

Focus-on-Trade is a regular electronic bulletin providing updates and analysis of trends in regional and world trade and finance, with an emphasis on analysis of these trends from an integrative, interdisciplinary viewpoint that is sensitive not only to economic issues, but also to ecological, political, gender and social issues. Your contributions and comments are welcome.

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In this issue of Focus on Trade, we report on the just completed Peace Mission to the southern Philippine regions of Zamboanga and Basilan. The fourteen-member team, which spent five days in the field and released its preliminary findings (see below) in Manila on 27 March, included human rights activists, parliamentarians, journalists and academics from Asia, Europe and the US.

The Peace Mission was organised by the Akbayan Citizen's Action Party (Philippines), Focus on the Global South (Thailand) and the Institute for Popular Democracy (Philippines). We would like to thank 11.11.11 (Belgium), Oxfam Solidarity (Belgium), Novib (Netherlands), InterPares (Canada) and Oxfam Hong Kong for supporting this project. The team members are listed at the end of the preliminary report.

As a footnote to this report, the CIA last week cited as "evidence" of the link between the Abu Sayyaf and al Qaeda, the fact the kidnapers always ask for the ransom in US dollars!

Also in this issue, Nicola Bullard looks at the disagreements between the major shareholders leading-up to the Spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank.

But first, Neta Golan, an Israeli and one of forty international activists who have occupied Yasser Arafat's besieged office in Ramallah as a "human shield" asks how many international laws does Israel need to break before the United Nations demands a full and immediate Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank?

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THE WORLD JUST WATCHES

by Neta Golan

For the international peace observers currently holed up within Yasser Arafat's presidential compound - myself among them - it is not Israeli actions but the inaction of the international community that has most shocked us.

Inside the pock-marked building surrounded by Israeli tanks and snipers, there is one question on everyone's minds: How many international laws does Israel need to break before the United Nations demands a full and immediate Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank?

The list of violations is reaching unprecedented levels, even for a conflict with a long history of ugly behavior on both sides. Collective punishment is illegal under international law, but Israel has now escalated from interrupting food shipments to shutting off water to the Palestinian city of Ramallah, endangering the lives of 120,000 people. The shelling of Palestinian civilian structures such as power plants, schools and sewage facilities is occurring at an alarming rate. Unarmed civilians are being killed daily.

There are also growing reports of Israeli troops raiding hospitals and firing on ambulances and journalists. These are grave breaches of international conventions.

Anthony Shadid, a correspondent for The Boston Globe, was shot on Sunday as he walked away from an interview in our building. The area, under full Israeli control, was quiet and there was no crossfire. Shadid was wearing the required signs on his back and front indicating that he was with the official press. Soon after he arrived at a hospital, Israeli troops raided it with machine guns drawn. When he was subsequently transferred for

further medical treatment, his ambulance came under fire from Israeli soldiers manning a checkpoint.

Israel is making a mockery of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the founding document of international human rights law, and by its tacit acceptance, the United Nations is severely eroding its credibility in the region and beyond.

Those of us inside the presidential compound need help desperately - but not half as much as those on the outside who are facing the full brunt of the mass round-ups and house-to-house raids. The situation cannot deteriorate much further. Medical supplies have run out. Food is scarce.

Pressure from abroad is essential. The presence of international "human shields" throughout the occupied territories has been very important in limiting the indiscriminate nature of Israeli military actions.

Nothing short of a UN demand for a full withdrawal to the 1967 UN recognized borders, however, will succeed in restoring calm and opening the way for peace negotiations. Simply pulling the troops out of the recently invaded regions will not suffice. In the compound we are left wondering, not without fear, whether the international community will allow the permanent expansion of the already illegal occupation and the exile if not assassination of the Palestinian leader.

* Neta Golan, an Israeli, is among the 40 international peace observers occupying Yasser Arafat's besieged office. This comment, which she wrote with Ian Urbina, an associate editor of the Washington-based magazine Middle East Report, was contributed to the International Herald Tribune.

