



Strengthening Human Rights in the Philippines Program

**QUARTERLY REPORT FROM THE ASIA FOUNDATION
TO THE UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
01 APRIL– 30 JUNE 2009**

(COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT NO. 492-A-00-07-00016-00)

The Asia Foundation

Strengthening Human Rights in the Philippines Program (Cooperative Agreement No. 492-A-00-07-00016-00) April 1, 2009 – June 30, 2009

SUMMARY

This quarterly report covers activities from April 1, 2009 to June 30, 2009 under The Asia Foundation's Strengthening Human Rights in the Philippines Program. The program is funded through a Cooperative Agreement with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and runs from October 1, 2007 to September 30, 2010. The program aims to introduce substantial and durable measures that will strengthen enforcement of human rights and rule of law in the Philippines through a three-pronged strategy to:

- (1) Promote respect for human rights and freedoms and progressively secure their effective recognition and observance;
- (2) Protect human rights of citizens in law and in reality through improved monitoring of violations; and
- (3) Prosecute human rights violations through capacity-building for better investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of cases.

During this reporting period, the Foundation intensified efforts to sustain the momentum of on-going initiatives and maximize project impact. As it prepared for a mid-term results evaluation, the Foundation maintained close coordination with partner institutions and organizations to ensure successful and timely completion of projects in accordance with program objectives.

On **promoting respect for human rights**, the University of the Philippines Institute of Human Rights made headway in formulating local human rights action plans in the cities of Naga and Calapan. For the **protection of human rights** component, the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility kept its online database updated by posting reports on recent media killings and pending court cases, including the conviction of a slain broadcaster's gunman in April 2009. The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) prepared to build its in-house capability to use the Martus-based Executive Information System for documenting and reporting human rights violations.

Efforts toward the effective **prosecution of human rights violations** continued to gain ground as the second Multi-Sectoral Quick Reaction Team (MSQRT) was established in Albay province (the first was the MSQRT formed in Leyte last quarter). This period also saw the completion of intensive forensic trainings for CHR investigators led by the Equipo Peruano de Antropologia Forense (EPAF or the Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team). More judges learned about human rights through another seminar conducted in

partnership with the Philippine Judicial Academy. The Human Rights Manual for Private Lawyers and Public Attorneys underwent editing, while validation of the procedures outlined in the Manual on Civil and Administrative Remedies for Human Rights Abuses commenced this period.

HIGHLIGHTS AND OUTCOMES OF SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES

I. Promoting respect for human rights

Development of a Local Human Rights Action Plan. The University of the Philippines Law Center's Institute of Human Rights (UP IHR), the Foundation's implementing partner for this project, conducted local stakeholder dialogues and consultations in Calapan City (Oriental Mindoro) and Naga City (Camarines Sur) as part of the action-planning process.

After securing the Calapan City Mayor's support last quarter, the UP IHR held a dialogue with other city government officials and staff¹ on May 25, 2009 to introduce the project. The dialogue was a strategic step to ensure buy-in since the local officials will be direct implementers of the action plan when it is drafted. During the meeting, local officials committed to work with civil society to develop and implement the action plan. The UP IHR likewise held separate meetings with Calapan-based non-government organizations (NGOs) to engage them in the project.

On June 4 and 5, 2009, the UP IHR convened the first multi-sectoral consultation for the development of the Calapan City Human Rights Action Plan. A total of 37 participants from the local government and civil society² attended. To provide a human rights framework for the discussion, a UP IHR lawyer delivered a lecture on the rights-based approach to development programming. Stakeholder inputs were thereafter gathered through small-group workshops designed to surface human rights issues, identify duty-bearers and rights-holders, and analyze their weaknesses and strengths. Most of the concerns raised dealt with economic, social, and cultural rights³ but UP IHR facilitators were able to draw from the discussion issues relating to insurgency; militarization especially in indigenous peoples' communities; extra-legal killings and enforced disappearances not just in Calapan but in other areas of Mindoro; and vulnerability of marginalized groups, particularly farmers and laborers, to human rights abuses. The UP IHR will consolidate workshop results and present them in the next consultation.

