

Philippines Australia Solidarity Group NEWSLETTER

(Queensland Edition)

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CHURCH CONFERENCES TO BE HELD IN AUSTRALIA

A series of conferences about the situation of Philippine churches are to take place in Australian capital cities from October 13 to November 12, 1989. The Brisbane conference is scheduled for three days from 3 - 5 November.

The conferences aim to foster an exchange between visiting Filipino church people and the ordinary Australian worshiper in the pew; to understand and discuss the role of the church in the Philippines today through hearing the stories of Filipino church people at first hand.

By providing accurate information about the work of church people and church agencies both in Australia and the Philippines, they hope to counter the misrepresentation of and attack upon this work which has taken place, particularly in the media. The conferences occur at a pertinent time as the church sector in the Philippines is under severe attack. In 1988 alone there were 181 major human rights violations against church workers and 95 victims in the first five months of this year. Many of the human rights violations against church members have taken the form of killings by way of hacking, salvaging, shooting and massacres.

The church in the Philippines is being attacked for supporting the peoples' struggle for basic human rights and equitable distribution of land, and for criticising the government's human rights record and the economic exploitation of women, peasants, workers and children. The Aquino government attempts to portray any person supporting basic human rights as either a communist or a communist sympathizer.

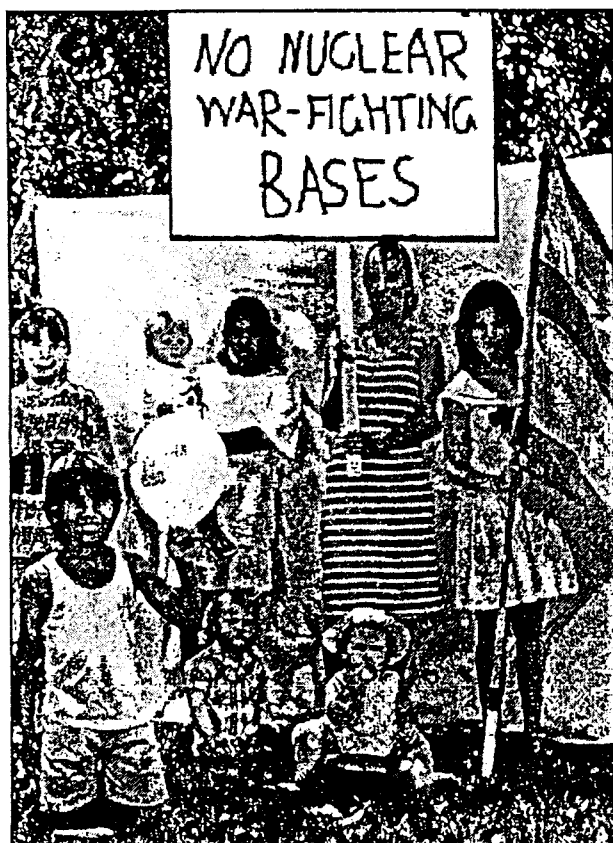
The Philippine churches and religious workers look forward to building solidarity links with Australian church people in order to break through the lack of critical reporting by the media of the real plight of church workers and their communities. They urge the setting up of support systems, especially at a local level, to further the development of ecumenism through coming to know, understanding and acting to help each other.

In July, Joy Balazo of the Human Rights Desk of the Uniting Church, Sydney, visited the various denominations in Brisbane to assist in the formation of a committee that will facilitate the visit of the Filipino church people. Any person interested in helping with the work of this committee or who wish to know the date of the conference in their state may telephone Terry Fisher on (h) 846 1607 or (w) 844 9646.