THE PUPPET MASTER SHOWS HIS HAND

By Nicola Bullard*

You could almost hear the yelp when the US treasury yanked the IMF's chain last week.

On 1 April IMF deputy managing director Ann Krueger told Washington's Institute for International Economics that she supported the creation a "single international judicial entity" to oversee and arbitrate debt restructuring of bankrupt governments.

The very next day, John Taylor, the international under-secretary at the US treasury, disagreed. "The most practical and broadly acceptable reform," he said, "would be to have sovereign borrowers and their creditors put a package of new clauses in the debt contracts." In other words, the US is willing to go as far as collective action clauses in bonds, but not a step further. This is a public setback for Krueger who has been shipping her ideas around governments, lawyers and investors for several months. Maybe she just forgot to ask Paul O'Neill, or maybe it's a well-choreographed exposition of the already limited terms of debate. Whatever the game plan, any reforms along the lines proposed by Krueger would require a change to the IMF constitution which, in turn, requires an 85 per cent majority vote. As luck would have it, the US controls 17 per cent of the votes.

Broadly, Krueger's proposal is to establish a set of binding international rules on debt restructuring that could override national courts. These rules would allow the establishment of a "single international judicial entity" that would "oversee disputes and oversee voting" in sovereign bankruptcy and debt restructuring negotiations. IMF officials suggest that the "entity" could be modeled on the WTO

disputes panel. Such an approach would give the IMF a quasi-legal status overseeing the establishment and implementation of binding international rules. Given the current balance of power within the IMF the resulting framework is most likely to be biased in favour of the creditors and could seriously undermining national sovereignty. What's more the mere suggestion that it would be modeled on the WTO, where the processes and rules are dictated by the major powers, should set alarm bells ringing.

The IMF proposal is not progressive and portends an even greater concentration of power in the Fund. Although the European Union supports the IMF proposal, the US is clearly willing to use its weight to sink the initiative because it prefers a laissez faire approach and because it doesn't want the IMF to assume a life of its own. In fact, strong sentiments must have been stirred in the US Treasury because it is usually more discreet when issuing its directives to the Fund. But, it's a useful reminder to see the puppet master's hand from time to time.

CAUGHT BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

Deep divisions between the World Bank, the EU and the US are also coming to the surface in the great "loans versus grants" debate. The splits first appeared at last year's G7 meeting in Genoa when Bush strode into town announcing that the US wanted to see the World Bank use up to 50 per cent of its \$6 billion annual outlay for grants to the poorest countries. Currently, the level is about one per cent.

World Bank president James Wolfensohn and the EU reject the idea, saying that unless the US is committed to dramatically

increasing its contributions such a plan would bankrupt the Bank. The EU has also put forward the strangely Calvinistic argument that paying interest "instills discipline" among borrowers and lenders. What is not stated, by either the Bank or the EU (for obvious reasons of good taste) is that they fear a reduction in tied-loans would reduce their power to dictate the economic policies of poor and low-income countries. In contrast, others – such as Jubilee South — believe that the US proposal would simply give the Bank even more leverage to impose conditions because poor countries would jump through any old hoop to get free money. At first glance, this does not seem convincing because borrowing countries are jumping through the hoops already and pay interest for the pleasure. However, if the ideas of Lerrick and Meltzer (see below) were implemented, they may be proved right.

Wolfensohn doesn't like the idea because he fears that increasing the grants portfolio would eventually bankrupt the Bank and reduce their policy leverage. But he is trapped by his need for the political patronage of the US treasury (and besides, who's going to get access to all that lovely new money that Bush promised in Monterrey).

Despite the poor hearing in Genoa, the US keeps pushing the proposal. When Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill raised it at the IIE in February this year, he said that the World Bank had "driven poor countries into a ditch" by lending money for projects to fight poverty rather than making grants (New York Times, 21 February).

