

Special Edition on FIND's Psychosocial Work 2012

THE SEARCH

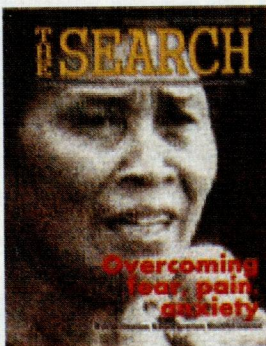
The official publication of the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND)

**Overcoming
fear, pain,
anxiety**

Rehabilitation Reintegration Reinforcement

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Notes on the Cover

Corazon Estojero, wife of labor organizer Edgardo Estojero, who disappeared in 1987, was and still is an activist. She personifies the full circle of FIND's psychosocial work. Her husband's enforced disappearance dealt her and her children a staggering blow but she refused to be knocked down. Along with other wives of the disappeared she joined psychosocial rehabilitation sessions and emerged a stronger woman. Now fully reintegrated into the mainstream of society, she does not feel marginalized but empowered as she performs her daily tasks as mother, grandmother and as FIND's Organizing and Education Program Assistant.

Cover Design and Lay-out: Gerry Arances

The unabated commission of enforced disappearances keeps old wounds fresh and remembering the missing loved ones brings on painful reminiscences of harrowing experiences wrought by this abominable State-perpetrated violence.

No matter how firmly and proudly families of the disappeared declare that when they gather to pay tribute to their missing loved ones they are celebrating sterling lives of courageous and self-sacrificing patriots and freedom-fighters, they cannot obliterate the reality that they struggle to muffle their cries of grief and immense loss. This, despite the years and decades that have elapsed since the enforced disappearance of their kin. It may be less discomfoting to think of the disappeared already resting in eternal peace than to imagine him/her still under inhuman incommunicado detention and being relentlessly subjected to torture and degrading treatment or punishment. Families of those who have long been missing try to find solace in such escapist thoughts; families of recent and not so recent victims continually agonize between hope of finding the disappeared and despair that the torturous disappearance may be prolonged to eternity or eventually end up in extrajudicial killing.

Needless to stress, these families, who strive to know the truth, bring the perpetrators to justice, hold the State accountable and demand reparation, are themselves victims as they suffer harm as a direct result of the enforced disappearance of their relatives.

Not unlike those who reappear after languishing in secret detention, most family members need a support group from whom they can draw strength and who can help them process and heal psychological and emotional pain.

It should be borne in mind, however, that not all who are exposed to trauma are psychologically harmed. It is not easy to discern much less understand the precise effects of enforced disappearance on various individuals and family members. Resilience is an important factor that should be carefully considered. Some family members of the disappeared choose not to undergo any psychosocial intervention. The family itself is their support group. Their unequivocal belief that their disappeared loved ones fought for noble causes and dedicated their lives to serving the poor and less privileged is enough inspiration for the family to sustain the advocacy pursued by their missing kin.

It is also important for those involved in psychosocial work to address and confront the root causes of enforced disappearance and other forms of State-perpetrated repression and violence with the end in view of strengthening the rights of individuals and families, more particularly the right to truth. Truth-telling and a strong political commitment to redress and stop enforced disappearance and other human rights violations are crucial to an effective psychosocial process that seeks to reintegrate surfaced victims and families into the mainstream of society.

A psychosocial rehabilitation program must be viewed and planned within a given social, cultural and political context. And it must be implemented in collaboration with experts in psychosocial work.

Giving Light to a Battered Life: FIND's Psychosocial Work

Families of victims of enforced disappearance experience losing their loved ones much differently from those whose loss is brought about by death. The latter are able to grieve immediately even in public and after giving the dead a decent burial gradually albeit not easily recover from the pain of loss. Unlike these families, families of those who remain missing - are tormented by the uncertainty of not knowing whether their missing kin are still alive but being subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment or have already been tortured to death and unceremoniously dumped in unmarked graves they know not where. Yet, their anguish may swing to hope that their loved ones may miraculously surface and be reunited with them. The families' oscillation between hope and despair may eventually veer more toward the latter as the period of disappearance lengthens into weeks, months and years. In a number of cases, this anxiety may degenerate into clinical depression or psychosis that may require psychiatric intervention. This is the case of an aeta mother of a disappeared who is now under psychiatric care.

Coping mechanisms of families vary. There are those who are able

to accept the loss in a relatively short period of time. Others, who are not resilient, suffer from unresolved grief and exhibit the following post traumatic manifestations:

- Prolonged inability to accept the disappearance of the loved ones;
- Continuous yearning for the missing;
- Persistent flashbacks, recurrent nightmares, intrusive memories;
- Constant feeling that the disappeared is always present and watching over the family;
- Guilt over acts and omissions concerning the disappeared.

There are family members who cannot move on as they continue to wait and hope that the disappeared would come back. Others rage over the elusiveness of justice - that the perpetrators remain unpunished despite the presence of evidence which they believe may warrant the conviction of the offenders. This problem stems from the absence of credible witnesses who are willing and courageous enough to testify before the courts.

Most families of the disappeared suffer economic dislocation more

particularly if the missing was the sole breadwinner of the family. Wives are suddenly burdened with raising their children alone; parents, especially the elderly are deprived of children who will take care of them as they grow older; and the children are denied the love and care that the disappeared parent should have showered them with. Many children are forced to quit schooling and look for odd jobs to enable them to augment the families' meager resources.

In view of these tremendous impacts of disappearance on the family, FIND had to devise a psychosocial rehabilitation program appropriate to the unique situations of individual families or aggregates of family members on the basis of their positions and roles in the family, i.e. wives, parent /elderly, or children.

The program seeks to:

- Enable family members to release feelings associated with grief;
- Overcome lingering pain;
- Prevent psychological trauma or prolonged grief.
- Create a support group; learn and acquire tools and exercises to promote well-being of "self"; develop the habit of tapping inner resources; and energize and empower themselves.

Among the techniques / activities employed are:

- Self-awareness activities such as personality types and temperament seminar-workshops;
- Expressive therapy, i.e., drawing, poetry reading, essay writing, painting, role-playing, various techniques using symbols as tools for self-awareness;
- Relaxation exercises and guided visualization;
- Values formation for the children of the disappeared;
- Visual (painting, drawing) and theatre arts therapy for the children of the disappeared;
- Writing letter to the disappeared loved ones;
- ‘Empty chair exercise’ wherein the disappeared is imagined to be sitting on a chair;
- Group-sharing of experiences and expression of feelings about the kin’s disappearance;
- and/or
- Group-sharing focussing more on the present situation than on past experiences according to the preference of family members; and recently
- Testimonial therapy.

Among the results of the above psychosocial activities are:

- “Letting go” or feeling of relief,

extinction or reduction in the “heaviness in their hearts”;

- Ability to cry freely;
- Better understanding of oneself and others;
- Better understanding of and determination to pursue the causes fought for by the disappeared;
- Openness or ease in communicating with others;
- Drawing strength from other families

A separate and distinct psychosocial work is employed on survivors or reappeared victims. This is designed to help them overcome the chilling and debilitating effect of various forms of torture. These cruel and degrading acts traumatize some victims making them perpetually fearful. Others develop distrust in the military and the police who ironically are supposed to provide them with security. Still others

have deepened their involvement in the movement for social change and have actively participated in the campaign to end torture and enforced disappearance.

From 31 May to 02 June 2005 FIND gathered 18 survivors from different parts of the country who for a certain period have disappeared even from themselves but have since struggled to move on. (See page 40 for the executive summary of this Psychosocial Conference of Surfaced Desaparecidos.)

Notwithstanding the continuing development of FIND’s psychosocial work, the organization hopes that someday it will focus more on economic and political empowerment of the families of the disappeared than on rehabilitation.



Yolanda Bon

FIND's PSYCHOSOCIAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

POLICIES AND GUIDELINES ON FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

In general, providing welfare assistance to victims of involuntary disappearance and/or their families is one way of recognizing that involuntary disappearance is not only a violation of civil and political rights but also of economic and social rights.

In more recent years when FIND's campaign for justice intensified, it was stressed that in providing the different forms of assistance priority would be given to those who actively participate in FIND's different tasks with the exception of the elderly and sickly parents of the disappeared.

Neither FIND nor our funding agencies consent to the traditional "dole out system" because this runs contrary to the conduct of our campaign for justice and the empowerment and development of people as a whole. On one hand, our partner-agencies entrust FIND the responsibility of ensuring that every centavo they give to the organization should be spent within mutually-agreed upon parameters. For its part, FIND exerts all efforts to ascertain that the different forms of its welfare assistance are contextualized within its holistic psychosocial rehabilitation program – that of rebuilding the broken lives of the families of the disappeared.

I. General Objective

To provide other programmed financial assistance to victims of enforced disappearance and/or their immediate relatives – ONE PER VICTIM / VICTIM'S FAMILY.

II. Various Forms of Other Assistance

A. Medical Assistance. Assistance provided to help immediate families of

victims augment the high cost of medicines in times of illness.

B. Emergency Assistance. Assistance extended to aid in hospitalization or confinement costs caused by emergency situations (medical, disasters / calamities or difficult situations).

C. Elderly Assistance. Special assistance given to elderly victims and/or

members of his/her immediate family.

D. Educational Assistance. Assistance given to dependent children and younger siblings of victims to help them pursue their studies.

E. Burial Donation/Death Assistance. Assistance extended to help defray the burial expenses of victims or members of his/her immediate family who die to aid in high cost of burial.

III. Who may apply?

Victims of enforced disappearance and/or their immediate families.

- If the victim is single: mother and/or father (if dead, younger single sibling)
- If the victim is married: wife or husband and dependent children

IV. Processing of applications

For FIND members

1. Prospective applicants should coordinate with the chapter officers to verify availability of assistance per victim's family.

2. All applicants should properly fill up and submit FIND's welfare assistance application form, with the necessary supporting documents attached, and submit to the designated chapter officer of FIND.

Requirements:

- 1) Medical assistance
 - medical certificate, doctor's prescription, official receipts of purchased medicines
- 2) Emergency assistance
 - barangay certificate, proof of medical confinement
- 3) Elderly assistance
 - senior citizen I.D. or birth certificate, proof of relation to the victim
- 4) Educational assistance
 - previous school grades with no failing grades, registration form, official receipts of enrollment
- 5) Burial donation/Death assistance
 - death certificate

3. Applications shall be initially assessed by the designated chapter officer(s) and verified with the Other

Assistance Record Book. After positive assessment, the application shall be forwarded to the Psychosocial Rehabilitation Program Staff for recommendation for final approval by the Secretary-General, or the Deputy Secretary-General in the absence of the former.

4. Upon approval, processing of the release of cash assistance shall commence. The assistance shall be sent direct to the beneficiary as much as possible. Only when extreme difficulty arises shall the cash assistance be sent thru designated chapter officers.

5. Amount of financial assistance (subject to availability of fund):

a) The abovementioned beneficiaries can avail themselves of the amount of up to P5,000/victim's family for any of the ff:

- Medical
- Emergency
- Elderly (maximum of P2,000.00)

b) An amount of up to: P2,000.00 per year for elementary level; P5,000.00 per year for high school level; P5,000.00 per semester college level may be given as educational assistance to deserving dependent children or siblings of victims.

c) A burial donation/death assistance of P5,000.00/victim's family may be given to his/her immediate family.

For non-members

1. All applicants should properly fill up and submit FIND's welfare assistance application form, with the necessary supporting documents attached, and submit to the designated chapter officer of FIND with a letter of intent to avail of the assistance.

Requirements:

- 1) Medical assistance
 - medical certificate, doctor's prescription, official receipts of purchased medicines
- 2) Emergency assistance

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Assistance	Requirement	Amount
Medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · medical certificate · doctor's prescription · official receipts of purchased medicines 	Maximum of P5,000xx
Emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · barangay certificate · proof of medical confinement 	
Elderly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · senior citizen I.D. or birth certificate · proof of relation to the victim 	
Educational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · previous school grades with no failing grades · registration form · official receipts of enrollment 	Elementary - P2,000/yr. High school - P5,000/yr. College - P5,000/sem.
Burial / Death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · death certificate 	P5,000xx



Traumatic Loss

Among Families of Victims of Enforced Disappearance

Annabel Manzanilla-Manalo, Ph.D.

(I waited for a long time . . . for five years I was hoping that he will be returned to me . . . I even consulted a fortune-teller and was told that my husband's dead body was placed in a sack and thrown into the sea.)

The difficulty of providing for her three children's needs compelled her to temporarily entrust her six-month-old baby to the care of her relative, who

Maria (not her real name), 49 years old, was one of the eight wives of disappeared husbands who participated in a trauma healing retreat which I facilitated on October 25-28, 2010 for FIND.

Maria and her husband were both community organizers in urban poor communities until his first disappearance in 1982. He was abducted, heavily tortured, disappeared for one month, resurfaced and detained as a political prisoner for four years. Two years after his release, he was again abducted by four armed men and has since been missing.

At the most difficult point in the aftermath of her husband's disappearance, Maria suffered significant emotional distress, so intense as to profoundly over-

whelm her ability to cope with day to day life. The first few months were extremely agonizing as she was preoccupied with locating her husband. She was confused about what to do and was in a chronic state of fear, anxiety, depression, anger and frustration.

Maria waited for many years for news of his whereabouts. She did not know if her husband would ever resurface, was painfully tormented by uncertainty regarding his fate and had a strong need to know what happened or where the body is buried. "Naghintay ako nang matagal . . . halos limang taon na umaasa ako na maibabalik pa siya . . . nagkonsulta pa nga ako sa manghuhula at ang sabi inilagay daw sa sako ang bangkay ng asawa ko at itinaapon sa dagat."

later refused to give back her child. She was also forced to remarry just for family support. The series of events compounded her sense of loss. She suffered multiple losses—her husband and child, and in a profound way, her sense of who she was. "*Maraming nawala sa akin . . . Di lang asawa ko ang nawala, pati ang anak ko. Pati pagkatao ko ay nawala rin . . . Napilitan akong mag-asawa muli para maitaguyod ko ang aking mga anak.*" (I lost many things . . . I lost not only my husband but also my child. And my person as well . . . I was compelled to remarry so I can support my children.)

The impact of the disappearance was severely felt in the family. Maria's seven year old daughter, who witnessed the abduction of

her father, was unable to speak about what happened. She reported that her daughter, now 29 years old, seems to carry the impact of the traumatic loss to this day. *“Palubog siya nang palubog . . . ang galit niya sa buhay ay ibinubuhos niya sa kanyang mga anak.” (She was mired deeper and deeper . . . she vented her anger on her children.)*

Maria’s anguish was exacerbated by the lack of support and constant blaming from her family. *“Sinisisi pa ako ng aking pamilya . . . kasi rebelde daw ang asawa ko, walang ginagawa sa buhay.” (My family blames me . . . they say my husband is a rebel, doing nothing with his life.)*

Even until this time, memories of her husband’s disappearance open up wounds that don’t seem to heal. She continues to feel the pain and grief. *“Napakasakit sa dibdib at kahit matagal na ang pangyayarari, masakit pa rin. Nagulo ang aking pag-iisip at nawalan ng direksyon ang aking buhay. Lagi akong nagkakasakit at napabayaang ko ang aking mga anak.” (Even if it has been a long time, it is still very painful. I lost peace of mind and direction in life. I would always get sick and even neglected my children.)*

Impact of Enforced Disappearance

The enforced disappearance of a loved one is experienced by family members as traumatic loss. Its sudden or violent nature makes it extremely devastating and

FIND’s Psychosocial...from page 5

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painful. For Maria, it triggered strong reactions such as anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, social withdrawal, isolation, and posttraumatic stress symptoms of hyper-arousal and avoidance. Her hatred or bitterness was so debilitating leaving her depressed and hopeless about the future. Most significant was the loss of

her sense of self or a sense of being fragmented.