**CLOSE NURRUNGAR
NATIONAL PROTEST
SEPTEMBER 23 -
OCTOBER 1, 1989**

SEE PAGES 2 & 3 FOR DETAILS

CLOSE NURRUNGAR



NATIONAL PROTEST September 23 — October 1, 1989

NURRUNGAR is a military communications base located near Woomera in South Australia, about 500 km north-west of Adelaide. It has been operating since 1971; late last year the Australian government renewed its lease for another 10 years. The Anti Bases Campaign is organising a major campaign in 1989 to have the base removed.

• **Nuclear War-Fighting:** Nurrungar receives and processes information on

Soviet missile launches and nuclear tests from US satellites, and so involves Australia in preparations for nuclear war.

• **Star Wars:** Information gathered at Nurrungar has been used in US plans for a space-based nuclear war system, and Nurrungar will be part of the Star Wars network.

• **Nuclear Target:** Nurrungar is an acknowledged target in the event of a nuclear conflict.

• **No Peaceful Role:** With the launch of a new satellite systems in the early 1990's any arms control role Nurrungar may possibly have played will be redundant.

• **Sovereignty:** Australia has little control and knowledge of Nurrungar's role, thus undermining our independence.

• **Land Rights:** Nurrungar is part of a land claim by the traditional owners of the area, the Kukutha people.

• **Cost:** Available figures suggest we contribute \$30 million a year to the running of Nurrungar.

• **Public Opposition:** Latest opinion polls show 51% of Australians do not want US communications bases with a nuclear role.

The Anti Bases Campaign will be organising protests and a public education programme during 1989. The campaign will focus on the week of September 23 - October 1.

* **September 23-24:** Nationwide protests against Nurrungar;

* **September 25-29:** Small-scale actions at Nurrungar and activities in Adelaide;

* **September 30 - October 1:** Mass action at the gates of Nurrungar.

Regional contact for Queensland: People for Nuclear Disarmament (Qld), PO Box 238, North Quay, Brisbane. Tel: (07) 229 7982.

(The above information reprinted by courtesy of the Close Nurrungar National Protest leaflet)

**AUSTRALIAN PEACE MOVEMENT LINKS
WITH ASIA PACIFIC PEACE AND
DEVELOPMENT CAMPAIGN**

In January of this year around 200 people from 15 nations in the Asia Pacific region converged on the Philippines to take part in the inaugural peace brigade. The peace brigade was the first action in the Asia-Pacific Peace and Development Campaign which has as its aim the dismantling of over 500 foreign military bases.

The ongoing campaign seeks to develop regional co-operation between those groups throughout the area seeking genuine peace, justice and self-determination for its peoples. The campaign recognises that our struggles are interdependent, it is not sufficient for the large US bases in the Philippines to be merely shuffled within the region.

There are many reasons why the Philippines was chosen as an initial focus for the campaign. Nowhere can the effects of out-of-control US militarization be viewed so starkly.

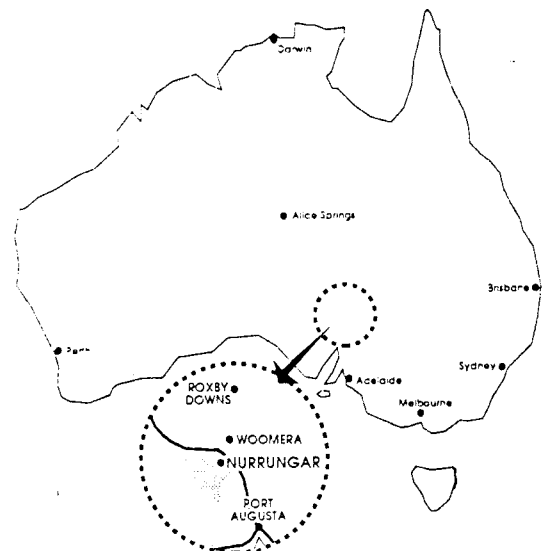
The Philippines hosts, among others, Subic Naval Base and Clark Airfield, the largest bases outside mainland USA. These bases are of considerable strategic importance and have been springboards for American intervention in the Vietnam and Korean wars and, more recently, in the Persian Gulf. Nuclear weapons are stored in these bases in flagrant contradiction of the Philippines 'nuclear free' constitution. The towns around the bases are notorious for their 'hospitality bars'. Desperate poverty lures girls commonly young as 15 into prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS are the legacy of this 'service' to Uncle Sam. The massive military budgets in the Philippines take directly from the poor.