So far though, the US proposal, as articulated by Bush and O'Neill, has been long on rhetoric and short on detail. However the

clue to what the US treasury has in mind may lie in a recent paper entitled 'Grants: a better way to deliver aid' by Adam Lerrick and Alan Meltzer (of the Meltzer report). (1)

Based on a briefing note (and not the paper itself) their proposal seems to be a cunning mechanism for liberalising services in developing countries via grants. The bottom line is that social service programs eligible for grants, such as education and health, would be put out to tender for competitive bids from both local and foreign public and private providers. Such an approach would segue very neatly into the WTO GATS negotiations and raise the bar of aid conditionality to unprecedented levels. Perhaps this is what the WTO and the World Bank means by "policy coherence."

But the US administration's basic proposition (while we await the details) has merit.

Poor countries would be absolutely better off with much greater access to free and unconditional money so they can guarantee health, education, housing, water and other fundamental economic and social rights. But we know that neither the US nor the Bank works that way, so we are still left wondering why Bush and O'Neill are pushing the "grants barrow" in the first place. It's probably not altruism. It may be a desire to weaken the Bank (Republicans, after all, are far less attached to the Bank and the Fund, having little appreciation of how much bang they actually get for their buck). It may, on the other hand, be part of a more complicated plan to link "grants" to liberalisation of services such as health and education. In short, yet another way of channeling public money into private hands in the name of aid effectiveness.

Until we know what the US is up to, it is impossible to "take sides" in this debate. Paul O'Neill,

however, is right about one thing: poor countries have been driven into a ditch by loans. We should, therefore, support the essential proposition that poor and low-income countries should have access to "no-costs no-conditions" grants from the Bank, especially for the universal and free provision of social services such as health, education, housing and water.

IMF 'STUNG' BY CHARGES OF LENIENCY

Finally, congratulations are due to the IMF's public relations department. Without missing a beat, they have shown their Teflon-like ability to deflect any responsibility for the crisis in Argentina AND rewrite history.

In the latest wave of public relations revisionism, IMF officials are apparently "stung" (sensitive creatures that they are) by criticisms that they were "too lenient" with Argentina. Not wanting to be seen as softies, the IMF has vowed to take a tough line in the latest round of negotiations, insisting that Argentina trim its budgets even further, change its bankruptcy laws (which apparently make it "hard for creditors to collect on bad debts"), revise tax sharing arrangements with the provinces and stamp out "pseudo-currencies."

The pressure to cut public expenditure is particularly bloody-minded, and not only politically. A recent study by the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) shows that from 1993 to 2000, Argentina's spending on government salaries, programs and operations was stable, while interest payments tripled due to a lethal combination of high interest rates and the currency peg to the ever-rising dollar. As the authors conclude, "the commonly believed story that the government could not accept a sufficient dose of the painful medicine of austerity, or spent its way into a hole, is not

supported by the data." (2)

The IMF's record in Argentina is disastrous: their policy advice, backed by loan conditions, created and perpetuated the ruinous combination of a fixed exchange rate and capital account liberalisation. Then, when default seemed the only option, they tossed the hot-potato of "restructuring" to their Man in Buenos Aires, Domingo Cavallo, who spectacularly dropped the potato and is now behind bars for his alleged involvement in illegal arms deals. (And, although harshly rejected by his own people, Cavallo must be comforted to know that he is still a welcome member of the unofficial club of international financiers, the Group of 30, which includes Paul Volcker, Larry Summers and Stanley Fisher.)

The IMF's reckless (and unfathomable) attitude to Argentina seems likely to continue. They know that insisting on more belt-tightening, more austerity and more sacrifices from the population will almost certainly push Duhalde's government to the precipice. What is the IMF's objective? Is it ideological bloody-mindedness, or are they simply protecting their shareholders interests? As always with the Fund, it's impossible to know where the economics ends and the politics begins.

