

ISSN 1655-5295

**IBON**

**EDM**

Education for Development

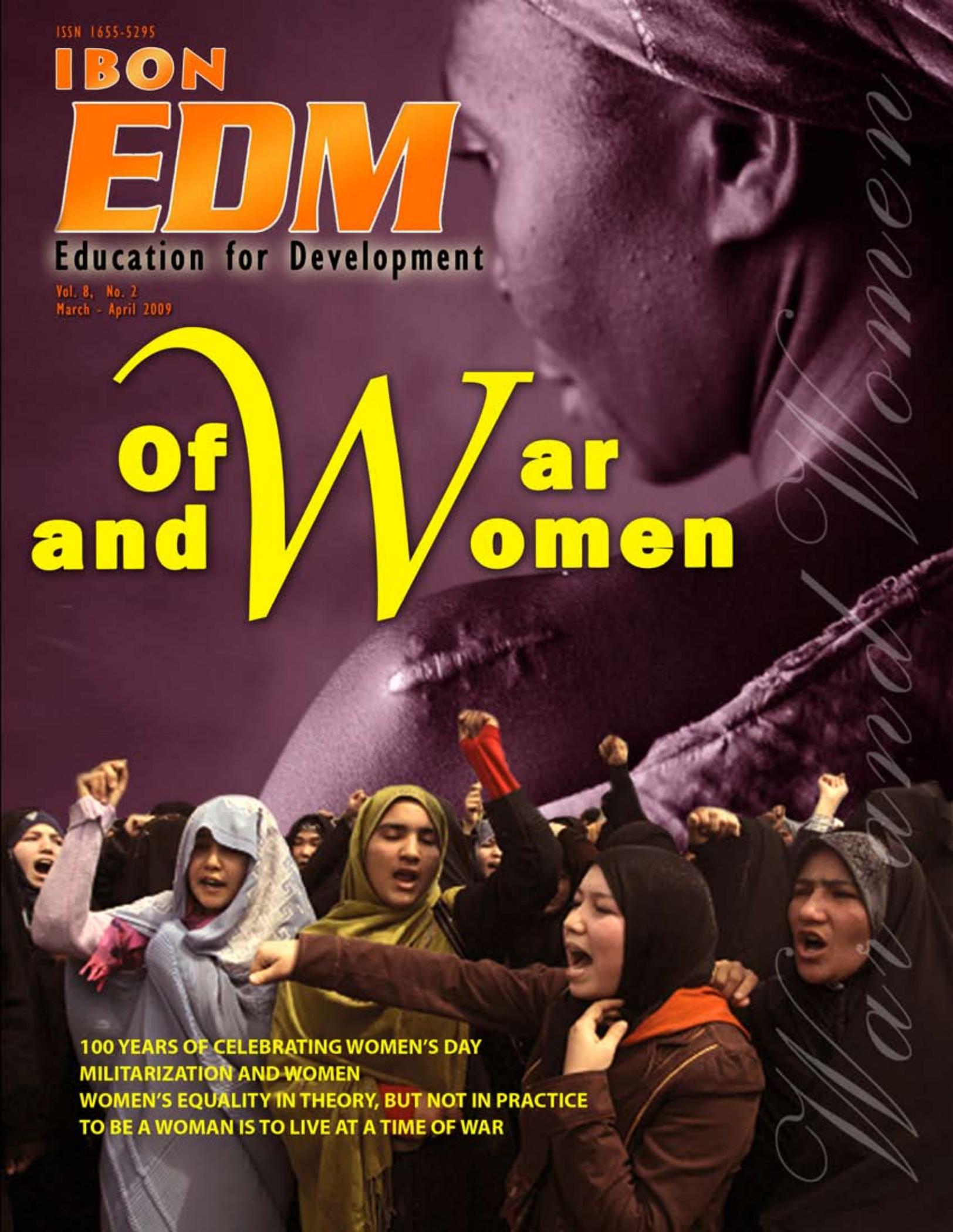
Vol. 8, No. 2

March - April 2009

# of and **W**ar Women

**100 YEARS OF CELEBRATING WOMEN'S DAY  
MILITARIZATION AND WOMEN  
WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN THEORY, BUT NOT IN PRACTICE  
TO BE A WOMAN IS TO LIVE AT A TIME OF WAR**

*War and Women*



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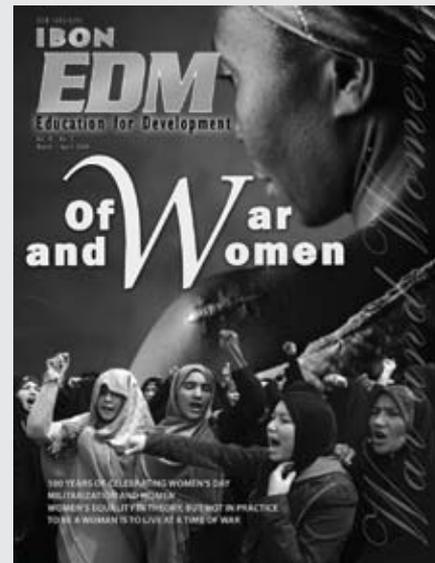
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## Education for Development Magazine

is published by



**IBON International  
Foundation, Inc.**  
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Katrina Stuart Santiago

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# One Woman, All Women

## 100 Years of Celebrating Women's Day

**“I’ll be a post-feminist, in post-patriarchy” — T-shirt slogan**

One hundred years ago, the women of the world were burdened with oppression. And one hundred years ago, they found the value of talking to each other, organizing themselves, and fighting for their rights. Then, a National Women’s Day was born in the United States, a first step towards women realizing their potential as powerful citizens of their nations and of the world. The day was February 28 1909. The now defunct Socialist Party of America was in celebration. The context, a time of turbulence and change, of ideological battles and injustice.

It would only take another year, at the International Socialist Women’s Conference in Copenhagen, when Clara Zetkin, leader of the Women’s Office of the Socialist Democratic Party of Germany, proposed the idea of an International Women’s Day. Zetkin asserted the need for a day that could be commemorated worldwide when women can collectively insist on their needs and demands.

Over 100 women from 17 countries would unanimously agree to establish an International Women’s Day (IWD) for the rest of the world. Then, it would begin to be celebrated on the third Sunday of February every year, until it

globe. It would also serve as a celebration of the women’s movements’ fight for suffrage.

This demand for the right to vote would be carried over to two years later on March 19 1911, when a historic one million men and women would go out to the streets of Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland to commemorate International Women’s Day. Here, they would also call for women’s rights to training and employment, to hold public office, and to end discrimination in the workplace.

More than this celebration though, a New York City tragedy would be a grim reminder of how

the fight for women’s labor rights must continue, beyond the successes. On March 25 1911, less than a week after the historic IWD march in Europe, 140 women workers would die in what would be called the “Triangle Fire” in New York City. Most of these women were Italian and Jewish immigrants, and their death would signal the beginning of the more urgent struggle to pass labor laws as well as look into the working conditions of women workers.

This as well, was an indication of how the women’s struggle does not exist in a vacuum, and is not only a matter of legislation or rights. It is a matter of living in the world, and the current socio-political events within it.

This would be proven true in the year 1913. In Russia, World War I had fueled a peace movement, and Russian women joined in the



is moved to March 8 in 1913. The decision to celebrate an International Women’s Day was an obvious response to the growing inequality women were experiencing in politics and the workplace – in all of their lives – across the

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struggle by celebrating their first International Women's Day in February. In 1914, IWD celebrations were about protesting the war and pushing for women's unity and solidarity, and in 1917, the women's fight against World War I would come to a head. With two million Russian soldiers dead and many of those alive coming home, women launched a strike calling for Bread and Peace. The protest would be held in St. Petersburg, and the number of women in protest would be difficult to ignore. This would be part of the many movements that would spark the Russian Revolution. After four days of the strike, the Czar would be forced to step down.

This was a two-fold victory for the women of Russia and the world: first, they had proven their power in numbers and their commitment to bigger socio-political issues; second, they would be granted the right to vote by the installed provisional government.

In truth, its beginnings in the socialist movement allows for International Women's Day to imagine a bigger world, where the woman is part of policy and decision making, and where she is in solidarity with women beyond her nation. Organizations like the United Nations would, in the 1940s, come to the realization of women's power and IWD's importance. In 1945, the UN Charter becomes the first signed agreement that acknowledges gender equality to be a basic human right.

For many years, the UN would organize conferences around the issues of equal rights, women empowerment, and women's participation in economic, social and political processes. Here they would bring together different women's organizations – and diverse women – bridging the geographical divide as well as intellectual and spiritual differences.