The military consumes twice as much of the budget as entire funds available for education. However, most disturbing of all is the clear link between the presence of the bases, the need to protect US economic interests and the savage escalation of violence against the Filipino people.

Human rights violations have not ceased since Aquino came to power. On the contrary, poverty and repression are worsening. In 1988 two youths were attacked and one murdered while putting up anti-bases posters. Assassination, arbitrary arrest, disappearances, harassment and torture are all part of the 'total war' policy of the Aquino government. There is evidence that US personnel and equipment have been involved in this 'total war' of anti-insurgency operations. The Armed Forces of the Philippines with CIA backing have supported and trained right-wing vigilantes who terrorize the people and are part of a US low intensity conflict strategy.

Australia is guilty of tacitly approving the atrocities committed by sending \$1.6 million in military aid. This aid consists of hardware sales and donations, joint exercises and the training of Filipino officers. This training, which takes place at centres such as Canunga, can be utilised in anti-insurgency activities enabling a more effective slaughter. The Asia-Pacific Peace and Development Campaign calls for an end to Australian aid to the Philippines military, to the presence of foreign military and intelligence bases and to foreign exploitation.

Visitors from the Philippines will be attending the national protest to CLOSE NURRUNGAR and the Philippines Australia Solidarity Group is proud to be nationally affiliated to the Australian Anti Bases Campaign Coalition.



THE TASADAY HOAX AND THE T'BOLI PEOPLE OF SOUTH COTABATO

THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXTRACT FROM THE STATEMENT OF T'BOLI PEOPLE OF SOUTH COTABATO PRESENTED BY THE LUMAD MINDANAO DELEGATION AT SESSION 7 OF THE UNITED NATIONS WORKING GROUP FOR INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS, GENEVA, 1-5 AUGUST, 1988

"The Aquino government, through the Office of Southern Cultural Communities (OSCC), continues to perpetuate the primitiveness of the Elizalde/PANAMIN-created 'Tasaday' in South Cotabato province of Mindanao. The presidential pronouncement of their authenticity in November 1988 masks the reality of manipulation and militarization of the T'boli in the sordid portrayal of the 'Tasaday' story. Extensive and serious expropriation of the T'boli homelands and the intimidation of those exposing the hoax is, in fact, at the core of the controversy.

"Massive Visayan and Ilocano colonial invasion brought the frontier population to one half million by 1970. Invasion marginalized the T'boli to the production of commodities in the lowlands which became dominated by migrants and transnational agribusiness but they continued to exercise control over their resources and produce their own subsistence in their remaining mountain homeland, despite logging concessionaires (BASILCO, MILUDECO, B&B, Habaluyas, Hofer and Montalban) which have been operating since the 1960's. Manuel Elizalde started competing on the resource frontier by establishing, through PANAMIN, the 'Tasaday' reserve in 1972 which eliminated B&B logging and ignored 15,000 Barrio Ned T'boli living in the reserve. The 'Tasaday' hoax proved to be PANAMIN's most successful forced primitivism scheme. The reserve remains protected, not as homeland of a handful of T'boli recruited as 'Tasaday' actors, but for who controls appropriation of the resources. Gold prospecting is replacing logging as the latest assault on T'boli resources and the entire reserve is ringed in leases. Militarization, masterminded by Elizalde, is forcing T'boli off the reserve where they are being hamletted into Blit.

