percent) said they still would like to continue working to pursue "jihad" and see to it that their fellow Muslims will be liberated from the oppression of the Philippine central government. Another 16 respondents from the MILF said they will still continue being members of the front so that they will help in attaining an independent Islamic State in Mindanao. Twenty-three respondents said they will continue to work for peace, in order to have a peaceful life, and to have peace of mind. Eleven respondents said they want to share their knowledge to the youth by teaching, and one respondent said he wants to be an Imam (a religious functionary in Islam). Two respondents said they wished to become a good leader and a lawyer respectively. Only one respondent did not reply.

5.8 Aspirations for self and fellow children

Table 5.7: Aspiration for self and fellow children

Aspirations/dreams	Frequency	%
Long lasting peace for all of us	7	8.25
An independent Islamic State for Mindanao and the liberation of all Muslims from oppression	68	80
Win this war against government	5	5.88
Become a true, full-fledged mujahideen (freedom fighter)	1	1.17
Martyrdom (to die a martyr in Islam)	1	1.17
Normal life for me and my family	2	2.36
No answer	1	1.17
Total	85	100

The majority of the respondents dream that someday the “jihad”(holy war) they are involved in will bring about the creation of an independent Islamic State for some parts of Mindanao. They believe that the creation of such a political entity for the Muslims in Mindanao can liberate them from an oppressive central government based in Manila. Sixty-eight respondents (80%) mentioned this as their sole aspiration in life as MILF child soldiers.

On the other hand, seven respondents (8.25 percent) said they hope that long lasting peace will be achieved in their own communities and in the region as a whole.

Five respondents (including three Abu Sayyaf members) hope to win the war against the government. One said he hopes he becomes a full-fledged “mujahideen” (freedom fighter) when the time comes. A martyr in Islam is what one respondent aspires to be, while two respondents (one demobilized NPA combatant and one Abu Sayyaf member) said they just wanted their lives to be “normal, just like other families and other children.”

5.9 Given a choice, what is R’s preference for a job?

Table 5.8: Respondents’ preference, would R still prefer being a child soldier?

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	78	91.76
No	5	5.88
No answer	2	2.35
Total	85	100

The majority of the respondents, especially from the MILF, said they would like to keep performing child soldiering duties as combatants or auxiliaries (78 or 91.76 percent). Only five respondents (4 Abu Sayyaf) and one NPA said they would not choose being a soldier, if they had a choice. Two MILF respondents did not give any response to this question.

The children were also asked whether they would like others who are closely related to them to do the same job or work they are doing. Their answers follow below.

5.10 Preference for others

Table 5.9: Preference for others

Answer	Frequency	%
Yes	82	96.47
No	2	2.35
No answer	1	1.18
Total	85	100

Almost all respondents said they would like others to be like themselves, 82 or 96.47 percent. This number includes all the MILF respondents and two other Abu Sayyaf members. One other ASG member said he does not want others to follow what he is doing now because it is dangerous. The other child who said he would not like others to follow in his footsteps is the lone NPA respondent. One ASG member did not answer this question.

5.11 Relationships with other people

The respondents, with the exception of the four Abu Sayyaf and one demobilized NPA combatant, said they have fairly good relations with other people they do their soldiering assignments with, especially their leaders or squad commanders or masters. They also mentioned that they have good relationships with both their peers and their older counterparts. They mentioned that there is no problem relating to the other people in the community or in the camp.

The five other respondents said they do not have good relations with their captors, especially the Abu Sayyaf respondents. The NPA respondent said he has been brought from one place to another without being asked whether he would like to go or not. (*See related textbox article after Chapter 3.*)

According to a large majority of the respondents (82 or 96.5 percent), they did not have problems in their relationships with the members of their household. In Maguindanaon, they said, it's "*mapia bun*" (just okay, no problem).

5.12 Attitudes toward school

As discussed earlier, despite the child respondents' involvement with the MILF, the majority of them are still in school. This is already an indication that they are still interested in school. It also underscores the importance they place on formal education despite their strong adherence to Islamic precepts (in the case of the MILF) which in some cases could contravene some lessons taught in a predominantly western oriented formal education system.

Table 5.10: What does R like most in school?

Response	Frequency	%
None, doesn't like anything in school	14	16.47
When one can graduate	9	10.59
Gain knowledge	46	54.12
Good teachings of ustadz	3	3.53
Involvement in Islamic student organizations	1	1.17
A place to meet new friends	3	3.53
Good for me; I enjoy the atmosphere in school	6	7.06
I learn history	1	1.17
I understand more about anything	1	1.17
I learn good values	1	1.17
Total	85	100

Despite their involvement in the armed group, most respondents still like to attend school because of the reasons given above. Only 14 respondents said categorically that they do not like anything about school.

Table 5.11: What does R like least in school?

Answer	Frequency	%
I like school a lot, there's nothing in it I don't like	36	42.35
Disturbances to it like when there is a military operation near our school	1	1.17
School gives us colonial education	3	3.53
When I am absent from school	2	2.35
Some students in school do un-Islamic acts	27	31.76
Some students belittle Muslims like me	4	4.71
Contributions to many things we don't know about	7	8.24
Strict teachers	3	3.53
Writing	1	1.17
Math	1	1.17
Total	85	100

A good number of respondents (36 or 42.35 percent) expressed that they like school a lot, and that there is nothing about it that they do not like. On the other hand, 27 respondents (31.76 percent) said there are some students in school who carry out un-Islamic acts. They are referring to the wearing of clothes that are prohibited in the strict Islamic dress codes, and some acts of students which are condemned in Islam, like drinking alcohol and using drugs. Seven students cited the fact that some schools, even government-run ones, demand cash contributions from the students,

and the school administrators are not quite transparent about where their contributions go. Three respondents said they like least the “strict” teachers in their school. Two respondents mentioned two subjects which they liked least in school: writing and Mathematics.

Text Box 2

The Case of the Accidental Child Soldier

Ronald Ponce, born August 30, 1987, is an Ata from Malungon, Malamba, Marilog District, Davao City, who, in military reports, was arrested on June 21 this year and turned over to the DSWD on June 26.

How and why he is now in the custody of the 73rd IB in Malagos, Calinan, Davao City, is an interesting, but tragic, story. It appears, from interviews with DSWD personnel who interviewed the parents of the boy, that Ponce was tagging along with the New People’s Army in the area, for want of something else to do. But when the NPA commander in the area learned he was only 12, he was reportedly sent home with instructions that he should be in school. (His record shows his involvement with the NPA was “errand boy” and that he finished Grade 2).

So the boy stopped tagging along with the NPA. The military, however, went to his area to conduct operations. Neighbors rushed to the parents’ house and advised them to bring their child to the barangay captain so his name would be “cleared.” The military captain, however, reportedly brought the boy to the military as a “surrenderee.”

By the time he was turned over to the DSWD (five days later), the boy was crying. He refused to be left behind and wanted to rush back to the military camp in Malagos, apparently enjoying the days spent in military custody. He and another boy were used by the military as “assets,” to point to NPA members. At the DSWD, all the boy wanted was to return to the military camp. By the time he was turned over to the DSWD, by the way, he had about a hundred pesos or so, courtesy of the military.

The boy was then sent to the DSWD’s Regional Center for Drug Dependents (RCDD) where he escaped twice, in both instances, returning to the military camp. The DSWD has since turned over the boy to the custody of the civil-military operations officer of the 73rd IB in Camp Malagos.

“I can see some problems – from one violent environment to another,” said DSWD Regional Director Ruel Lucentales.

Lucentales said he knows he will be criticized by human rights groups but what else can they do given the circumstances? The child, he said, was clearly enjoying his stay in the military camp. He has since been enrolled in a nearby school.

-Carol O. Arguillas

5.13 Summary and conclusions

Generally, most informants in both KIs and FGDs believe that children should not be used in any form of armed struggle although circumstances force them to do so. Utilization of child soldiers has serious traumatic consequences resulting in personality disorders stemming from not having gone through the “normal” process of childhood.

1. Payment or income

- No material rewards; voluntary; meager allowance (NPA); get paid depending on assignment (Abu Sayyaf)
- Child soldiering is another income generating activity to augment family’s earnings.

2. Assignments as child soldiers

- Forty-eight percent of survey respondents think that their tasks are, by nature, dangerous and hazardous, although they are willing to sacrifice.
- Dangers include illnesses; threat of being attacked, injured or killed; and being caught by the military.
- Thirty-five percent of the respondents are not afraid (except of Allah s.w.t.), while others are afraid of possible encounters, not attaining their mission, of more wars and of betrayal by others.
- Almost all survey respondents (97.6%) do not feel sad about what they do as they serve Allah(s.w.t.)
- Generally the children are not punished (62.35%) as they work on voluntary basis; seldom do they refuse assignments; punishment is not harsh, especially in comparison to adult treatment; “summary execution” was mentioned in the case of the NPA.

3. Aspirations

- 31.76% aspire to continue to work in pursuing “*jihad*” while 18.82% want to attain an independent Islamic state in Mindanao
- Given a choice, 91.76% would still prefer to be child soldiers. In fact, they want others to do the same (96.47%). Only a few do not want others to follow in their “footsteps.”

4. Relationships

- Child soldiers have generally good relationships with other people and good attitudes towards their schools. They generally like to go to school to gain knowledge.

CHAPTER VI

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

6.1 Legal framework

In July 1991, the Philippine Congress enacted Republic Act 7610 or the Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act. This law is considered a landmark in the efforts to protect children from abuse and exploitation from employers or institutions that recruit children as labourers or as soldiers. Article X, section 22 states: "...children shall not be recruited to become members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines or its civilian units or other armed groups, nor be allowed to take part in the fighting, or used as guides, couriers, or spies." Children are defined in Section 3 (a) of this Act as "persons below 18 years of age or those over but unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation or discrimination because of a physical or mental disability or condition."

Three years later, the legal protection given to children was further clarified with the drafting of the implementing guidelines for Article X of RA 7610. Section 3 of the guidelines provides 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 as a soldier, guide, courier or in a similar capacity which would result in his being identified as an active member of an organized group that is hostile to the government forces."

Section 1 of the rules and regulations in the implementing guidelines defines 'Government Forces' as the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police (PNP) and other armed groups supporting the government forces. Such groups include paramilitary groups like the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGUs) created in 1987 and more recently, the Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVOs).

Under the Executive Order that created the CAFGUs, its members are subject to military law and regulations, receive up to a month's military training and must wear uniforms. According to CAFGU guidelines, recruitment is voluntary. However, as CAFGUs are regarded as part of the government forces, it is legally possible for people to be conscripted. In the early 1990s, forced recruitment into CAFGU was reported, particularly in areas where armed opposition was suspected. There are also reports that some CAFGU members are younger than 18.