By Adolph Stradkov

Across the world, the growing feminist movements would prove its power in the 1970s, when the commemoration of International Women's Day became more and more symbolic for the struggles that women continued to face. It is by no accident therefore, that the UN would declare International Women's Year to be 1975: the feminist movements and women's organizations of that era almost demanded this distinction. It is also no surprise that it would be two years later, in 1977, when the March 8 celebrations of IWD would be declared by the UN General Assembly as the United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace.

The UN would also provide the women's movement with strategies, standards, programs



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and goals, internationally agreed upon and are for the advancement of women's status across the globe.

But diversity cannot be helped. As there are a number of different women in the world, so are there a great number of celebrations. In countries like China, March 8 is a holiday, when women workers get half a day off. It is also an official holiday in countries like Armenia, Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. In many of these countries, women – mothers, wives, girlfriends, female colleagues – are honored by men with gifts of flowers and small tokens. In some countries, it is almost like a version of Mother's Day, with children giving their mothers gifts.

For many countries, IWD celebrations resonate with success: women are now in positions of power, after all. They are educated, some of them can become who they want to be – astronauts, presidents, prime ministers – and many others have become successful in various fields. That glass ceiling has been broken

countless times by women, and it has become more and more true that women are holding up half of the world economy's sky.

It is easy to imagine that we are now equal to men.

But the feminist roots of IWD as celebrated today, would also allow for the more complex reading of current situations: patriarchy is not easy to beat, nor is it simple. Gender equality in all spheres of living is not going to be given us on a silver platter. A crucial point was agreed upon in the 1995 UN Women's Conference in Beijing: that gender inequalities affected the well-being of both women and men.

As such, there is a need to acknowledge this as well: that social, economic and political problems of the world cannot be solved without the full empowerment and participation of women. Equality is non-negotiable.

But it does remain to be far in coming. IWD celebrations year-in year-out have zeroed in on past successes, but more importantly, on the continued need for change. Women continue to struggle through many fields of employment, they continue to be victims of violence, and their fundamental rights remain as a battlefield. Unequal pay is still the rule instead of the exception, and the trafficking of women's bodies – be it legally as migrant workers, or illegally when they are victimized into white slavery – has become the most normal occurrence. Women's ownership of their bodies through reproductive health is still a primary issue for the women's movement, as across the world many women remain ignorant of their bodies and laws have yet to be put in place to protect them. For many spaces across the globe, women remain as second class citizens to men, and suffer for having fewer rights.

It is clear that women have much work to do, because the struggle for women's rights is uneven in its development.

As with a country like Liberia which celebrated Women's Day as a high-profile event for the first time since the 1970s, and in the aftermath of the country's 1989-2003 Civil War. This brought US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and German Chancellor Angela Merkel to the country, and allowed for Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to celebrate and focus on the future of the women of his country, and the world.

And how can we forget the women of Gaza Strip? Palestinian women continue to suffer and be killed in the hands of Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF). According to statistics, 8.3% of the total number of Palestinians killed by the IOF, were women. That's 120 Palestinian women killed in the Gaza offensive. The number of injured and maimed women has climbed up to 735 in number.

In the Gaza Strip, no woman is safe. She is injured and killed in her own home, in her school, and even in shelters that are supposed to protect her. If she survives the violence, then she is doomed to spiritual and emotional distress, having witnessed the murder of her own husband and children. Her human rights are violated in the demolition of her home and source of income. In the West Bank, Palestinian women live with restricted freedom of movement, house raids and demolitions, willful killings, inter-alia extrajudicial executions, and collective punishment.

The saddest fact for Palestinian women is this: over and above the violence they suffer in the hands of Israeli soldiers, they are also oppressed and repressed in the hands of their own society. They have suffered through

systemic discrimination and violence against their persons all this time, even before the IOF landed on their shores.

While not literally at war, the women from the Third World remain in battle. Here, it is poverty and corruption that are their long-standing enemies. It is what has kept them oppressed, uneducated and ill-informed about their rights. Here, women do not have the benefit of social services and reproductive health bills. The third world woman is victimized by her mere existence as a mother who needs to feed her children, as a wife who needs to care for her husband, as a worker who can only expect measly pay or employment in the underground economy that's unregulated and unsafe.

Here, countless women are forced into sex work, even more of them into becoming labored bodies crossing borders and swinging across the pendulum of sadness and longing, for home and family. If they are lucky, they come home to start over, but more often than not, they remain poor given the unstable economies of their third world countries, and they cannot imagine a life that is not about working elsewhere.

At worst, these women come home in coffins. With no justice in sight.



It is for the women of Liberia, the women of the Third World, and more urgently the women of Palestine that we must imagine International Women's Day as more than just a celebration. March 8 must be more than an acknowledgment of the women's movement's successes, more than women rallying in the streets, making their voices heard. In the past years, International Women's Day has been about being reminded of the successes of women's struggle towards equality.

But today, 100 years after the first Women's Day was celebrated, we are being reminded of how far we truly are from success. And of how the struggle must continue for all women of the world.

Yes, despite business and non-government organizations, governments and policy-makers, joining in the celebrations. Despite our successes

in the areas of employment and education, of women's issues being talked about, of women's visibility in the higher offices of government and law. Despite all of these, we must be reminded, that while women hold up half the sky, she can only truly do so, when all women are liberated from the chains of oppression. When each and every woman can really and truly say that, they have ceased to look at that sky and dream of a better life, because they hold half of it up as well.

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Mary Joan A. Guan<sup>1</sup>

# The Myth of Terrorism and the Reality of Resource Wars in Southeast Asia

In 2002, the government of the United States (US) declared the Southeast Asian region as the second front in the US-led war on terrorism, justifying increased militarization and deepening armed conflicts in the region. Eighty percent of the victims of militarization are women and children.<sup>2</sup>

While Southeast Asia is considered home to radical Islamist groups such as the Abu Sayyaf, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), and the Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia (KMM),<sup>3</sup> the region is a mere transit point and not a target of Al Qaeda's strategy. So why have more US troops been deployed in the region following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US?

The history of colonial conquest provides an answer: there is a close relationship between wars and the scramble for control of natural resources.<sup>4</sup>

The global campaign against terror in Southeast Asia masks deeper motives to expand and protect U.S. economic and geopolitical interests in the resource-rich region.

Studies have shown that resource extraction, arms trafficking, violent conflict, human rights violations, humanitarian disasters, and environmental destruction are inextricably linked.<sup>5</sup> As global demand for primary commodities such as fuels, minerals, and water continue to rise rapidly, conflicts over ownership,

<sup>1</sup> Abridged version of a paper presented to the Workshop on Women and War, Asia Pacific Research Network, June 17, 2008, Hongkong, SAR

<sup>2</sup> Kofi Annan, UN DocA/52/298, 1997, as cited in "Violence against women in armed conflict situation across the Asia-Pacific region", [http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/apro/aprowe.nsf/pages/issue8\\_VAW\\_conflict](http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/apro/aprowe.nsf/pages/issue8_VAW_conflict)

<sup>3</sup> John Gershman, Is Southeast Asia the Second Front? *Foreign Affairs* July/August 2002 <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/58041/john-gershman/is-southeast-asia-the-second-front>

<sup>4</sup> William Tabb, *Resource Wars*, *Monthly Review* Vol. 58., No. 47, <http://www.monthlyreview.org/0107tabb.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Renner, *The Anatomy of Resource Wars*, *Worldwatch* Paper 162, State of the World Library, Oct 2002



## Strategic location

The Southeast Asian region is rich in agricultural products such as rubber, palm oil, tropical fruits, coconut, sugarcane, and timber. Multinational corporations take interest in the gemstones of Burma, Laos, and Cambodia; coal of Laos and Vietnam; natural gas of Indonesia, Laos and Burma; oil in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Burma, Vietnam and Thailand; gold of Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines;<sup>9</sup> copper of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.<sup>9</sup> The variety of fishes and other marine resources found in its seas and lake waters are also attractive to foreign investors.

Further, the region is home to the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. Endowed with oil and natural gas, the South China Sea is also the world's second busiest international sea lane - more than half of the world's supertankers passes through these waters. Though not suitable for habitation, the islands are important for strategic and political reasons. Ownership claims to them are used to bolster claims to the surrounding sea and its resources. For the past two decades, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines have all staked rights over the islands or portions thereof.