For most families, traumatic loss results in unresolved grief which usually lasts for many months, or even years after the disappearance. This is commonly expressed in lingering pain, difficulty with transitions or changes, inability to make decisions, decreased ability to cope

with routine activities, inability to move on from a sense of loss, helplessness, and despair. Unresolved grief reactions are indications of "complicated mourning," a condition where both trauma and grief coincide. The nature and depth of traumatic loss and, consequently, the healing process would vary according to factors such as availability of social support, cohesiveness of the family, socioeconomic situation, time that has elapsed since the disappearance, establishment of truth and retrieval of the body, and the possibility of justice and reparations. Similarly, the need to simultaneously address legal, economic and other family concerns can make the healing process more complicated.

The space and ability to mourn is also a crucial factor in healing and being able to resume one's life routines. The trauma that comes with having a disappeared loved one, however, is characterized by ambiguity. The loss remains undetermined and family members are caught between uncertainty and hope. They continue to search and yearn for the body of the missing person. Failure to recover the body makes it very difficult to adjust to, come to terms with and bring closure to the "loss." This may be aggravated by the stigma that the family could experience in reaction to the nature of the disappeared's involvement. In a society where mourning takes on a cultural character, inability to

mourn becomes even more unbearable.

Facilitating Trauma Healing

People who suffer from symptoms of traumatic loss often feel insane or abnormal. They need psychosocial support and must be made to feel that they are not alone in their experiences. Thus, providing a safe space for sharing their grief with those who have gone through the same experience plays a significant role in the healing process. This validates their pain and acknowledges the many losses they have been through. Similarly, they must be prepared to accept that healing is a complicated process, as it may not come in neat stages, and may take several years. Just as when they feel they have experienced significant healing, reminders of the loss may resurface the pain and grief. Finally, they should be made to appreciate the resources inside and outside the family which they can draw from for healing.

The trauma healing retreat that I facilitated provided space for the participants to work through some of their unresolved grief issues. The interventions took the form of art work, meditation exercises, rituals and other creative group activities. What seemed to have created the deepest impact was the visualization exercise that involved conversation with the person/s they need to reconcile or resolve issues with. It could be anyone—the self, the dis-

appeared, any family member or the perpetrator.

For Maria, the activity provided a safe space to reconnect with her inner self and reconcile with the perpetrators. During her dialogue with the perpetrator she shared, "*Nakita ko siya, malungkot, may luha ang mga mata. Humingi siya ng tawad sa akin, 'patawarin mo ako, bigyan mo ako ng kapanatagan'. Sagot ko, 'Pinatawad na kita pero kailangan mo pa ring panagutan ang ginawa mo.'*" ("I saw him, sad, with tears in his eyes. He asked for forgiveness, 'forgive me, give me peace.' I replied, 'I forgive you but you still need to account for what you did.'")

She also conversed with someone she refers to as one of the witnesses. "*Umiiyak siya, hila ang binti at paa, nakaluhod. 'Pinatawad na kita, kung ang Diyos nga nakapagpatawad.'*" ("He was crying, and was down on his knees. 'I forgive you, just as God forgives.'")

Finally, she dialogued with her inner self. "*Sa matagal na panahon, 18 taon, hindi ako nakapagpatawad, naging mahina at nawala sa sarili . . . Ngayon tinatanggap ko na nang lubos ang lahat. Pakiramdam ko lumaya na ako at ang galit sa puso ay nawala na.*" (For a long time, for 18 years, I would not forgive; I have been weak and I lost sense of myself . . . now I fully accept everything that happened. I feel free and the hatred in my heart is gone.)



In describing the resolution that took place, Maria used the metaphor of the bright moon. "Maliwanag ang buwan, muling nabuo ang liwanag. . . lumakas ang loob ko na ibangon ang sarili at tanggapin ang katotohanan." (Bright moon, the light was restored . . . I gained the resolve

to raise myself and accept the truth.)

The encounter enabled Maria to let go of the anger and bitterness that have held her captive for a long time. They seem to be the missing dimension in her healing, the key that brought closure to her unresolved grief issues.

Maria's account of being able to forgive, while not softening on the demand for justice, is a critical element to healing that is worth exploring further. Forgiveness is a recurring theme in the healing narratives of many trauma survivors, either individually or collectively. It could be a resource which one could draw from to courageously face the perpetrators or even overcome fear of them.

The processes that I designed for the group, which basically provided space for surfacing, remembering and acknowledging, still need further evaluation and refinement. But what is evident is the significant role played by a psycho-spiritual-social perspective in understanding traumatic loss, facilitating the healing process and strengthening resilience.

The participants in the retreat taught me a lot about the meaning and the all-encompassing impact of traumatic loss among bereaved family members. Healing intervention in this context needs to be done in the spirit of accompaniment. Such an approach can facilitate finding meaning in their suffering and transforming their grief into actions for social justice.

(Ms. Annabel Manalo is a clinical psychologist and a professor of counseling & psychology. She has done trauma healing work with survivors of human rights violations. She is at present a board member of BALAY).

Understanding and Working with Families of the Desaparecidos

Imelda V. G. Villar, Ph.D.

Enforced disappearance inflicts excruciating pain not only on the victims but on those who love them.

The degree to which families are pained are affected by several factors. The first is the emotional bond with the person: the deeper the love and appreciation for the person, the greater the loss felt.

If the *desaparecido* is a suspect for some crime, the family could be stigmatized and scoffed at. The pain is doubled by the condemnation of other people.

If the person is considered a rival - business, political, and the like - the family could be avoided by friends and relatives who are afraid to get involved. Nobody may want to help the family emotionally, financially, legally or socially. The pain is compounded by the loss of significant support. Furthermore, suspiciousness can arise because the same thing might happen to other family members. This can aggravate the sleepless nights, crying spells, nightmares, worry /tension.

The length of time that has elapsed since the time of disappearance can aggravate the psychological distress. The longer the period, the less the expectation of seeing the loved

one again. But the hope and the pain continue to linger. Since many questions are left unanswered, it remains to be an unfinished business. Instead of forgetting the *desaparecido*, the significant others become obsessed with knowing what happened. They trace back when they last saw the person: what he/she was saying; if he/she ever mentioned any significant information that could give clues to answer the following haunting questions:

- What happened?
- Who did it?
- Why?
- Where is he/she?
- What if?
- What is happening now?

Since the uncertainty regarding what has happened or what will happen remains, there is no closure for a long time or the mourning process cannot begin and the pain can resurface every now and then. Despite all the difficulty, the abandoned person finds it difficult to answer this question: "Do I want to know that he's dead, or do I want to keep hoping he's alive?"

If it is an offspring or a husband that disappeared, the spouse and/or the other children suffer much. Mothers tend to neglect their own

needs and those of other members of the family. All energy and attention are focused on searching for the missing child or husband. Because they withdraw socially and emotionally from those around them, there is a consequent loss of vital support from the outside.

The family can suffer from economic distress if the missing is the breadwinner. Those left behind who are working may be so disturbed that they cannot work and eventually lose their job. This economic difficulty may worsen if the family spends money on fortune-tellers, informants and other expensive administrative steps to find out the fate of loved one.

Thoughts about how the loved one may have suffered or is suffering can heighten the pain. This is compounded by the guilt that they did not do enough to protect the victim.

Should the survivor have any unresolved issues with the *desaparecido*, the guilt is heightened and pain is intensified. Ruminations can preoccupy the person.

The family can be so absorbed in the case that they cannot grieve. They cannot accept the possibility that the *desaparecido* has died because resignation is tantamount to giving up on their loved one. They believe that they are the only person who would see to the case. They get irritated with those whose duty is to help because they

feel that they are not doing enough. The perceived lack of support from the community and the government doubles their feeling of abandonment and/or despair.

Should they begin to think that the spouse or child is truly gone, they go through a whole gamut of emotions:

- Guilt for doubt as to whether they tried to search

can bring a real sense of relief, as it enables the family to begin the process of coming to terms with the loss

- Fear that the missing loved one will be forgotten forever. If the body is not found there is a nagging question: "Who will remember him/her when I am gone?"
- Guilt because stopping the search is like abandoning the *desaparecido* forever or "killing him/her all over again."

Since families feel alone in their anguish and the daily struggle to survive, the psychological burden may be so great that counseling or therapy is required.

For those helping, the following guidelines are useful:

- Handle family with:
 - flexibility
 - sensitivity
 - discretion
 - empathy
 - compassion
 - patience
- Build a relationship of trust
- Establish regular contact even in the absence of developments
- Help establish contact with the victim's colleagues

or with families of other victims as they can become a support group

- Coach, but give options, on how to liaise with service providers, organizations or independent individuals
- Respect desire for minimal contact or more involvement with others
- Emphasize the victim's desire to have them go on with their lives and have happy lives
- Organize activities to bring affected families together to share experiences and exchange information. These

- encourage breaking out of isolation
- create opportunity to join forces to find solutions to problems
- improve mental and emotional health and approach to dealing with the consequences of their loss

- Establish family associations among parents/spouses of the missing to give long-term sustained support. These

- create intimate understanding of problems
- act on behalf of families and can guide and advise authorities and other help-providers
- facilitate relationship with the authorities and ensure their voice is heard
- act as spokesperson and enhance visibility

hard enough or exhausted all possibilities to locate the loved one early enough to save him/her

- Distress that the loved one had not been given a proper burial - important to find the body and to return it to family. While confirmation can be extremely painful, it



Imelda V. G. Villar, Ph.D.

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WARNING SIGNS that a Family Member of a Disappeared or the Reappeared Victim Needs Psychiatric Intervention

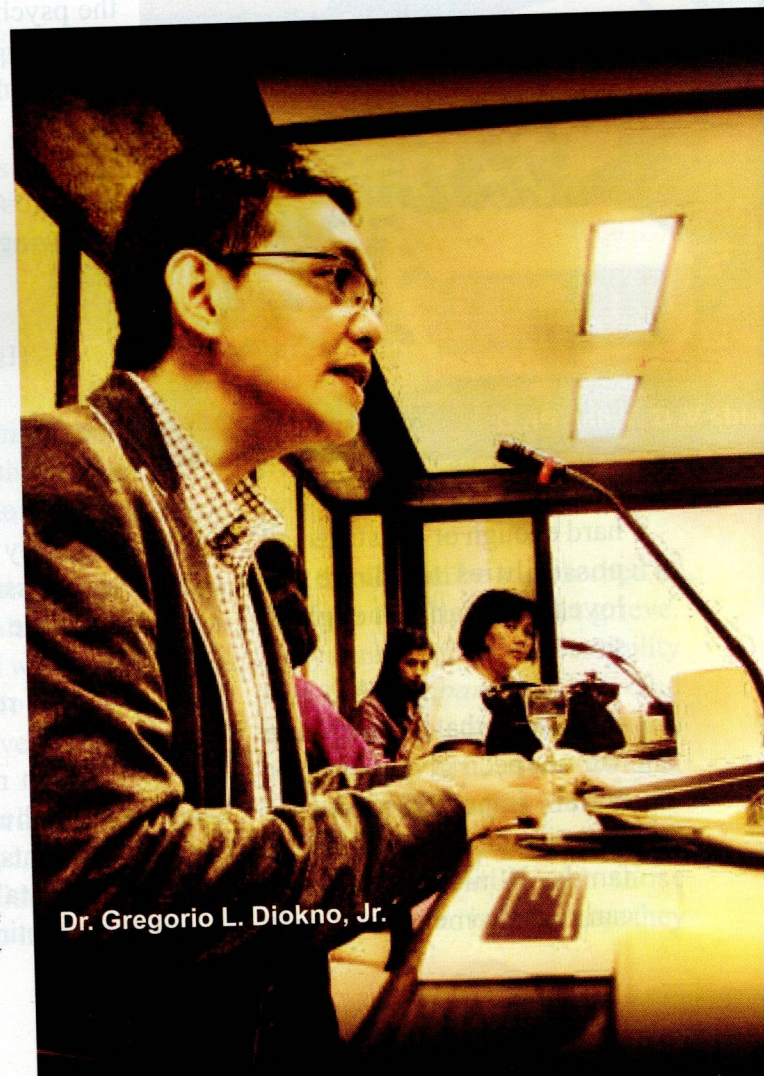
Dr. Gregorio L. Diokno, Jr. MD, DPBP, FPPA

When looking for warning signs and symptoms in a family member of disappeared victim or the reappeared victim, it is important that all family members of the victim or the reappeared victim himself or herself **MUST/SHOULD** undergo complete psychiatric evaluation. In this way, we can screen who needs psychiatric intervention and not miss those who also have subclinical presentation.

The warning signs and symptoms that the clinician should look for are the signs and symptoms of diagnoses closely related to post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. Not only should we identify psychological symptoms, but also physical symptoms if we consider the paradigm of Mind-Body relationship. Most common signs and symptoms observed are intense fear, helplessness, and also horror. The person behaves like he or she is reexperiencing the traumatic event. There is physiologic reactivity on exposure to internal and external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event. There are recurrent distressing dreams of the

event and recurrent and intrusive recollections of the event. Likewise, persistent avoidance of anything closely related to the traumatic event is also common. He or she exerts effort to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma. There is also an effort to avoid activities, places, or people that will arouse recollection of the trauma. Very common also is the inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma. This symptom is very significant and has a huge bearing on the therapy aspect. The person has markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities. The person may

also feel detached or estranged from others. The range of affect of the person is quite restricted. Importantly, the person has lost sight of his or her future. Difficulty in falling asleep or staying asleep is usually the chief complaint of the person. Other people notice that the person has become more irritable than usual, and exhibits outbursts of anger. He or she also has difficulty in concentrating. Hyper-vigilance is observed. For most of them, there is exaggerated startle response. But to consider the signs and symptoms as pathologic, the combination of the different signs and symptoms must cause clinically significant distress or impairment in interpersonal,



Dr. Gregorio L. Diokno, Jr.

social, occupational, or other areas of functioning.

Immediate intervention should be done as soon as the signs and symptoms are clearly identified. No time should be wasted in referring that particular person to a psychiatrist. Why refer to a psychiatrist and not to a psychologist or social welfare volunteer? The psychiatrist views the condition as a medical condition. In that aspect, there is a need to address some symptoms with pharmacologic approach. It has been shown that the behavioural and psychological signs and symptoms are results of chemical imbalance in the brain. Using the bio-psychosocial model of health, the psychiatrist is able to address the medical problem as well the psychological and social dimensions of the condition using psychotherapeutic intervention. In terms of treatment, the psychiatrist should be first in line when a pathologic condition has already been identified. Again, prescribing medications is a quick step in addressing the most debilitating signs and symptoms. Critical incident stress debriefing (CISD) is a mainstay in the therapeutic process. The social support system should also be established and networking with other discipline and social support system can be facilitated by the psychiatrist as well.

Individual and group or family therapy should also be included in the therapy process.

What Human Rights Defenders Should do Before, During and After Psychiatric Intervention?