Basic military training is compulsory for all boys and girls in high school and advanced military training is compulsory for male college and university students. This training, which is done in the ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps), takes

two years and must be completed in order to graduate. Trainees completing ROTC are assigned as reservists.

The Philippine Military Academy (PMA) at Fort del Pilar, Baguio City, is the highest military school in the country. It offers a tri-service curriculum for the three branches of the armed forces (navy, air and armed forces). The minimum age to enter the academy is 17 years, and once a cadet has been accepted he or she becomes a member of the armed forces. Female cadets make up about 5 percent of the total number of cadets.

Under the implementing rules and regulations for RA 7610, “a child taken into custody by government forces in an area of armed conflict shall be informed of his constitutional rights and treated humanely. He/she shall not be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, or used in a military operation in any capacity. The government forces shall ensure the physical safety of the child under its custody; provide him with food and the necessary medical attention or treatment; and remove him from the area of armed conflict and transfer him at the earliest possible time to higher echelons of command/office for the proper disposition.” In addition, government forces are required to inform the child’s parents or guardians and relevant social workers within 24 hours of the child’s transfer to a military camp and permit access to officials of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

Children who are caught in situations of armed conflict as combatants or guides or spies also have explicit rights under RA 7610. Any child who has been arrested for reasons related to armed conflict, either as a combatant, courier, guide or spy, is entitled to the following rights:

- Separate detention from adults except where families are accommodated as family units;
- Immediate free legal assistance;
- Immediate notice of such arrest to parents and guardians; and
- Release of the child on recognisance within 24 hours to the custody of the DSWD or any responsible member of the community as determined by the courts.

In March 2000, several government agencies, including the AFP and the PNP, signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on the handling and treatment of children involved in armed conflict. The MOA specifies responsibilities for rescuing or facilitating the surrender to children involved in armed conflict; provision of physical and medical treatment; placement in protective custody; and protection from exposure to the media. This MOA has been implemented more in the breach than in performance (*see textbox after Chapter I*).

The legally mandated age for compulsory and free elementary education has been decreased to six. Several decades ago, the age for entering elementary education was fixed at seven.

On October 6, 1993, the Philippine Congress enacted Republic Act No. 7658. This Act prohibits the employment of children below 15 years of age in public and private undertakings. Section 12 of this Act states that “Children below fifteen (15) years of age shall not be employed except:

1. When a child works directly under the sole responsibility of his parents or legal guardian and where only members of the employer’s family are employed. Provided, however, that his employment neither endangers his life, safety, health and morals, nor impairs normal development. Provided further, that the parent or legal guardian shall provide the said minor child with the prescribed primary and/or secondary education; or
2. Where a child’s employment or participation in public entertainment or information through cinema, theatre, radio or television is essential: Provided, the employment contract is concluded by the child’s parents or legal guardian, with the express agreement of the child concerned, if possible, and the approval of the Department of Labor and Employment: and Provided, that the following requirements in all instances are strictly complied with:
 - i. The employer shall ensure the protection, health, safety, morals and normal development of the child;
 - ii. The employer shall institute measures to prevent the child’s exploitation or discrimination taking into account the system and level of remuneration, and the duration and arrangement of working time; and
 - iii. The employer shall formulate and implement subject to the approval and separation of competent authorities, a continuing program for training and skills acquisition of the child.

In the above exceptional cases where any such child may be employed, the employer shall first secure, before engaging such child, a work permit from the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) that shall ensure observance of the above requirements.

The Philippines is one of the countries that has ratified international treaties or conventions protecting and safeguarding the welfare of children. Among these are the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); and ILO Conventions 138 and 182, the Minimum Age Convention and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention respectively. In addition the CRC-OP-CAC which the government signed on 8 September 2000 supports the “straight 18” position or having the age of 18 as the

government's compulsory or voluntary recruitment age as well as the start of voting age.

In June 2001, the Human Rights Watch wrote in its report that the Philippines is among the countries in Asia that has child combatants. These combatants are recruited by the two major insurgent groups in the country, the MILF and the NPA. The capture of 16 minor Abu Sayyaf members in Basilan province in the second quarter of 2001 affirmed that aside from rebel groups, armed bandit groups like the Abu Sayyaf also recruit children and minors as members.

6.2 Government institutions relevant to labour and children

The Philippines has several agencies that oversee the implementation of appropriate rules and regulations on labour and children. The Department of Labor and Employment is one such agency. Aside from promulgating rules and regulations necessary for the effective implementation of national and local legislations governing labour, the DOLE is also concerned about the employment of children and minors below 18 through its Bureau of Child Workers.

The welfare and legal protection of children in difficult circumstances (like being engaged in the worst forms of child labour) is the primary concern of another government agency, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). It has a bureau dedicated to child and youth welfare called the Bureau of Child and Youth Welfare Program. This program is aimed at the care and protection of abandoned, neglected, abused or exploited children and youth, delinquent youth, offenders, the disturbed, street children and victims of prostitution. By seeing to it that the care and protection of the youth are safeguarded, the Bureau hopes that these children will soon be socially adjusted with others in society.

On the other hand, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports is (DECS) mandated to implement educational policies, legislations, rules and regulations governing the education of children in both the elementary and secondary levels.

6.3 International and national non-government organizations

The Philippines has a very dynamic civil society. Several non-government organizations have been in existence for more than four decades designed mainly for social upliftment of disadvantaged and marginalized sectors. In some areas, these organizations have veritably taken over the responsibilities and services of government agencies. Labour unions, for example, like the Federation of Free Workers (FFW) has an advocacy program called the Labor Initiatives toward the Elimination of Child Labor (LITECHILD). Academic institutions like the Ateneo de Manila Human Rights Center – Adhikain para sa Karapatang Pambata (AHRC-AKAP) periodically conducts seminar-workshops for legal advocacy and capacity building for those who are concerned with the protection of child labourers.

Some of the local or national NGOs have international affiliations and many of these are funded by international philanthropic or civic organizations and overseas development assistance.

Among the international agencies that have an active presence in the country are all the offices under the umbrella of the United Nations system. These include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the International Labour Organization. Development banks that have poured funds for social development into the country include the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Of these international agencies, only two have explicit programmes for children. These are the UNICEF and the ILO. The former has a project for Children in Situations of Armed Conflict (CSAC). CSAC aims to provide basic and psychological services to these children and to promote the protection of children in conflict areas. On the other hand, the latter has a specific programme that promotes the elimination of child labour all over the world – the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

6.4 Programmes

As mentioned earlier, the government through the DSWD has various programmes for the benefit of children in different circumstances. Among these are the following: day care service – for preschoolers and streetchildren to develop character and moral values; supplemental feeding service to provide food assistance to underweight or malnourished children to improve their nutritional status; peer group services – provides opportunities for the psychological, social and spiritual, and leadership development of youth through group activities; protective service; self-employed assistance; child placement service; special services for delinquent youth and youth offenders; after care-service and assistance to the disadvantaged transnationals.

In terms of children in situations of armed conflict, the DSWD offers a range of services that address psycho-social trauma among the children. They also coordinate with the parents of the child and try to find ways to make the child go back to mainstream society after a series of psycho-social interventions. First, they enrol him or her in the appropriate grade level and then provide him or her with necessary school supplies, even a modest allowance everyday.

On the other hand, various non-government organizations in the country have been concerned with assisting displaced communities in relief and rehabilitation efforts after man-made calamities like armed strife or other similar incidents. These groups provide a range of services from directly assisting victims of displacement to facilitating assistance for them in various forms, i.e. medical missions, provision of psycho-social interventions like stress therapy workshops, counselling, etc.

Table 6.1: Partial listing of existing non-government organizations

Name of NGO/PO	Main concerns and services rendered	Geographical reach or coverage
1. Ecumenical Commission for Displaced Families and Communities (ECDFC)	To address issues of internal displacement due to human-made factors in the country, i.e. military-rebel clashes, development aggression and to assist victims of such displacement. Services include socio-economic development assistance for displaced communities aside from direct relief assistance, as well as psycho-social interventions for children affected by conflict	National – and have a coordinating office in Cotabato City to facilitate response to communities in Central Mindanao affected by the war between MILF and government or government vs. NPA
2. Medical Action Group (composed mostly of non-government health professionals)	Provision of free medical missions, consultation and treatment among displaced and depressed communities	National
3. Kabiba – Alliance for Children’s Concerns	Children’s welfare	Mindanao
4. Philippine Human Rights Information Center (Philrights)	Advocacy on human rights	National
5. BALAY INCORPORATED	Psychosocial relief and rehabilitation programs and services to internally displaced families and communities; assistance to political prisoners and other traumatized victims of political repression.	National with offices in NCR, Zamboanga City, Cotabato City, Davao City, South Cotabato, Tacloban City, Bacolod City and Iloilo City
6. Children’s NGO Network	Advocacy and monitoring for children’s rights through collaboration and networking, provides interventions at the community level	Mainly Cebu City and all over the Visayas region
7. Sabakan	Women and children’s welfare; particularly those who have been physically, psychologically and emotionally abused and traumatized due to armed conflict/war or disasters; currently has creative therapist for traumatized children and women	Pagadian City and Zamboanga del Sur

Textbox 3:**The Warrior is a Girl Child**

By Bobby Timonera* (*published in the Human Rights Forum, 1999*)

Ten-year-old Jonainah Sarip could be any ordinary grade school pupil, a Girl Scout obeying her troop leader's commands. Her self-discipline and good training show in the brisk, snappy movements with which she responds to calls of "Atten-shun!" and "Parade rest!"

But the military drills to which Jonainah and her six friends, aged 10 to 16 years, have become accustomed are for real. And unlike in the Girl Scouts, these young girls carry real M-16 Armalite rifles and homemade grenade launchers. Fourth grader Jonainah and her "classmates" all attend a *madrasah* (Arabic school) inside a Moro rebel camp deep in the mountains of Lanao del Sur.

They may not have been as good as the cadets at the Philippine Military Academy, but they perform much better than tired, pot-bellied policemen. Not only that, the children, all of them girls, can shoot using real live bullets. They aren't good as marksmen yet, but they can hit the foot-wide handmade target sheet from 20 meters away.

None of them hit the bull's-eye when they displayed their skills with weapons to reporters inside Camp Bushra of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Butig town, but only one of them missed the target. There was no way to tell whose shot landed where, but one was close enough at the tangent between the first and second circles outside the bull's eye.