Southeast Asia is also strategically located near the Middle East and China, two countries which are a matter of vital interest to the US. The insecurity of the US government is fuelled by the other rising economies like Brazil, Malaysia and India, which aside from China and the other western countries are emerging rivals in the global rush for scarce raw materials..

access and control multiply and intervention by industrial powers to secure their raw materials increase.<sup>6</sup> In "Anatomy of Resource Wars", Michael Renner suggests that one out of four wars and armed conflicts during the 1990s have a strong resource dimension: legal or illegal resource exploitation helped trigger or exacerbate violent conflicts or financed its continuation.<sup>7</sup>

The human toll of resource-related conflicts is atrocious. More than 5 million people were killed during the 1990s; close to 6 million fled to neighboring countries, and anywhere from 11 to 15 million people were displaced inside the borders of their home countries.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Michael Klare, *Resource Wars: the new landscape of global conflict*, Carnegie Council: Books for Breakfast, as facilitated by Joanne Myers, 22 May 2001

<sup>7</sup> Renner, loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

The plunder of oil, minerals, metals, gemstones, or timber fuels militarization and conflicts in the region. Plunderers are financed by superpowers or other external supporters. Aside from this, corrupt governments, warlords, and unscrupulous corporate leaders benefit from the pillage by raking in billions of dollars.<sup>10</sup> In many developing countries, the economic benefits of mining and logging operations accrue to local elites and foreign investors.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the costs – ranging from the expropriation of land, disruption of traditional ways of life, environmental devastation, and social maladies – are shouldered by the local population. These communities are rarely informed nor consulted about resource extraction projects. The pillage results in more resource scarcity – overuse and depletion – which contribute to a growing lack of economic opportunity and deepening social divides among the populace. As the powers-that-be get richer, the majority gets poorer and poorer.

## War on Terror as Raison d'être for Militarization

Repressive governments make use of the global anti-terrorism campaign to continue the colonial tradition of curtailing civil liberties. The Southeast Asian governments welcomed

[former] US President Bush's war on terror as a political leverage over their people. They accepted US offers to curb "terrorism", even to the extent of flouting their constitutions and bill of rights. Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Indonesia, to name a few, have already passed laws on "human security" or anti-terrorism that render the people more vulnerable to abuse.

The politicized term "terrorism" is deployed vaguely with a broad definition that targets ideological, political, religious and similar motives by certain organizations or individuals. By such broad definition, political authorities have been given the prerogative to take discretionary actions against their adversaries and against the people, resulting in all kinds of violations of fundamental rights and freedoms.

The US ensures the global war on terror in various ways: through military aid, by pushing other influenced countries to pass anti-terrorism laws, and by employing direct training of capabilities of the military in repressive regimes.

The US legislative branch had increased military funding for the Philippine government from US\$ 11.1 million to US\$ 30 million.<sup>12</sup> For its part, the Philippine government enacted an anti-terrorism law, Republic Act 9372 or the Human Security Act of 2007. Human rights



<sup>10</sup> Renner, loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "US raises RP military budget plan to P1.38 billion; P92 million to solve killings", [www.gmanews.tv/07/06/2007](http://www.gmanews.tv/07/06/2007)

organizations in the Philippines are questioning the legality of the Human Security Act in the Supreme Court. The Philippine government is one of the US-supported governments that have been under fire for its human rights abuses.

In Indonesia, then US President Bush had announced a US\$ 157 million program “to improve the quality of Indonesian schools”, which is aimed at reducing the influence of Muslim boarding schools, many of which preach a “radical brand of Islam”.<sup>13</sup> In Thailand, the country’s Counter Terrorism Center (CTIC) had reportedly been provided with US\$10 million to US\$ 15 million and 20 CIA agents deployed as “technical assistants” to conduct counter terrorism activities.<sup>14</sup> Thailand had been designated by Bush as a major non-NATO ally in recognition of its support for the US war on terrorism.<sup>15</sup>

With US support, Southeast Asian governments are sharing intelligence information and forging cooperation to combat “terrorists’ attacks”.

One of the early initiatives of the region is the Agreement on Information Exchange and Establishment of Communication Procedures, signed in 2002 by Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines followed by Brunei, Cambodia, and Thailand in 2003.<sup>16</sup> This agreement stipulates cooperation on anti-terrorism exercises, combined operations to hunt suspected terrorists, and the establishment of hotlines as well as the sharing of airline passenger lists.<sup>17</sup>

Another initiative is the Convention on Counterterrorism signed by members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in January 2007, which provides a framework for cooperation on countering and suppressing terrorism through rapid information sharing, establishment of a common database, and common procedures for prosecution and extradition.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, the Regional Maritime Security Initiative has been proposed by the US to apparently “secure Southeast Asian waters against piracy and terrorism threats”.<sup>19</sup>

## Collaboration with repressive governments

The US has supported repressive regimes in the Southeast Asian region through an escalation of military operations against local rebel groups. A case in point is the resource-rich Aceh province in Indonesia. It is home to the multinational Exxon Mobil natural gas plant, which exports gas to Japan and South Korea.<sup>20</sup> The plant is one of the largest resource projects in Indonesia and generates more than US\$1 billion a year in government revenues.<sup>21</sup>



<sup>13</sup> Mark Manyin (coordinator), Richard Cronin, Larry Nicksch, and Bruce Vaughn, Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division, *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, CRS Report for Congress received through the CRS web, The Library of Congress, Order Code RL31672, updated November 18, 2003

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Acharya & Acharya, *loc. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Al Gedicks, “Aceh’s War Centres on Resources”, AlertNet, July 22, 2003

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

The Exxon Mobil plant had been subject to attacks by the guerrillas of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), causing its temporary shut down in March 2001. Historically, the GAM rebellion was sparked more than 30 years ago by the Acehnese people's demand for independence. As in any other country where people revolt against an abusive state authority, attempts to portray separatists as terrorists to be crushed by military force do not come as a surprise. In May 2003, then President Megawati Sukarnoputri put the Aceh province under martial law and ordered over 40,000 soldiers and paramilitary officers to put down the GAM's 5,000 guerrillas.<sup>22</sup> One of the priorities during the crackdown was to secure the plant. In the guise of the war on terror, the plant was provided by the government with 3,000 troops in what the country's top security minister called "the biggest security deployment in Indonesia ever to defend a vital installation" during its reopening in July 2001.<sup>23</sup> During the first five days of the invasion, the United Nations reported the burning of more than 200 schools; and the number of internally displaced people in Aceh increased to 100,000 from 5,000.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, Malaysia's Internal Security Act (ISA) has imprisoned political opponents without trial for up to two years including human rights defender Irene Fernandez whose trial has entered its seventh year in Kuala Lumpur. But the former Bush administration had downgraded US human rights concerns over Malaysia especially since the ISA was employed against suspected members of JI and KMM, both tagged as terrorist organizations by the Malaysian and US governments.<sup>25</sup>

Malaysia also applied the ISA to the country's ethnic Indian minority last November 2007. The minority group's complaints of economic, educational, and cultural discrimination were

met by police batons and tear gas. They were accused of having terrorist links and were arrested. At least 10 people died in custody in 2007 and police reportedly continued to use excessive force on peaceful demonstrators. The minister warned that the ISA could be used to prevent "illegal" protests and at least 83 people were detained under the ISA.<sup>26</sup>

Military-ruled Burma made a harsh crackdown of peaceful street protesters in September 2007. Vietnam's police force was used to crush a movement led by farmers demanding compensation for lands that were seized by officials for "new development projects".

## Militarization: the 7th Deadly Sin Against Women

The global war on terror places a greater priority on state and private business security than the real essence of human security. Those who campaign for human rights and civil liberties are often at the receiving end of brutal measures unleashed by elected and non-elected governments.

Violence becomes severe in times of conflict, as documented in the different parts of the Southeast Asian region. Most are state-instigated. All cases have been characterized by the disproportionate victimization of women and children. Southeast Asian women have

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Amnesty International Report 2008

experienced rape, forced prostitution, sex trafficking, and health-related threats.

Women are considered as “spoils of war” and rape is seen as an inevitable though unfortunate by-product of armed conflict. Rape is systematically used for various purposes including intimidation, humiliation, political terror, extracting information, rewarding of soldiers, and “ethnic cleansing”. Those who are raped or sexually abused can hardly find a support system for counselling and processing of their traumatic experience.