Much as we want the psychiatrist to be first line in the treatment, the reality is that, reappeared victims and families of victims are brought to other interventionists. It is important that human rights advocates and defenders should be knowledgeable about the clinical signs and symptoms that are commonly observed in reappeared victims or families of victims. In that way, immediate intervention like critical incident stress debriefing or CISD can be immediately done. Thus, identification of a pathologic condition and CISD entails training from a psychiatrist. Immediate referral to a psychiatrist is a must. If human rights defenders are not sure, it is best to refer to a psychiatrist rather than committing an error of omission. What should be done by

human rights defenders during and after intervention are more less the same. They should provide physical and psychological security. Informing them of support groups that are existing will not alienate the patient knowing that there are so many others who are experiencing the same condition. Human rights defenders may also provide the reappeared victim or their family members legal advice and take legal actions if the reappeared victim or the family wants to elevate the case to a different level. They can also provide support (not only financial) for the victims to stay in therapy for as long as necessary.

(Dr. Gregorio L. Diokno, Jr., Diplomate, Philippine Board of Psychiatry and Fellow, Philippine Psychiatric Association, renders free medical services to families of victims of enforced disappearance who need psychiatric intervention).

Understanding...from page 11

- Protect children of victims from being taken by authorities, being renamed and/or being adopted.
- Build public recognition of their plight and of the disappearance e.g., through a monument or register featuring the names of the missing so that families are assured they are not forgotten and allowed to disappear forever.

Therapy is essential for families. The aim is not to encourage the

families to mourn unless the fate of the disappeared loved one is ascertained or the body has been found and honored. The therapy should help find a way of coping with disappearance, without letting it disrupt their day-to-day lives or their social and emotional relationships.

(Dr. Imelda Villar is a clinical psychologist. She is the former president of the Psychological Association of the Philippines and the Philippines Guidance and Counseling Association).

The Truth Must Be Told

Armando L. Paragat, RSW

On May 31, 2011, at the Minority Conference Room of the House of Representatives, five representatives from families of victims of enforced disappearance and two surfaced *desaparecidos* who survived their ordeal met face-to-face with the human rights officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights and House Minority Leader Edcel Lagman, Honorary Chairperson of the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND). This was the first of a series of truth telling conferences which was a collaborative effort between FIND and the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD).

Ms. Nilda Lagman Sevilla's opening statement

Ms. Nilda Lagman Sevilla, FIND's Co-Chairperson who is the sister of disappeared labor and human rights lawyer, Atty. Hermon Lagman, in her opening statement clarified the meaning of enforced disappearance under the anti-enforced or involuntary disappearance bill and the International Convention for the

Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPAPED). She also briefly discussed the following salient features of the bill and ICPAPED:

- Both the bill and the ICPAPED limit the commission of enforced disappearance to State actors or persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State or persons in authority;
- Enforced disappearance is a continuing offense as long as the perpetrators continue to conceal the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared;
- The prosecution of persons responsible for enforced disappearance shall not prescribe unless the victim surfaces alive or his/her fate and whereabouts have been established with certainty;
- "Victim" of enforced disappearance refers to both the disappeared person and any individual who has suffered harm as a direct result of an enforced or involuntary disappearance;
- Enforced disappearance is not an ordinary common crime but a human rights

violation for which the State is accountable whoever is in power.

She underscored that in the event an enforced disappearance is committed it is the duty of the State to:

- Help locate the disappeared person;
- Investigate the case and tell the truth – whether the person is detained and where and why he/she is detained, or if the victim is already dead, return the remains to the family or help the family conduct an exhumation;
- Protect the family, witnesses, legal counsels and all persons involved in the search, investigation and prosecution from intimidation and harm;
- Sanction those responsible for the offense;
- Provide victims with reparation (compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, restitution and guarantees of non-repetition).

Before she introduced the families of the disappeared she informed the participants that the truth telling session would be a freewheeling exchange of ideas without any presiding officer. She

urged everybody to accord each other due courtesy notwithstanding differences in beliefs, perceptions, feelings and sentiments regarding the circumstances of the enforced disappearance of the victims.

The Victims and Their Stories

Nicolas Sanchez and Heherson Medina

Nanay Cleofas Sanchez tearfully recalled the disappearance of his son Nicolas Sanchez, an Aeta or a member of an indigenous community, along with his cousin Heherson Medina. Both were last seen on September 18, 2006 in a rice field near their homes in Sitio Cabatuan, Barangay Bueno, Capas, Tarlac.

In between sobs and heavy breathing, she recalled that fateful night when her son together with her nephew Heherson decided to hunt for frogs so the family would have food to eat.

Unfortunately, she said, there was a military operation that night near the river. All that remained in the place where they went looking for the two early in the morning were the gears that the cousins used — lamp, spear, rubber slippers and a hat.

According to Nanay Cleofas, that same day they went to the Barangay Chairman and to the Police station and reported the incident. They went as far as San Jose and visited all the detachments only to be told that they had not taken the persons they were looking for.

“We searched for them in every camp but they denied that they had them in their custody,” she said with pain in her eyes.

In looking for Nicolas and Heherson, Nanay Cleofas was accompanied by her sister and sister-in-law. She expressed sadness and anguish every time they searched for their kin and

would return home with no positive results. She admitted that the feeling of hopelessness in their search for Nicolas and Heherson had greatly affected their mind and body. Her sister passed away without having known Nicolas’ fate while her sister-in-law lost her sanity after a severe bout of depression because of what happened to Heherson.

Nanay Cleofas’ emotional condition was reflected in her parting statement “We are suffering now. We went to the Court of Appeals; we filed a *writ of amparo* but until now we don’t know if my son Nicolas would finally come home. I’m sorry, but I’m really hurting inside.”

Charlie Del Rosario

Professor Estelita Del Rosario is the sister of Professor Charlie Del Rosario, the first *desaparecido* documented by the human rights community. Her recollection of her younger brother was that of a determined activist and student leader being one of the founders of the *Kabataang Makabayan (KM)* in Lyceum.

She recalled, “I only learned of his disappearance through the newspaper, which was two days after he went missing on March 19, 1971. According to the report, he was last seen posting a meeting announcement inside the campus on the night of March 19. He was expected to attend the same meeting somewhere in Cubao but failed to show up.”



Gen. Clarence V. Guinto and Col. Domingo Tutaan, Jr.

According to her a wide-scale search for Charlie was conducted. In one of the rallies organized in Malacañan her mother demanded from President Marcos that Charlie be surfaced if the military had a hand in her son's disappearance.

"We went all over the military camps in search for him. My parents even instructed me to check the morgues and funeral parlors every time there was a reported dead body to verify if it was Charlie. But nobody really could tell us what had happened to him," she said.

Professor del Rosario added, "We have taken every possible step to find Charlie. We even consulted a psychic hoping to receive information on his whereabouts. Until now no one could shed light as to what really happened to my brother. We refuse to believe rumors. We want to know the truth."

Daryl Fortuna

The story of missing student Daryl Fortuna was another moving chronicle tearfully narrated by his parents.

Daryl Fortuna was a graduating student of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP). He was last seen on March 9, 2010 in Sitio Matalbis, Barangay Inhobol in Masinloc, Zambales while doing research for his thesis on the nuclear power plant. According to Mrs. Fortuna, Daryl was with three other youths when abducted.

The Fortuna couple went to the 24th IB (Infantry Brigade) camp and reported the incident where they learned that one of their companions, a certain Landingin had surfaced already. Daryl and one Jinky Garcia meanwhile remained missing and the military denied any information on their whereabouts.

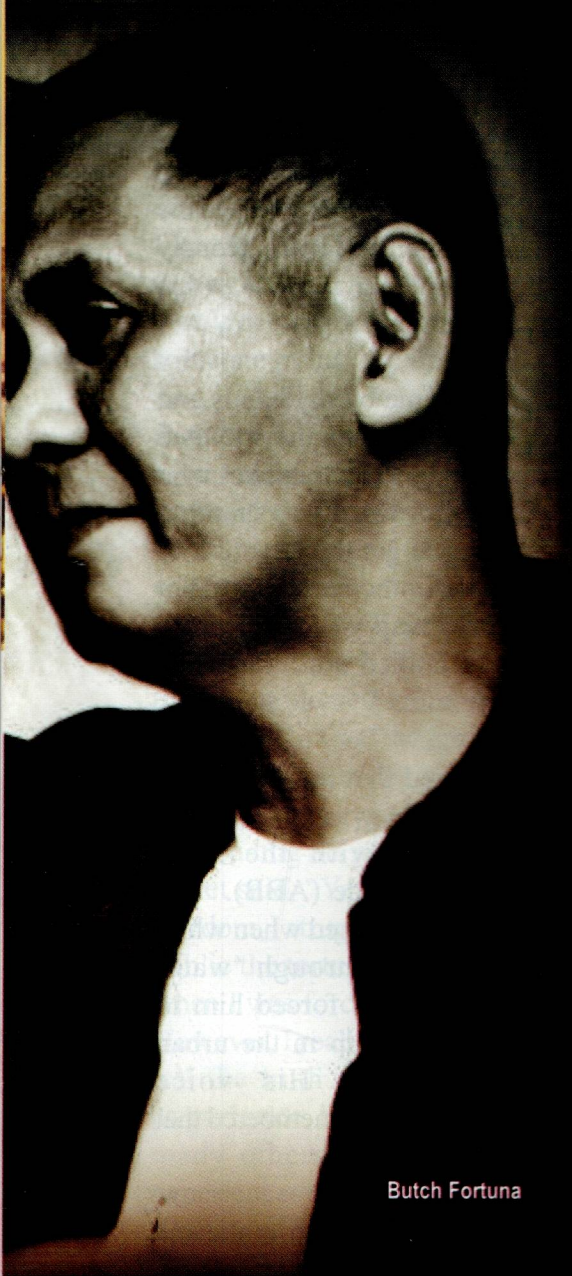
The couple took turns relating their experience in searching for their missing son. While narrating the father became speechless and paused while catching his breath as he tried to control his emotion. In one instance Mrs. Fortuna expressed sadness when while asking for help and reporting the incident to the officer in Camp Magsaysay they were instead told in an insisting tone that maybe Daryl joined some organizations or was an NPA (New People's Army) if not an RHB (*Rebolusyonaryong Hukbo ng Bayan*) cadre.

Like the testimonies of families of missing persons, the couple got no information from the military and the police on the whereabouts of their son as they denied having Daryl in their custody.

With the help of FIND, AFAD and PAHRA (Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates), the couple sought audience with President Benigno Aquino III in Malacañan but until now, more than a year after, they still haven't found their son. All the couple got are questions that remained unanswered.



Louie Crismo



Butch Fortuna

Addressing the panel Mr. and Mrs. Butch Fortuna asked, "How could we find our son? Where could we find him? Whom are we going to approach, even if we are not sure whether he is still alive or already dead? This has affected our family immensely."

Professor Romeo Crismo

Former FIND Secretary General Mr. Louie Crismo grappled with words when it was his turn to share the story behind the disappearance of his elder brother, Professor Romeo Crismo. It was obvious that he was trying to restrain his emotions.

When his father broke the news of his brother's disappearance back in August 1980, he was not a bit surprised. It was the 80's after all—the time of 'Boycotts'. In those times the student movement was raging on the campuses and his brother Romy, who was a certified accountant at the age of twenty-two, was already teaching at the Cagayan Teachers' College (CTC). He was then actively involved in both the teachers and the Christian youth movements.

Professor Crismo was barely five months married when he went missing. He got married to the former Phebe Gamata on March 28, 1980 and was abducted August 12, 1980. According to the information the family gathered, Professor Crismo's students at CTC where he was teaching accountancy noticed certain persons eavesdropping by the window of their classroom. When he proceeded to St. Louie for his other class, some of his students saw him enter the campus but that would be the last time they saw him for he never made it to his class. According to the students they saw four plainclothesmen abduct Professor Crismo but later these students who reportedly witnessed the abduction refused to testify.

His wife and the rest of the family searched for the missing professor all over the military camps and reported the incident to the Philippine Constabulary (PC), the NBI (National Bureau of Investigation), National Intelligence Security Agency (NISA),

the Integrated National Police (INP), the Ministry of National Defense, the National Church Military Liaison and to then President Ferdinand Marcos. She wrote letters to some friends at the World Christian Students Federation and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines but then, all these yielded negative results.

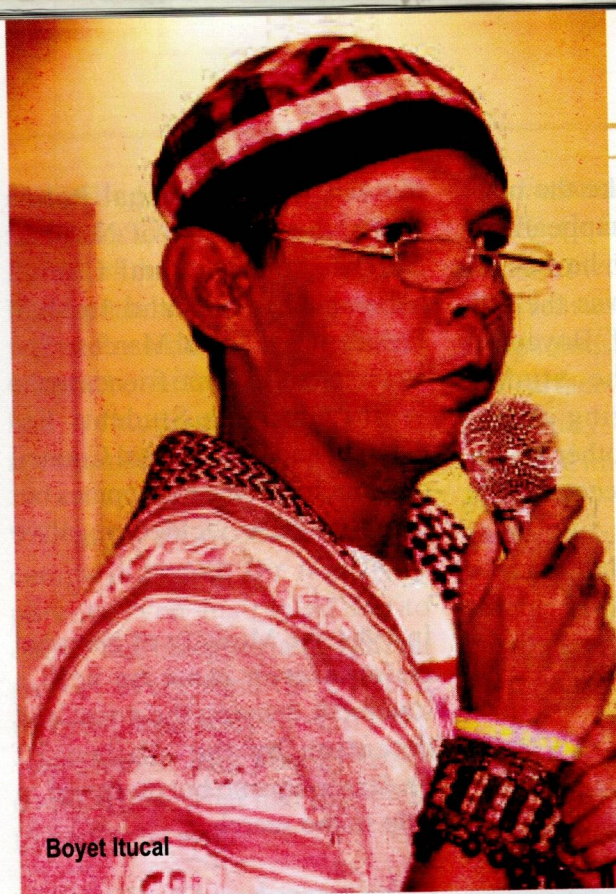
In 1981 the Ministry of National Defense even came up with a statement denying the arrest and detention by the military of Professor Crismo but promised to help in the search.

Louie remembered that for some time their family got some information that Romy was seen in a safe house in Tuguegarao, Cagayan that belonged to the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAF) and that his brother was later brought to Manila but the informant was not sure of the exact location. To date, more than three decades later, Professor Romy Crismo remains missing.

"Our family only wish to be enlightened as to what really happened. As for me, I'm not even thinking of filing a case against the perpetrators anymore. I'm just hoping that they will tell the truth, the truth about where they took him, or where they buried him," Mr. Louie Crismo concluded his narration.

Jimmy Malicdem

Linda Malicdem was straightforward as she began her narration: "My husband was a community organizer and KPML



Boyet Itucal

(*Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng Maralitang Lungsod*) leader in 1987. Jimmy was abducted by nine unidentified armed men somewhere along Ninoy Aquino Avenue in Sucat, Parañaque at about 11:00 o'clock in the evening of October 8, 1987. He was then actively defending the human rights of the urban poor and other related issues."

Upon learning about the abduction of her husband, together with some friends and relatives she immediately went to the Parañaque Police Sub-station but failed to locate Jimmy. The following morning they proceeded to Camp *Bagong Diwa*, Camp Crame and other places of detention, but Jimmy was not there.

Remembering what she went through, Linda could not contain her emotion. With tears welling from her eyes she recalled, "At

that time we had three children aged 11, 9 and 7. It was so difficult for me to raise our children then but I did all that I could do for nobody was there to help me."

Jimmy Malicdem is still missing to this day and his whereabouts remain unknown. Twenty-four years after the disappearance of her husband, Linda persists in seeking

justice together with the families of other *desaparecidos*.