* Nicola Bullard is deputy director of Focus on the Global South.

(1) Quarterly International Economics Report, Carnegie Mellon Gaillot Centre for Public Policy, January 2002

(2) 'What happened to Argentina?' Mark Weisbrot and Dean Baker, CEPR, January 2002. www.cepr.net

REPORT FROM BASILAN

Victoria Brittain

Guardian 1 April 2002

I ta Ajarul, a copra farmer, got up before dawn as usual and went to the well to wash in preparation for prayers two Sundays ago. But he never made it home. According to his wife, Haring, he was stopped by soldiers, arrested and killed. Pregnant, and with two small children, she was forced out of the house and fled to relatives nearby. "Everyone was running when the soldiers came, they don't speak our language, they just made us go," she said.

Haring and her sister-in-law came to Basilan's capital, Isabela City, last week to meet delegates from the Philippines House of Representatives who visited the island to hold hearings on human rights violations by the security forces.

Basilan, seen from the ferryboat, looks like a peaceful island paradise of white sands, palms, coconut trees and dense forest. In fact it is an island of fear, where death and disappearance are random. The three congressional representatives did not sleep overnight, the last foreign priest left for mainland Mindanao under orders from the Vatican and our group was guarded by two dozen heavily armed policemen and many plain clothes guards.

Dozens of other witnesses like these peasant women never made it to Isabela City - either because of the difficulty of moving through the checkpoints and the ongoing military exercises against the Abu Sayyaf group, or because they had been intimidated.

Basilan, poor, Muslim, and for 30 years a violent and forgotten corner of the world, has now become a second front for the US international war on terrorism. Under a \$100m six-month agreement, 600 US troops are in

Mindanao (160 of them now in Basilan), and there are reports that more may be sent.

The US deployment, known as Balikatan (meaning shoulder to shoulder), is described as a training mission, but the heady combination of reported links of Abu Sayyaf to al-Qaida (though the Philippine government has stated that 1995 is the last record of such links), and two American hostages, are in the subtext.

Above an idyllic bay at the end of a rutted jungle road leading to their camp, American soldiers sit at breakfast under banana and papaya trees and bushes of orange and crimson bougainvillea. The Philippine military, 6,000 or so on the island, are already well trained and described by one US major as "excellent soldiers".

The Abu Sayyaf hostage and ransom specialists are not a political or ideological group. Now numbering only about 60 to 70 people, they have powerful protectors, according to islanders who have been their victims. Waves of arrests have taken place recently, without warrants but on the word of hooded men driven into villages to point out suspects as Abu Sayyaf supporters. But who is menacing whom? Isabela City alone has as many as 500 militias, according to the governor, Wahab Akbar. Their shifting allegiances are secured by cash, family and clan ties.

It is a decade since mass protest in the Philippines forced the US out of their bases in the country. Their return is highly popular in elite circles in Basilan, where the governor told us they would be welcome to stay as long they want, have a nuclear base or even take over Basilan as a new province of the US.

But the former senator Wigberto Tanada spoke for others when he said: "I do not believe Balikatan consists of mere joint training exercises. It includes actual US involvement in combat operations... these troops will be staying in Mindanao for as long as it takes to protect US interests."

"We have to look at the problem of terrorism in a larger perspective, why militant Islam is luring Muslim youth and how pseudo-Islamic groups like the Abu Sayyaf are able to play on such trends."

* Victoria Brittain was a member of the Peace Mission to Basilan. She was formerly foreign editor of The Guardian and is presently writing a report on women and war for UNIFEM.

INTERNATIONAL PEACE MISSION VISIT TO BASILAN AND ZAMBOANGA

Preliminary Findings

Opening Statement, Press Conference, March 27, 2002, by Dr. Walden Bello

I think that the best way to begin is to repeat what Fr. Cirilo Nacorda said two days ago in Lamitan, Basilan, when he thanked the members of the International Peace Mission for “risking their lives” in going to Basilan to look for the truth. My colleagues have come from different parts of the world to spend three days and two nights in the principal war zone in the Philippines today, and one day visiting a jungle training site for Special Forces on the border of Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga del Sur.