During the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, many girls from East Timor were abducted by Indonesian army officers and militias. They were sent to camps in West Timor and made to marry Indonesian soldiers.<sup>27</sup> In February 2001, five women from the district of South Aceh were sexually abused by members of the paramilitary police, known as the Brimob.<sup>28</sup>

As governments unleash their swords and guns under anti-terrorism mantras, military operations occur without let up. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of families are displaced, with women and children comprising 80% of the internally displaced persons.<sup>29</sup>

As families lose their sources of livelihood and poverty is made worse by displacement, women are forced into prostitution. Some end up engaging in “survival sex” or “transactional sex” to obtain food.<sup>30</sup>

Military operations especially those that cause displacement put women’s health at risk. The absence of health facilities and the irregular supply of food cause malnourishment among pregnant and lactating mothers; and many women in this condition experience miscarriages and premature births. They also lose the extended network of family support during pregnancy, taking away emotional and practical support to already traumatized women.<sup>31</sup>

Areas of destination for trafficking of women and children are conflict zones where foreign or international military and civilian forces are based. Bars, brothels and entertainment establishments abound in conflict zones to serve the prurient needs of foreign troops as part of their “rest and recreation” activities.<sup>32</sup>

Some women who are forced to head their households after the breakdown of family and social networks may be at particular risk of sexual violence. This is because women may be forced to offer sex in exchange for food, shelter or protection,<sup>33</sup> making them vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Thus state violence is considered by the Center for Women’s Resources (CWR), a research and training institute for women, as the “seventh deadly sin against women.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Wolte, Sonja. *Armed Conflict and trafficking in women: a desk study, a GTZ sector project against trafficking in women*, January 2004

<sup>28</sup> Human Rights Watch August 2001, Vol. 13, No. 4 (C) 2

<sup>29</sup> Internally Displaced Monitoring Centre, 2006

<sup>30</sup> prepared by Gabriela National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, “Militarization and Rural Women in the era of the US global war on terror”, a briefing paper for the Rural Women’s Consultation, July 31-August 2, 2007, Philippines

<sup>31</sup> Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights, May 27, 2004

<sup>32</sup> Wolte, loc. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights, loc. cit.

<sup>34</sup> CWR categorized the different forms of VAW as seven deadly sins and these are the following: 1-rape and incest, 2-sexual harassment, 3-domestic violence, 4-prostitution/ white slavery/ sex trafficking, 5-discrimination in the workplace, 6-absence of maternal healthcare, 7-state violence

## The Need for a United Call

Southeast Asian women should consider the underlying issues associated with the concept of human security. The US-led war on terrorism is a war against the people to control the world's resources. It has resulted in the violation of the basic human rights of the people in defiance of international humanitarian laws. Women, who comprise half of the poor and struggling peoples, have been deprived of food, resources, and basic rights. Militarism has been instrumental in creating these conditions.

Yet, together with the people's movements around the world, women are building movements and organizations to fight imperialism. More and more women have gotten to the roots of the problem; they have questioned the role and the legitimacy of US intervention and the prevailing interests of the powers-that-be in this global campaign against terrorism.

Many women have discerned that until the war on terrorism ends, more women and children will be victims of violence. As more Asian governments embrace the call for a war on terror,

women must respond with a unified stand against the campaign and expose its abuses. Women are beginning to make use of the available venues for redress in the international and national arena.

Advocacy work that is gender-based should be actively pursued in every Asian country. Information should be disseminated among women so as to make them aware of the situation and move them to action. Female scholars and educators need to be grounded so as to provide appropriate intervention to other women in Asian communities. Women should get organized because it is only through their solid voices that they can be heard.

Hand in hand with the disadvantaged peoples of the world, women will have to rely on their own power to attain genuine security. The potentials of women's power can best be realized when women all over Asia unite through movements and collective actions. The strength of women's unity can best be achieved when they closely link with other communities of peoples in the world to build a global society free from fear and hunger.



banbalikatan.files

Center for Women's Resources

# Militarization in the Philippines



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In the Philippines, women and children have not been spared from state-sponsored violence.

March 8, International Women's Day, would hold painful significance for Angie Ipong, a 64 year-old peace advocate. She was forcibly taken by soldiers during a peace workshop in Mindanao, last March 8, 2005. During interrogation, she endured molestation and sexual abuse at the hands of her captors. She was surfaced after 14 days and is presently detained at the Pagadian City Jail.

Nine-year old Grecil would have been an honor student last school year. She was an intelligent and kind girl, according to her teachers and friends. Grecil's bright future was abruptly extinguished when soldiers sprayed her with bullets during a military operation in a village in Mindanao. The military initially claimed that she was a "child soldier", photographing her

lifeless body with a machine gun (longer than her slight frame) beside her. The head of the battalion later admitted that Grecil had been caught in a crossfire with New People's Army guerillas. Grecil's parents filed a complaint with the Commission on Human Rights. To date, no decision has been handed down on the case.

University students Sherlyn Cadapan and Karen Empeno were conducting community research in a small village in the town of Bulacan, in the central part of Luzon region, Philippines. They were abducted in 2007 by military men in the middle of the night. According to witnesses' accounts, the two women were held captive in a military camp and were repeatedly gang-raped by soldiers. They were tied to the bed so as to ensure that they could not escape. At times,

they were stripped naked and were ordered to sing or dance in front of the soldiers. Sherlyn, who was pregnant during the time of the abduction, attempted to communicate with her in-laws through a letter, but she was caught by her guards. She was heavily tortured and was hanged upside down. As of this writing, the two women are still missing.

## The Philippine Experience

In July 2007, the Human Security Act (HSA) came into effect in the midst of international criticism and public outcries against the massive human rights abuses being perpetuated by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) under the Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo regime. Ms. Arroyo signed the HSA into law despite warnings from

the Supreme Court that its passage could lead to more violations of human rights.

Even before the enactment of the HSA, the Arroyo government has been realizing the aims of the program Oplan Bantay Laya (Freedom Watch), a counter-insurgency program patterned after the US military strategy on its war on terror. The Arroyo government received US\$4.6 billion in US military assistance for the armed forces, with an additional US\$ 30 million allotted for counter-terrorism trainings.<sup>1</sup>

The program divides military operations into four stages: conduct of military operations to “clear” the area of “terrorists” or insurgents; “hold” the area by forming paramilitary groups and an intelligence network; “consolidate” the area by improving relations between the AFP and the civilian population through civic action

Table 1. Women victims of Human Rights Violations, 2001-October 2007

TYPE OF VIOLATION	NUMBER OF VICTIMS
Political killing	98
Frustrated killing	79
Abduction	75
Enforced disappearance	28
Illegal arrest	76
Illegal detention	48
Massacre	32
Physical assault/injuries	106
Threat/harassment/intimidation	298
Torture	14

Source: Gabriela, Karapatan

Table 2. Children Victims of Human Rights Violations, 2001- August 2007

TYPE OF VIOLATION	NUMBER OF VICTIMS
Political killing	59
Frustrated killing	64
Physical assault/injury	44
Threat/harassment	198
Illegal arrest/detention	82
Forced disappearance	11

Source: Children’s Rehabilitation Center

<sup>1</sup> Oplan Bantay Laya Primer, Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace, 2006

Table 3. Violation of Civil and Political Rights, January - March 2008

TYPE OF VIOLATION	NUMBER OF VICTIMS
Extra-judicial, summary & arbitrary killing	13
Frustrated killing	1
Enforced disappearance	1
Abduction	6
Torture	5
Illegal arrest	25
Illegal detention	10
Physical assault	20
Physical injuries	14
Threat/ harassment/ intimidation	2,815
Illegal search and seizure	13
Forcible evacuation/ displacement	7,442
Use of schools, medical, religious and other public places for military purposes; and endangerment of civilians	1,776
Hamletting	372
Violation of children’s right to protection or safety by the state or its agents	450
Food and other economic blockade	3,042
Forced/ fake surrender	4
Indiscriminate firing	5,459

Source: Karapatan Monitor, January to March 2008

operations such as medical and dental missions; and “develop” the area by introducing livelihood and development projects.<sup>2</sup>

The program’s pre-emptive strikes, particularly the abduction, torture, and killings of suspected terrorists, have been widely condemned by human rights watchdogs in and outside of the country, including the United Nation’s Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial executions, Mr. Philip Alston. On the other hand, the provision of services like medical and dental missions are merely palliative and do not provide impoverished communities with long-term access to essential services.

With the Oplan Bantay Laya in place, the curtailment of civil liberties became rampant. Since Gloria Macapagal Arroyo came to power in 2001 until October 2007, there have been 4,969 incidents of state-sponsored human rights violations (HRVs),<sup>3</sup> 1,010 of the cases involved women and 303 involved children victims of HRVs. (See Tables 1 and 2)

In the first quarter of 2008, 21,456 human rights cases were recorded: 7,442 persons were displaced, 2,815 were threatened or harassed, more than 3,000 experienced food blockades, and more than 5,000 experienced indiscriminate firing. (See Table 3)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> data obtained from Karapatan, March 2008

As women become more assertive in fighting for their rights, they are more vulnerable to violence. Activists and human rights advocates are outrightly considered by the military as “communists” and therefore enemies of the state who ought to be humiliated, tortured and even eliminated. They are often abducted. As of October 2007, 28 women activists have been reported missing after being abducted by military men, Lisa Posa-Dominado, a human rights activist and organizer in the Philippines, among them.