In order to facilitate bringing the perpetrators of enforced disappearance to justice, Linda sought support for the approval of the Anti-Enforced Disappearance Bill.

Bernardo Itucal, Jr.

Bernardo Itucal, Jr. was a former member of the *Kabataang para sa Demokrasya at Nasyonalismo (KADENA)* or Youth for Democracy and Nationalism in Caloocan. He was among the 109 enforced disappearance victims documented by FIND during the Corazon Aquino regime who surfaced alive.

Way back in 1988, Boyet, as he is fondly called in the human rights community, was forcibly taken from his residence in Caloocan by policemen in plainclothes in an

early morning operation. He is one of the few victims who came out in the open and courageously tell an agonizing account of his enforced disappearance.

"They took me by my hands and feet like a pig. Then they pointed their firearms to my relatives who tried to follow us. I was shouting frantically to get the attention of the people in the community but those who responded and came out were bullied and threatened not to interfere."

He suspected that the reason for his abduction was his alleged involvement with the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB). His doubt was confirmed when while being tortured through 'water cure' his captors forced him to admit membership in the urban guerilla group. His voice trembling, Boyet remembered that he almost gave up.

"When they failed to make me admit involvement in the ABB, they put chili on the water that they poured over my face covered with a towel. In that kind of situation I thought, I could own up to all the crimes they wanted me implicated, even the killing of [Jose] Rizal."

"There was this incident when they blindfolded me and took me outside the safe house. I had no idea where they were taking me when I was pushed into what seemed to be a digging. My suspicion was confirmed when leaning I felt the cold earth on my back and the damp ground I was sitting on. I thought this would

probably be my burial ground. Then I heard someone order that I be removed from where I was. It was only then that I realized I was indeed in a digging because someone pulled me up," he said.

Boyet was found by his mother after almost three weeks in detention. He learned that his mother went camp hopping the whole time he was missing. She told him that she first went to the police station in Balot, Tondo but the police denied having him in custody. Colonel Maganto told her that he was already released.

Concluding his painful narration, Boyet said, "Years after I gained freedom, I struggled to disclose in public the torture inflicted on me when I was forcibly disappeared. However, I realized that I need to tell the truth about my painful experience because there are many others who have worse experiences and are still missing. They are my inspiration. So when I was released from detention I became a human rights advocate and eventually joined FIND".

Romy Castillo

Ka Romy was arrested by armed men who later turned out to be military elements, in Antipolo on July 23, 1984, a day before Marcos' State of the Nation Address (SONA). Like Boyet, he barely survived his nightmare and surfaced

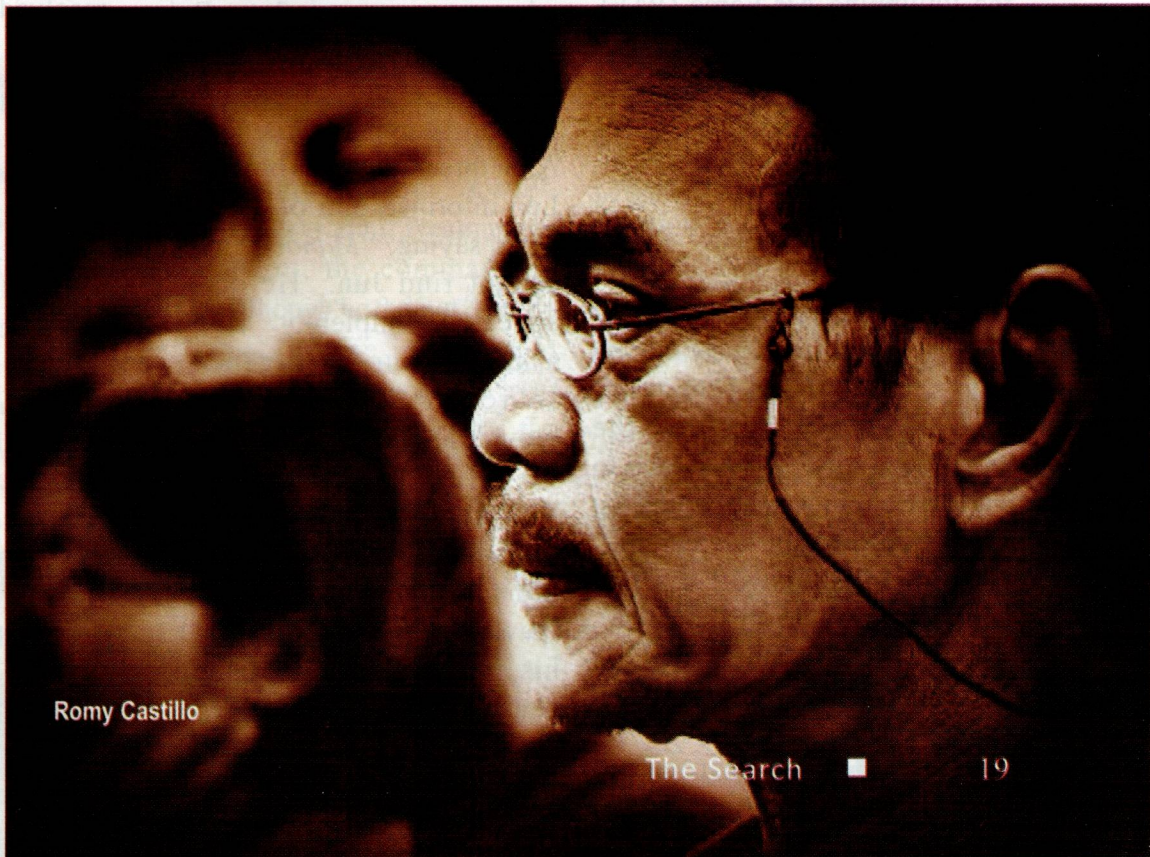
to tell his painful experience in the hands of his tormentors. He too remembered clearly how he was manhandled by his captors.

"It was raining and the dogs were barking so I went outside the house. I heard people cursing when somebody grabbed me swiftly, then they started mauling me," Ka Romy said. He added that when he regained consciousness he could barely move and found himself inside the trunk of a car, blindfolded, handcuffed with both feet bound. Once inside the safe house, he said he was stripped naked and tortured. Electric shock and other inhumane acts of torture were inflicted on him.

"I went through all kinds of torture. When my captors were drunk they urinated and vomited over me. I was denied food, water, and sleep for a prolonged period. They were so noisy every time they came in. They arrived in different teams and asked

repetitive questions like: What is your name? What is your name in the movement? From whom and where do you get your funding? What is your position in the movement and who are your members?" he rattled off without a hint of emotion. Moreover, Ka Romy said that he was detained and admitted at the Camp Panopio Hospital due to severe infection after his torturers burned his testes and his penis "barbecued". It took him nine days to recover and lost 44 pounds as a result of the cruelty inflicted by the military.

To his relief, he was transferred to a regular detention center in Bicutan sometime in September after more than two months in secret detention. He believed that he was not killed because many were looking for him. When he was finally located, friends, workers and human rights advocates started visiting him. That's when he heard stories of



Romy Castillo

people close to him, workers from Pasig and Rizal who went looking for him in hospitals, morgues and the military camps.

Ka Romy revealed that he knew the authorities behind his abduction and incarceration. He named the camp commander, the warden, and the General who slapped him when he was transferred to the Bicutan detention facility. He even recognized his torturers who belonged to the dreaded MISG or the Military Intelligence Service Group.

"I know all of them. I could smell them even if I could not see them then," Ka Romy claimed.

Nilo Oligario, Jr.

Nilo Oligario, Jr. is the son of retired Colonel Nilo Oligario, Sr. who used to be the vice-commander of the air division of the Philippine Air Force (PAF). He retired on December 15, 1983 three months after the late Senator Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino, Jr. was assassinated. His office was in-charge of overseeing the arrival of the late Senator.

Col. Oligario brought with him a large picture of his 28 year old son Nilo Oligario, Jr. and showed it to everybody inside the conference room as he started to share the circumstance behind the latter's enforced disappearance. He remembered well his last conversation with his son Nilo, whom he fondly called 'Jun', on December 13, 1983. It was a

long-distance call as he was in Chicago, Illinois at that time while Nilo was in Manila. In that talk Nilo informed him about going to the mountains with his friends. The son explained that he had joined Butch Aquino's organization called the August 21 Movement (ATOM) and that he was chosen as its assistant auditor. When he asked the reason behind their move, Nilo's reply was "Dad, Marcos will rig the coming elections. The military and the PC [Philippine Constabulary] are after us that's why we are all hiding. At least, up there I don't think we would be arrested." With that, all Col. Oligario could say was "Okay. Just be careful and take care of yourself."

It was not until Ferdinand Marcos was ousted and fled to Hawaii that a year later, according to Col. Oligario, he came back and started looking for Nilo. He was lucky enough, he said, to have a brother, who was promoted to Brig. General after martial law, whom he could turn to for help in search for his son. After three weeks, his brother Leo informed him of a bad news saying, "*Manong*, we cannot find Jun. He disappeared completely. I've asked all our intelligence sources but they cannot provide any information."

This led Col. Oligario to suspect that what the military did to Jun was kind of a 'payback time' for him and his family because of the embarrassment that he caused

the establishment during the dictatorship. He believed that since they could not get to him because he was in the States, they vented their anger on his son.

Col. Oligario spent almost eighteen years in America hiding from General Fabian Ver and his associates because his brother Leo had told him that Marcos' former General was hunting him down. But he would sneak in, stay for two to three weeks then go back to the States.

When Ninoy's son, Benigno Aquino III ran for office and made a campaign promise that if elected President, he would order the reinvestigation into his father's assassination, Col. Oligario decided to return to the Philippines. He is now more than interested to know who really ordered the killing of Ninoy. He is convinced that if the mastermind is uncovered and the killing is resolved it would be the key to



knowing the truth about what happened to his son.

"I'm still hoping against hope that he's still alive," he added.

It has been 28 years since the disappearance of Nilo Oligario, Jr. but his family still suffers for no one knows where he is, whether he is still alive or already dead.

Response of House Minority Leader Edcel C. Lagman

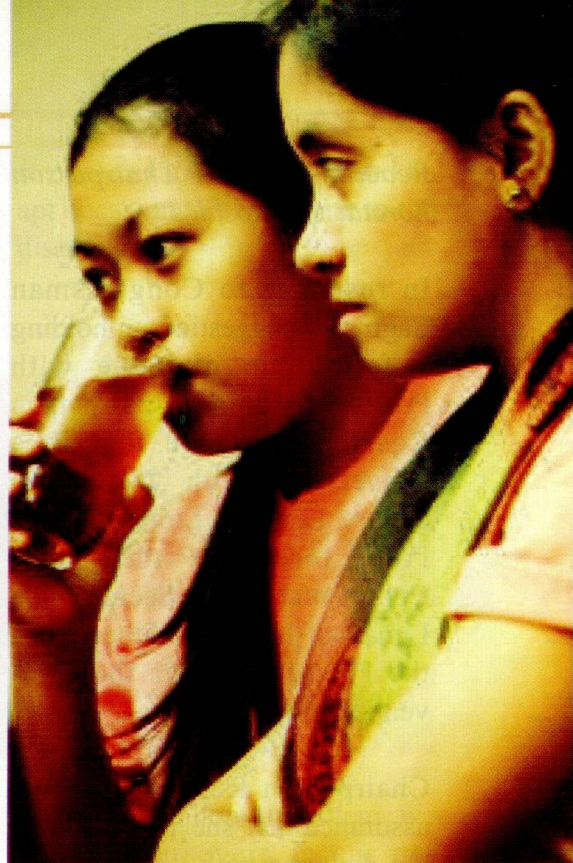
Rep. Edcel C. Lagman, FIND's honorary chairperson and principal author of House Bill No. 98, the proposed Anti-Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance Act, was the first to give his reaction to the victims' painful experiences. The lawmaker appreciated the joint effort to project the issue of enforced disappearance. He said that the truth-telling session should not be enough; that it should be used to advance the advocacy for the

protection of human rights particularly against enforced disappearance and torture; and that it should help us convince Congress to enact the long delayed law criminalizing enforced disappearance.

Rep. Lagman reminded the Commission on Human Rights of the Phi-

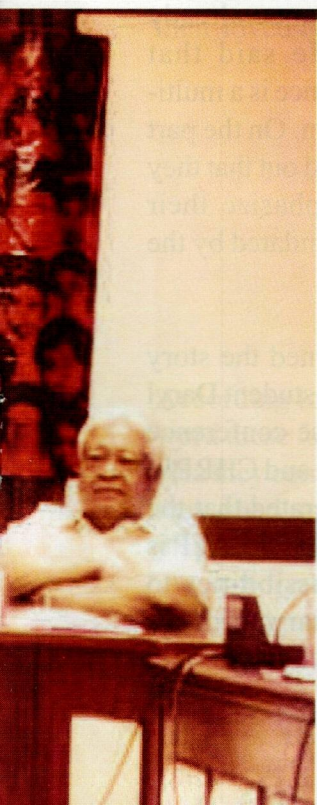
lippines (CHRP) Chairperson Loretta Ann Rosales and Col. Domingo J. Tutaan, Jr., Chief of the AFP Human Rights Office, about a recommendation he made in the enforced disappearance forum at the InterContinental Hotel in Makati last year that "through the leadership of the Secretary of the Department of Justice and the Chairperson of the Commission of Human Rights, another delegation should be constituted to dialogue with the President and once again urge him to endorse the anti-disappearance bill as a priority measure and the Philippines' signing and ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance."

Reacting to the testimonies of Ka Romy and other surfaced *desaparecidos* who have identified the military officials who were responsible for their torture including the commanding officers, he said that under Republic Act No. 9745, an Act Penalizing Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the commanding officer although he did not directly participate in the infliction of torture, has the command responsibility and is liable for the offense. Moreover, he said that Ka Romy's testimony can be used as a basis for the President not to promote or appoint those involved in the commission of acts of torture to higher positions in the military.



However, Rep. Lagman quickly pointed out that Ka Romy's case could have already prescribed. In any case, the documentation of his testimony should be released to the public so that the people will be aware of the acts of torture committed against Ka Romy and that the persons involved who may still be in government service will not be promoted.

Another relevant provision of Republic Act No. 9745 that the Congressman underscored is Section 20 which provides for the creation of an Oversight Committee. He urged CHR Chair Rosales to immediately convene the monitoring committee because despite the passage of the anti-torture law, torture remains unabated and is committed with impunity.



*Reaction of CHR Chairperson
Loretta Ann Rosales*

In response to Congressman Lagman's suggestion on holding a follow up dialogue with President Aquino, Chairperson Rosales disclosed that in a conversation with Justice Secretary Leila de Lima after the IWD forum at the Inter-Continental Hotel, Secretary de Lima said that she could sense that the President wants the Convention ratified.

Chairperson Rosales gave the assurance that she will push for the dialogue with the President. She also suggested that we get in touch with appropriate government agencies and other cabinet members and talk to them. But she stressed the importance of going straight to the President.

On the testimony of Romy Castillo, Chairperson Rosales, who declared that she was a torture victim herself, agreed with Rep. Lagman that the case might have already prescribed. She then urged everyone to make the 'Truth

Telling' a meaningful and fruitful move instead of just a ritual and a venue for sharing painful life stories.

"Even if it has prescribed already, if there is a possibility that they (torturers) can make a public apology, that would still be a statement," she asserted.

She then proceeded to inform the body of a letter she sent to the President and to the National Defense Secretary that the burning or shredding of declassified materials of martial law be stopped. Chairperson Rosales reminded the PNP and AFP of their task and demanded that concrete actions be taken in this regard. She said that both the President and the House of Representatives declared that said declassified documents should not be shredded but should be turned over to appropriate authorities in fitting ceremony.