In Naga City, the UP IHR met with the Mayor and nine other city officials on April 17, 2009 to finalize the action-planning process. During that meeting, the Mayor requested

¹ Twenty representatives from the city treasurer's, assessor's, human resource development, accounting, budget, environmental, agriculture, engineering, legal, public health, and social welfare offices attended.

² Vendors' association, farmers groups, indigenous peoples groups, and human rights organizations.

³ E.g. duty of the government to provide access to potable water, properly enforce demolition orders against informal settlers, etc.

for a brief seminar on the rights-based approach that will be the guiding framework for drafting the plan. Thus, on May 29, 2009, the UP IHR organized an education session on the topic for 20 local government and NGO representatives. The session was also an opportunity to introduce the project to civil society members, who expressed eagerness to participate. Consultation workshops to gather stakeholder inputs and writeshops to draft the plan will follow in the next reporting period.

II. Protecting human rights of citizens

Expansion and Interactivity of the CMFR Database on the Killings of Journalists.

The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) continued to update its online database by posting reports about slain journalists in the alerts section of its website.⁴ During this reporting period, CMFR documented three media killings all in the month of June. On June 9, 2009, radio commentator and former Occidental Mindoro vice-Governor Crispin Perez, Jr. was gunned down. Three days later, print journalist Antonio Castillo was shot in Masbate province. On June 25, 2009, another radio commentator who was also a municipal councilor, Jonathan Peltavero, was shot dead in Agusan del Sur. CMFR is still confirming whether Castillo's and Peltavero's deaths are work-related. In Perez's case, investigation revealed that he was targeted because of his criticisms against mining and of a contract for local distribution of electricity. A total of five journalists have been killed from January to June 2009. Two of them (including Perez) were reportedly killed in the line of duty.

Apart from posting such alerts, CMFR's website also featured developments in court cases involving slain journalists. Among these is a recent court victory: in an April 20, 2009 decision, a Digos City Regional Trial Court convicted the gunman of block-timer Armando "Rachman" Pace of homicide.⁵ This is the third conviction among cases of media killings since 2001. Two others involved the death of Edgar Demalerio and Marlene Esperat.⁶

⁴ <http://www.cmfr-phil.org/flagship-programs/freedom-watch/alerts/>

⁵ Pace, a hard-hitting broadcaster in Digos City, Davao del Sur, was gunned down on July 18, 2006. The court convicted his assassin of homicide instead of murder. A qualifying circumstance that would raise the crime of homicide to murder is use of a motor vehicle in the commission of an offense. In Pace's case, the accused used a motorcycle only after the shooting to escape, and not while he was firing the gun. The court thus ruled that the motorcycle was not used in the actual killing or commission of the offense. In the absence of a qualifying circumstance, the crime committed was simply homicide.

⁶ Edgar Demalerio, radio broadcaster and print editor in Pagadian City, was gunned down in May 2002. In May 2005, a former policeman was convicted of murder for his death. Marlene Esperat was a radio broadcaster and publisher of a local newspaper who wrote exposés about corrupt practices of Department of Agriculture (DA) Region XII officials. She was killed in 2005 in full view of her family in Sultan Kudarat. Although the Regional Trial Court in Cebu convicted her assassins of murder in September 2006, the case against the suspected mastermind DA officials is still pending in court.

During this reporting period, CMFR also worked on logistical arrangements for and selected journalists-participants to the training on human rights reporting to be held in Cebu City next quarter.

Martus-based Executive Information System (MAREIS). During the quarter, the Pentaho project development team (a foreign information technology consultant), the Foundation, and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) finalized the training design on the Pentaho Business Intelligence Platform.⁷ This platform is the application system that enables various functionalities of the MAREIS. Slated for next quarter, the Pentaho training will equip the CHR's Information Systems Management Office with skills to troubleshoot, properly maintain, manage, and further enhance the MAREIS.