Owing to the active condemnation of the international community and the unwavering vigilance of Filipino human rights groups, the number of cases of extra-judicial killings has tapered off since 2007. Even so, there were 13 victims of extrajudicial killings, four of them women, by the start of 2008.

There are around 235 women political prisoners jailed in different parts of the country, 204 of them imprisoned under Arroyo’s term. As of March 31, 2008, 18 women are still detained in different parts of the country. Sexual abuse as a form of torture by state security forces are not rare or isolated occurrences as shown in the case of Angie Ipong, who even at her senior age of 64 had suffered molestation from the military.

## Joint Military Exercises with US troops

US troops have frequented the Philippines under the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). Since 2002, 25 military exercises involving US forces have taken place. Last February 2009, 6,000 US soldiers arrived in the country and joined 2,000 Filipino soldiers for a military exercise.

The armed forces insist that such exercises are purely socio-civic missions. But a Muslim woman whose husband was killed during a recent military operation in Muslim Mindanao attested that she saw a “Kano” (slang for American) during the operation.

The documented abuse of foreign troops in the country includes the rape of a 22-year-old Filipina two years ago. While the case involved four US soldiers, only one was convicted due to lack of evidence against the other three suspects. The vigilance of women’s organizations has pressured the government to take the case seriously. However, the convict was placed under the US embassy’s custody in violation of the VFA which stipulates that US soldiers who violate Philippine laws while in the country should be placed under Philippine jurisdiction. He was eventually acquitted after reaching a settlement with the victim and immediately flew back to the US.

## Women’s Fear and Insecurity

As the Philippine government rationalizes the existence of HSA, the Center for Women’s Resources (CWR) conducted a survey among 1,212 women aged 18 and above to find out if



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Filipino women feel threatened by terrorism and if they feel the need for additional legislation to make them secure. The respondents were randomly chosen from 3,217,228 women in the National Capital Region (NCR) based on the 2000 national census. Most of them were relatively young: 26.2% were aged 18-25; 20.9%, 26-33; and 18.3%, 34-41. The survey, consisting of seven questions, was conducted in September 7-23, 2007, with +/-3 margin of error at 95% confidence level.

According to the survey results:

Majority of the women respondents (60%) do not consider the HSA as the solution to the “terrorist” problem in the Philippines.

Majority do not consider terrorism as a threat; rather, the absence of food, jobs, and social services are the major threats in their lives.

Majority do not fully understand nor appreciate the government’s war against terrorism.

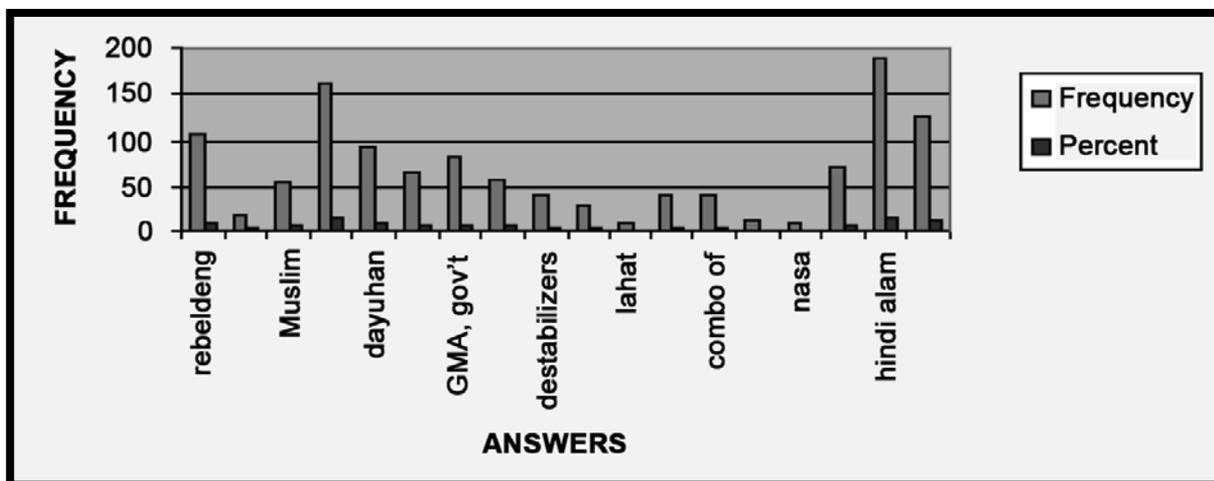
21% believe that Muslims are the instigators of violence and terrorism, reflecting the influence of media and other institutions.

15.7% do not have any idea or cannot tell or name any terrorist group while 10.3% are reluctant to say who the terrorists are.

8.8% identify communists as instigators of terrorism; 7.7% believe that invading foreigners are the terrorists; 6.8% consider the Arroyo government itself as terrorist, and 5.4% deem anyone who is in the political opposition terrorist.

The survey results have guided women organizers and leaders in identifying appropriate steps for human and women’s rights advocacy.

*Excerpt from a paper presented to the Workshop on Women and War, Asia Pacific Research Network, June 17, 2008, Hongkong, SAR*



# WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN THEORY, BUT NOT IN PRACTICE

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)



A groundbreaking legal action in Swaziland's High Court is testing the new Constitution and its recognition of equal rights for women.

King Mswati 111, sub-Saharan Africa's last absolute monarch, approved the Constitution in 2005 - on the back of centuries of discrimination against women that accorded them second class status - ending customary and institutional discrimination based on gender.

Although the Constitution recognizes the equality of women, in practice much legislation remains unchanged and discriminatory.

Mary-Joyce Doo Aphane, an attorney, filed the lawsuit to compel government to overturn Section

16 (3) of the Deeds of Registry Act, which forbids women to register property in their own names.

“This is the first test case for women and for the Constitution,” Fikile Mtembu, an attorney and the country’s first female mayor, told Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN).

Section 28 of the Constitution stipulates: “Women have the right to equal treatment with men, and the right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities.”

Aphane’s court action stems from her attempts to jointly register a property, using her maiden name, Aphane, with her husband, Michael Zulu. The deed’s office refused to register her as independent of her husband. “The property had to be registered in the name of my husband. The Deeds Registry Office will not accept the registration of the property in our joint names,” Aphane said in papers filed with the High Court.

The Constitution specifies that all laws prior to its promulgation are void if they conflict with constitutional clauses. However, to date no laws - some of which hark back to the British colonial era - have been amended or suspended.

“All the laws in the country are so discriminatory - they reflect the attitude towards women of a patriarchal society,” Mtembu said.

## Accepted law

“Banks still turn down women for loans if they don’t have husbands to co-sign. Some of the comments broadcast over the radio show the mindset of the country’s authority - they refer to ‘accepted law’ when it comes to women,” she said.

“Accepted law” is a euphemism for Swaziland’s customary law, which classifies women as

minors. Traditionalists argue that customary law takes precedence over the Constitution.

“There is a lack of political will to carry out what is called for in the Constitution,” said Aphane, a founding director of Women in Law in Southern Africa, a non-governmental organization advocating the rights of women.

“You find this in all quarters of government and traditional authority. In parliament, MPs understand nothing of this case. The person who should ferret out old laws and discard them is the attorney-general, but he is not interested. He is part of the system, part of the status quo.

When the Constitution came into force, Swazi authorities decided against establishing a Constitutional Court to deliberate on constitutional matters, delaying implementation of its provisions.

## Against the people

“Instead, we as taxpayers must foot the bill as government hires one lawyer after another to argue against the people of Swaziland who want their rights,” Aphane told IRIN.

The success or failure of Aphane’s case will determine whether women’s equality is a reality or, as one legal professional who declined to be identified, said, “the truth is rather that the constitution’s human rights guarantees were simply put there to indicate to the world that we are something that in fact we are not.”

Gigi Reid, a lawyer who has worked to gain title deeds for Swazi women in traditional, polygamous as well as civil marriage unions, told IRIN: “I am headily excited about having our rights as women upheld, as embodied in the Constitution under Sections 20 and more

specifically Section 28, which both envisage economic emancipation of women away from the concept of a *publica mercatrix*.”

*Publica mercatrix* is a concept that can be traced to ancient Rome, which states a woman cannot trade without the consent of her husband.

“This is a long overdue freedom, especially in the context of the fast-growing ‘career woman’ phenomenon and the single [parent] family entity,” Reid said.

“It is outrageous that even after three years since the inception of the constitution, women are still unable to sign sureties without the expressed consent of their husbands,” she said.

Reid hopes the constitution’s human rights provisions will be upheld by the High Court, and that government will honour the court’s decision.

But human rights activists are concerned that Swazis might have to spend years and a fortune

on legal fees in forcing the government to shelve discriminatory laws and practices.