Regarding the oversight committee on torture, Chairperson Rosales shared that Mark

Thompson of the Association for the Prevention of Torture, a worldwide organization that deals with torture cases and the setting up of prevention mechanisms in many countries will be coming to the country and has promised to help set up the me-

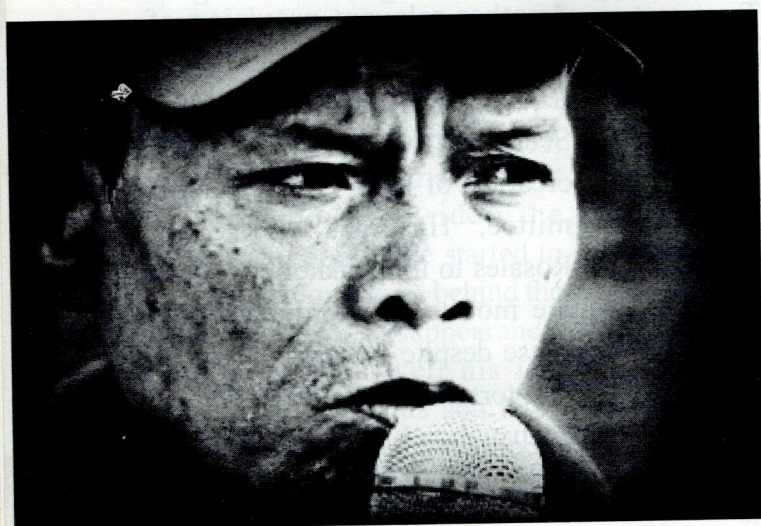
chanism for the oversight committee.

In conclusion, Chairperson Rosales called on all the stakeholders to work together in order to make a difference. She said that "We should all be together in this endeavor; it should not only be the civil society or Congress alone, or the security sector or the CHR only, but all of us."

*Colonel Domingo J. Tutaan, Jr.'s
commitment*

Colonel Domingo J. Tutaan, Jr. the chief of the Human Rights Affairs Office (HRAO) of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), in his opening statement was appreciative of Chairperson Rosales' recognizing the sincere efforts of the security sectors in effectively addressing the issues and concerns about human rights violations particularly on enforced disappearances. Col. Tutaan acknowledged that the problem of enforced disappearance already spans decades. He said that enforced disappearance is a multi-stakeholders concern. On the part of the AFP he pointed out that they really want to emphasize their protector role as mandated by the Constitution.

Col. Tutaan mentioned the story of disappeared PUP student Daryl Fortuna and the case conference initiated by PAHRA and CHRP in Region III. He reiterated that the human rights office of the AFP is looking into all possibilities to draw out all necessary evidence so that a case could be filed.



Like Chairperson Rosales, Col. Tutaan believes that the key to seriously resolve the issues or incidents of human rights violations is through partnership and dialogue. He said that “Our present efforts in the AFP is forward looking or pro-active in order to prevent violations of human rights. But we will not turn our back on the past cases wherein the military or members of the military are being accused as the perpetrators of violations and that is my assurance to the Chairperson and to the members of AFAD and FIND.”

Ms. Aileen Bacalso's closing message

Ms. Mary Aileen D. Bacalso, Secretary General of AFAD, thanked all the conferees more particularly the families of the disappeared for courageously testifying on the circumstances of the enforced disappearance of their loved ones.

“To continue honoring them, we need to persevere in our determined search for truth amidst continuing lies...”

According to Ms. Bacalso, every word these families uttered, every plea they conveyed, and every tear they shed speaks of an atrocity that ought not to be repeated in the history of humankind. She added that “the testimonies of those who have fortunately lived

to tell their poignant stories are reasons enough why we need to totally erase the crime of enforced disappearance from the face of the earth.”

“Our present efforts in the AFP is forward looking or pro-active in order to prevent violations of human rights. But we will not turn our back on the past cases wherein the military or members of the military are being accused as the perpetrators of violations...”

She cited the truth telling conference as a breakthrough that has been made possible through the courage of the victims’ families and openness of the highest officers of the Human Rights Affairs offices of both the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police.

“We are grateful that through the sacrifices of human rights defenders, including our dear *desaparecidos*, we have come to this stage when it is already possible to have a face-to-face dialogue with high ranking representatives of the security forces,” she said.

She informed the group that the first International Week of the Disappeared (IWD) was observed by families of Latin American *desaparecidos* three decades ago. She added that the truth telling conference as one of the joint IWD activities of AFAD and FIND is a step in the uphill

struggle against impunity and an apt occasion to pay tribute to the disappeared.

“To continue honoring them, we need to persevere in our determined search for truth amidst continuing lies, for justice amidst the injustice against the *desaparecidos*, their families and society, for reparation amidst the irreparable damage brought about by the crime of enforced disappearance and for the reconstruction of the collective memory of the disappeared against the crime of forgetting,” she stressed.

In conclusion she reiterated the calls of FIND and AFAD on President Benigno Simeon Aquino III:

PRIORITIZE THE ANTI-ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE BILL AND ENACT IT INTO LAW NOW! SIGN AND RATIFY THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL PERSONS FROM ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY!

A Deafening Truth

TRUTH TELLING CONFERENCE II

Armando L. Paragat, RSW

Again it was no ordinary gathering. Among those seated in the room were wives who lost their husbands; sons aching for love and guidance of their father; proud fathers determined to search for their missing sons; brothers and sisters pining for a lost sibling; and a priest who almost lost a member of his flock. They have one thing in common. The people close to their hearts were victims of enforced or involuntary disappearance committed mostly by government security forces. All bore harrowing tales to tell. They came hoping to know the whereabouts of the victims. They hoped to stumble upon the truth behind the forced disappearance of their loved ones.

Also present were representatives of security sector: Police Chief Superintendent, General Clarence V. Guinto, Chief of the PNP Human Rights Office (PNP RO), Colonel Domingo Tutaan, Jr. Chief of the AFP Human Rights Office (AFP HRO) and Police Superintendent Henry Q. Libay of Task Force Usig. Also in attendance were Atty. Brenda Canapi of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP) who represented Chairperson Loretta Ann Rosales, and six other CHRP personnel.

For the second time, on 06 December 2011, FIND brought together in the Minority Conference Room of the House of Representatives families of the victims who uneasily sat down face-to-face with the representatives of the security sector. As the minutes wore on, the distrust and the animosity between the aggrieved and the alleged offenders seemed to have diminished.

In her opening remarks, FIND Co-Chairperson Nilda Lagman Sevilla reminded the group that during the first session, it was the consensus that concerned government agencies along with the Commission on Human Rights as well as civil society, need to work together in addressing enforced disappearances in the country. Moreover, she stressed that “while recent cases may urgently draw the attention of government and the public, old cases must also be attended to because of the continuing character of enforced disappearances”.

For the nth time members of the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND) express their pain and sorrow in dealing with their loved one’s sudden disappearance. Slowly, distrust and animosities that have bedeviled the relations between the aggrieved and the perceived offenders have gradually diminished.



Ezekiel Estojero, left, and Jeffson Lopez,

"If solutions to our problems are to be pursued, there is a need for cooperation. It is important that families of victims should work together and communicate with concerned government agencies in order to bring perpetrators to justice," Ms. Nilda L. Sevilla emphatically recommended.

"The government should welcome this opportunity that the people still get in touch with the authorities," she added.

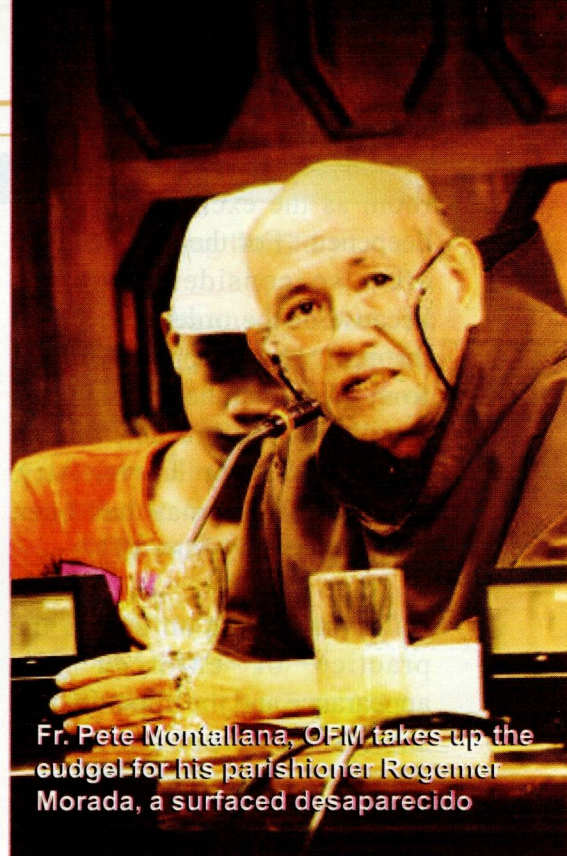
The PNP and AFP — agencies that now present themselves as human rights defenders welcomed the truth-telling conference. Speaking in behalf of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Col. Tutaan pronounced; "We are

really into a paradigm shift towards building a culture of human rights. Please have faith in your AFP."

Human rights advocates and defenders came to support the families of the victims and hear the response of the security sector.

Seven testimonies were heard as invited family members took turns recounting the circumstances of the disappearance of their loved ones. They were stories begging to be told repeatedly, tirelessly searching for answers, and like jigsaw puzzles waiting to be solved. Narrated were chronicles of the lives of an activist, community organizer, defender of the oppressed, workers' rights advocate, a responsible and loving father, husband, son and friend.

Revelations were made by: Grace Cante whose husband, Jose "Peping" Cante, has been missing since 22 March 2010, in Mexico, Pampanga; Yolanda Bon, whose husband Remigio Bon was disappeared on August 8, 1989, subsequently extrajudicially killed and whose remains were exhumed six years later; Artemio Ayala Sr. whose son, Artemio Ayala Jr., was disappeared on 14 October 2000 along with five other log



Fr. Pete Montallana, OFM takes up the cudgel for his parishioner Rogemer Morada, a surfaced desaparecido

haulers in Sta. Maria, Trento, Agusan del Sur, all believed to have been summarily executed; Jeftsen Lopez whose father, Federico Lopez, Jr. was abducted in Las Piñas, Metro Manila on 03 April 1987 by four armed men believed to be military agents and remains missing to this day; Ezekiel Estojero, whose father Edgardo was disappeared on 14 November 1987 in Pasay City and is still missing; brothers Maximo and Arthur Daguna-Nartates who lost their brother Edwin Nartates in 1971; and Fr. Pete Montallana, OFM whose parishioner Rogemer "Demer" Morada, a member of the indigenous community in Burdeos, Quezon, was abducted allegedly by elements of the 76th Infantry Battalion on 23 August 2011 and surfaced alive on 05 September 2011.

Most of the kin expressed longing and hope to be reunited with their loved ones. The feeling was



lament growing up without a father

strongly felt inside the conference room as the exchange of ideas deepened. For the families who are also considered victims because of the ordeal they went through; "hope springs eternal from the human heart," said Ms. Sevilla whose brother, human rights and labor lawyer Atty. Hermon C. Lagman has been missing since 11 May 1977.

Calls for putting an end to the practice of enforced disappearance and the impunity that shields its perpetrators were amplified by the victims. Also brought up was the question on how the security forces could be seriously reformed to which Col. Tutaan committed, "I am one with all of you especially with the victims in cleansing the security sector of any incident of human rights violations, not only enforced disappearance but all forms of human rights violations."

Police Chief Superintendent Clarence Guinto reinforced Col. Tutaan's manifestation and said

that "PNP has initiated reforms as far as human rights are concerned and as a policy has done away with the practice of maintaining an 'OB' (Order of Battle)."

Both institutions declared their full support for the enactment of the Anti-Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance Act and the signing and ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPAPED).

With respect to the recent cases the PNP and AFP Human Rights Offices heads committed to take appropriate actions such as rendering cartographic sketches of suspects, investigation of cases, direct referral to and dialogue with unit/field commanders, recommending filing of possible administrative charges and prosecution before the military court and furnishing FIND with a copy of case investigation reports.

As for the enforced disappearance cases that happened in the 80's, Gen. Guinto was forthright and said, "As far as crime investigation is concerned, I think it's already far fetched but the least we could do is to continue to search for the truth with you."

The Truth Telling Conference (Series 2) succeeded in giving the term 'moving on' a progressive context. Indeed the call for cooperation among the victims and the government institutions involved has been sounded through this no ordinary gathering. But much still has to done. More has yet to be accomplished to firm up the trust that is aimed to be established.

In fact, towards the end of the dialogue some issues were left hanging. Unresolved were questions about; sustaining the collaborative efforts so that the security institutions would eventually regain the people's trust and that hopefully the commitments that had been expressed were not personal but institutional and are buttressed by sincere pledges to help uphold and protect human rights. But whatever uncertainties there had been, everyone left the emotionally charged Minority Conference Room feeling lighthearted knowing that a meeting like this won't be the last.

(Armando L. Paragat, RSW is FIND's National and International Advocacy Program Coordinator.)



Gen. Clarence V. Guinto, Chief of the PNP Human Rights Office, Col. Domingo Tutaan, Jr., Chief of the AFP Human Rights Office, and Police Supt. Henry Q. Libay of Task Force Usig listen intently to the testimonies

Testimonial Therapy Intervention for SAD

Caroline Y. Sevilla, RN

Eight members of SAD or Samahan ng mga Anak ng Desaparecidos (Association of the Children of the Disappeared) from the National Capital Region (NCR) and Central Luzon chapters underwent a psychosocial session on December 2-4, 2011 at Bahay ni Isis in Quezon City.

The objective of the activity was to provide a venue for further reflection and a deeper healing process for the participants, focusing on their resilience and highlighting their positive values. The methods employed were therapeutic arts (visual, clay models, mixed media), small group processing and individual therapeutic interviews using the testimonial therapy method.

Testimonial Therapy Method

A testimony is a narrative about an event, a “truth-telling”, a “map of pain and survival”, and a trauma story. It is told by a person who suffered an injustice or something painful or terrible.

A testimonial can be used for a legal purpose or for advocacy work. In this activity, however, it is used as a healing or therapeutic tool.

Writing the Testimony

In writing the testimony, the focus is on the resilience (stress hardiness, spirituality, sense of humor, social support system, principles and philosophy in life); and it should be “re-framed”. The facilitator and documenter listen in a warm and empathic way even as they ask the survivors what they have done in daily life to help themselves recover (self-healing activities).