Our mission had been prompted by the designation of Basilan in particular as the second front in the so-called war against terrorism by President George W. Bush. We went with a definite perspective, which is that military solutions, as in Vietnam and Afghanistan, worsen the situation, and that only dialogue among communities in conflict can create the conditions that can lead to peace. We went to probe the realities of the war in Basilan.

We emerged more worried than when we went in.

We still have to pull our findings into a final report, but allow us to share some tentative findings.

First, in the war against the Abu Sayyaf, there is strong evidence that the military is committing human rights violations. We encountered numerous cases of warrantless arrest, imprisonment of minors and a pregnant woman, allegations of extrajudicial execution, and allegations of torture via electric shock. These

cases need to be fully investigated and the perpetrators punished. Let there be no mistake: All of us in the mission condemn the atrocities committed by the Abu Sayyaf; in fact, we spent our last day in Basilan listening to the testimonies of Abu Sayyaf victims in Lamitan. However, the military cannot adopt Abu Sayyaf tactics to destroy the Abu Sayyaf, not only because this is immoral but also because engaging in warrantless arrest, torture, and the killing of innocents is the surest way of creating more recruits for the Abu Sayyaf.

Second, the Abu Sayyaf problem appears to be a complicated political phenomenon which is resistant to a military solution. Throughout the visit, we met Basilenos who would ask us to answer the question: Why can't 6,000 troops eliminate a group that numbers only 40 to 60 bandits? One answer that many Basilenos, Muslim and Christian alike, swear by is that at the highest levels of the provincial administration and at different levels of the regional and provincial military command, there are influential elements that coddle the Abu Sayyaf, some of them in exchange for monetary gain. These are serious allegations, but even just coming out with the demand to investigate them exposes to great risk those making the accusations. If the Abu Sayyaf is mainly a political problem, then relying on a military solution is not likely to produce results. Dismantling the structures of collusion and corruption should be the main focus, not adding more troops and firepower.

Third, our trip has raised more questions than answers about the US military deployment in Basilan

and Zamboanga. Many of those we talked to dismissed the claim of ongoing links between the notorious Al Qaeda and the Abu Sayyaf. In fact, Philippine government sources admit that no evidence of collaboration exists beyond 1995. Moreover, the American Special Forces do not seem to have any clear “value-added” in the fight against the Abu Sayyaf. One Filipino officer in the 103rd Infantry Brigade that we interviewed referred to US help in medical evacuation and in marksmanship training, but even Major Max Carpenter of the US Special Forces in Tabawan agreed that these are skills that either the Philippine troops need no instruction in, as in marksmanship, or, as in medical evacuation, something they do not need much training to acquire, certainly not six months.

As for the alleged acquisition and training in high tech equipment, we think that this has marginal use when dealing with a political problem like the Abu Sayyaf, who seem to be hidden more by a canopy of corruption and collusion than thick forest cover. So why are US troops pouring into Basilan? Why the request for 300 more US troops to join the 160 Special Forces already there? We are more and more worried that there is a strategic intent in these moves, and that is to establish and expand a military presence in the Southern Philippines directed at Muslim revivalist movements there and in Southeast Asia. If this is the case, then the Philippines may be sliding into a situation of being a base for a long-term US war against insurgent and revivalist movements, with all the destabilizing consequences for the whole region of such an endless war.

This is important, since a number of local officials who should know better have been painting the expanding US military presence as a magic bullet that will solve not just the Abu Sayyaf problem

but everything. Both Basilan Governor Wahab Akbar and Isabela City Mayor Luis Biel told us that they now favor the incorporation of Basilan as the next state of the United States, with Mr. Biel saying he favored the introduction of nuclear weapons by the US to his province—something that is expressly forbidden by the Philippine Constitution. These are illusions that can only lead to the deepening of war in a war- and conflict-ravaged region.