"Some journalists and academics have trivialized the controversy by only pronouncing on the alleged primitiveness of the 'Tasaday'. The scandal is entirely beyond what they speak, eat or wear. Those who expose the hoax are summarily labeled as 'Communists' and, more than ever before, the intimidation has spread to South Cotabato residents, especially in Maitum. This statement is issued to provide a measure of international recognition for the beleaguered individuals involved. Meanwhile, the T'boli are networking with other indigenous peoples in the Philippines to assert their right to self-determination and control over their ancestral domain. They welcome, through Lumad Mindanao, support for and alliance with their struggle."

INTERVIEW WITH MA ELENA ANG PHILIPPINE NEWS AND FEATURES JOURNALIST

Ma Elena Ang is a journalist with Philippine News and Features (PNF), an independent news agency based in Manila. As a political prisoner and the subject of a well documented human rights violation case, Ma Elena survived torture and detentions over a ten year period. During a recent visit to Brisbane she talked to Kerry Thatcher about Filipina women in Australia, media in the Philippines, and her work with PNF.

Ma Elena started work with PNF in the latter half of 1986. "PNF rose from the ashes of another alternative medium, the Philippine Signs. So far an alternative news agency has been very effective because it is being subscribed to by most of the mainstream papers in Manila and even has exchange subscriptions with some other international networks such as the Third World News and Features. Consequently, some of our articles are printed in the US, European and Australian press."

Rather than compromising content, style has to be adjusted in order to get articles printed in the mainstream media. Ma Elena said that Manila dailies are inundated with columnists and tend "to cover issues that are inane, issues that are light". To publish more serious and obviously threatening issues, PNF submits "popular writing" to the mainstream press, writing up serious issues in the form of feature articles.

"We take this as a challenge. We've pioneered a lot of issues - the issues of environment, women, street children, the presence or potential absence of the US military bases, land reforms and labour issues".

On a contentious issue in this country, the Australian perception of Filipina women, she said:

"The image that's created is that most Filipina women who come here, come as 'mail order brides'".

The Philippines is a third world country. Filipina women who export themselves, do so to escape widespread poverty where 80% of the 60 million people live well below the poverty line. Intensified militarisation has pushed increasing numbers of people

into cities to escape the dislocation caused by bombings, harassment and food shortages in rural areas. In the cities however, there are less jobs for women than there are for men - "they still receive wages that are below the wages received by men, although a lot may be more educated than the men". Employment for unskilled women may be found in the red light districts of Manila, or Olongopo and Angeles, cities which surround US military bases.

According to Ma Elena, it's not surprising that many Filipina women see marriage to a white man from the West as an escape from the Philippines. She pointed out problems that Filipina women encounter when they leave to marry the 'American Dream' ... "often they are caught in an imprisonment of isolation, of being alone with their husbands or sometimes by themselves, alone here in a very strange country in which they have to overcome a lot of things about the culture and build up a relationship with a man they hardly know". Difficulties here include obligations, often financial, to an extended family left behind in the Philippines, racism from the Anglo-Australian community and, "because they have the reputation of being mail-order brides, the Filipino community here looks down on them". "Filipina women are here not necessarily for love but to get out of the trap of poverty".

There are certainly Filipina-Australian marriages not characterised by the sexual-politico bargaining chips of western male colonial power. Yet the consequences of modern colonialist actions and attitudes predominate Ma Elena's analysis of the position of Filipina women living in Australia.

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"I think a third world situation is really incomparable to any first or second world situation".

Ma Elena also targets colonialism in her analysis of media work in the Philippines. "During the negotiations on the US bases last year, it was exposed that there was an aid memo that came from the US ambassador to the Filipino government stipulating that there should be 'a management of media' during the bases negotiations and that there should be limited press access to the negotiation talks". Media in the Philippines has a long history of 'management'.