From the way they handled the M-16, it was obvious that the girls have been trained well. As they knelt, their left elbow touched the left knee, the right knee kept stable on the ground. Except for Jonainah, whose arms and legs were so small that her elbow and her knee would not meet while holding the rifle up. The youngest in the group, she was about as tall as the Armalite.

The girls showed no trace of nervousness as they aimed. No shaky hands, No one appeared scared when she pulled the trigger. They all handled the recoil without panicking. Still, their trainer ensured their safety by loading only a bullet as each of the girls fired her shot, with the magazine safely in his hand. It was just a precaution in case the recoil was too strong for the girls who might accidentally pull the trigger with the rifle pointed upward.

Sultan Kammad Gunda, the trainer, said the seven girls were part of a class of 25 women of various ages who finished the MILF's "basic military training" at Camp Bushra last June (1999). He has been training Muslim women for more than 10 years now.

All year round, some 300 to 500 Muslim women undergo training in this camp, said Jannati Mimbantas, one of the ranking MILF leaders at the camp. (Jannati is a younger brother of Abdul Azis Mimbantas, MILF vice chair for internal affairs and head of the rebel group's negotiating panel in talks with the national government.

But Al Haj Murad, MILF vice chair for military affairs, says that aside from the three-month intensive training, the children continuously undergo military education in *madaris* (plural of *madrasah*) inside the camps. This education, he explains, is equivalent to the regular schools' military training, except that it is much longer.

History

Murad says that children have been trained for military preparedness since 1982, when the rebel group set up Camp Abubakar in Matanog, Maguindanao. Prof. Rudy Rodil, an expert on Mindanao history at the Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT), traces the beginnings of training for children even earlier than the Moro uprising that started in the late 1960s.

“Even during the American colonization, Moro women and children were already fighting the invaders,” he said. The involvement of children in armed conflicts, he added, was highlighted in the battles of Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak in Sulu in 1906 and 1913, respectively. (“Bud” is a Tausug word for mountain). Hundreds of Moros were killed in both encounters.

“A considerable number of women and children were killed in the fight, numbers unknown, for the reason that they were actually in the works when assaulted and were unavoidably killed in the fierce hand-to-hand fighting which took place in the narrow enclosed spaces,” said an account of the battle of Bud Dajo by Gen. Leonard Wood, the first governor of the Moro Province during the American occupation. (Source: *Mandate in Moroland*, by Peter Gordon Gowing, 1977, p. 162).

“Children were, in some cases, used by the men as shields while charging troops.” Wood’s narration continued. About 600 Moros died in Bud Dajo.

Rodil also notes that the use of children in warfare is not limited to the Moros. In the infamous Battle of Balangiga in Samar in 1901, Gen. Jacob H. Smith ordered the killing of all persons “who are capable of bearing arms in actual hostilities.” By this he meant anyone above the age of 10.

“Of course, many of the attackers at Balangiga had been boys of that age, swing their razor-like bolos,” says Joseph L. Schott in his book *The Ordeal of Samar*, published in 1964.

Commissioner Nasser Marohomsalic, a Maranao member of the Commission on Human Rights, admits that it has become part of the Moro culture to train their young for warfare. He says, “Even in the *darangen*, the epic of the Maranaos, children are already trained in martial arts such that even before they reach maturity, they have already gone to battle.” He adds that this is a test of a child’s prowess and a chance for him or her to earn renown not only for himself/herself but also for his/her community. He himself was taught the same during his early years in Lanao del Sur.

According to Murad, having guns has become part of the Moro culture. “Every Moro looks at the gun as a symbol of prestige and manhood.”

MILF policy dictates that only children above age 12 will undergo training but the culture of the gun actually starts much earlier. At Camp Bushra, for instance, the preschool children’s favorite toy is a well-crafted plastic caliber .45 pistol that looks like a real gun. Children also play with homemade grenade launchers. A boy of about 12 jokingly pointed his launcher at another boy who raised both his hands as if in surrender.

The Human Rights aspect

The use of children in the country's various rebel groups has come under severe criticism from government officials. (Then) Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who is also secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, said in a statement that they "were disturbed that insurgent groups have mustered children and minors into their armed struggle in violation of the Constitution and international standards protecting the rights and welfare of the youth."

Susan Ajel, an official of the DSWD central office, cites Republic Act 7610, or the Special Child Protection Act, which prohibits the recruitment of children by armed groups and their participation in combat. Children, she adds, are not to be used as guides or spies, either.

The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict ensure the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

Marohomsalic says he has reminded MILF chair Hashim Salamat not to recruit children for the armed struggle.

"But in the concept of Islam this is not a violation of human rights," argues Murad, who adds that the main purpose of teaching young children to be combat ready is not to instill violence in their young minds but to help them defend themselves because the camp could be attacked at anytime by the enemy. "It is more inhuman to let them die without having defended themselves," Murad points out.

Role of children

He emphasizes that children are not for combat. "There have been no instances where they have been used in combat. None of them have been killed," he stresses. He says that women and children usually help out as medics, cooks and carriers of supplies in battle. Children also serve as security for the camp.

The journalists who visited Camp Bushra found the children working in the kitchen, cooking food for the visitors. They wore their "combat uniforms" only when told to perform for the media. The combat uniform is a black "kimon," a gown that covers all parts of the body except the hands and the face (some used camouflage cloth just like the soldiers), long black pants underneath and slippers or heeled step-ins.

There is no active recruitment of children, Murad reiterates. These youngsters, he says, are usually children of *mujahideen* (Muslim warriors) who live with their parents inside the camps. "They would rather stay with their parents in the frontline than wait for news as to what happened to their parents in combat," he explains.

Ready to Die

But the seven girls interviewed by newsmen at Camp Bushra said they were ready to become martyrs. "I'm ready to die, as long as it is for jihad," said 14-year old Najida Haya.

Their parents were just as proud. “This is a noble cause,” said Abduljalil Panutalan, the acknowledged “elder” in the camp whose 12-year old daughter also test-fired an Armalite. “It’s okay with me if my daughter gets killed in combat. She’d be a martyr then.”

If the children were yearning for a happy childhood, like normal kids enjoy, they tried to suppress this longing when interviewed.

“We’re happy here. We enjoy the training. We have no complaints,” said Laina Gunda, 14, the trainer’s only child.

“I don’t envy the other kids. I enjoy what I’m doing,” seconded Adlea Mimbantas, 14, whose father is the MILF’s chief negotiator.

Helpless situation?

Murad and Marohomsalic are resigned to the fact that as long as there is war, children will be exposed to violence. “It’s a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don’t situation,” Marohomsalic says.

For Rodil, on the other hand, it is a matter of perception. “The Moros perceive that they are a threatened community, so defense becomes everybody’s business,” he says.

As far as Marohomsalic is concerned, the only solution to the problem is to end the hostilities. “We are pinning our hopes on the peace talks,” he states.

Fortunately for all Moro children, the Philippine government and the MILF have finally started talking to find ways to settle their differences, aside from firing at each other.

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CHAPTER VII

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is the result of a rapid assessment on the phenomenon of child soldiers in some selected areas in Central and Western Mindanao, the Philippines. It aimed to assess the magnitude, pathways, manner and circumstances of recruitment, work conditions, fears and aspirations in life of children who are engaged in armed struggle against the established government of the Republic of the Philippines.

The assessment covers structured interviews (purposive survey) conducted among 85 children, ages 14 to 17, 80 of whom are still actively performing duties related to being soldiers for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Central Mindanao area. These include upland or mountainous barangays (smallest unit of government in the Philippines) in Maguindanao province which are considered part of what the MILF consider as their “major” military camps. For security purposes, the respondents and their leaders have strongly requested the survey team not disclose specific areas or barangays where the survey was conducted although they permitted the team to mention some towns considered or acknowledged as “MILF influenced-areas.” These include the mountain towns of Buldon, Matanog, Barira and Datu Odin Sinsuat. The period of field research was three months.

The study is the first of its kind in the Philippines using a combination of RA methods developed by ILO/UNICEF. Both quantitative (survey) and qualitative data (from KI interviews, FGDs, observation notes) were analyzed as the basis for this report. Children were interviewed regardless of whether or not they get paid for their soldiering or related services (like being auxiliaries or errand boys/girls or cooks in the military camps).

To augment the data from the purposive survey of 85 children respondents, structured key informant interviews were also conducted among 23 individuals, many of whom are knowledgeable and influential individuals both from the NGO community and from government organizations. One informant is a highly placed MILF official. In addition, three separate focus group discussions (FGDs) were held among 1) former NPA members and sympathizers from an indigenous community in South Cotabato who are now residents of General Santos City; 2) former MILF youth volunteers, now students at an institute of higher learning in Cotabato City; and 3) members of both print and broadcast media and NGO leaders in Kidapawan City, Cotabato province.

Literature related to the study were also reviewed to give the research team a better handle on the context of the phenomenon of child soldiers in this part of the country. Such literature included reports from the National Statistics Office, socio-economic profiles of the provinces covered in the study; other materials written by journalists on the war in Mindanao and the team leader’s own studies on the Mindanao conflict.

7.1 Summary of findings

7.1.1 Background characteristics of child soldiers

- There are more males involved as child soldiers in the three armed groups now fighting against government forces in Mindanao. Eighty percent (68 out of 85 child soldiers interviewed for this study) are males. The majority of them belong to the MILF (80 respondents). The rest are Abu Sayyaf (4) and NPA (1).
- The majority of the child soldiers interviewed are Maguindanaon (52 or 61.2%). The rest are Iranun (28 or 32.9%), Sama (4 or 4.7%) and Zamboangueno (1 or 1.7%).
- They come from poor, economically marginalized families whose parents are involved in the armed struggle themselves. They live with them in communities influenced by the armed group. This is true for the MILF child soldiers interviewed for this study. Key informants also believe that this is true for the NPA which operates in Central, Northern and Western Mindanao.
- The majority of the children live in houses made of light materials, usually unfinished with little or no appliances at all.
- The majority of the child soldier respondents are 17 years old (58 or 68 %). The rest are 16 years old (15 or 17.6%); 15 years (nine or 10.64%); and the youngest respondents are 14 (3 or 3.53%). The mean age of respondents is 16.51 years old. Key informants and other literature, however, cite that children as young as 11 have been “drafted” as soldiers in both the NPA and the MILF.
- Child soldier respondents are highly literate in both English and Arabic (55 or 64.7%) while 22 respondents (25.9 %) said they can only read and write in English, which means they have never gone to a *madrasah* (Arabic school).
- Despite the children’s involvement in the armed group, many of them are still enrolled in formal education at different levels. This is true for 52 respondents (61.2%). Only 33 respondents have dropped out of school. This includes four demobilized Abu Sayyaf combatants and one NPA child soldier.