1. Opening the Story

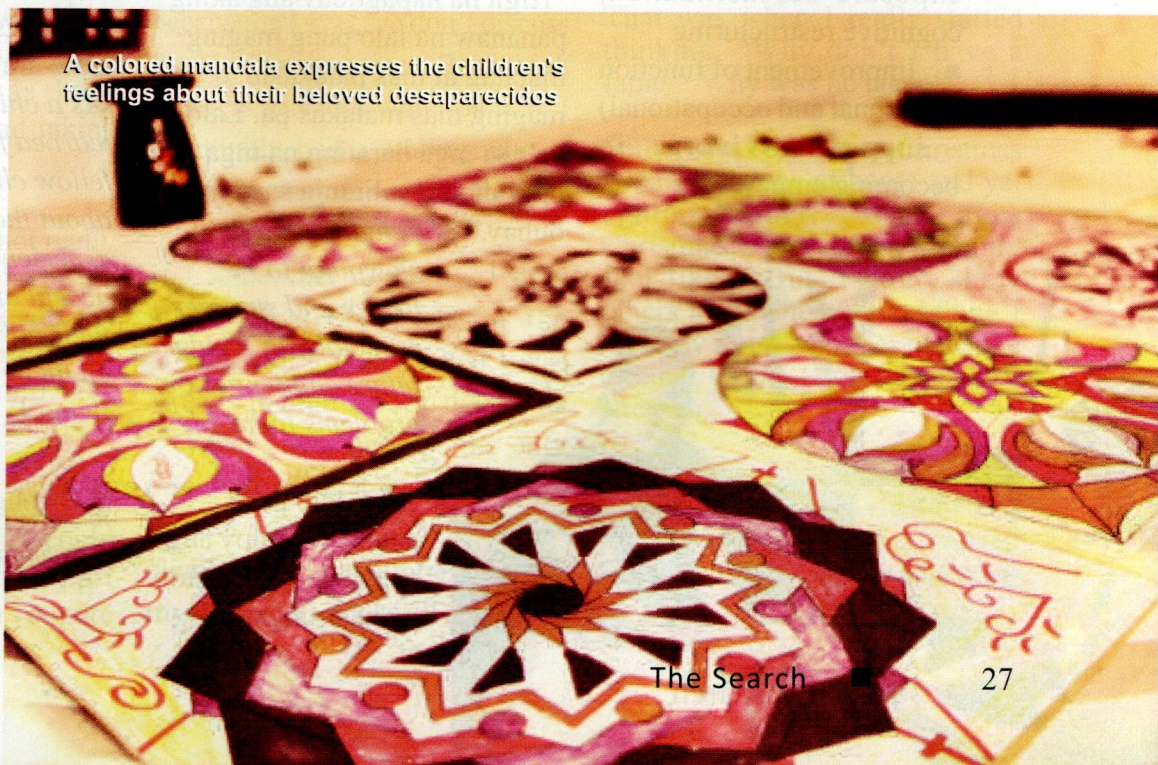
Two persons conduct the testimonial therapy. One acts primarily as the interviewer while the other is the note-taker. They support each other as co-therapists in the elaboration of the testimony.

2. Justice and Reparation plus Other Issues & Concerns

Facilitators try to determine the participants’ ideas of dispensing justice including the effect of a grant of pardon to the perpetrator.

3. Writing the Story

After the sessions, the interviewer and note-taker collaborate in filling in the missing parts of the story and produce an encoded version of the narrative



A colored mandala expresses the children's feelings about their beloved desaparecidos

4. The Delivery Ceremony

- Restoration of integrated well-being

Both the interviewer and note-taker stand with the survivor as one of them reads out the testimony. If a family member is present, he or she is informed in advance that he or she will give an affirmation message to the survivor after the reading of the testimony. After all the testimonies are read, the audience expresses its solidarity and particular affirmation by shaking hands with the participants.

Participants' Evaluation of the Psychosocial Session

“Higit na napalalim ang pagkilala sa mga kasamahan” (*Got to know my colleagues more deeply.*)

“Naging matibay at mas nangangap ang pagkatao” (*Became stronger and more easily accepted my kind of person.*)

Goals of Testimonial Therapy

- Transformation of trauma story from an account of “shame and humiliation” to one of dignity and virtue

- Relief of emotional distress, catharsis, insight, exposure desensitization, cognitive restructuring

- Improvement of function (relational and occupational) – support survivors in becoming empowered

“I wish I could I have had even a glimpse of your smiles. They say you were a cheerful person, I guess I took after you...But above all, Tatay, I wish to be able to embrace you and tell you how much I love you.”

“Higit na napagtibay ang aking pananaw na lalo pang maging matatag at mas palakasin o maging mas malakas pa. Lalo pa’t sa mga darating na mga pagsubok o suliranin sa aking buhay.” (*Strengthen my viewpoint to be firmer and stronger especially in facing future challenges or problems in my life.*)

“Mas lalo pang patuloy o ituloy ang paglaban sa pagkamit ng katarungan na

matagal nang minimithi” (*Sustain the fight for the long aspired for justice.*)

“Nagpatatag nang higit sa aking pananaw bilang isang anak ng desaparecido ay ang mga bagong natutunan at narinig sa mga kwento mula sa kapwa ko anak ng desaparecido, tulad ng paglalahad ng kanilang suliranin, karanasan at kung paano nila tinatanggap at patuloy na nilulunasan ang mga kalbaryo at mga pagsubok sa kanilang pang-araw-araw na pamumuhay ...” (*As a child of a disappeared I learned from the stories of my fellow children of desaparecidos about their problems, experiences and how they accept and continue to alleviate their calvary (sufferings) and challenges in their day to day living.*)

(*Caroline Y. Sevilla, a registered nurse, is FIND’s Psychosocial Rehabilitation Program Coordinator.*)



Papa's look-alike

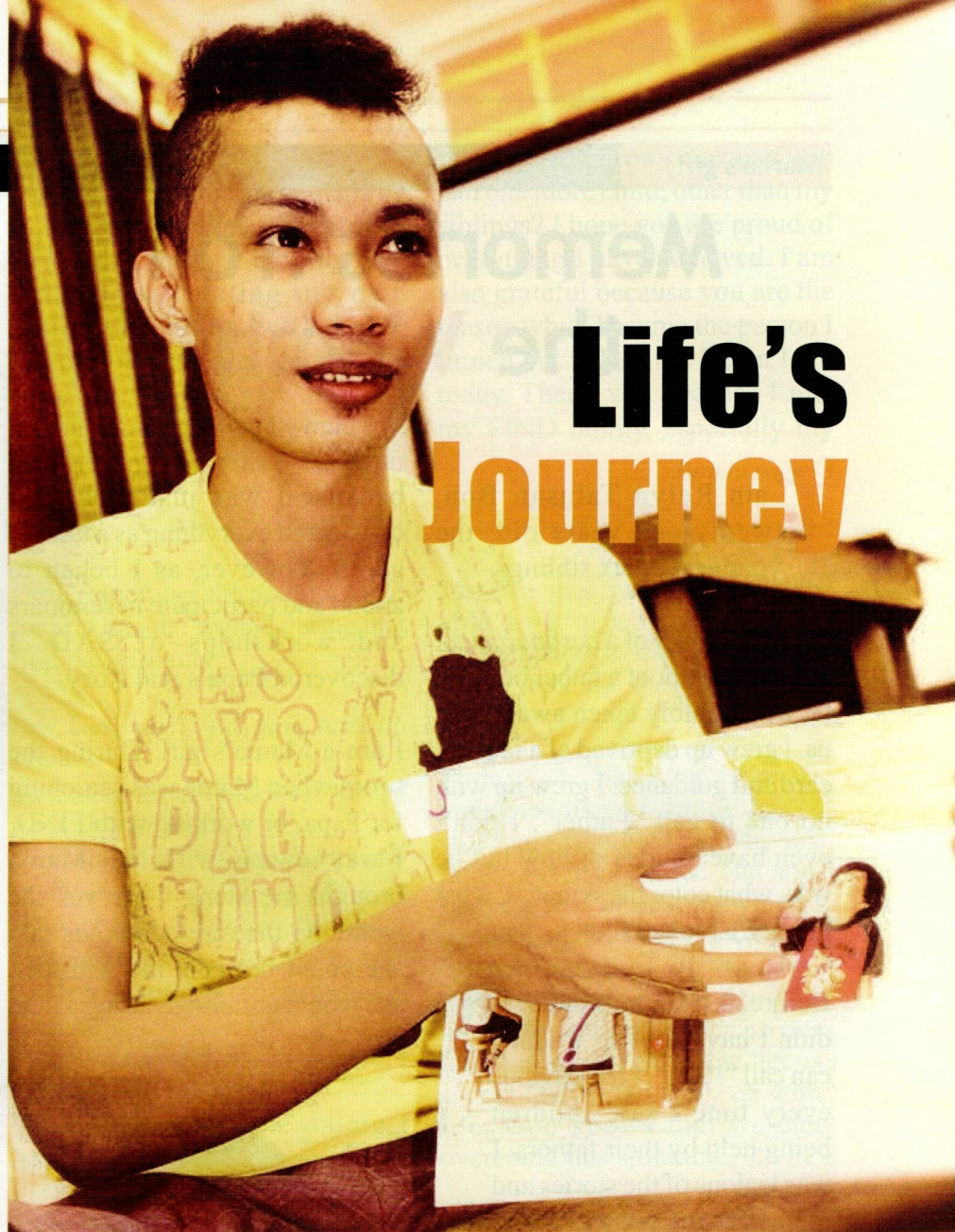
My name is Jeftsen Lopez, 23 years old. I live in Manila with my younger sibling. My mother is Arlene Paniel and my biological father is Federico Lopez, a *desaparecido*.

I had just been born when my father disappeared. I was too young to really know him. But according to my grandfather and from the stories I hear from my uncles and aunts, my father was an activist who crusaded for the rights of the marginalized.

Once, after my mother went abroad to support the family, we picked her up at the airport. She exclaimed in surprise, "I didn't recognize you! You look so much like Dodong!" That was my father's nickname, Dodong. Thus, I found out that I look like my father and so I'm sure he's handsome too.

They say Papa was also a good basketball player, even if he wasn't that tall. According to my grandfather, Papa was hard working and didn't mind taking on any kind of job.

As for Mama, she does not really tell stories about Papa. Maybe it's too difficult for her to do so. Perhaps that is why she focused so much on work and has repeatedly left for the Middle East over the years. She also chose to become active in FIND rather than spend her time grieving. Or could it be that that was her way of coping and healing? I can't be sure



Life's Journey

because as I said, we don't discuss Papa's disappearance. But I think she gets sad too, which is why I eventually had a sibling who is twelve years younger than me.

If I remember correctly, I only started to truly wish for the presence of a father when I was already in high school, due to the fact that I was perhaps the only one who didn't have parents present during graduation day in elementary. I remember holding my diploma...I was all alone.

That was when I really started thinking, "Why don't I have a father? Why was he taken?"

Sometimes I cry during Christmas when I'm alone at home and yet again wonder, "What does Christmas with a complete family feel like?" But, I don't show others my sadness. Good thing I have my Lolo, who tries to be like a father to me. He is a source of strength.

I think I was in second year high school when I was invited to take part in an art workshop organized by FIND. I was still shy back then

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Memories from the Womb

I am Relyn Talusan Bon, twenty-one years old, the youngest of six siblings.

I am a daughter of a *desaparecido*. I grew up without a father because he was forcibly taken away from us. I grew up deprived of a father's care and guidance. I grew up with no one to call "Father". I don't even have an idea of how tall he was, what color his skin was, what he *really* looked like.

Before, I used to wonder why I didn't have anyone whom I can call "Papa". I felt envious every time I saw children being held by their fathers. I was jealous of the stories and memories my older brothers and sisters have of Papa.

When I was young, Mama told me that Papa died in a vehicular accident. But in time my eyes were opened to the truth – that Papa was disappeared.

Papa became a *desaparecido* in 1989, while I was still in Mama's womb. Before I even learned what the word "*desaparecido*" meant, Mama would already bring me along to protest rallies and search missions. But

because I was just a child, I considered everything as a kind of game. However, as I began to attend and participate in seminars and workshops of SAD, I discovered Papa's real story.

I am a Mama's girl. During the times when Mama was searching for Papa, or working with FIND, I was *always* with her. Mama brought me along wherever she went. On the rare occasions that she could not take me with her, she would unfailingly bring a treat

home for me. I miss those days. Mama gave me everything I wanted, making me think that we were rich. I was mistaken.

Because of Papa's disappearance, two of my brothers had to go and live with our grandmother in Bicol. I didn't even know that I had two more *Kuyas*! I felt awkward around them at first, but eventually grew comfortable with them. Still, sometimes, I really could not help feeling a pang of envy when they talk about Papa.

They say Papa was strict. One anecdote they could not forget was the day when my eldest brother was exceptionally rowdy, and Papa actually hung him upside down! There are many stories, in which I am not included. There was no Relyn yet in the memories everyone has of Papa. It makes me wonder, "Would Papa have been the same with me if we got to spend time together?"

We are not rich. Papa's disappearance made things worse. Mama had to support all six of us. This was not easy especially since she was pregnant with me at the time. But in the face of all challenges, Mama remained strong. Neverthe-



Relyn Bon

less, I am very much aware of how much she struggles especially with finances, so whenever I have some money from my scholarship grants, I never fail to give her part of it.

When asked about Papa's disappearance sometimes I try to

hold back my tears. I can overcome the sadness, perhaps by telling myself that things were destined to turn out the way they did. Or by creating my own visions of being with Papa. Visions of a complete family.

If I could talk to Papa, I would say, "Do you know that I am your

youngest? Do you know that you had one more child, other than my siblings? I hope you are proud of everything I have achieved. I am also grateful because you are the reason why I became the person I turned out to be - the Relyn I am today. Thank you because I met my FIND family, especially my

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Life's...from page 29

though, and knew only one other participant. In 2010, just last year, Tita Azi, Chairperson of FIND-NCR and a close friend of my mother, invited me to BITAW¹, another activity organized by FIND for SAD. I asked, "But what is BITAW?" I found out that it has something to do with theater, with acting onstage. Because BITAW required a lot of interaction with the other participants, it was easier for me to become more actively involved this time around, and that was when I really discovered that there are other youth like me, who would understand my situation. It felt so good to be able to talk to others about family!

I was surprised because almost all of us had similar experiences. Our first performance moved the audience to tears...I myself cried onstage. Again, it felt good to release the heaviness in my chest to others, no matter that they were strangers to me.

If I was shy before, now I have more confidence in facing people. I tell myself, "For my father. I must do this."

I still remember the poem I wrote for him which I recited during that first performance:

Itay, kung nasaan ka man, nandito ako.

Itay, kung nasaan ka man, mahal na mahal kita.

Itay, kung nasaan ka man, sana makita kita.

Itay, kung nasaan ka man, ipagpapatuloy ko ito ...

(Father, no matter where you are, I am here.

Father, no matter where you are, I love you very much.

Father, no matter where you are, I hope I get to see you.

Father, no matter where you are, I will continue the struggle...)

The positive feedback about my acting, hearing people say, "*Ang galing mo!*" ("You were good!"), added to my self-confidence. It was my first time to perform, and the audience was touched enough that they cried. One foreigner even approached me after the performance and asked, "Do you have a card?" I felt like a star, what with the audience hugging and congratulating me. But the one hug I will not forget is the one from Ate Cel, one of our mentors. She gave me a heartfelt embrace and told me, "*Ang galing-galing mo!*" ("You were great!")

Just this past year, I have been able to join a total of three performances of the Samahan ng mga Anak ng Desaparecidos (SAD).

Today, I have a deeper understanding of things. Yet, I still find myself asking why my father was disappeared. But now I have a way of dealing which I would also like to share with my fellow children of the disappeared: Despite everything, let us not lose hope. Even if our families are not complete, let us accept reality and carry on with life. God knows that we can overcome this situation.

Now that I am more mature and have finished college, I dream of the day when I can provide enough for our family so that my mother won't have to go abroad. As far as I'm concerned, this will be her last trip abroad. I don't want to lose another parent.

I love my mother so much and I will do everything for her. It won't be long now. She will finally witness that all the sacrifices she made to be both mother and father, will lead to something good, something beautiful.

