

# Filipino Children at the Margins of Development

## The Philippine NGO Coalition Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) 2001-2007

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Philippine Government submitted a consolidated document of its third and fourth periodic reports on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) last September 2007. This present document, on the other hand, is the culmination of the process initiated by the Philippine Non-Government Organisation Coalition on the CRC (NGO Coalition) in order to consolidate information from different child focused agencies and organisations in the country as early as July 2007. Central to this process is a series of island-wide consultations which sought to validate information included in the State report and to gather additional information on local situations of children as suggested by the reporting guidelines of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. A total of 111 adults and 110 children representing 101 NGOs and children's organisations in the National Capital Region and Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao participated in the consultations.
2. This report covers the period 2001-2007, which may be known as the Arroyo years as Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo rose to power through a popular uprising that deposed then President Joseph Estrada in 2001. In 2004, Arroyo narrowly triumphed in an election marred by alleged massive cheating and fraud. She faced several impeachment attempts and calls for her ouster. Allegations of corruption continue to hound her presidency.
3. This period was tumultuous for the Philippines, and it continues to be so as the country faces the challenges of ballooning population, massive poverty, growing disparity between the rich and the poor, increasing lack of livelihood opportunities, continuing exodus of skilled workers, political instability, a bureaucracy riddled by corruption, and pockets of civilian strife and armed conflict. The report provides an initial discussion on how these existing conditions and corresponding government priorities and responses directly or indirectly impact on the State Party's compliance to the provisions of the UN CRC which the Philippines ratified in 1990.
4. The evidence collected for this report clearly show that the State Party's compliance to the UN CRC is constrained by its own development agenda. Despite the Government's focus on macro-economic concerns, data and analysis of the situation of children show that Philippine economic growth does not necessarily translate to growth and development in the lives of Filipino children.
5. The insistence of the government on debt servicing has taken away much needed funding support for basic services such as health, education, and social services. The lack of resources has affected anti-poverty strategies, making them mostly short-term and palliative, and thereby unsustainable to effectively address the burgeoning poverty affecting millions of children. These programmes and services only reach a small percentage of children and they fail to benefit the sectors that most need these services.
6. Several macro-economic policies of the government have directly or indirectly affected children negatively:

- a) The reliance on overseas labour migration to shore up the national economy has eroded children's fundamental support system in the family. They were left without safety nets to protect them from the negative impacts of parental absence.
- b) The strategies to attract foreign investment gave license to certain mining companies to lay waste to the environment without fear of censure. Children have encountered health risks due to pollution. They have lost their homes through forced evictions. Children's right to life, survival and development were severely compromised.
- c) The government's aggressive promotion of tourism have exposed children to the dangers of sexual exploitation, prostitution and trafficking, but the mechanisms necessary for children victims to seek redress were not effectively installed.

7. Legislation has been touted as the cornerstone of the State Party's compliance to the UN CRC. Yet, previous legislative recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child have still not been addressed: total ban of corporal punishment, minimum age of sexual consent, protection of children born out of wedlock.

8. Genuine compliance to the principles of the Convention should go beyond the enactment of laws. This should be supported by investments in funding, structural mechanisms and adequately trained personnel to enable proper, effective and efficient implementation. The glaring absence of budget allocations for children at the national and local levels reflects the State's lack of commitment to ensure that these resources are available to address children's concerns. There is a corresponding lack of serious enforcement of the provisions of laws and policies in order to promote children's survival and development and to ensure children's participation in decisions, plans and programmes that respond to their concerns. Concerted efforts from NGOs and other civil society actors have been integral in addressing this gap.

9. The majority of the people's views and perspectives show that children's rights in general are still not recognised because of ineffective information dissemination. Venues for children to be involved in planning, budget allocation, programme implementation and monitoring are limited in degree (token consultation) and scope (limited to children who work with NGOs who have direct collaboration with government and LGUs).

10. The State Party needs to take seriously its obligation to the UN CRC and exercise its political will in fulfilling children's rights. The challenge for the State is to go beyond minimum compliance by seriously placing children at the centre of the national development agenda. This shift in emphasis would have several important implications to government policies, programmes and ways of working.

11. *Placing children at the centre means that the children's best interest is always considered in all matters of public policy.* The State Party needs to ensure that policies at the local and national level do not impinge on children's right to life, survival and development. It is also in the children's best interest that the laws enacted to protect and promote their rights be fully implemented and enforced. This also means that meaningful participation of children in matters affecting them needs to be ensured by the State Party.

12. *Placing children at the centre necessitates the allocation of more resources for the realisation of children's rights and needs:* The economic growth experienced by the Philippines recently has not been translated into the improvement of the welfare of children and other

vulnerable groups. The realisation of the provisions of the CRC requires substantial financial resources; thus, the State needs to prioritise children's needs and rights.

13. *Placing children at the centre means providing substantial investments in the social protection system, particularly within the education and health care sectors.* To ensure that all children are healthy, educated and safe, the state should strengthen social protection for the most vulnerable and excluded children. Thus, children's vulnerability to poverty and other social problems will be significantly reduced.