Already, this stepped-up US deployment, under cover of training, is creating not just political problems such as infringement of sovereignty. Leaders of a Subanon indigenous community about 50 kilometers from Zamboanga City, in Barangay Limpapa, told us that 50 hectares of their ancestral land had been illegally leased to the Armed Forces of the Philippines by the Zamboanga Freeport and Economic Zone Authority to serve as a site for joint training of Philippine and US troops in jungle warfare. As a result, 17 families face eviction.

Let me state that despite assurances to the contrary, the government and the military did not cooperate with this mission. Governor Wahab Akbar of Basilan prevented us from visiting and interviewing those arrested without warrant in the Basilan Provincial Jail, even as he admitted to us in a meeting that there were some innocent people among them. Nor did the Philippine military and US military cooperate. The Philippine military withdrew a promise of providing us with a military escort, and one of the Southcom's top generals who promised to meet with us did not show up. Likewise, Colonel Maxwell of the Special Forces failed to turn up for our meeting at the joint 103rd Brigade and US Special Forces Camp in Tabawan at 10 a.m. on Monday, March 25.

In conclusion, we would like to

thank the people of Basilan and Zamboanga who provided assistance to the mission even at risk to their lives, with graciousness and hospitality.

PEACE MISSION MEMBERS

Aijaz Ahmad, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India
Bill Rolston, University of Ulster
Earl Martin, Eastern Mennonite University, Virginia, USA
Etta Rosales, Chair, Congressional Committee on Human, Civil and Political Rights, Philippines
Lee Rhiannon, Member of the Legislative Council, NSW, Australia (Greens)
Matti Wuori, Member of the European Parliament (Greens)
Marco Mezzera, Focus on the Global South
Nicola Bullard, Focus on the Global South
Pierre Rousset, European Parliament
Roland Simbulan, University of the Philippines & Nuclear Free Philippines Coalition
Seiko Ohashi, Japan Committee for the Negros Campaign
Virginia Brittain, Journalist
Walden Bello, University of the Philippines & Akbayan Citizen's Action Party

PEACE MISSION ACCUSES PHILIPPINE MILITARY OF VIOLATING RIGHTS

BBC Monitoring Service - United Kingdom; Mar 27, 2002

An international peace mission visiting the Philippines has said it found human rights violations in the military operations against the Abu Sayyaf. The mission called on the Philippine government to investigate the allegations. It also expressed concerns regarding the US involvement in military exercises in the region. The following is an excerpt from report by Dario Agnote in English by Japanese news agency Kyodo

Manila, 27 March: At least 107 Muslim Filipinos, including seven women, are languishing in jails in

the southern Philippines on suspicion of being members or sympathisers of the Abu Sayyaf Muslim separatist group, an international peace mission said Wednesday.

"In the war against the Abu Sayyaf, there is strong evidence that the military is committing human rights violations", said Walden Bello, head of the 14-member mission that visited the southern city of Zamboanga and Basilan Province this week.

"We encountered numerous cases of warrantless arrests, imprisonment of minors and a pregnant woman, allegations of extra-judicial execution and allegations of torture via electric shock," Bello said. Many of the victims have been arrested since August or September last year, he said, adding that one of the detainees is around 70 years old. Mission member Amy Catacutan said all 107 people are being detained in provincial jails in Isabela City, the capital of Basilan.

The mission, composed of representatives from Japan, Europe, the United States, Italy, Australia and the Philippines, also said that government soldiers allegedly gunned down two Basilan residents.

The latest case occurred 17 March in Tipo-Tipo town, where soldiers allegedly shot a farmer with four children near his house. "We are urging the government to investigate right away these human rights violations, which are contributing more to the feeling of insecurity and tension now prevailing in the area," said Wigberto Tanada, a member of the mission.