7.1.2 Pathways to child soldiering or children’s participation in armed conflict

- The earliest age of entry to being a child soldier is 11. This is validated in the key informant interviews. The mean number of years spent as a soldier is 2.6 years; and the mean age started as soldier is 14.44 years old.
- A big number of respondents said they “voluntarily” joined or made their own personal decision to join the armed group (34 or 40 %).

This is followed by those who said they were invited to join by family members like parents, siblings and relatives (19 or 22.34%). Some respondents said they joined the group to fulfil one's religious duty/obligation to do "jihad"(16 or 18.82%). The rest mention the following manner of recruitment: invitation by rebel group leaders (7 or 8.24%); to take revenge against those who killed parents or relatives, and to fulfill one's duty for proselytization (*dawwah*) (1 respondent each).

- Children want to have access to firearms in order to arm and defend themselves and their families or communities in case of attacks.
- According to some key informants, children are fascinated and are proud of knowing how to carry and use a firearm at a young age.
- FGD participants point to the strategy of recruiting much younger children as a part of their long range strategic plan. In this way, the rebel group maximizes the "services" of young recruits.
- The participants also add that children of organized peasant groups and communities would easily join the armed struggle as an articulation of their communities' concerns and needs.

7.1.3 Activities and environment of child soldiers

- The average number of hours a child engages in soldiering related activities is 7.61.
- Despite their involvement with the activities of the armed group where they belong, the children claim to sleep well, at an average of 7.90 hours a day.
- Among the common duties or responsibilities of child soldiers are the following: foot patrol, guard/sentry, platoon/squad leader, combatant (28 or 33%); food preparation and combatants in rotation (25 or 29.4%); food preparation only (12 or 14.1%) and medical team member (11 or 12.9). The last assignment is specifically assigned to girls.
- Child soldiers claim to have good relationships with the adults around them (82 or 96.5%). The three remaining respondents did not answer.
- There is no difference in the child soldiers' assignment and those of the adult members of an armed group
- Because of their youth, child soldiers are given "special" treatment when they commit mistakes in their work. They are just admonished or scolded, the way parents do it with erring children. This is true to the MILF respondents.

7.1.4 Consequences of child soldiering

- Eighty-one respondents said they do not get paid for their services as child soldiers. This number includes the 80 MILF soldiers and one NPA demobilized combatant. The latter claims he is given a meagre allowance but not a regular salary. The ASG members said they get paid in cash, but it is not a fixed amount, and the pay depends on the nature of their work.
- The respondents claim they do not get paid because they work on a “voluntary” basis. It is their contribution to the armed struggle against oppression and in order to fulfil their obligation to do “*jihad*.”
- Thirty respondents (35.3%) claim they do not fear anything in their job although they know it is hazardous and dangerous. They accept the danger and hazards as part of their job. Among the hazards include getting sick with diarrhoea, fever, and other ailments; getting wounded or killed in an encounter with the enemy; and being tired after a long day of hiking or running in the mountainous areas.
- Eighty-three respondents (97.6%) said they do not feel sad in their work and in their place of work. This is because they feel that what they are doing is right, and it is in defence of their way of life (Islam).
- Both FGD participants also confirm that as far as they know, child soldiers do not get paid a regular salary for the services they render to the armed group. They mentioned that a meager allowance is given to them (especially for NPAs). Some key informant in Basilan said that huge amount of money are mentioned by the ASG recruiters to entice minors from poor families to join them.

7.2 Conclusions: analysis of factors or pathways to child soldiering in Central and Western Mindanao

Various literature reviewed for this study suggest a combination of two major factors that push children to join the armed forces of a rebel group. These are a) abject poverty and b) marginalization. When people are pushed to very low levels of poverty, they become easy targets for recruitment into an armed opposition group. For these people, it is not difficult to understand the justification or rationale for armed struggle. Because of their circumstances, there are a lack of opportunities that could lead to their empowerment as a people. Marginalization is the twin or consequence of poverty. People are pushed to the margins or peripheries of political power because they do not have the means (especially economic) to push for reforms and to pressure government leaders to find solutions to their problems. Consequently, they become disenfranchised, and robbed of the opportunities to participate actively in democratic governance.

Other minor factors or combination of factors also lead to the phenomenon of child soldiers or the participation of children in armed conflict. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- Taking revenge against abusive government soldiers who have committed atrocities against the children's parents or relatives;
- The proliferation of lightweight and easy to carry or dismantle weapons in the firearms market worldwide;
- The perception that children are cheaper to maintain as soldiers because they do not usually demand for higher pay and are generally subservient or submissive;
- In some places, there are no wholesome activities or opportunities for children like schools that provide adequate and quality education.

In this study, the two major factors leading to the involvement of children in the armed opposition group are present, especially among those recruited to the Abu Sayyaf group and to the New People's Army (NPA).

The results of the three data gathering methods used for this study validate each other regarding the pathways that lead to a child becoming an MILF soldier. These are the following:

- The MILF is anchored on their strong belief that the Bangsa Moro or Islamized people in southern Philippines are a people of distinct nationality and identity different from that of the majority Christian Filipinos. This identity is not being recognized by a predominant government which is basically Christian in orientation.
- This identity revolves around Islam as a total way of life, which dictates the "right path" in everything a Muslim should do in order to please God (Allah). All Muslims are bound together in the concept of brotherhood in the community of believers called the *ummah*, which requires for every Muslim to come to the rescue of those whom they perceive as oppressed by a dominant central government.
- As a consequence of this non-recognition of their identity, the Bangsa Moro people have been pushed to the peripheries of political power even in the territory they used to dominate during the times of the sultanates (before the coming of the Spanish colonizers to the Philippines).
- Armed struggle is justified as a form of "jihad" (or struggle in the way of Allah) especially so that this is believed to be the only way to liberate an oppressed people from the clutches of a "government of strange people" (*gubilnu a sarewang a tau* in Maguindanaw).
- As a good Muslim, a child must obey what the elders say about how to perform his or her duties and responsibilities as an integral component of the *ummah*.
- Thus, working as a child combatant or as an auxiliary in the MILF is not perceived to be work that should be paid with money but is an obligation; therefore, all children who get to be invited to join military trainings in the MILF camps in different parts of Mindanao are not conscripted, drafted or forced to do so. They come to the camps on a voluntary basis, according

to both the child respondents and the key informants, and even the participants in the focus group discussion.

- In the mountainous barangays where the MILF major and satellite camps are located, the Philippine local government leadership in the areas have not made their presence felt, so the MILF leaders or commanders are the “virtual” government officials in their areas. These are areas with poor access to basic social services like health, education and other assistance. Even government infrastructure is wanting in these mountainous, hard to reach areas.
- MILF camps are self-contained communities which look like any other ordinary village in the Philippines, except perhaps it has a military headquarters and barracks where children and adult recruits get their basic military training. These communities are where the parents of the children live. When there are no armed encounters, the mujahideen parents work on their farms to earn a living. Children of these parents look at their eventual membership to the MILF as part of the “natural” order of things.

Moreover, there are aggravating conditions that push children to become combatants. In the case of the Abu Sayyaf, the socio-economic and political conditions of the province of Basilan already make it a veritable hotbed of an insurgency: large numbers of very poor population; poorly educated constituency; inadequate or absent social services from the local government unit; poor infrastructure which hampers the movement of farm products to the nearest market in the capital city of Isabela; and the proliferation of guns. One television report claims that there are “more guns than people” in Basilan. An NGO leader who was interviewed said an ordinary citizen in Basilan has access to at least two units of firearms. Even one parish priest totes an M-16 Armalite rifle in the daily rounds he makes to his parishioners. This priest has been a victim of kidnapping by the Abu Sayyaf in 1995.

It is impossible to determine the exact numbers of membership of any armed insurgency group. Even in this study, the RA team was able to derive only estimates from their interviews with key informants and from the literature already reviewed for this study. Most key informants have strong reasons to believe that at least 10 to 30 percent of children in any given community in the places influenced by an armed group become “volunteered” or “convinced” to participate actively in the armed group. This means, if the estimates of their forces are about 10,000 regular fighters, there would be around 1,000 to 3,000 child soldiers affiliated with the MILF. But this is a very conservative estimate. In an interview with Al Haj Murad, the Vice Chairman for Military Affairs of the MILF, he claims that the front is 120,000 strong as of 1998. For the Abu Sayyaf, whose estimated armed strength is placed at a conservative 500, then there should be around 50 to 150 child Abu Sayyaf members. For the NPAs, whose numbers are already dwindling according to military sources, an estimate of about 800 to as many as 2,000 children and minors 18 and below are working full time for them.

While they may not be full-fledged combatants on a day to day basis like their adult counterparts, children are given enough training and exposure so that they are prepared just in case their communities or camps are being attacked. As one MILF leader said, “it is better to prepare them for battle than let them be vulnerable for any attack. It is more inhuman to leave them to die without being able to defend themselves and their families or villages.”

7.3 Analysis of factors critical to policy design and implementation

While most respondents claim that their work is not dangerous, this does not mean that they do not feel threatened or get scared when going about their duties as members of an armed group. Not being able to recognize the danger of their work is a consequence of a very deep conviction that armed struggle is the only “righteous” way to achieve social justice in this world. This is reinforced by a pervasive perception that they are not recognized as a people worthy of being treated with dignity, nor acknowledged regarding their needs and aspirations to live the principles of their way of life as Muslims.

It is difficult, albeit impossible, for the Philippine central government to pressure armed insurgent groups to adhere to internationally ratified documents, charters or protocols governing the welfare of children in difficult circumstances, as those in the armed groups are. This is partly because the Philippine government is a weak nation state. Its own bureaucracy stands helpless as multinational corporations and other huge business entities defy labour standards even among the working age populations. The Philippine national coffers cannot adequately provide basic social services to its rapidly growing population. As the government expenditure chart shows, the Philippine government allocated measly amounts for social services like education, health and other social services, but it has allocated a staggering amount for debt servicing every year.

Any form of social interventions for a problem like that posed by the participation of children in armed groups cannot succeed if some basic issues are not considered by government. These have something to do with preventing the emergence of armed conflict or better still, eliminating the circumstances or possible pathways to the participation of children in armed conflict.