“I fear this will set a precedent in respect of all other rights under the Constitution; that citizens will have to spend not only monetarily but also emotionally and otherwise in order to enforce their rights. This is definitely not within the spirit of our Constitution,” Reid commented.

Aphane said her case would be an opportunity to educate both men and women in the social and economic value of emancipating Swazi women. “I will not win this case, personally,” Aphane said, predicting victory in the courts. “The women of Swaziland will win this case.” – **Third World Network Features**

*The above is a report by IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Networks), the humanitarian news and analysis service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. It is reproduced from African Agenda, Issue Vol. 12 No. 1, 2009.*





# Women against War!

**Stop human rights abuse of women,  
and uphold gender equality and  
non-discrimination in Sri Lanka**

We are deeply concerned of the gravity of humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka, particularly in the north of Sri Lanka which has been reported on by the local and international media, civil society organisations, International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN including by the Secretary general and his senior Humanitarian officer Sir John Holmes despite the denial and control of access of media to the conflict zones by the Sri Lankan government.

According to the Human Rights Watch, over the past two months, more than 2,000 civilians have been killed in the conflict and thousands more injured, and currently some 150,000 civilians are at grave risk from fighting and aid shortages in the northeast Sri Lanka. Many are dying because of lack of food and medicine, as reported by the UN.

Those who have been displaced by the conflict are experiencing violence and human rights abuses on a daily basis. Their fundamental human rights such as right to life are severely curtailed because of restricted movement, denial of humanitarian assistance, lack of adequate food, water, sanitary conditions, medical care, etc. by the Sri Lankan government.

We are particularly concerned of the violence perpetrated against women, violation of human rights of women, and discrimination against women in the crisis situation in Sri Lanka. Two recent reports from Batticaloa in the east of the island about the sexual abuse of a 14 year old girl by a policeman as well as of the murder of a woman by unidentified persons point to the severity of the insecurity faced by women in the context of the conflict.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 acknowledges that “civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict including as refugee and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements”. In Sri Lanka, the conflict has not only exacerbated violence against women but has also disabled mechanisms through which women victims and survivors of violence can seek justice and redress. Internally displaced women and girls are at specific risk without protection mechanisms and access to support. Women human rights defenders, women engaged in the provision of humanitarian aid, women journalists and social workers are particularly at risk in conflict situation. Not only are women targeted for violence and sexual abuse, but also disproportionately affected in gender-specific ways in conflict situation.

CEDAW General Recommendation 19 makes clear that gender-based violence which impairs or nullifies “the right to equal protection according to humanitarian norms in time of international or internal armed conflict” is prohibited by the Convention which has been ratified by the government of Sri Lanka. The government of Sri Lanka is also bound by many other human rights obligations under other human rights treaties that it has also ratified.

Paragraph 131 of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) on women and armed conflict condemns gross violation of human rights in armed conflict including rape and systematic rape of women, creating a mass exodus of refugees and displaced persons, and states that perpetrators of such crimes must be punished.

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which set out the humanitarian standards for providing assistance and protection to internally displaced persons, explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in the application of all of the Guiding Principles.



media.nowpublic.net



The prolonged war in Sri Lanka has also violated fundamental human rights of people in other parts, including the east of Sri Lanka. The collapse of democratic institutions, restrictions on the freedom of speech and opinion, widespread torture, arbitrary detention and failure of law enforcement agencies to actively investigate and prosecute perpetrators of human rights violations.

Curtailed social services provided by the Government has had impact on women and men in rural areas. It is reported by National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO), Sri Lanka that women and men engaging with small-scale

fisheries lost their property and income due to restriction of fishing areas and safety zones, armed groups snatching the catch of fisher women and men, increased check points affecting the smooth transportation of fish, increasing costs of living such as oil and food.

Lack of commitment to implementation of policies to improve gender equality negatively affects women in terms of accessing education, employment opportunities, social security entitlement, etc. On top of those disadvantages, women have shouldered additional roles and responsibilities to cope with the deteriorating

living conditions by taking care of sick or injured family members, taking informal wage work to cover additional expenses, etc.

A woman in Trincomalee is struggling for her life and her three children by herself after losing her husband on the sea allegedly killed by the navy. She sells hoppers and pittu for people's breakfast. Widening high security zone reaching to the forest near her community does not allow her any more to collect fire wood and some food items from the forest causing her to lose her livelihood and adding to her burden.

A Muslim woman in Ampara has to travel 25 km from her home to work as domestic helper of a restaurant after her husband lost his livelihood as fisherman due to the national security measures set in force in the area which forbid him to go fishing. She has to go through four check points to go to work and come home everyday. As a Muslim woman she is blamed and harassed for traveling by herself and engaging in this kind of job. The mosque also urged her to stop doing the job. She was depressed but has to keep herself up and sustain her family.

We emphasise that "Peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men and development" (para 113, Women and Armed Conflict, BPFA, 1995) and call upon the Sri Lankan government and LTTE to immediately declare ceasefire, seriously engage in peace talks to arrive at a negotiated political settlement and strategically address the fundamental root causes of the armed conflict which has been raging for decades now in Sri Lanka costing thousands of people's lives.

#### **We call upon the Government to:**

- **immediately** declare its willingness to a cessation of hostilities with the LTTE in order to facilitate an emergency evacuation of civilians trapped in the conflict zones of the Vanni;
- **ensure** urgent delivery of food, water and medical supplies to IDP camps without discrimination based on sex;
- **ensure** the needs of women, particularly in rural area in service provision;
- **investigate** and bring justice to every human rights violation;
- **support** women's peace efforts and promote women's leadership in community mobilisation; and
- **ensure** women's participation in decision making processes at all levels.

#### **We call on the international community to:**

- **uphold** gender equality in human rights protection and humanitarian aid work; and
- **ensure** incorporation of gender dimension in investigating and reporting the situation of armed conflict in Sri Lanka.

*For the list of signatories visit [http://www.apwld.org/women\\_against\\_sri\\_lanka.html](http://www.apwld.org/women_against_sri_lanka.html)*



www.rafahtoday.org

# On International Women's Day, the Suffering of Palestinian Women Continues

Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

On 8 March, the world celebrates International Women's Day. This event highlights issues particularly affecting women, including their collective struggles for equality, and a universal commitment to women's enjoyment of all their rights in accordance with international standards and conventions.

This year Palestinian women continue to face extremely difficult personal and political circumstances due to human rights violations perpetrated by Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) against all Palestinian civilians, including women.

The most recent form of systematic violence by IOF was the twenty two day military offensive against the Gaza Strip. Throughout the offensive, the lives of Palestinian women were endangered by IOF excessive and indiscriminate use of lethal force. Civilians, including women, were killed without any consideration for the principles of proportionality and distinction as prescribed by international humanitarian law in order to minimize civilian casualties during military operations.

According to PCHR documentation, 120 Palestinian women were killed by IOF during the offensive in Gaza, which constituted 8.3% of the total number of Palestinians killed by IOF during the offensive. In addition, 735 women were injured (17% of the total). Dozens of these women were maimed.

Many of the female victims were killed or injured whilst at home, or else in shelters at UNRWA schools, which had been transformed into temporary accommodation for internally displaced civilians. It is civilians who continue to pay the real price of Israel's systematic acts of reprisal and retaliation against Palestinians and their property. During the recent Israeli military offensive, hundreds of women also witnessed the horrific deaths of their husbands or children.

The suffering of Palestinian women during the IOF offensive in the Gaza Strip was not limited to killings. IOF perpetrated a range of human rights violations that directly affected the lives of women, including house demolitions and destruction of local sources of income.



In addition, Palestinian women continue to be seriously affected by the IOF policy of collective punishment, and the siege imposed by IOF against the civilian population of the Gaza Strip, especially since June 2007.

In the West Bank, Palestinian women continue to suffer due to human rights violations perpetrated by IOF, including inter alia extra-judicial executions, willful killings, house raids and demolitions, settlement activities and restrictions on freedom of movement.

In addition to these violations, Palestinian women continue to face systematic discrimination and violations within their own society which also need to be addressed urgently.

PCHR reiterates its support for Palestinian women in the face of the obstacles they face from the continuing occupation of the IOF. The Centre believes that the international community, particularly the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, have failed to fulfil their obligations, including the obligation to ensure Israel's respect of the Convention in order to provide protection for all Palestinian civilians. Accordingly, PCHR calls upon the international community:



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1. To fulfil their obligations towards the Palestinian people as a people living under a belligerent occupation;
2. To provide the necessary protection for all Palestinian civilians, including women;
3. To force Israel to respect the Fourth Geneva Convention especially with regard to protecting civilians during military operations;
4. To hold Israel accountable for its violations against Palestinian civilians, which caused hundreds of civilian deaths during the recent military operation.