When Ma Elena first qualified as a journalist in 1976 she did not practise conventional journalism for ten years. Those were the final ten years of the Marcos regime in which Manila boasted only three major papers, all controlled by Marcos and his cronies. She could not be satisfied with just being a hack writer, or writing down the press releases from the Presidential office. "As a matter of principle I did not practise journalism (as) there was not really any chance to get into real journalism." Instead she used her skills to write and agitate for Task Force Detainees - an organisation which monitors human rights violations in the Philippines and supports the survivors, ex-political detainees such as Ma Elena herself.

According to Ma Elena, media and the conditions of production have not changed since the advent of Cory Aquino. There is more media, both electronic and print media instruments, but ownership has reverted to the few wealthy families who owned media pre-Marcos. In the interests of big business, the print media is open to a range of censorship measures including a call from Aquino's Defense Secretary, General Fidel Ramos, for advertisers to boycott newspapers which publish anti-government sentiments.

"The President herself has called on print media to 'please paint the more beautiful and positive side of government'".

At the same time, the Television and Movie Review Board exercises prior restraint on politically sensitive material. A recent documentary about the urban poor was banned, presumably because one informant claimed that evictions under the Aquino government were more frequent and brutal.

As a mechanism of control, censorship reaches an extreme when journalists are harassed, detained, tortured and/or killed. This scenario has worsened under the Aquino government. Ma Elena states that, while under Marcos one could safely assume that the military were responsible for killing dissident journalists. Under Aquino, responsibility is shared by the military, armed anti-communist vigilante groups (recently endorsed by the President), or other right wing fundamentalist groups. In the Philippines "we have the scenario that is occurring right now in Latin American countries".

"In the past two years, 30 journalists throughout the world have been killed while working - 17 were from the Philippines".

Most of those killed were exposing graft and corruption committed by public officials and businessmen, or human rights violations. Task Force Detainees reports that the same number of political detainees released by Cory Aquino in 1986 are now back in prison - 600 political prisoners plus many more massacres, 'disappearances' and internal refugees from rural military activity.

But there is more to censorship than using commercial or militarist methods to impede or stop the flow of information. Ma Elena argues that the Philippine military inundates the print media with disinformation and misinformation. There is a well organised and high profile PR machine which contributes to "most of our papers being flooded with stories coming from the military - real stories are flooded out". Mechanisms of disinformation were used during the US bases negotiations in 1988. The flow of information is further distorted as media reaches only those who can afford it anyway. It's a western assumption that everyone gets to read a paper, hear the radio or watch TV.

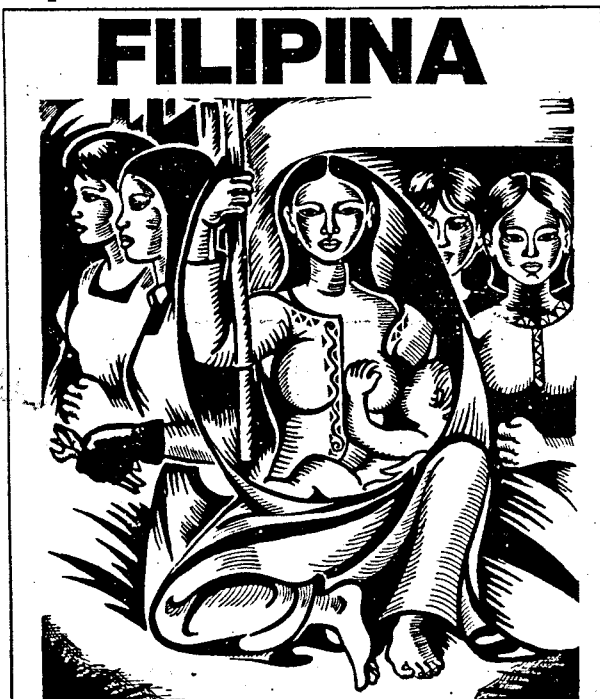
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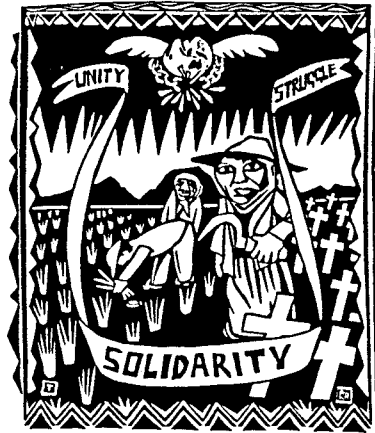
In the Philippines "you couldn't expect a poor peasant to buy a newspaper even once a week ... rarely would you see a farmer who knows what is happening in the (whole) country - there are areas in the country where they don't even know that the government has changed hands".