¹ BITAW – Basic Integrated Theater Arts Workshop

It has been eleven years since I embarked on my journey with my fellow children of the disappeared. Eleven years - almost half my life. It has been a formative period, a time of growth. There were moments of struggle, facing and overcoming challenges, participation and solidarity.

For me, the journey began with the disappearance of my father in the year 2000. I was in Grade 6 that fateful year, when I first met Tita Linda and Tita Grace, both FIND workers who helped our family visit military camps in our search for Papa. We went to Camp Aguinaldo, Fort Bonifacio, Camp Crame...probably all camps in Manila. It took us a month before we finally found him. He lost a lot of weight and looked haggard. I immediately wrapped him in a tight embrace.

Steadfast Commitment & Dedication

I am a self-confessed Papa's girl. I would race with my siblings to be the one to lay down beside him every time he comes home after a long absence. As a young child, I thought his job as an electrician entailed his being away from us for months at a time. I thought this was normal for all electricians. So, I was confused the first time he was detained in 1995 when I was only in Grade 2. I wondered, "Why? Is Papa a criminal? Is he a murderer? But he's just an electrician!"

I had many questions but didn't feel the need to find out the answers simply because I love Papa and trust him completely. We had to sell the house the family worked hard for in order to post his bail, but all that mattered for us was his freedom.



Lorena Lenin Castillo

This is why Papa's first disappearance hit me hard. By that time, at the age of twelve, I already understood that he wasn't just an electrician. Worse, even after we found him in Camp Crame, his release did not come as easily as it did the first time.

I was then graduating from elementary school. My older brother was the only one with me. Among all the children who graduated, I was probably the only one who didn't have a souvenir photograph taken with the whole family.

But it was still a good day because Papa was finally released during my graduation. Mama picked him up, thus they were both unable to attend the ceremony.

As the days passed I noticed certain changes in Papa's behavior and attitude – he began to have nightmares, became very vigilant especially when there were strangers around, and according to Mama he would keep on changing routes every time they go out somewhere, thinking that someone might be tailing them.

Around this time, I increasingly became an active member of SAD. It started when in 2000, the year Papa first disappeared, I was brought to the *Kalbaryo ng Kawalan ng Katarungan* (Calvary of Injustice) or KNK. The KNK is one of FIND's traditional activities, held each year on Holy Wednesday.

That same year, I was among the SAD members who performed in a stage play held in St. Joseph's College of Quezon City, which required overnight rehearsals even as we underwent counseling sessions. I particularly remember Mary, whose first question to me was, "Are you an officer in your class in school? I'm the Secretary in mine." Thus began a friendship that lasts to this day.

Mary and I played the role of siblings of a *desaparecido*. I can still recall our lines: "*Hinuli siya habang nagsasagawa ng Operasyon Pinta! Natagpuan siyang basag ang sentido!*" ("He was abducted in the middle of an *Operasyon Pinta!* He was found with his temple smashed!")

It was only with FIND and SAD that I discovered the nature of the life of a *desaparecido*. I couldn't bring myself to ask Papa directly. Mama was the one who eventually told us stories, especially about their lives as activists, such as them being unable to wed without their comrades' consent.

After Papa's second disappearance, the arguments

Memories...from page 31

brothers and sisters in SAD. I am proud of you for the work you have contributed to the nation. Thank you for your continued guidance of our family."

As for Mama, she still cries when she talks about Papa, even if his remains have already been found and we have been able to give him a decent burial. That is why I am thankful that FIND is there for Mama, supporting her.

I miss the times we spend together, Mama. I miss your warm embrace. I am sorry for the times when I don't listen to you, because I feel that I am already my own person, because I am already an adult. But just because I don't listen does not mean I don't want to spend time with you. You're still my Mama and nothing can change that. Thank you too because for at least a part of my life, you made us feel that our family was whole. Thank you for never giving up and never neglecting us. Thank you for being resilient notwithstanding the challenges God gave us. I love you very much. I wish you many, many more years and just as much patience.

To my Ates and Kuyas in SAD, I miss you all. Thank you for being

my Ates and Kuyas. For the attention and understanding. I hope that even when we are all old we will never lose the memories we share. Even when we already have our own families, let us still give some of our time for SAD. Let us not forget the pain, the sadness, and most of all the joy we experienced together. The struggle continues, do not grow tired, be strong.

With every challenge that has passed my life, I have realized that happiness is not only found in being perfect or complete. Just as I have realized that just because one is laughing or smiling does not mean that he or she is happy. *I am* happy, though, because I have gone through almost every emotion – I have been upset, angry, joyful, sad. And I have loved. This has made me resilient.

Resilience does not choose age or character. As long as it's for the family, you will surely find yourself doing *everything*. You will find yourself becoming resilient, no matter what kind of person you were at the start. Pray, have faith, love. And trust. Believe in yourself. Everything happens for a reason.

between my parents started to become heated. Mama was then working in an NGO and was urging Papa to discontinue his work as an organizer; after all he took up electrical engineering; he

can do other jobs. So, my father really is an electrician after all!

In the meantime, financial problems forced me to stop going to college for two years. But, I

went on volunteering in FIND and remained active in SAD. Even when I was able to enroll in college again, I volunteered to work with FIND in the morning before proceeding to school.

One day, as a volunteer in FIND, I came upon the files of its Search and Documentation program. Upon reading them, I was surprised to discover that Papa actually disappeared again in 2005! He was disappeared and interviewed by the same people who took him in the year 2000. It was just for five days, but still, isn't that disturbing?

Perhaps others perceive us as lucky since my father has surfaced alive. What they are unaware of is the constant anxiety, the fear that IT CAN HAPPEN AGAIN. Any moment, his disappearance may be repeated. His name might still be in the Order of Battle. And if he disappears again, he might

not surface this time around. So many what ifs, so many possibilities...just because Papa is with us does not mean we no longer have heavy burdens to bear.

In one of our more recent performances as SAD, this was my unscripted message to my father: "*Kahit hindi ko laging sinasabi, alam mo naman na mahal kita. Sana matagal ka pa naming makasama at alagaan mo ang iyong sarili, gaya ng pag-iingat namin sa iyo.*" ("Though I may not say it often, you must know that I love you. I hope that we can still be with you for a long time. Take good care of yourself, the way we care for you.")

For half my life now, I've been letting the gust of fate take me where it wants, and I find myself constantly in the company of the

families of the disappeared. This may partly be out of appreciation, of gratefulness to FIND for all the support. But perhaps more so, it's because of the sense of fulfillment and immeasurable joy I feel every time I am able to provide heartfelt service to the other relatives of the disappeared, in response to the call of those who are more in need.

But...what if the wind changes direction? What if the dreams I used to dream came true - of studying abroad in the field of international law or architecture? Do I even still remember what I really dreamt of becoming as a child?

The journey continues. Though the paths and direction may be uncertain, the destination is definite - the defense of human rights, the pursuit of justice for the families of the disappeared.



SAD members with FIND workers and psychologist therapist Lyra Verzosa

Notes on Roundtable Discussion 2: Economic Empowerment and Psychosocial Rehabilitation Work

Caroline Y. Sevilla, RN

On September 16, 2011 FIND held its second round table discussion on psychosocial work at Ceferina's Restaurant in Matahimik St. Quezon City. The goal of the RTD 2 was to blend rehabilitation with socio-economic empowerment through productivity, income earning opportunities, enhancing security and promoting environmentally sustainable livelihoods.

The presenters were Ms. La Rainne Abad-Sarmiento (Sikap Buhay - QC), Ms. Myla Loza (DSWD-NCR), Ms. Alicia Taroy (TESDA QC), Ms. Josephine Lascano (BALAY)

The other guests include Ms. Nelia Muncal (DOLE-NCR), Ms. Lyra Verzosa (Well-Being Foundation), Ms. Melinda Cruz (Barangay Sikatuna), Ms. Beverly Jimenea (DTI-NCR), Ms. Analiza Villar (TRC-DOST).

I. Livelihood Program for Communities: The Sikap Buhay Experience

"We need to move small business to manufacturing then export," stressed Ms. La Rainne Abad-

Sarmiento of Sikap Buhay. Ms. Sarmiento said that there are many business-minded citizens in Quezon City but the necessary entrepreneurial values need to be instilled in them. Equally important is how to teach the people to open a business.

She enumerated the entrepreneurial "musts" requisite to doing business:

- Do something you love
- Maximize your skills
- Join livelihood training programs
- Motivate yourself
- Be hardworking
- Be innovative
- Be open to partnership with government agencies or NGOs

"In the end, aim not only to help ourselves but the country as well. Because when we engage in business we employ people and we give *ka-buhayan* to others, we help the community and eventually the country," Ms. Sarmiento concluded.

II. Role of Economic Empowerment in the Psychosocial Rehabilitation of Victims of Enforced Disappearance and Their Immediate Families

In her presentation, Ms. Myla Loza (DSWD-NCR) stated that victims and families should be able to move forward, end their crisis and fulfill of their social functions. This can be done through psychosocial interventions that will assist clients in hurdling their crises. She discussed the DSWD programs and services that address psychosocial needs such as:

- 1) Counseling Services – the provision of individual, group or family counseling services to the victims and their families. They aim to



Ms. Myla Loza of DSWD-NCR (center) gives inputs on DSWD-supported livelihood projects

address identified impairments in social functioning.

2) Critical Incident Stress Debriefing – small group supportive crisis intervention process. This is provided to clients who have experienced traumatic events and the group members' usual coping methods have been exhausted and clients are exhibiting signs of considerable distress, impairment or dysfunction.

3) Self Employment Assistance Kaunlaran (SEA-K) Family Enterprise Project – provision of capability building and capital assistance to the disadvantaged families to enable them to undertake income producing projects and gain opportunities to develop positive work habits and attitude, and improve capacity to utilize labor and income oriented community services.

4) Financial Assistance – given to clients needing immediate financial support for their basic needs including expenses in returning to their home/ province, i.e., fare, food and traveling allowances. The social worker shall determine the amount of financial assistance.

According to Ms. Loza, a holistic approach should be considered in addressing the needs of clients

and their families. Integrated interventions should address emotional, social, mental and spiritual needs, all of which are considered essential elements of a meaningful and positive human development. She further pointed out that the ultimate objective is to maintain or regain physical, mental and socio-economic comfort and to engage in usual or pre-crisis activities in life.

She made it clear that economic empowerment for the victims of involuntary disappearance and their families requires a sustainable intervention which will help the clients become economically self-sufficient and can aid in restoring their normal way of life.

III. The BALAY Experience and Perspectives on Livelihood Assistance in Communities

BALAY Rehabilitation Center is a human rights organization mandated to undertake psychosocial development response to victims of human rights violations such as torture and internal displacement.

The process and goals of psychosocial rehabilitation in BALAY involves a series of

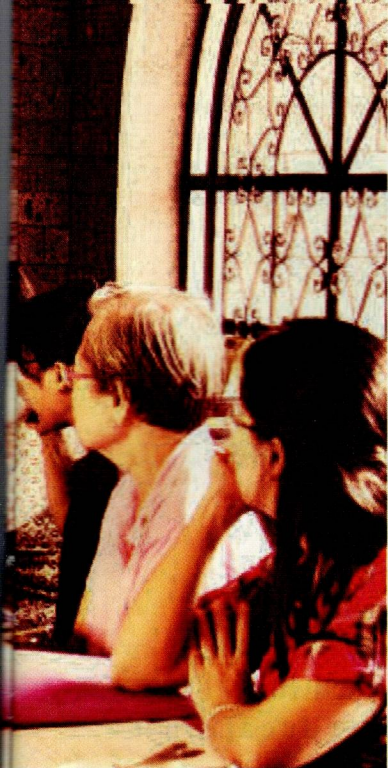


curative and preventive psychological and social interventions, which aim to strengthen individuals, families and communities, to enable them to develop mechanisms for long-lasting or sustainable self-help.

“Livelihood is contributory to the mental health and well-being of a person,” Ms. Joy Lascano stressed.

Livelihood Support in Psychosocial Rehabilitation Work and Psychosocial Adjustment should consider:

- Human capacity (including mental health and well-being),
- Social ecology (the network of relationships linking individuals within and between communities), and
- Culture and values (the value and meaning given to behavior and experience).



It is important to evaluate the person's capacity, skill and vulnerability in order to formulate an intervention plan suited to the person.

Livelihood support or assistance is relevant and integral to

the psychosocial rehabilitation and development of the clients/partners. Livelihood may be one of the strategies in the case management plan or intervention for a person or family depending on the given situation.

Livelihood as a Support Strategy for Healing/Therapy:

- The client/partner may fail to have a return on investment/repayment if he or she is still having functional (or mental health) problems as a result of the human rights violation.
- Livelihood activities may help the person to be functional.
- Livelihood activities may also enhance relationships within the family and the community.

Livelihood as an end goal should enable the person to attain and maintain maximum independence, ability, inclusion and participation in all aspects of life.

IV. Skills Development and Livelihood Trainings of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)

TESDA is the government agency mandated to ensure the provision of relevant, efficient, accessible and high quality TVET opportunities for the Filipinos to meet the skills requirements for economic and social development. It was created under RA 7796, otherwise known as the TESDA Act of 1994.

According to Ms. Alicia Taroy, (TESDA-QC) TVET is recognized as a major strategic option in the country's overall human resources development strategy because it is:

- Rapid
- Flexible
- Job-oriented, and
- Competency-based

Ms. Taroy said that the strategic role of TESDA has become more pronounced as it straddles in three essential roles:

1. Education and Training
2. Employment
3. Poverty Alleviation

She briefly discussed the TESDA's Unified TVET Program Registration and Accreditation System (UTPRAS).

■ UTPRAS is the quality assurance mechanism for the mandatory registration of technical-vocational programs with TESDA.

■ A process by which a training provider is authorized to deliver a particular training program.

■ A Certificate of Program Registration (CoPR) is issued to a training provider for each training program registered and authorized to be delivered.

Some of the services offered in TESDA-QC are:

1) Quezon City Lingkod Bayan Skills Development Center

- Courses/Programs offered:
- Electrical Installation & Maintenance NC II & NC III
- Computer Hardware Servicing NC II
- Consumer Electronics Servicing NC II
- Biomedical Equipment Servicing NC II
- Mechatronics Servicing NC II
- Appliance Servicing

Turn to page 39



BALAY's Experience and Perspectives on Livelihood Assistance for Psychosocial Rehabilitation

Josephine Acuna-Lascano

BALAY

A human rights based organization mandated to undertake psychosocial development response to victims of human rights violations such as torture and internal displacement.

Psychosocial

- 'Used to emphasize the close connection between psychological aspects of our

between psychological and social effects, each continually influencing the other."

Process and Goals of Psychosocial Rehabilitation

- Involves a series of curative and preventive psychological and social interventions, which aim to strengthen individuals, families and communities, so they can develop mechanisms for long lasting sustainable self-help

- Promote well-being, dignity, and human rights through strategies that enable people to regain and

enhance their psychosocial protective factors;

- Mobilize themselves to address the psychosocial stressor, i.e. social violence, discrimination, and poverty.

Building Blocks of Rights-Based Psychosocial Development Response (Rehabilitation)

- a. Counseling & Other Therapeutic Activities
- b. Psycho-education (cognitive behavioral)
- c. Pain Management
- d. Legal Assistance
- e. Family Support
- f. Relief and Other Welfare Support
- g. Conflict Transformation (Relationship)
- h. (KVA) Capacity Enhancement
- i. Livelihood Opportunities and Relocation

Livelihood Assistance (sustainable)

- Support provided to the individual, family or groups that will enable them return
- Addressing poverty and vulnerability in both development and humanitarian contexts. They have emerged from the growing realization of the need to put the poor and all aspects of their lives and means of living at the centre of development and humanitarian work, while maintaining the sustainability

experience [*our thoughts, emotions and behaviors*] and our social experience [*our relationships, traditions and culture*]

- "The word 'psychosocial' simply underlines the dynamic relationship bet-



Ms. Josephine Acuna-Lascano

of natural resources for present and future generations.