As project counterpart, the CHR provided refresher trainings and rolled out the MAREIS to its 19 regional offices. To ensure full use of the system, the Commission issued a memorandum⁸ in June 2009 directing all field offices to report human rights abuses through the MAREIS. From January to June 2009, the CHR received 357 complaints of human rights violations through the MAREIS.⁹

III. Prosecuting human rights violations

Forensic Training of Commission on Human Rights Investigators. The Foundation partnered with the *Equipo Peruano de Antropologia Forense* (EPAF or the Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team)¹⁰ and the CHR for this activity. EPAF prepared a manual entitled "Extrajudicial Killings and Forced Disappearances, A Forensic Manual for Human Rights Investigators" which illustratively outlines how field investigators can recover, analyze, and interpret evidence using forensic techniques. The CHR, for its part, handled training logistics. Its Forensics Unit identified participants consisting of doctors, lawyers, regional directors, laboratory aides, crime photographers, and other CHR staff who regularly take part in field missions. Four forensic trainings were held as follows:

⁷ The Pentaho BI Platform is an enterprise-class business intelligence platform that supports Pentaho's end-user reporting, analysis, and dashboard capabilities with back-end security, integration, scheduling, auditing, and more. See http://www.pentaho.com/products/bi_platform/

⁸ Martus Investigation Module Full Implementation, Commission on Human Rights Memorandum MVVC-M-08G09.

⁹ This figure includes all kinds of human rights violations. The breakdown based on type of violation (e.g. extrajudicial killings, torture, illegal arrest, etc.) has not been released pending issuance of the CHR's guidelines on public disclosure of MAREIS-generated information.

¹⁰ EPAF is a non-profit civil society organization based in Lima, Peru that applies forensic anthropology and other forensic sciences to investigate human rights abuses. EPAF has documented more than 13,000 enforced disappearances in Peru and has undertaken exhumation missions in the Latin Americas and Kosovo.

Batch	Date	Venue	No. of participants¹¹
National Capital Region	April 24-26, 2009	Clarkfield, Pampanga	31
Luzon	April 29-May 1, 2009	Clarkfield, Pampanga	31
Visayas	May 4-6, 2009	Cebu City	34
Mindanao	May 9-11, 2009	Cagayan de Oro City	37
Total number of participants			133

Local forensic doctors from the University of the Philippines and civil society representatives of the Multi-Sectoral Quick Reaction Team in Leyte province joined these trainings since they work hand-in-hand with the CHR in fact-finding missions.

The EPAF team consisting of the EPAF President¹² and a forensic archeologist/bio-anthropologist led the trainings. Each session opened with classroom lectures on standard crime scene investigation procedures, including scientific and systematic documentation and analysis of human rights abuses. The trainers familiarized participants with applicable principles of trauma, anthropology, and DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) testing. Gruesome photos of dead bodies and recovered bones from EPAF's missions in Peru and Kosovo enriched the discussions.

For field work, EPAF set up simulated incidents of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances using straw dummies. EPAF also dug a grave for an exhumation exercise. Participants were divided into teams to investigate. To make the simulations as close as possible to Philippine reality, no hi-tech equipment was used. Participants thus used ribbons to cordon off the crime scenes, improvised flags to mark evidence, disposable gloves and paper bags to handle artifacts, ordinary shovels to exhume bodies, and construction levels and measuring tapes to triangulate and draw the scenes. Just like any real-life mission, participants completed their work under the scorching sun and heavy rains. CHR Chairperson and the other Commissioners, clad in their working shirts and pants, actively joined their teams in the exercise.

Each three-day activity culminated with a presentation of the participants' findings. The teams recovered bullet casings and other material evidence from the simulated sites. Based on their investigations, they reconstructed what had probably happened and identified possible perpetrators. EPAF and other teams critiqued each group's findings. Their evaluation underscored the need to follow step-by-step procedures to keep the crime scene secure, strategize the investigation process, thoroughly and patiently recover evidence, systematically mark the evidence, and logically draw evidence-backed

¹¹ A total of 133 participants attended the four batches. They were composed of 92 investigators, 13 regional directors, 11 lawyers, four commissioners, three laboratory aides, two crime photographers, and one chemist-physicist – all from the CHR; four forensic doctors from the University of the Philippines; and three civil society members of the MSQRTs.