Tanada also slammed the ongoing Philippine-US joint counterterrorism training exercises in the southern Philippines aimed at wiping out the Abu Sayyaf. The exercises, he said, are "derailing our efforts to obtain and achieve a peaceful

resolution of our other armed conflict in the country and I believe this should not be allowed to take place...”

Bello said, “These cases need to be fully investigated and the perpetrators punished.” “Let there be no mistake. All of us in the mission condemn the atrocities committed by the Abu Sayyaf, and we spent our last day in Basilan listening to the testimonies of Abu Sayyaf victims in Lamitan town,” Bello said.

“However, the military cannot adopt Abu Sayyaf tactics to destroy the Abu Sayyaf, not only because this is immoral but also because warrantless arrests, torture and the killing of innocents is the surest way of creating more recruits for the Abu Sayyaf,” Bello said.

Victoria Brittain, a another member of the mission, said that, in war, innocent civilians are the first victims of casualties. She said what is happening in Basilan now “is a complete destruction of the people’s lives”.

The mission stayed in Basilan for three days to document reported human rights violations there and gather testimonies of the relatives of the victims...

Local officials reportedly barred the delegation from interviewing the prisoners. They were also unsuccessful in holding talks with Basilan Governor Wahab Akbar and officials from the US and Philippine armed forces.

The mission members said they plan to bring up their findings with the United Nations and other international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International.

Earl Martin, an American member of the mission, said he intends to bring up the matter with two US senators due to arrive in the country on Monday to evaluate the joint exercises. The evaluation

report of Senators Daniel Inouye of Hawaii and Ted Stevens of Alaska will form the basis of a possible enhancement of the US contingent in the southern Philippines.

The mission expressed deep concern over reports Washington has requested permission from Manila to bring in more troops for the exercises. “We are more and more worried that there is a strategic intent, and that is to establish and expand a military presence in the southern Philippines directed at Muslim revivalist movements there and in Southeast Asia,” Bello said. He added: “If this is the case, then the Philippines may be sliding into a situation of being a base for a long-term US war against insurgent and revivalist movements, with all the destabilizing consequences for the whole region of such an endless war.”

Although US troops are not directly involved in human rights violations, the mission urged the US government to recall its troops in the Philippines. Philippine government officials belittled the role of the mission, calling the panel a “fault-finding frenzy”.

“They will see human rights violations in everything the military, both the Philippines and US, does but will see no evil in the ways of the Abu Sayyaf,” National Security Adviser Roilo Golez said.

INTERNATIONAL PEACE MISSION POINTS TO HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Business World (Philippines); Mar 28, 2002

By Cathy Rose A. Garcia

There is “strong evidence” of human rights violations committed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in the war against the Abu Sayyaf in Basilan, said the international peace mission investigating the Philippine- United States Balikatan military exercises.

Members of the international peace mission yesterday held a press conference at the Edsa Shangri-La Hotel, to bare the “tentative” findings from their three-day trip to Basilan and Zamboanga.

University of the Philippines professor Walden Bello said the mission is convinced there is “strong evidence” the AFP is committing human rights violations in relation to its efforts against the Abu Sayyaf. He added there is no evidence of any US military involvement in these human rights violations.

“We encountered numerous cases of warrantless arrests, imprisonment of minors and a pregnant woman, allegations of extrajudicial execution and of torture via electric shock. These cases need to be fully investigated,” Mr. Bello said.

“Let there be no mistake - all of us in the mission condemn the atrocities committed by the Abu Sayyaf. ... However, the military cannot adopt the Abu Sayyaf tactics to destroy the Abu Sayyaf,” he added.

Mr. Bello said the Abu Sayyaf problem is a “complicated political phenomenon resistant to a military solution,” especially since there are certain influential elements coddling the Abu Sayyaf for monetary gain.