Among such issues are the following:

- ***Restructuring of government budgets.*** Budgetary allocations for items that are not important (like debt servicing) for the welfare of the people in general have to be redirected to more basic needs like health, education and social services. Good governance cannot be achieved without giving top priority to people’s basic needs. Government has defaulted itself in many far-flung areas in Mindanao because people do not perceive it to be present there. There are hardly any government services in such areas.

- ***Recognition of the Bangsa Moro people's inherent right to self-determination.*** For as long as the minority groups of Muslims in the southern part of the country feel that this right is not recognized, there will always be an insurgency group among these people. Operationally, government planners can conceptualize various mechanisms by which this recognition could be granted without having to dismember the Philippine polity. These have been tried through various autonomous arrangements, but all have failed. Among the reasons advanced for the failure of the first set of autonomous structure and the more recent Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is that the region is only autonomous in name and not in substance. One major reason is the failure of the national government to grant a “meaningful” autonomy, i.e. one that recognizes the potentials of governance and leadership among Muslims and allows them the full range of privileges inherent in their right of self-determination.
- ***Rethinking government policies on education, especially for the first basic education levels (elementary and high school).*** Corollary to being granted the right to self-determination is the common complaint among Muslims in Mindanao that most government and private schools are designed in a way that caters only to the cultural values and practices of the majority population, Christian lowland Filipinos. Education and culture play a critical role in the molding of a responsible and politically mature citizenry, the type that makes the process of democratization possible. But if such policies are addressing only the cultural values and needs of one segment of the country's population, then there will always be a reason to become “separate” and to express these in a radical armed struggle.

7.4 Policy and action recommendations

The following recommendations are culled from the key informant interviews, focus group discussions and the validation workshop conducted to present the initial findings of this study. The RA team members and the national consultant/team leader for this study also made a synthesis of their own recommendations and collated these with the recommendations of the informants. Two types of recommendations are presented here: one set requires immediate action by concerned or responsible agencies or institutions and the other is on policy advocacy toward long term solutions to the problems related to the phenomenon of child soldiers.

7.4.1 Recommendations for immediate action

- It is the consensus of the key informants that there should be an immediate stop to the massive militarization in Mindanao. Militarization includes recruitment, deployment, continuous military action like bombings, shellings, armed encounters, and other provocative military action from both government and rebel forces. Halting all military action will allow children to

go back to their schools and resume normal lives. It will also decrease the level of tension and insecurity among the population in conflict affected areas. The Philippine Army leadership, together with the Department of National Defense should seriously consider engaging the rebel forces in a series of talks regarding mutual withdrawal of their respective forces.

- A massive relief and rehabilitation programme for areas in Central and Western Mindanao badly affected by armed conflict since last year (at the height of former Pres. Estrada's "all-out war" campaign) is needed. But such areas have now included scenes of recent skirmishes between forces of the New People's Army and the government; the MILF and government; and more recently, government forces versus the loyalists of former ARMM governor Nur Misuari in Zamboanga City. The Department of Social Welfare and Development, in collaboration with the Philippine National Red Cross and other international aid and donor agencies can pool their resources together to maximize their inputs to this programme. A mechanism or scheme could be developed to identify target beneficiaries for this programme.
- As the study has shown, MOAs, charters and other legislations protecting the welfare of children involved in armed conflict have been observed more in the breach than in performance. It is recommended therefore that an efficient and stringent mechanism or scheme for monitoring the implementation of such legislations be organized. ILO-IPEC and UNICEF together with DSWD and the Department of Labor and Employment can initiate a workshop with NGOs and other leaders in civil society groups to come up with an ad hoc type of monitoring and evaluation organizational structure.
- Conduct of an intensified education, information and communication (IEC) programme through the use of multi-media and folk media (whenever appropriate to be used in the cultural communities) about the plight of children involved in armed conflict not only as combatants but also as victims of war. The Philippine Information Agency together with the national organizations of media practitioners both in broadcast and print media can come up with such a program with the support of UNICEF and ILO/IPEC.
- Review of government education programmes and policies as a basis for reformulation to make them relevant to the cultures and sensitivities of the populations in regions affected by armed conflict. For example, a separate school system should be put in place in the areas (barangays, towns or provinces) which are populated predominantly by either Muslims or indigenous communities. One system could be based on the madrasah (Arabic school) which conducts classes from Sundays to Thursdays. In this system, the week-end is Friday and Saturday. This is to allow the Muslims to go to the mosque on Friday for their congregational prayer. The review should also look at the possibility of accrediting these alternative school systems and having them recognized by the mainstream educational system in

the Philippines. This would entail certain affirmative action type of support programmes to be initiated by the country's Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS).

- Conceptualization and implementation of a special tutoring programme that will benefit the child members of either the MILF or the NPA who have been absent from classes due to their "soldiering" assignments. This will be designed as a transitional step. Care should be taken that this program will not be misconstrued by either government or rebel forces as a way of "brainwashing." The NGO community, with support from UNICEF or ILO/IPEC can spearhead the conceptualization and implementation of this program.
- Conceptualization and implementation of income generating or livelihood programs that are appropriate and sensitive to the culture and way of life of the programme partners. Such programmes could be identified by the target communities themselves, with the help of social development agencies, NGOs and the government's Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Agriculture and other concerned government agencies. The programmes could make use of locally available resources, as well as knowledge and skills already available among the target communities. This is one way of enhancing more efficient development cooperation. International donor or aid agencies could be tapped to provide the needed funds to start these programmes.

7.4.2 Recommendations for policy advocacy

- Sustained campaign or lobby in the Philippine Congress (both Congress and the Senate) to come up with a legislation that will restructure annual government budgets so that basic social services, health and education get a much bigger share than debt servicing. A strong lobby group could be organized that will coordinate with "champions" or advocates in the two houses of Congress for them to pass a law that repeals the Republic Act that mandates an automatic allocation of huge percentages of the annual budget for debt servicing.
- Regarding the Bangsa Moro or Muslim peoples' claim to their right to self-determination as a nationality distinct from that of the majority lowland Christian Filipinos, there is a need to engage civil society and other influential leaders among the Muslims in a series of talks. The talks could focus on the root causes of Moro insurgency: the recognition of the Moro's of their distinct identity, as a people with the inherent right to self-determination; ancestral lands and domain of both Moro and indigenous populations in Mindanao; land ownership and tenure; etc.
- Strong campaign or lobby for fair trade and market opportunities for small and micro-entrepreneurs among the marginalized populations in

Mindanao; i.e. the Muslims and the indigenous tribes. The DTI should take the lead in these efforts, with coordination and support from private sector groups, especially the country's biggest corporate entities. This is part of their social responsibility to the people who have given them opportunities to grow in their business.

- The DTI, in cooperation with the Cooperative Development Authority should take the lead in coming up with policies that would provide simple, hassle-free and uncomplicated access to soft loans and other financial windows for marginalized women in the barangays. Such financial windows should be made available to both small and micro-entrepreneurs among the rural households in the neighborhood.
- Stronger policies should be formulated to organize a team to monitor violators of the various legislations and charters to protect children's welfare. The DSWD can initiate a series of workshops where this topic and other sensitive, related ones will be discussed after which a monitoring body with some degree of police power will be organized. The local civil society can be tapped to organize this type of monitoring body.

7.4.3 Recommendations for further research and enhancement of RA methodology

- This first ever RA on child soldiers in the southern Philippines is limited only to three areas in Central and Western Mindanao. It has barely scratched the surface, so to speak, of getting a much more comprehensive picture of the situation, conditions, pathways to, consequences of, and perceptions about child soldiering. Thus it is recommended to carry out a more in-depth (longer time frame) study in other places in the Philippines, like Luzon and the Visayas islands. The in-depth research could be expanded to include known "influenced" areas of the NPA.
- Data gathering tools used in this RA could be enhanced, especially when dealing with displaced, marginalized, and impoverished communities. Visual tools for eliciting data like drawings, Venn diagrams, for example, may be introduced during a gathering to be held for this purpose. Venn diagrams, for example, can tell us about people, organizations and institutions that children relate to in their soldiering duties and assignments.

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SAMPLE KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

(For reasons of confidentiality, names have been changed and KI personal details have been modified)

Key informant: Samrod Edzla

Marital Status: Married

Occupation/Profession: School System

Role in the community: _____

Length of service on the position: 15 years in service

I. Knowledge about the participation of children in warfare or armed conflict situation:

Yes, 80% of our school children in our school have participated in the armed conflict situation during the all-out war last year.

We are all aware that majority of the Bangsa Moro families are below poverty threshold. Of course, Moro families who have better economic well-off can not participate in the actual armed struggle, but surely, they give their financial support to the struggle. In fact, majority of the Bangsa Moro people are supporting in the struggle. Why, because this is one of the religious obligations of every Muslim.

As to the participation of girls in the armed conflict, I believe, very minimal. But training them to defend themselves, are given to those who report to their camps.

As to the question whether they have salary or none, that I don't know, but based on our observation, if there is, it is very minimal. Children's participation in the struggle is voluntary, and they even bring their own "baon" - enough to sustain them for a number of days they will be staying in the camps. Their service is founded on their commitment to their religion.

As a religious obligation, no need to recruit them by force. What is needed is orientation on the basic teachings of Islam and the need to establish a community where peace and order will prevail, and where the law of Allah (subhanaahu wa taala) will be applied.

This cannot be a threat to them, because no one is forced to do it. Children all over the area are voluntarily reporting, and submit for proper training and orientation, so that they can help in attaining peace and order in Mindanao.

As to the reasons of children to join the armed struggle, there are those who feel that they cannot anymore live up with the current crisis that our people are facing, both from the regional and national scene. The situation is very clear to many of us, that the government has no plan for the good of the Bangsa Moro people. Those

children whose family and hometowns were totally destroyed by the government their combat against the MILF. Both young and old were affected by the battle, we cannot stop them from defending their property and families. This is why even those who are already in the urban centers still participate in the struggle.

But normally, children are not allowed to participate in the actual warfare. Only on the emergency cases whereby they may be play a critical role. All of them are Muslims, coming from all sectors of our society. As a Muslim, everybody are enjoined by Islam to defend their right to live peacefully, free from all forms of oppressions and exploitations.

Though I am not aware of how they are being recruited, I have heard from the Islamic teachings, to participate in the struggle is an incunvent duty of every Muslim, male and female. Just like the other obligatory acts in Islam. Failure to do that is rebel against Allah (s.w.t.).

II. Knowledge about the living and working conditions of children in the armed forces.

As to their work and life in the camps, that I do not know. I have not participated in the process, and observed nor conduct an interview on their situations. But as I feel, those children who participate in these activities are really committed in their job. They have not complained at all, neither made any negative comments in their situation. I am not also familiar with their activities. What is clear to me is they are out of school for a maximum of one week, some even ask permission from their teachers, and my teacher cannot prevent them from going to the area of conflict.