¹² The President of EPAF is a forensic anthropologist who served as expert witness in the International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

conclusions. Hands-on work allowed participants to learn new forensic techniques and at the same time unlearn outdated investigation practices.

Based on their over-all assessment of the training experience, the participants found the exercises difficult but stimulating, and extremely relevant to their work. Participants from the CHR's Region III office had a chance to immediately apply the exhumation procedures they learned. Just a few weeks after the training, their team assisted the Philippine National Police excavate the body of a rebel returnee abducted in 2004. Techniques on removing the soil layer by layer, systematically identifying and marking evidence, handling the recovered body, and identifying the victim based on clothes, distinguishing features, and other ante-mortem data¹³ proved useful in that mission.

The Australian Agency for International Development co-funded the trainings.¹⁴ The CHR paid for the transportation of participating staff as counterpart.

Establishment of Multi-Sectoral Quick Reaction Teams (MSQRTs). After the first MSQRT was established in Palo, Leyte last quarter, human rights stakeholders in Albay province followed suit. This period saw the establishment of the second MSQRT in Legaspi City, Albay during a focus group discussion organized by the Ateneo Human Rights Center (AHRC) on June 30, 2009. Twenty-two representatives from the local church diocese, provincial government, Commission on Human Rights, Integrated Bar of the Philippines, local universities, and civil society organizations agreed to work as a team to respond to extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in the province. The group designated the Social Action Center of the diocese to be the secretariat. Although members noted that the number of reported human rights violations in the province has declined, summary killings and abductions continue to happen in Albay, and some remain unreported. To help address this, the group drafted an operational procedure to facilitate prompt referral of complaints and smooth coordination of services among NGOs on the ground, investigating authorities, and other offices and organizations. They also agreed to develop and disseminate information materials to educate the community about basic crime scene preservation (e.g. that the crime scene must be cordoned off and should be untouched until official investigators arrive, etc.). They will meet next quarter to plan this initiative and to discuss the specific roles and functions of the different institutions and organizations represented in the team.

Three members of the Leyte MSQRT participated in the Forensic Training of CHR investigators in Cebu City on May 4 to 6, 2009. They plan to share what they learned with other team members in a meeting scheduled next quarter.

¹³ Ante-mortem data refers to the characteristics of the person and events that happened before his/her disappearance or death (e.g. age, sex, height, limping leg, handedness, personal belongings, clothing).

¹⁴ AusAID funds covered training expenses (food, accommodation, venue, and materials) of participants from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. USAID supported the travel, food, and accommodation of EPAF trainers, printing of the manuals, as well as training expenses (food, accommodation, venue, and materials) of participants from the National Capital Region.

In the next reporting period, AHRC will continue to organize MSQRTs in Nueva Ecija, Oriental Mindoro, Albay, Sorsogon, Davao del Sur, and Northern Samar. A meeting among heads of agencies in Metro Manila and national networks of human rights organizations will be convened to share project updates and rekindle their commitment to mobilize local counterparts.

Multi-Sectoral and Skills-Building Seminar Workshops on Human Rights Issues: Extralegal Killings and Enforced Disappearances. On April 28 to 29, 2009, the Philippine Judicial Academy (PhilJA) organized another seminar in Baguio City. A total of 67 regional trial court judges, public prosecutors, public attorneys, members of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines, Commission on Human Rights, Philippine National Police, Armed Forces of the Philippines, and human rights organizations from the First Judicial Region attended.¹⁵

Like the previous seminars, the trainings included lectures on what constitutes an extrajudicial killing and an enforced disappearance; state and command responsibility; protective writs that may be issued by courts; and human rights and international humanitarian law. A Filipino forensic pathologist oriented participants on the use and appreciation of forensic evidence in human rights cases. To facilitate interaction among participants, thematic problem solving workshops and multi-sectoral dialogues were incorporated in the program. The dialogues served as a venue for a candid exchange of experiences and views in handling cases of human rights violations. Specific questions on the application of the Rules on the Writ of Amparo and the Writ of Habeas Data were raised.