“If the Abu Sayyaf is a political problem, then relying on a military solution is not likely to produce results. Dismantling the structures of collusion and corruption should be the main focus, not adding more troops and firepower,” he said.

Another concern of the peace mission is the increased US military deployment in Basilan and Zamboanga, despite the fact there is no evidence of collaboration between the Abu Sayyaf and the al Qaeda network beyond 1995. Mr. Bello said there appears to be a strategic intent to establish and expand the US military presence in the country directed against Moro movements.

“If this is the case, the Philippines may be sliding into a situation of being a base for a long-term war against insurgent and revivalist movements, with all the destabilizing consequences for the whole of such an endless war,” he said.

American human rights activist Earl Martin expressed concern over the government’s focus on a military solution to the Abu Sayyaf problem, which left no room for other solutions such as socioeconomic and political dialogue.

“I am personally concerned about the interjection of foreign military forces, particularly United States troops, in Basilan. ... There is grave concern this will mean escalation of the situation,” Mr. Martin said.

European Parliament member Matti Wouri said he will present the findings of the mission to the parliament’s committee on foreign affairs, human rights and international policy for further action.

“We have to dispel the atmosphere of fear and intimidation in Basilan. Is this

indicative of a serious human rights problem? ... This may only be the tip of the iceberg, we may not know how big the problem is beneath the surface,” Mr. Wouri said.

The international peace mission’s final report will be out within the next three weeks.

Mr. Bello said copies of the report will also be submitted to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the Philippines’ Commission on Human Rights, US State department and Pentagon, and civil society groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

PEACE MISSION VISITS US BASE

By Jim Gomez
Associated Press Writer
Monday, March 25, 2002; 4:50 AM

TABIAWAN ARMY BASE, Philippines — U.S. Special Forces officers assured foreign peace activists on Monday that American troops in the southern Philippines will not directly fight al-Qaida linked Muslim extremists or condone rights abuses by local troops.

More than a dozen activists, including nine foreigners, met with Filipino and U.S. soldiers at a seaside army brigade camp used as a staging ground for attacks against Abu Sayyaf guerrillas, who are holding an American missionary couple hostage.

“There is a great deal of concern internationally whether Basilan is becoming another Afghanistan,” Walden Bello, a Filipino delegate of the peace mission, told U.S. officers in a thatch conference hut in the hilly encampment dotted with U.S. satellite dishes, generators and tents.

Earl Martin, an American delegate on the peace mission, said he witnessed how an American military adviser force eventually shifted to wage a full-blown war in Vietnam.

“I don’t see this escalating,” said U.S. Army Maj. Max Carpenter.

Carpenter said anti-poverty programs should complement the offensives against the rebels.

The military says about 60 Abu Sayyaf rebels are left from a peak guerrilla force of more than 1,200 in Basilan before government troops launched a large-scale offensive last June. The guerrillas hold three hostages, including Wichita, Kan., missionaries Martin and Gracia Burnham and Filipina nurse Ediborah Yap.

About 660 U.S. soldiers are training Filipino troops in counterterrorism on Basilan and nearby Zamboanga city.

Members of the peace mission, visiting Basilan for three days to assess the impact of the assault on the Abu Sayyaf, said they heard accusations of illegal executions of suspected rebels and sympathizers by the Philippine military and obtained affidavits from civilians complaining of illegal arrests and torture.

Carpenter defended local troops and said U.S. forces would never condone military abuses.

“We’ve seen no evidence of any activities like that since we’ve been here. None,” Carpenter told the delegates.

“It is counterproductive. Everybody knows it only compounds problems when that happens, obviously, because now you’re alienating the people.”

The peace mission faces strong and widespread support for the U.S. military presence in Basilan and nearby Zamboanga city where most victims of Abu Sayyaf kidnappings, beheadings and violence can be found. In downtown Isabela city, posters have appeared supporting U.S. troops.

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