I believe, some of them are assigned to do dangerous tasks, especially in emergency situations. But normally, they just help in the camp on whatever capacity they can contribute for the success of the struggle.

As to the protest against the recruitment, to whom we shall protest? To the MILF, to the parents or to the children. We cannot protest to the MILF, because they are not recruiting these children. The children are voluntarily reporting to them. Again, if we protest to the parents? I would say most of the Muslim parents are happy for the decision of the children to join the struggle. Especially now a days, that drug addiction is rampant. They are thankful enough that their children will be saved from these social menace. I have not heard any complaint or plan to protest the participation of the children. Because to whom we shall address our protest?

The Bangsa Moro struggle has been a very long struggle for self-determination, but no lasting solution has been offered by the national government. Our people have been dreaming for a very peaceful place to live. No criminal, no robbery, no one was treated unjustly.

III. Perceptions on the use of children as soldiers.

I don't think, our people have the intention to use our children in the warfare. No community in this entire universe would want to harm their children, even to the slightest pain. Our parents took good care of us, and have prevented us from danger, even the bites of small insects. However, the defense of our lives, our property and families, including our religion is every body's duty. If our children will help defend our rights, what we can only say is "be careful". Now, whose fault lies on these problems. I believe, the government has to take a look at the root of these problems, and make a sincere move the resolve once and for all these centuries old menace. I strongly believe that the problem was not created by the Moro people, rather it was thrust into their neck, until they cannot anymore bear the pain. Long for self-determination is universal dream of every society.

Whether the use of children in the armed conflict is a problem or not, it depends upon who looks at it. For the laymen who enjoy the blessings of the system, it is a problem. But for those who suffer pains brought about by the system, it is blessings. We are in the academe, and we cannot afford to be one-sided. We have to be balanced in dealing with every issue. Otherwise we will be bias in molding the mind of our children.

Should we look for a lasting peace and development in Mindanao, we must urge our government to let the Muslims live according to the teaching of their own religion. Grant them what they want in order to practice their religious obligation towards Allah (s.w.t.) and to their people. The national government should stop applying their Low Intensity Conflict between and among the Moro people, their divisive approach towards the MNLF and the bangsa Moro people. They should refrain from capitalizing the ignorance of the Moro, and making our leaders as a mere puppet.

While they are enjoying their self-determination process, there must be some kind of rehabilitation process on the mind of those child soldiers. Like in our school, we have just opened our program on school of peace as a substitute for the values given to our pupils and students in the secondary level. This aimed to rehabilitate the mind of our children, especially those who have been exposed to armed conflict situations. This will gradually erase their negative experiences, and transform those torturing experiences with nurturing experience of peaceful life and positive outlook towards life.

Lastly, I believe if the government will be faithful enough in dealing with the Moro problems, peace and development will thrive in Mindanao.

SAMPLE KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

(For reasons of confidentiality, names have been changed and KI personal details have been modified)

Key Informant: Abdul Bantilan

Marital Status: married

Occupation: trucking

Role in the community: Transportation Sector

Length of service in the position: since 1986

Socio-Economic Profile

In Barira, these are our problems. We have schools, madrasah, but our people have lack of education, because of the bad road, and no farm-to-market roads. We have health centers, but our assigned nurses, midwives are not reporting to the area because of fear on the way.

We have 11 barangays, but have no barangay roads. We have 17,000 plus population as of 1995 census. The territory of the Camp Abubakar were congested with people, but it was not covered by the census, ever since.

Our farm product includes, rice, corn, abaca, copra, coffee, durian, marang, lanzones and other fruit trees, but we can hardly transport them to market. Our distance from Parang to Barira is 24 kilometers rugged road. Only during long dry season where Trifort truck can penetrate to the poblacion proper.

The estimated population of the camp was 30,000. Now only 70% of our evacuees have returned to their homes. The 30% are still in Parang, and in other parts of Maguindanao and Cotabato City. About 50% of our municipality was heavily affected by the war.

Knowledge about the participation of children in warfare or armed conflict situation:

If I will tell you, no children in our barangay have participated in the warfare, I will be a great liar. First, the entire town of Barira is covered by site of Camp Abubakar, and it 50% of our area was totally devastated by the all out war of the government against the MILF. Both young and old were affected by the battle, that we cannot stop them from defending their property and families. But only 5 to 10% from our children came from our barangay. Majority of those who joined came from other part of Maguindanaon province. But normally, children are not allowed to participate in the actual warfare. Only in the emergency cases whereby they may be play a critical role. All of them are Muslims, coming from all sectors of our society.

As to the recruitment, I'm not very sure of the process, though I believe they are not being forced to join, because they are already in the area. They came from different parts of the Mindanao, and they built their houses there.

At present, our town is normal. The Peace and order is quite good, except fear still prevails due to the presence of the Philippine Army in the area. As I have said, majority of those who participated in the warfare activities are not from our municipality. And we have no control of them. It must also be remembered that Camp Abubakar is very wide.

As to the protest against the recruitment, I would say no one will protest an action taken to defend one's property, their religion, and their families. I did not hear such complaint from any sectors. Our municipality was a very peaceful place to live. No criminal, no robbery, no one was treated unjustly.

II. Knowledge about the living and working conditions of children in the armed forces.

- As I have mentioned above, children in our town are not really in the warfare situation. If children are in the camp, it was because they live there, and it was their home place. If they happen to join the training, that is part of their training in preparation to protect themselves and their home place. However, in a normal situation, no children were placed in the warfare activities. Only for the defense of their lives, properties and home place where they may join the fight.*
- With regards to their assignments, just like household chores, everybody are tasked to help, according to their age level, and knowledge.*
- The dead mujahidin are automatically buried right at the spot where they fell. This is why you will see their members bringing along shovels. The wounded were treated in their clinic.*
- Inside the camp, everybody were busy in their own business. Only those who are assigned in the warfare have allowance for their families. But that was not a salary.*

Perceptions on the use of children as soldiers.

Our people have no intention to use our children in the warfare, which was not done in a normal condition. But when our own government forced them to join the jihaad, we cannot stop them from doing their duty towards Allah (s.w.t.) and themselves. The problem was not created by our own people, rather it was thrust to them, by our own government.

As I have said, the problem was not from our people. Should we look for the complete solution to this problem, we must urge the government troops to leave the camp, because as far as I know, the MILF will not get out of their camp. Tell them that should they wish our people to go back to their home places, they should abandon our town, so that we can live peacefully. We wish that the peace that we

have experienced for short period of time shall be restored and continued to reign in our hometown. Let the people achieve their dream of peaceful society, and not to destroy this dream.

**RAPID ASSESSMENT ON THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN WARFARE
OR IN ARMED CONFLICT SITUATION**

Sample Completed Survey Questionnaire
(names have been changed for confidentiality)
(Para sa wata a sundalu)

I. Profile of child respondent.

1. Ngala (optional) watamama sa jihad (child of jihad)
2. Umul: 16
3. Babay o mama: mama (male)
4. Lugal a pinbatan: Datu Piang, Maguindanao
5. Tribu: Maguindanaon
6. Ebpangagi ka bun saguna? Uway (yes) U uway na ngin a gradu? 3rd year HS
7. U dikena na nakapangagi ka bun? N, A.
8. U uway na taman sa ngin a gradu? 3rd year HS
9. Ngin I umul engka sa kinaenda nengka mangagi? N.A.
10. Ngintu ka naketelen ka mangagi? N.A.
11. Makabatia ka bun? Uway (yes) (English?Arabic) uway Ngini pangkat' in? Arabic I
12. Mataw ka semulat? Uway (English?Arabic) uway Ngini pangkat' in? Arabic I

II. Living conditions and socio-economic situation of family.

Egkatamanan nu kabpaguyag-uyag

13. Endaw ka pegkaleben? Sa mga lukas ko bon (with my parents)
14. Entain I pebkalebenan nengka? Mga lukas ko bon (my parents only)
15. Nauget den I kapegkakaleben nengka siya ba? Uway (if yes, proceed to question 18) _____
16. U dikena na endaw andang pegkaleben? _____
17. Ngintu ka nakaawa su pamilya nengka lu?

18. Su pamilya nengka na madtalu nengka I kawasa ataw miskin ataw egkadsalilidan denmun siya kanu dalepa nu? Kadsalilidan den mun
19. Edtalu ka sin u ngin I betad a kabpagawiday nu (Mana mapia bun sin, di aku nilan kalilinian, mapia bun, da patatagan nilan sa laki, etc.) mapia bun man
20. Ngintu aden minatay ataw minawa a mimbru nu pamilya? Dala (none)
21. U ya minatay na su mga lukes, na kanu? N.A.

22. *U minawa su mga lukes, na kanu I kinawa nilan?* N.A.
23. *Ngintu ka minawa sekanin?* N.A.
24. *Endaw ka ebpagiganen/Pedtulg?* Sa walay o dala duty sa palaw(at my house if I don't have soldiering duty in the mountain camp)
25. *Pila kauras I ipedtulg nengka sa uman malamag/magabi?* Mga 6 hours sa malamag, 6 hours bon sa magabi o lu ako Sa blocking (6 hours in the daytime and 6 hours in the blocking area)
26. *Panudtul ka kun u ngin I buntal a walay nu? (mana ngin I mga igagama nin, ngi kasela nin, endaw matun, endu ped Pn, ngin I mg appliances nu, ped pan).* Half concrete, with radio
27. *Mataw bun matia endu semulat su mga lukes nengka?* Uway (yes)
28. *Ngin a basa I katawan nilan semualt endu matia?* Arabic, Maguindanaon, Tagalog
29. *U di, na ngintu ka di silan mataw matia?* N.A.
30. *Ngin I masela a pantialian nu mga lukes nengka?* Sikad endu kandagang sa sari-sari a mga pagken (trisikad driving and food vending)
31. *Endaw tatap ebpagangay su mga lukes engka u pendalu ataw egkapalian silan?* Hospital
32. *Endaw ka nilan ebpananggiten u pedsakit ataw egkapalian ka?* Hospital
33. *Ngin I kalibpes a kabpamasa nu mga lukes nengka sa bagu a balegkas?* Minsan na madulua aden nanto na makiisa bo.(once or twice a year)