■ A **livelihood** comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for means of living.

■ **Livelihood strategies** are the range and combination of activities and choices that people make in order to achieve their livelihood goals.

Livelihood Support in Psychosocial Rehabilitation Work and Psychosocial Adjustment should consider:

■ Human capacity (including mental health and well-being), social ecology (the network of relationships linking individuals within and between communities), and culture and values (the value and meaning given to behavior and experience).

■ Psychosocial well-being principally reflects adjustment across these three core domains, though availability of other physical, material and economic resources (e.g. personal assets, economic livelihoods, local infrastructure, etc.) will often also be of relevance in defining the context for such adjustment.

Notes...from page 37

- Maintaining & Repairing Mobile Phone
- English Language
- Japanese Language
- Korean Language

2) Quezon City Skills and Livelihood Training Center (Ilaw ng Bayan Foundation)

Courses/Programs offered:

- Bartending NC II
- Restaurant & Coffee Shop leading to Food & Beverage Services NC III
- Hilot (Wellness Massage) NC II
- Housekeeping NC II
- Household Services NC II
- Food & Beverage Services NC II
- Motorcycle/Small Engine Repair NC II

3) TESDA Women's Center

- Dressmaking NC II

- Bread/Pastry Production NC II
- Commercial Cooking NC II
- Housekeeping NC II
- Food & Beverage Services NC II
- Food Processing NC II
- Automotive Servicing NC II
- Consumer Electronics Servicing NC II
- Gas Metal Arc Welding NC II
- Shielded Metal Arc Welding NC II
- Pharmacy Services NC II

Ms. Taroy emphasized that the main focus of TESDA is skills training. She further stressed that it is easy to avail oneself of the trainings once the requirements are met. She urged FIND members to visit www.tesda.gov.ph for the list of requirements and schedule of trainings.

Livelihood as a Support Strategy for Healing/Therapy

■ We cannot expect the partner to have a return on investment/repayment if he or she is still having functional (or mental health) problems as a result of the human rights violation.

■ Livelihood activities are used to enable the person to be functional, productive and gain meaning in life.

■ Livelihood activity can be used also to enhance

relationships within the family and community.

Livelihood as an End Goal

■ The aim should be to enable the person to attain and maintain maximum independence, ability, inclusion and participation in all aspects of life.

(Ms. Josephine Acuna-Lascano is the Deputy Executive Director of BALAY Rehabilitation Center, Inc.)

Revisiting the Past
2005

FOUND!

First National Gathering of Surfaced Desaparacidos 31 May – 2 June 2005

Redemptorist Retreat House, Lipa City, Batangas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The long-dreamed of plan of the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND) to bring together survivors of involuntary disappearance finally found fulfillment as eighteen (18) survivors from different parts of the country gathered from 31 May to 2 June 2005 in Lipa City, Batangas for the First National Gathering of Surfaced Desaparecidos.

It was a momentous event for FIND as the organization has continuously labored to reach out and extend assistance to the families of victims through its different programs for the spouses and children, of search and documentation of victims, national and international advocacy and welfare and rehabilitation of victims of which this activity falls under. But it was especially so for the victims, who for a certain period have "disappeared" even unto themselves and who have since struggled to move on with their lives, some successfully but most with tentativeness signifying

unresolved issues hanging specter-like from their past.

It was an intensive three-day gathering of storytelling and fellowship done through rituals, group dynamics, small-group sharing and workshops toward that sought-after healing into which all the participants enthusiastically poured in their creative and practical energies. It was the beginning step towards understanding that one defining moment in their lives so that acceptance and healing might eventually occur.

FIND invited two experts, Rev. Fr. Ben Moraleda, CsSR and Ms Lally Abainza, in the field of trauma counseling and therapy. They enjoined the participants to create through this gathering a "safe space" with which to face up to their experiences while accepting each other as companions in this journey of self-recovery. They were also reminded that there are lessons that may be plumbed from their well of pain, lessons that will enrich others not only themselves. The facilitators were on hand to

explain in theory the process of self-recovery, however, it is they, the participants, who will heal themselves that they may go forward with their lives.

I. The Opening Celebration

The participants were welcomed by Ms Nilda Lagman-Sevilla, FIND Co-Chairperson who in her inspiring talk acknowledged the delay although not intentional in addressing the situation of those who have directly suffered state repression. She expressed the sentiments of those at the helm of FIND and assured the victims that they empathize with the gravity of the experience of losing one's dignity as a human being, including one's self-respect. Not only their families were left with the scars but more so they who up to the present may be unable to get on with their lives. She challenged them to approach this gathering positively that the wounds may heal and the experience be a bridge to recovering those that were lost in themselves.

A short pause to remember all the Desaparecidos was held as was the ritual regularly held when members of FIND gathered. The opening celebration was capped with all participants planting monggo seeds in a small planter to signify the hope that is to blossom from this breakthrough initiative.

II. The Individual and Group Processes

The facilitators introduced the novelty of this activity by explaining that the most important objective of the group is for all the participants to be able to accept the gathering as a “safe place” to tell their stories, and each other as companions in the journey of remembering and, hopefully, understanding and moving on.

The main processes were divided into two: the deepening of the individual and group processes and the integration of the individual and group processes. The activities were not strictly structured but were free-flowing to a point to allow the participants to feel comfortable enough to share, not only their experiences but more importantly, the feelings and emotions that accompanied the experience. Small group workshops and group plenary sessions were held for individual re-telling of stories. Creative activities such as clay art workshops and free-style drawing were adapted to aid the participants in the process of remembering and identifying “defining” moments of their experiences. Questions such as

What do I remember of the experience?

What were my emotions at the time?

What are the important things in my life now?

What are my strengths and positive qualities?

What are the symbols of my life?

What are my hopes and visions for the future?

What can FIND do for me and what can I offer to the group?

helped to guide the participants in their creative workshops. These were interspersed with community singing and centering exercises such as body prayer, chi gong and meditations. The participants also relaxed through shiatsu massage in-between sessions given by some of their colleagues.

Fr. Ben Moraleda, CsSR spoke about *psychological trauma* that he defined as the impact of an extreme stress or critical incident on an individual’s psychological and biological functioning. And the resulting *helplessness* and *isolation* are the core experiences of trauma. An individual affected by such needs to effectively *reconnect* with society and feel *empowered* to take charge of his/her life in order to successfully *recover* from trauma. He further explained that three stages constitute recovery: one, re-establishment of safety; two, remembrance and mourning; and three, reconnection and empowerment. The gathering is supposed to create the “safe place” for remembering and through the process of re-telling their stories, meaning-giving to the experience will ensue thus renewing relationships and planning for the future will occur.

III. The Survivors

The participants came from different parts of the country, from

regional and local chapters of FIND. Mindanao down south was represented by five (5) survivors while from the Visayas came six (6) participants. There were three (3) participants from up north in Northern Luzon, one (1) representing the Ilocos region and two (2) came from Cagayan Valley. Four (4) survivors represented the National Capital Region (NCR). Two of the participants were national minorities – one belonged to the Subanen tribe in Mindanao and the other an Igorot from the Cordilleras. Their ages ranged from early 30’s to their 50’s. There were seven (7) women survivors while eleven (11) were male.

IV. The Closing Celebration

The three-day gathering closed amidst warm and profuse emotions from the participants, organizers and facilitators. The overwhelming response from the participants was for FIND to raise funds for follow-up activities for this initial gathering and to organize similar meetings for a wider group to participate in. The participants also reiterated their need for physical and infrastructure support that FIND may raise funds for to assist them in rebuilding their lives.

Mr. Louie Crismo, Secretary-General of FIND spoke in recognition and support of the concerns and welfare of this initial group of survivors. He welcomed their suggestions and outlined the continuing plans of FIND to seek financial support for such needs.

Restorative Justice and the Families of Desaparecidos

It is true as the exploratory study has shown that certain elements, features or tendencies toward restorative justice already exist in some indigenous communities or have been integrated into the mainstream legal system. I wish to congratulate PhilRights, AHRC, PILCD and IBS for bringing this to light. Your collaborative effort is indeed a giant step toward making restorative justice a felt alternative to the prevailing punitive justice system.

However, we still have miles to go before we could really institutionalize restorative justice. As the critique toward the end of the study rightly puts it, there is no certainty whether the out-of-court modes of dispute resolution among the studied indigenous peoples were restitution-driven or effected by perceived super-normal interventions. Be that as it may, they somehow assure that crimes or social norm infractions can be resolved amicably and definitely without lengthy court litigations.

Experiences of the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND) in dealing with the families of the disappeared including victims who have reappeared show that prospects of restorative justice in the country could be bright.

The primary concern of the victims' families is to find the missing kin, hopefully alive. They usually say, "*Maibalik lang sa aming piling ang aming mahal sa buhay, wala na kaming balak magsampa ng demanda.*" Or if they fear that their missing loved ones have already been killed, they say, "*Muling makita at mabigyan ng disentang libing.*"

Whether it is the absence of witnesses who are willing to testify in court or fatalism that makes them accept in peace the loss of a loved one that accounts for this attitude, we really are unsure. What is more pronounced is the absence of vengeful expressions as "*pagbabayaran nila ito*" or "*buhay ang inutang, buhay ang kabayaran*" or "*ipaghihiganti ka namin*" when they find the missing dead.

During exhumations, it has been observed that outbursts of vengeance are never heard. Cries of pain, anguish and grief, uncontrolled or hushed are always there especially when the remains are already unearthed. But the grieving families never rage not even in silence.

The heinousness of the offense notwithstanding, the sorrowful families' demeanor illustrates that eventually healing and forgiveness could be realized without vengeance and retribution.

Another factor worth considering is the background and orientation of the victims including some

families. Most of the victims of enforced disappearance are political activists, cause-oriented advocates, and/or human rights defenders who are critical of government policies they perceive to be oppressive, violative of human rights or a hindrance to the promotion of sectoral or general welfare. For this reason, justice for our beloved *desaparecidos* cannot be fully served through the courts. Equally if not more important is doing justice to their life and martyrdom by sustaining the struggle for the causes they fought for and resisting those who impede their realization. For some enlightened families of the disappeared they would rather continue the fight and help prevent other families from suffering their harrowing experience than consume themselves seeking the arrest and incarceration of the offenders or perpetrators.

This, does not mean, however, that the families no longer hold agents of the State or persons in authority accountable for acts of enforced disappearance. In fact, they have been lobbying Congress to enact an anti-disappearance law. Criminalizing an offense by law entails providing for concomitant penalties. The anti-disappearance bill, however, goes beyond the imposition of penal sanctions. It provides for several measures that aim to prevent enforced disappearance even as it also provides for compensation, rehabilitation and restitution.

Together with Ms Raquel Santos, Deputy-Secretary General, they thanked the participants for their trust in the organizers in re-telling their stories and how their contributions are going to help in updating FIND's files. They also noted the participants' promise of active participation in future FIND activities, especially in reactivating and organizing chapters all over the country.

Special thanks were expressed to the facilitators who, despite the

unstructured form of the activity, ably guided the process with ease. Ms Santos then led the awarding of certificates and tokens to all the participants and facilitators.

Ms. Phebe Gamata-Crismo, Board member of FIND led the closing ritual that capped the three-day gathering. Blessings for each other were exchanged as lighted candles were placed on the altar. The planter of monggo seedlings, then turned sprouts, were placed in the center to signify and remind the group that hope lives on.

The eighteen survivors will go back to their respective lives fired with the inspiration of support from each other and looking forward to meeting again in a year's time for the founding assembly of their new organization –

FOUND! No longer alone and missing but belonging and sharing the nobleness of personal commitments that led to their dark “defining” moments.

(Documented by the late Diane S. Reyes)

Finally, considering as mentioned earlier that most *desaparecidos* like other victims of human rights violations protest anti-people government policies, how then in the process and spirit of restorative justice do we effectively hold ranking policymakers and implementers accountable for crimes not only against individuals or small groups but against entire social sectors, against a nation, or against humanity?

How do we bring to restorative justice those who were and still are responsible for the loss of lives, liberty and property of displaced communities in war zones or areas of conflict? How do we make these officials see and rectify the wrong of a total war on insurgents, of relentlessly pursuing free trade at the expense of Filipino entrepreneurs, workers and farmers, of fiscal irresponsibility that denies the people adequate social services, of failing

to protect the earth's carrying capacity?

How do we make these offenders say they're sorry to the present generation and to those yet unborn? How do we heal, restore and make whole again a broken people?

**Reaction of Ms. Nilda L. Sevilla, FIND Co-Chairperson, to “Restorative Justice: Addressing Crimes Through Accountability and Rehabilitation”, U.P. Balay Kalinaw, Diliman, Quezon City, 28 February 2007.*

HOUSE PASSES *DESAPARECIDOS* BILL

"The Philippines may soon hold the singular distinction of having enacted the first domestic law in Asia that criminalizes enforced or involuntary disappearance," enthused Rep. Edcel C. Lagman, principal author of House Bill No. 98, the proposed "Anti-Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance Act of 2012".

The House of Representatives passed the bill on third and final reading with 234 affirmative votes, zero negative, and no abstention on 21 March 2012, the last session day before the Lenten recess.

Essentially adopting the United Nations' definition of enforced disappearance, House Bill No. 98 defines the offense as the "arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty committed by government authorities or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of such persons in authority, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared person, which places such person outside the protection of the law."

According to Lagman "a two-decade gestation for this invaluable human rights legislation is not only inordinately long. It is a grave injustice to the *desaparecidos* and their families who are also victims as they suffer interminable pain and anguish over the unknown fate and whereabouts of their disappeared loved ones."

"This measure reaffirms the principles of State accountability, justice and the rule of law. It is envisioned to help government prevent, suppress, investigate and penalize enforced disappearance as well as provide victims and their families effective machinery for reparation and redress," Lagman stressed.

Members of the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND) who were in the session hall gallery during the bill's third reading, welcomed the long awaited plenary approval.

Lagman, who is also the Honorary Chairperson of FIND, said that although the Philippines has not yet signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPAPED), the country is already poised to comply with a vital provision of the Convention that mandates States Parties to enact domestic laws penalizing enforced disappearance as an autonomous or separate offense.

"With the approval of H.B. No. 98, the Congress is laying the groundwork for the country's compliance with the landmark international human rights convention," the Albay solon said.

The ICPAPED entered into force on December 23, 2010 and to date has 91 signatories and 32 States Parties.

"I see no reason for the Philippines' temporizing on the ICPAPED which is the basis of the proposed anti-enforced disappearance law," Lagman said.

Lagman urged President Benigno Simeon Aquino III, whose father was a victim of grave human rights violations, to champion the cause of the disappeared by ensuring the enactment and full implementation of the complementary domestic and international laws on enforced disappearance.

As a human rights advocate legislator, Lagman is also a principal author of RA 9346 prohibiting the death penalty, RA 9745 penalizing torture, and HB 5990 the proposed compensation to victims of human rights violations law that was also approved on third reading on 21 March 2012.

enact anti-enforced disappearance law now!

Sign and accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, enact anti-enforced disappearance law now!

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Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND)
NGO in Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council