Ma Elena believes that this distortion is exacerbated by the colonialist attitudes of western countries to third world aid. First and second world notions of aid are basically economist - access to information is not typically seen as an aid priority. Yet "information or knowledge contributes to the overall development of a people, especially in a third world country like the Philippines". Without adequate information most Filipinos are disempowered. There can be no forum for debate on major issues affecting the development of their country, let alone any unified thought or consensus when people have no access to mediums of information such as the print media.

According to Ma Elena the international community is kept even more ill informed about the Philippines: After Cory Aquino came to power in 1986, "people said democracy has been restored to the Philippines - but not many people know that things have grown worse ... we still don't know what it is to be sovereign, what it is to be independent".



AGAINST ALL ODDS



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The Continuing Struggle of Workers in the Philippines

"AGAINST ALL ODDS" is a report based on the experiences and reflections of the Australian trade unionists who participated in the Philippine International Solidarity Affair (ISA) in April/May 1988. Co-ordinated by Australia Asia Worker Links (AAWL) and hosted in the Philippines by Kilusang Mayo Uno - May First Movement (KMU), the Australian delegation spent two weeks in the country. The ISA incorporated a conference, exposures, report-back sessions and meetings with some major labour organisations.

AAWL, a trade union based organisation, is committed to developing solidarity links between workers and trade unions in Australia and genuine workers' movements in Asia. In 36 pages the report shares the exposures of the ten delegates to the condition of workers in five regions of the Philippines including Atlas Mines in Cebu, Lepadaya Banana Plantation in Davao, Mindanao and the mining community of Coto.

Packed with facts and figures giving the 1988 economic indicators for the future and a profile of the Philippine workforce, the report explains the structure of the Philippine TU movement, government policies and attitudes to union rights, and the workers' struggles to combat harassment, repression and vigilante death squads. With photographs and articles on US bases, health and safety, and women workers, it presents a picture of life under Aquino's first 1,000 days in the Presidential Office through the eyes of Filipino and Australian workers.

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE ALWAYS WELCOMED

The Philippines Australia Solidarity Group (PASG) Queensland is part of a national organisation which has offices in all state capitals and in Canberra. It brings together people of diverse backgrounds and includes both Australians and Filipinos living in Australia. As well, it has close links with Filipino Community Organisations in Australia and the Philippines. Among its members there are people with extensive Philippine experience with information on trade unions, the role of the church (Christian and Non-Christian), women's organisations, industrial working conditions, peasant organisations, rural working conditions, teachers working conditions and the conditions of indigenous peoples in the Philippines. PASG in Queensland provides resource material such as slides and videos as well as speakers.

The objectives of PASG are to generate support in Australia for all Filipino organisations working for genuine democracy, freedom and sovereignty; to end Australian military aid to the Philippines and to oppose all forms of foreign intervention in the affairs of the Filipino people.

PASG holds regular meetings on the second Tuesday of each month in the Albion Peace Centre, 102 Macdonald Road, Windsor. For further information contact David Hyndman, Ph.377 4029 or Terry Fisher, Ph.844 9641.

ATTENTION: PASG Co-ordinator
P.O. Box 174
St. Lucia 4067
Queensland

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- receive other Philippine information materials.
- make a donation of \$..... for solidarity work.

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