*The press statement is reproduced from <http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/PressR/English/2008/33-2009.html>*



# After Mourning and Melancholia, A Testimony to the Uncanny Filipina Gaze

## Or, Anticipating the Revenge of the Balikbayan Cargo Cult

(Part 1)

E. San Juan, Jr.

*A Review of MARISOL (2009)—a film directed by Hella Wenders; cinematography by Merle Jothé; produced by Barbara Mutschler and Florian Gerstenberg ; German Film and Television School, Berlin, Germany*

We live in the era of the global commons, but very few have actually met their neighbors—except as subalterns: household maids, hotel service-workers, nannies, most likely college-educated women from the Philippines. The ubiquitous phenomenon of Filipina domestics and overseas contract workers (almost ten million), known also as Overseas Filipino workers (OFW), has become a tedious and soporific topic for cynics and skeptics. Scholars have categorized them as modern indentured servants of the global ecumene. If you mention that at least five OFW cadavers/coffins arrive everyday at the Manila International Airport, a big yawn greets you: “So what else is new?” Those still awake may prod: “Why? How did this happen?”

Like millions around the world devastated by global capitalism’s meltdown, the lives of

migrant Filipinas/as have become redundant or disposable. This began in the 1970s. The Marcos dictatorship, supported chiefly by the United States and the IMF-World Bank, institutionalized the export of “warm bodies” to the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. In the neoliberal global market, the nationality label “Filipino” quickly became equivalent to “servant” or “maid” in Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and elsewhere. After 9/11, the terrorist Abu Sayyaf in the southern Philippines may have eclipsed the OFWs. But with the continual brutalization of Filipinas in Okinawa, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and the “Nicole” scandal (“Nicole” is the Filipina raped by an American soldier subsequently convicted but “kidnapped” by the US Embassy while his case is on appeal), with hundreds in jail or awaiting execution, their plight will continue to haunt the conscience of “the pillars of society.”



It may even disturb the sleep of State functionaries whose salaries depend on OFW remittances.

## Marisol's Sister: The Hanged Woman

One example is Flor Contemplacion whose case is well-known in the Philippines, but not in the global North. Accused of killing a fellow worker and a Singaporean child, and despite witnesses testifying to her innocence, Contemplacion was hanged in March 1995 by the Singaporean government. Instantly she became a national heroine. She

continues to symbolize the unconscionable plight of Filipinas abused, raped, and killed by their bosses. Then president Fidel Ramos, threatened by a groundswell of sympathy for the victim, intervened; but given the historic subservience and bankruptcy of the Philippine nation-state, OFWs will continue to endure barbaric humiliation and exploitation. The fate of Flor Contemplacion stands as a haunting sign of what awaits Filipinos—unless they organize, refuse this intolerable status quo, and help liberate the country from imperial oppression and poverty.

The current Arroyo regime and its predecessors have survived chiefly due to the \$12-14 billion OFW remittance. That is more than enough to cover the huge foreign debt and subsidize the obscene privileges of the tiny local oligarchy and the corrupt military/police. At least 1.3 million

families, 7.9% of the total 16.5 families of 90 million Filipinos (most of whom survive on \$2 a day), rely on OFW earnings for their survival. With the global economic downturn, a small drop in their household incomes will produce extreme hunger, criminality, and untold social upheavals. At least half a million OFWs work in Europe today, with 54,000 in Germany alone. The European Union's new immigration policy will target undocumented migrants by penalizing their employers. What happens to OFWs in Europe and in the diaspora around the world, will deliver an impact with profound consequences. This is why this film about the agonizing plight of a Filipina domestic in Berlin, Germany, serves as an emblematic alarm-signal, a wake-up call, a portentous omen of things to come.

Marisol, the protagonist of Hella Wender's short film, easily proves herself the uncanny half-sister of Flor Contemplacion. We wonder how a film can depict the structural situation of Filipino poverty driving thousands of wives/mothers to seek work abroad and preserve their integrity/sanity amid abuses, isolation, and an uncertain future. One way is to condense the complex total social situation into the experience of a typical individual, into one or two representative episodes. It's a challenge that Hella Wenders takes up, with intriguing success.



Flor Contemplacion

Her film is itself a "balikbayan" box we have to unpack. It uses the predicament of an illegal Filipina domestic in Berlin struggling to support her family (Luis, her husband, and two children, Jason and Lizelle). She thinks of them everyday and wants to go back home—she even orders a plane ticket under a false name. She holds up chiefly because her sister Wena,

a domestic in Hong Kong, reminds her of their dream of one day becoming free, owning a store back home.

The normal routine is disrupted. One day Marisol's husband calls to tell her that her sister Wena is dead. We expect Marisol to collapse, but except for one traumatic instant of abjecthood, she holds up. What happens to her dream of rejoining her family? She is undeterred. We saw her earlier taking care of two German children and cleaning windows. The film then focuses on Marisol—wife, mother, sister, family provider—filling her “balikbayan” box with commodities, gifts lovingly itemized as though they were fragments cut off from her body. Somehow she succeeds in paying for the shipping of her dead sister Wena: a “balikbayan” with a cruel twist. At the end, together with German friends and compatriots, Marisol vicariously participates in the burial of her sister via the computer's Internet screen.

## Media Seduction Vs. Aura of the Balikbayan Box

Will the dead rest in her grave? Is everyone pacified then, assured that Marisol will eventually realize the dream she shared with her “sacrificed” sister? Having hurdled this ordeal, will she move on to dare take other moves? What are her alternatives? These are a few questions aroused by Wender's film. How about us, the audience: Do we learn anything? While OFW families are disrupted by their country's neoconial underdevelopment, migrants re-imagine their community/fictive family with the help of prosthetic devices such as cellphones and electronic mail, satellite TV, internet, that help sustain identities and lifestyles across shifting or porous boundaries. Technology



extends and trains the human sensorium for survival in a dis-integrated anomic world, or in contested terrains. In postmodern jargon, these fluid and hybrid identities of OFWs inhabit the crucible of global ethnoscapes; presumably their psyches, if not their bodies, are able to elude bureaucratic definitions and traditional judgments. Do they?

The theme of a Filipina mother working abroad, without valid documents, is one pregnant with sentimental and melodramatic possibilities. No messianic guardian comes to the rescue. Wenders is able to deepen this figure by sophisticated camera work and nuanced framing of scenes and their calibrated sequencing. On first acquaintance, we are impressed by Marisol's lively but sober demeanor. The upbeat forward looking tonality of the film is conveyed by the introductory shots: sailors/workers gracefully doing gymnastics, smooth transition from ship to flowing traffic overlapping with Marisol's buoyant address to her sister: “Dear Wena...” Her voice-over evokes the dominant affect of the film. It centers on motherhood indexed by the “balikbayan” box. The leitmotif of sending/



receiving packages, plus the recollection of two sisters over their mother's love, sutures the montage of departure/removal, a transition from Manila to Berlin that easily folds us into the cinematic narrative.

Throughout the film, the “balikbayan” box operates as the central unifying trope: it connects dispersed family members, like the umbilical cord. Though separated, Marisol and Wena are united by memory of their mother and a dream of freeing oneself from serfhood to take up an independent pettybourgeois life—the dream of millions. Marisol is shown cleaning windows, symbolizing both aspiration and blockage; she cooks and minds the German children, a surrogate fulfillment of what her family and society expects. Unlike the child in the theme-song “Anak,” Marisol did not disobey her parents by indulging in wicked vice only to repent later. No pathos here, no melodrama, no tears—except shouting at the vacant urban landscape, a protest against some existential injustice or malice sprung on her from above. The film is very quiet, disturbingly reticent. Is this a deliberate provocation, a Brechtian estrangement-effect, challenging us to complete the film which ends with a medium-shot focus on Marisol's face?

## Dialectic of Speaking and Listening

One alternative is offered by the film: utterance. And access to the facilities of communication. Language unites and divides, but here the Filipino/Tagalog sutures episodes of loneliness and painful endurance. We soon discover that Marisol's sister Wena lives a double-life: her poetic efforts overshadow her bondage to household chores. Through a phonecall, Wena transmits her prophetic message of a monsoon outburst veiled by the overheated afternoons, allowing them to “fly to the moon.” The power of poetic language supplements, more exactly prescinds, electronic media. Their conversations dissolve the physical and temporal distance that separates them, compensating for their drab alienating circumstances. How long can this last? And can illusory relief by art/communication—the “talking cure” in which Wena becomes the analysand, Marisol the mute analyst—resolve material, historically structured adversities in our everyday life?