III. *Egkambebetad u kapenggalebek nu wata a ebpangingidsan:*

35. *Ngin I umul nengka kanu kinaludsu nengka edsundalu? Age started as a soldier)* 14 years old ako
36. *Ngin den I kinauget a kinaamung nengka sa kadsundalu?* Mga duwalagon den
37. *Ngin I pinggulengka sa kinaludsu nengka kumapet sa sinapang?* Med-training ako
38. *Panun I kinpagakat sa leka sa kaamung nengka sa kadsundalu? (Let the child respondent describe the events or situations that got them into this type of work)* madakel kami a minamun, endo ko kasabuti e kaumis
39. *Tanu a I mga Bangsamoro na minamung ako sa kan jihad (we are many here because we know that we are oppressed so I decided to join in Jihad)* _____
40. *Ngin I leka a galebekan? (What is the child's specific assignment? And what are his specific duties and responsibilities?* blocking and guarding
- _____
- _____
41. *Aden bun mga tagapeda nengka a matuwa kanu niya ba a galebekan nengka?* Madakel (a lot of them)
42. *Udala na, ngintu sakabias ikanilan a galebekan?* N.A.
43. *Endaw ka tatap pakanbetad, ataw penggulan su leka a galebekan?* Sa field
44. *Pila kauras I kapenggalebek engka sa uman gay?* Mga walo kauras (8 hrs. a day)
45. *Ngin I mga uras a kapenggalebek engka, mapita, malulem, magabi?* Mga memba

46. *Pilay gay kanu sakapadian I kapenggelbek engka?* U luako ako na umanggay
 47. *Penggalebek ka bun Sa uman gay den ataw uman kapupus a padian?*
Depende sa schedule ko _____
 48. *Kanu salagun na penggululan nengka den ba niya a galebek engka, ataw*
uman ba nasisita, mana su kapame lusud u militari? Kanu salagun na makaduwa
komakanggalebekan lu (twice a year I'm doing my duty) _____

IV. *Hazards associated with work as soldier or member of armed forces:*

49. *Iniganat kanu kinaamung engka sa niya a lumpukan, na midsakit, ataw*
masakitan ka bun? Dala (none)
 50. *Upama ka uway, ne endaw natabu?* N.A.
 51. *Mapakay a mapanudtul engka sin?* _____

 52. *Aden bun katawan negka a pagidsan nengka a wata a midsakit bun ataw*
nasakitan siya sa penggalebekan? Aden
 53. *Upama ka aden na mapakay a mapanudtul engka sin u panuni nanggula nilan*
Bantu? Sakit bo ento sa tiyan ogaed na nagagan bon nawa (slight stomach ache
which did not last long) _____
 54. *Aden bun timpu a nalugat ataw da mangapia I ginawa nengka sa galebekan?*
Nalugat na den normal bo enan salkame (Of course I get tired)
 55. *Upama uway, na kanu baintu?* Kanu 1999 pan *Ngin I punan nin?* Kasi o
luka na malugat (tired only) (yes, in 1999)
 56. *Aden bun nanggula nengka a nakadsendit ka u enduken ka nakaamung ka sa*
niya a gelebekan? Insha Allah na Dala (no regrets for having joined the struggle)

 57. *Upama ka dala, na ngintu?* Kagina su kanJihad a galebek na mapia endo
simba Sa Allah (s.w.t.) (because Jihad is a good deed and it's a praise to Allah
(s.w.t.)
 58. *Upama ka uway, na enduken?* N.A.
 59. *Kailay nengka luna makagilek I leka a niya a gelebekan?* Dili bon (No)
 60. *Ngin I manggula nengka u di ka enggalebek?* Dal ka volunteer kami
 61. *Ngin I manggula nengka u malimban ka kanu galebekan nengka?* Dala bon
ka limban bon mambo na (none)
 62. *Panun su mga tagapeda nengka a mga wata sa galebekanm ngini manggula*
nilan u di nilan enggalebeken su galebek ilan? Dala (none)
 63. *Aden bun sukay nengka siya ba?* N.A. (not paid, this is voluntary job)
 64. *Upama ka aden na panun I ukita kapedsukay sa leka (kulta, ataw ngin, uman*
gay, uman padian, uman saulan, ped pan?) N. A.
 65. *Upama ka di na enduken ka sukay nengka?* N.A.
 66. *Upama ka kulta I ipedsukay sa leka, na ngi papedtagan nengka sa kulta*
nengka? N.A.
 67. *Ngin I penggulan nengka u di ka penggalebek siya?* Lu ako sa school.

V. *Kapagawida sa ped a taw.*

Panudtul ka kun sa laki u panun I kapagawida nu sa niya a mgga taw. Mapia bun I kabpagawida nu sa kanilan (kalinian nengka bun sulan, mapia bun silan Sa leka? (malata kapagawida) mana su di nengka silan kalinian, da bun silan sa leka, kepenggalebek bu I kapedtatagapeda nu) (To interviewer: write answers on spaces provided).

<i>Su mapulu nengka</i>	Mapia bun silan sa laki (they are good to me)
<i>Pagidsan engka a wata a sundalu</i>	Mapia bon (good, no problem)
<i>Matua a sundalu a kaped' engka sa galebek</i>	Mapia bon
<i>Su mga mimbru nu sundalu nu umpungan</i>	Mapia bon

68. *Su mga wata a pagidsan engka sa galebek an maya bun ba I kapagawida nilan kanu niya a mga taw.* Uway (yes)

VI. *Kailay sa galebek endu kapangagi:*

69. *Ngin ka siya ka penggalebek?* Endo ako makasurga, endo inisugo niya a galebek (I want to go to paradise and its Allah (s.w.t.) prevail this.

70. *Padtemu-temun ka na ya nengka tinumu I dikena ka siya makanggalebek? (Upama ka uway, na ngin I kalinian nengka a galebek, mangilay sa ped a galebek, magiskuwela, semugud kaped su mga pakat, ataw endang lu sa padian, ped pan: Dili, ka siya sa kanJihad o lillahi ta Allah na magagan e kasurgah na taw siya o lu ka sa eskuwela na kadodonya bo ento (No, I prefer Jihad because it will lead you to paradise)*

71. *Kalinian nengka bun u lu ka matatap sa iskwela?* Depende sa situation o dala giyera (depends on the situation, if there is no encounter)

72. *Upama ka maka-enrol ka, na ngin I mga kalilinian nengka gaid siya sa iskuwela, endu ngin menem I mga di nengka kalilian? Naka-enrol ako don ka pngage ako den. Kalinian ko e kataw bu, ya de ko kalinian na madakel pan e kabayadan. (I want to learn only and I dislike the many contribution*

73. *Ngin I kalinian nengka enggululan u egkatuwa ka den?* Makalilintad den, maka-independence Islamic state den (to attain peace, to attain an Independent Islamic state)

74. *Kalinian nengka bun a enggulan nu mga kaka a mama a wata nengka I maya ba a galebek?* Uway (yes)

75. *Upama ka uway na enduken?* Endo makasurga bon sila insha Allah (So they will also go to heaven, hopefully in the name of Allah)

76. *Upama ka dili, na enduken?* N.A.

VII. *Ebpangabungan endu paginagkay sa uyaguyag:*

77. *Ngin I ipegkagilek nengka gaid sa maya ba a galebek?* Dala bon man
(none, I don't fear anything)
78. *Upama ka padsasamin ka na pamin nengka bun ba I niya a galebek?*
Uway (yes)
79. *Upama ka uway, na enduken?* Siya na o ikhlas ka na magagan ka makasurga
(if you are no doubt or regrets in Jihad you may go to paradise.)
80. *Upama ka dili, na enduken?* N.A.
81. *Ngini mapanganganay nengka gaid a manggula nengka endu su mga*
tagapeda nengka a mga wata sa mauma a mga gay? Maka-Independence
Islamic State den sa magagan insha Allah (to attain an independent Islamic
state)

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE PHENOMENON OF CHILD SOLDIERS
AND THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT IN
CENTRAL AND WESTERN MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES**

Survey Questionnaire: English version
(For child soldiers)

I Profile of child respondent

1. Name (optional) _____
2. Age _____
3. Gender _____
4. Place of birth _____
5. Ethnic group _____
6. Are you going to school? _____ If yes, what grade?
7. If no, have you ever been enrolled? _____
8. If yes, up to what grade? _____
9. How old were you when you stopped schooling?
10. Why did you stop attending
school? _____
 - a. (Reasons)
11. Can you read?_(English/Arabic)_____ what level? _____
12. Can you write?_(English/Arabic)_____ what level? _____

II Living conditions and socio-economic situation of family

Living conditions

13. Where do you live? _____
14. With whom do you
live? _____

15. Have you always lived there? (If yes, proceed to question 18) _____
16. If not, where did you live before? _____
17. With whom did you live
before? _____
18. Why did you or your family
move? _____

19. Is your household richer or poorer or the same as the other families in your
community?

20. Who are the members of your family? (To interviewer: If R mentions siblings, be sure to get birth order, who are younger, or older than R, also include other members, like parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties, cousins, etc.) Please write answers on the table below)

Name of family member	Relationship to R	What does he/she do

21. Tell me about your relationship to them (E.g. they are good to me; they are bad to me; neutral, they don't care about me, etc.)_____

22. Has any of the child's immediate family (parents or guardians) died or left?

23. If parent has died, when?

24. If parent has left, when _____

25. Why did he/she

leave?_____

26. Where do you sleep?_____

27. How much sleep do you get each night or day? _____

28. Tell me about your home (what it is made of, how big it is, where it is located, etc, what appliances are in it, etc.)_____

29. Can your parents or guardians read and write? _____

30. In what language or dialect?_____

31. If not, reasons why they can't read or write_____

32. What is the occupation or major source of income of your parents/guardians?_____

33. Where do the members of your family go when they are sick or hurt?_____

34. Where are you brought when you are sick or hurt?_____

35. How often do your parents or guardians buy new clothing or wearing apparel for the members of your family?_____

III Working situation and conditions of Child Respondent

36. How old were you when you started as a soldier or member of the armed forces? _____
37. How long have you served as a soldier or a member of a military group? _____
38. What did you do before you became a soldier, or started bearing arms? _____
39. Why were you recruited as a child soldier? Why did you decide to join the armed group (for instance, MILF) How were you recruited as a child soldier? (Let child respondent describe the events or situations that got them into this type of work) _____

40. What do you do at work? (What is the child's specific assignment?, and what are his or her specific duties and responsibilities? _____

41. Do your adult companions at work do the same thing as you do? _____
42. If not, do they have different duties and responsibilities _____
43. Where do you do most of your work (or where are you assigned most of the time? _____
44. How many hours per day do you work? _____
45. Do you work in the morning, afternoon, or evening? _____
46. How many days per week do you work? _____
47. Do you work on weekdays, week-ends or both? _____
48. Do you work all year round or only during times when you are needed (like when there are intensive military operations, etc) _____