For OFWs, despite kinship networks, the danger of individualist solutions always proves seductive in a competitive global marketplace. There are now organizations like MIGRANTE that provide support (emotional, legal) to make up for government apathy or hostility. However, Marisol and many others are exposed to hazardous psychic injuries on top of physical harms. How do we handle sudden turns of fortune—actually, what's more horrible than death are marital infidelities—allegorized by interruptions of phone calls, sudden Internet fadeouts, silence? Unexpectedly Wena dies—not an accident but a homicide. No one else can help pay for her return home except Marisol whose precarious status exposes

her to possible arrest and deportation. Will she resort to extreme, law-breaking measures? Marisol is already a lawbreaker. But her plight encapsulates risk, alienation, and hope. Her contact with her German employer is defined solely by the money-wage (captured by a brief scene). In Berlin, Marisol's life-world is inhabited by children, women friends, cellphone, computers, and money. She seems never to engage in any pleasurable leisurely act—except videoke conviviality with other Filipinas and their German friends in a club. Apparently she has no one to replace Wena, someone with whom she can regularly communicate or confide to, linking past and present with the future.

Of course there is the ubiquitous Filipino priest who represents the absent family, homeland, parents. He is shown consoling an illegal OFW (Rica Santos), betrayed by another Filipino, jailed and about to be deported. She personifies the possible future of Marisol and countless others. It is Rica Santos to whom Marisol later confides outside "Gigi's Meeting Point," their common predicament establishing their fictive kinship, while other Filipinas and their German friends sing the song "Anak" about a child who repents for having ignored her parents and strayed from the straight and narrow path. Should Marisol repent being an OFW?

Using "Anak" seems a deftly ironic choice here. Providing continuity to several scenes



in the film, this popular song underscores the importance of parents and the need of children to heed their counsel lest disaster overtakes them. It warns children not to strike on their own without the guidance of authority, especially the father. But the father in the film is starkly undercut, glimpsed only in the unstable computer-screen, eclipsed by the strong mother-figure of Marisol, the lawbreaker. The film interrupts Marisol's conviviality with the news of Wena's "suicide" (several Filipina maids who fell from buildings in Hong Kong were really murdered by their employers). Marisol protests, suggesting that Wena should be put in a "balikbayan" box—a fulfillment of her mother's desire cited at the beginning. Fast forward and we see Marisol confiding in Rica the sister-surrogate, reflecting on their own somehow intertwined, "weird" fates: one wants to stay but cannot, and the other wants to go home but cannot.

*(to be continued)*

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# TO BE A WOMAN IS TO LIVE AT A TIME OF WAR

(English translation of "Ang Pagiging Babae ay Pamumuhay sa Panahon ng Digma")

by Joi Barrios\*

To be a woman  
Is to live  
At a time of war.

I grew up with fear beside me,  
Uncertain of a future  
Hinged  
To the men of my life:  
Father, brother,  
Husband, son.

To be a mother  
Is to look at poverty's face.  
For the cruelty of war  
Lies not on heads that roll,  
But tables always empty.  
How does one look for food  
For the eldest,  
As a baby sucks at one's breast?

No moment  
Is without danger.  
At home,  
To speak, to defy,  
Is to challenge violence itself.  
On the street,  
Walking at nightfall  
Is to invite a stranger's attack.  
In my country,  
To fight against oppression  
Is to lay down one's life for the struggle.

I seek to know this war.  
To be a woman is a never ceasing struggle  
To live and be free.

# TIGHTROPE WALKING\*\*

(A letter to all Filipinas living in the United States)

by Joi Barrios\*

Dear fellow / Filipina,

Dear sister,

The news on the woman raped,  
the plaintiff who recanted her testimony,  
was news that whipped our hearts,  
news that asked us to bridge the present  
and the past,  
the present and the future.

How does one forget the violation of the  
body,  
the stripping of dignity,  
the violence of conquest?

We are women walking tightropes,  
seemingly floating on air.  
Each day a balancing act,  
one foot in front of another,  
arms outstretched holding on a balance pole,  
eyes front to the point of destination,  
the key to the certainty of our steps,  
the stability of our stand.



We live in a colonizing nation  
while our spirits reside  
in our mother country in the East.  
Like her, the woman raped, she who fought,  
and then again, went forward and backward,  
Each day, we face, we weigh,  
our questions and contradictions.  
Yes, so many questions, so many contradictions.  
And yet, we hold in our hands the memory

of the Victoria Laktaws, poets who wrote verses on colonial rape.  
 of Karangalan, or Honor, the heroine who rejected Macamcam the Greedy  
 in a play performed a century past.  
 of Tandang Sora, the 90-year old revolutionary  
 who refused to take an oath of allegiance to America.  
 Together, if we look towards the struggle in the homeland,  
 each step we take, anywhere in the world,  
 is a step we offer towards the freedom  
 of the country of our hearts.

It is not true that tightrope walkers have no fear.  
 They just have faith that even when the ankle pivots,  
 the soles of their feet will never sway.

*\* The author is a renowned poet, playwright, critic and author of landmark literary and scholarly books on women empowerment, activism, human rights and theatre. She is a homegrown scholar and professor from the University of the Philippines-Diliman. She is currently an academic staff at the University of California-Berkeley. As a public intellectual, Dr. Joi Barrios is actively engaged in the community work of BAYAN Women's Desk, May First Movement, Karapatan and the Congress of Teachers/Educators for Nationalism and Democracy (CONTEND).*

**\*\*English translation of "Pagtulay sa Alambre"**

*Author's note: This poem was inspired by the work and statements of Nicole's lawyer, Ging Ursua, as well as other fellow TOWNS members (June, Tita Letty, Lorna, Nina, Tessy, etc.) who have fought hard not only for Nicole but also for true sovereignty in the Philippines. I also acknowledge Gabriela Philippines's consistent struggle against the Visiting Forces Agreement. I dedicate this poem to the following women I work with in the US: Kuusela Hilo, whom I relied on for comfort and friendship when I was a homemaker in Boston; to Chat Aban, Rachel Redondiez, Rhonda Ramiro, and Roseli Ilano, my co-workers in the Bay area, and to Julia Camagong, my friend and fellow Peryante member for twenty-five years.*

## Gender dimensions of the current global economic crisis<sup>1</sup>

The current global financial crisis is still unfolding. The developing Asia-Pacific region started to feel its impact deeply from the third quarter of 2008. It is still too early to comprehend the full social implications of the crisis. The following emerging trends, however, indicate that women could be affected significantly.

**Labour intensive sectors early casualties:** Low-skilled labour intensive manufacturing exports (the female-dominated industries) have been hit hard. Exports are declining rapidly in textiles, apparel and clothing, footwear, and electronics—an emerging trend across Asia. Other female dominated sectors, tourism and related services, are also affected. The burden is borne not only by women. Male-dominated industries, car and auto parts, and construction, have been equally hard hit. Several countries have experienced layoffs in financial services, information and communication technology (ICT)-based back-office services, and telemarketing. The gender composition of these sectors is fairly equal. As observed during other crises, the main casualty is the “flexible” labour force—low-skill, temporary, casual workers. Women constitute the majority of these workers in the Asia-Pacific region.

**Impacts on migrant workers sector-specific:** Overseas migrant workers are often hired as temporary workers, so they get dismissed first during economic downturns. Sufficient data is not available to discern clear trends. But press reports and other evidence lead to conclude that impacts would depend on the sector. Women workers are mostly engaged in skilled health care and education related activities; and low-skill intensive domestic care services and tourism. Since there is a conscious effort to protect social spending, especially the health budgets, in developed countries and the Middle East, job losses in these categories are expected to be low. But those engaged by private firms, private institutions and as domestic help would be more at risk.

**Impacts on micro-credit still unfolding:** Poor, in general, and women, in particular, are considered “subprime” borrowers by commercial banks. Having shunned by the formal banking sector, poor women largely rely on micro-credit facilities for financing their businesses and smoothing consumption during difficult times. Micro-credit institutions are largely funded by commercial banks and through aid. Commercial banks in most developing countries, faced with a global liquidity crisis, have significantly cut down on lending across the board. And there is early evidence from South Asia that the impacts are already felt on microfinance programs. Aid is expected to decline, and may exacerbate the problem.

**High food prices add to the burden:** While food prices have come down from the historical peaks observed in early-2008, the prices of many staples remain higher than the pre-food-price-crisis levels. This means that the poor face a “twin” crisis—high cost of food on which they spend around 60-80 per cent of their incomes; and the threat to their livelihoods from the still unfolding global financial crisis. Women, who have the responsibility to put food on the table, bear the brunt of the burden.

<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from a statement by Shamika Sirimanne, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Fifty-third session, New York, 2 – 13 March 2009



**8 МАРТА - ДЕНЬ**

**РАСКРЕПОЩЕНИЯ ЖЕНЩИН**

Poster for the International Women's Day in Russia in 1920 by Adolf Strakhov