IV Hazards associated with work as soldier or member of armed forces

49. Since you started working as a member of this group, have you been hurt or sick?
50. If yes, when did this happen? _____
51. Can you tell me what happened? _____

52. Do you know of other children in your group getting sick or hurt at work?_____
53. If answer is yes, can you please tell me what happened to them?_____
54. Have you ever felt sick or tired while working?_____
55. If yes, when was this?_____Why did this happen?_____
56. Do you ever feel sad that you are involved in this type of work?_____
57. If no,
why?_____
58. If yes, why?_____
59. Do you think your work is dangerous?_____
60. If yes, why?_____
61. What happens if you don't work or refuse to work? _____
62. What happens if you commit a mistake in your work?_____
63. What about other children in your group, what happens to them if they don't work?_____
64. Are you paid for your services?_____
65. If yes, how are you paid? (in cash, in kind, per day, per week, per month, etc.)
66. If no, why aren't you paid?_____
67. If you are paid in cash, what do you do with the money that you earn?_____
68. What do you do when you are not working in this job?_____
-

V Relationships with other people

69. Tell me about your relationships with the following people. Do you have a good relationship with them(you like them, they are nice) a bad relationship (you don't like them, they are mean) or a neutral relationship with them (we just work together) (*To interviewer: write answers on spaces provided for*)

<i>Your immediate superior</i>	
<i>Your fellow child soldiers</i>	
<i>Adults that you work with (adult soldiers)</i>	
<i>The members of your armed forces</i>	

70. Do the other kids that you work with have similar relationships with these people?

VI Attitudes toward work and school

71. Why do you work in this job?_____
72. Would you prefer not to be working in this job? (if yes, what would he or she prefer to do: take another job, go to school, hang out with friends, sell goods in the market, etc.)_____
73. Would you like to spend more time in school?_____
74. If ever you have enrolled in school, what did you like most in school?_What did you like least?_____
75. What do you want to do when you are older?_____
76. Would you want your other male siblings (older and younger) to do the same thing as you have done? (get involved in this job?)_____
77. If yes, why?_____
78. If no, why?_____

VII Fears and aspirations in life

79. What do you fear most in this
job?_____

80. If given a choice, would you have chosen this type of
work?_____

81. If yes,
why?_____

82. If no,
why_____

83. What do you aspire for yourself and for your fellow children in the
future?_____

**RAPID ASSESSMENT ON THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN
WARFARE OR IN ARMED CONFLICT SITUATION**

Survey Questionnaire: Maguindanaon version

(Para sa wata a sundalu)

I. Profile of child respondent.

1. Ngala (optional): _____
2. Umul: _____
3. Babay o mama: _____
4. Lugal a pinbatan: _____
5. Tribu: _____
6. Ebpangagi ka bun saguna? _____ U uway na ngin a gradu? _____
7. U dikena na nakapangagi ka bun? _____
8. U uway na taman sa ngin a gradu? _____
9. Ngin I umul engka sa kinaenda nengka mangagi? _____
10. Ngintu ka naketelen ka mangagi? _____
11. Makabatia ka bun? _____ (English?Arabic) _____ Ngini pangkat' in?

12. Mataw ka semulat? _____ (English?Arabic) _____ Ngini pangkat' in?

II. Living conditions and socio-economic situation of family.

Egkatamanan nu kabpaguyag-uyag

13. Endaw ka pegkaleben? _____
14. Entain I pebkalebenan nengka? _____
15. Nauget den I kapegkakaleben nengka siya ba? Uway (if yes, proceed to question 18)

16. U dikena na endaw andang pegkaleben?

17. Ngintu ka nakaawa su pamilya nengka lu?

18. Su pamilya nengka na madtalu nengka I kawasa ataw miskin
ataw egkadsalilidan denmun siya kanu dalepa nu? _____
19. Edtalu ka sin u ngin I betad a kabpagawiday nu (Mana mapia bun
sin, di aku nilan kalilinian, mapia bun, da patatagan nilan sa laki, etc.)

20. Ngintu aden minatay ataw minawa a mimbru nu pamilya?

21. U ya minatay na su mga lukes, na kanu? _____

22. U minawa su mga lukes, na kanu I kinawa nilan? _____
23. Ngintu ka minawa sekanin? _____
24. Endaw ka ebpagiganen/Pedtulg? _____
25. Pila kauras I ipedtulg nengka sa uman malamag/magabi? _____
26. Panudtul ka kun u ngin I buntal a walay nu? (mana ngin I mga igagama nin, ngi kasela nin, endaw matun, endu ped Pn, ngin I mg appliances nu, ped pan). _____
27. Mataw bun matia endu semulat su mga lukes nengka ? _____
28. Ngin a basa I katawan nilan semualt endu matia? _____
29. U di, na ngintu ka di silan mataw matia? _____
30. Ngin I masela a pantialian nu mga lukes nengka? _____
31. Endaw tatap ebpagangay su mga lukes engka u pendalu ataw egkapalian silan? _____
32. Endaw ka nilan ebpanggiten u pedsakit ataw egkapalian ka? _____
33. Ngin I kalibpes a kabpamasa nu mga lukes nengka sa bagu a balekas? _____

III. Egkambebetad u kapenggalebek nu wata a ebpangingidsan:

34. Ngin I umul nengka kanu kinaludsu nengka edsundalu? _____
35. Ngin den I kinauget a kinaamung nengka sa kadsundalu? _____
36. Ngin I pinggulengka sa kinaludsu nengka kumapet sa sinapang? _____
37. Panun I kinpagakat sa leka sa kaamung nengka sa kadsundalu? _____
38. Ngin I leka a galebekan? _____
39. Aden bun mga tagapeda nengka a matuwa kanu niya ba a galebekan nengka? _____
40. Udala na, ngintu sakabias ikanilan a galebekan? _____
41. Endaw ka tatap pakanbetad, ataw penggulan su leka a galebekan? _____
42. Pila kauras I kapenggalebek engka sa uman gay? _____
43. Ngin I mga uras a kapenggalebek engka, mapita, malulem, magabi? _____
44. Pilay gay kanu sakapadian I kapenggelbek engka? _____
45. Penggalebek ka bun Sa uman gay den ataw uman kapupus a padian? _____
46. Kanu salagun na penggulan nengka den ba niya a galebek engka, ataw uman ba nasisisa, mana su kapame lusud u militari? _____

IV. *Hazards associated with work as soldier or member of armed forces:*

47. *Iniganat kanu kinaamung engka sa niya a lumpukan, na midsakit, ataw masakitan ka bun?* _____

48. *Upama ka uway, ne endaw natabu?* _____

49. *Mapakay a mapanudtul engka sin?* _____

50. *Aden bun katawan negka a pagidsan nengka a wata a midsakit bun ataw nasakitan siya sa penggalebekan?* _____

51. *Upama ka aden na mapakay a mapanudtul engka sin u panuni nanggula nilan Bantu?* _____

52. *Aden bun timpu a nalugat ataw da mangapia I ginawa nengka sa galebekan?* _____

53. *Upama uway, na kanu baintu?* _____ *Ngin I punan nin?* _____

54. *Aden bun nanggula nengka a nakadsendit ka u enduken ka nakaamung ka sa niya a gelebekan?* _____

55. *Upama ka dala, na ngintu?* _____

56. *Upama ka uway, na enduken?* _____

57. *Kailay nengka luna makagilek I leka a niya a gelebekan?* _____

58. *Ngin I manggula nengka u di ka enggalebek?* _____

59. *Ngin I manggula nengka u malimban ka kanu galebekan nengka?* _____

60. *Panun su mga tagapeda nengka a mga wata sa galebekanm ngini manggula nilan u di nilan enggalebekan su galebek ilan?* _____

61. *Aden bun sukay nengka siya ba?* _____

62. *Upama ka aden na panun I ukita kapedasukay sa leka (kulta, ataw ngin, uman gay, uman padian, uman saulan, ped pan?)* _____

63. *Upama ka di na enduken ka sukay nengka?* _____

64. *Upama ka kulta I ipedsukay sa leka, na ngi papedtagan nengka sa kulta nengka?* _____

65. *Ngin I penggulan nengka u di ka penggalebek siya?* _____

V. 66. *Kapagawida sa ped a taw.*

Panudtul ka kun sa laki u panun I kapagawida nu sa niya a mgga taw. Mapia bun I kabpagawida nu sa kanilan (kalinian nengka bun sulan, mapia bun silan Sa leka? (malata kapagawida) mana su di nengka silan kalinian, da bun silan sa leka, kepenggalebek bu I kapedtatagapeda nu)

<i>Su mapulu nengka</i>	
<i>Pagidsan engka a wata a sundalu</i>	
<i>Matua a sundalu a kaped' engka sa galebek</i>	
<i>Su mga mimbru nu sundalu nu umpungan</i>	

67. *Su mga wata a pagidsan engka sa galebek an maya bun ba I kapagawida nilan kanu niya a mga taw.* _____

VI. *Kailay sa galebek endu kapangagi:*

68. *Ngin ka siya ka penggalebek ?* _____
 69. *Padtemu-temun ka na ya nengka tinumu I dikena ka siya makanggalebek? (Upama ka uway, na ngin I kalinian nengka a galebek, mangilay sa ped a galebek, magiskuwela, semugud kaped su mga pakat, ataw endagang lu sa padian, ped pan:* _____

70. *Kalinian nengka bun u lu ka matatap sa iskwela?* _____
 71. *Upama ka maka-enrol ka, na ngin I mga kalilinian nengka gaid siya sa iskuwela, endu ngin menem I mga di nengka kalilian?* _____

72. *Ngin I kalinian nengka enggululan u egkatuwa ka den?* _____

73. *Kalinian nengka bun a enggulan nu mga kaka a mama a wata nengka I maya ba a galebek?* _____

74. *Upama ka uway na enduken?* _____

75. *Upama ka dili, na enduken?* _____

VII. *Ebpangabungan endu paginangkay sa uyaguyag:*

76. *Ngin I ipegkagilek nengka gaid sa maya ba a galebek?* _____

77. *Upama ka padsasamiliin ka na pamiliin nengka bun ba I niya a galebek?*

78. *Upama ka uway, na enduken?* _____

79. *Upama ka dili, na enduken?* _____

80. *Ngini mapanganganay nengka gaid a manggula nengka endu su mga tagapeda nengka a mga wata sa mauma a mga gay?* _____