As of this quarter, PhilJA has conducted 20 batches of multi-sectoral trainings on human rights, benefiting 1,176 participants (including 480 judges) in ten out of 13 judicial regions. The program supported ten of these trainings. Among the judges who attended the training series is the Judge of Branch 20, Digos City Regional Trial Court. This is the Judge who issued the April 20, 2009 judgment convicting the assassin of slain journalist Armando “Rachman” Pace.¹⁶

In the next reporting period, PhilJA will complete the last leg of the seminar series in Cagayan de Oro and Zamboanga City to cover the Twelfth and Ninth Judicial Regions, respectively.¹⁷

¹⁵ The First Judicial Region consists of the following provinces: Abra, Benguet, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Mt. Province, and Pangasinan. In accordance with USAID rules, the Foundation did not extend funding support to participants from the police and the military.

¹⁶ See also previous section on the Expansion and Interactivity of the CMFR Database on the Killings of Journalists under the Protecting Human Rights component.

¹⁷ The Twelfth Judicial Region covers Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, and North Cotabato. The Ninth Judicial Region includes Basilan, Zamboanga del Norte, and Zamboanga del Sur.

In-depth Analysis of the Results of the Legal Audit of Extrajudicial Killing Cases.

The Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) identified 38 cases of extrajudicial killings pending in different courts through a legal audit in 2008.¹⁸ During this reporting period, the consultant validated the status of these 38 by counter-checking the information in IBP's raw data with updates from Task Force 211 and courts. Based on the consultant's evaluation, only 28 of the 38 cases are still active cases; the rest have been dismissed or archived. Of the 28 active cases, 6 involve killings of activists, 12 are media killings, while the rest appear to be ordinary crimes of homicide or murder. The consultant started visiting courts where these cases of political and media killings are pending in order to analyze their progress; identify causes of delay and other obstacles to prosecution; and recommend remedies to address them. The consultant is expected to complete the study next quarter.

Publication of the Manual on the Use of Civil and Administrative Remedies and Manual on Human Rights for Private Lawyers and Public Attorneys.

These manuals were developed by consultant human rights lawyers under the program. The Manual on the Use of Civil and Administrative Remedies consists of a study entitled *Civil and Administrative Remedies as Instruments of Accountability for Violations of Human Rights* and an accompanying *Paralegal Training Manual*. The study includes a section on existing procedures for administrative complaints against state agents who commit human rights abuses. To ensure the accuracy of the manual's contents, the Foundation validated this section with the human rights offices of the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The Foundation's intern from Georgetown University Law Center, who used to be a copyeditor, edited *The Manual on Human Rights for Private Lawyers and Public Attorneys*.¹⁹ Layout and printing of the manuals will be completed next quarter.

Mid-term program evaluation. In consultation with the Agreement Officer's Technical Representative for the program, the Foundation finalized discussions with an independent consultant, the Center for Public Resource Management Consultants, Inc. (CPRM) for a mid-term project results evaluation. CPRM's team of evaluators commenced the review of relevant reports and documents about the Strengthening Human Rights in the Philippines Program, including the performance monitoring and evaluation plan. Apart from a desk review, evaluators will also conduct interviews and focus group discussions among project partners and beneficiaries in Metro Manila and other sites. The evaluation team will assess the merits of project framework, approach, strategy, and implementation

¹⁸ In 2008, The Asia Foundation, with support from the Australian Agency for International Development, partnered with the IBP to conduct a legal audit of cases of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines. The audit involved an inventory of cases filed before courts and other quasi-judicial agencies such as the Commission on Human Rights, the Philippine National Police, and the National Prosecution Service. The project yielded a list of cases and basic information about them such as their status; the names of victims, alleged perpetrators, and witnesses; dates of relevant incidents from the filing of the complaint to trial and resolution of the case, including outcomes, admissions, and issues raised, whenever these are readily available.

¹⁹ This is the redesigned and expanded version of Special Section on Human Rights of the Revised Manual for Prosecutors, which was likewise developed under this program.

process, including the mix of program activities. Overall achievements and results of the project, including constraints encountered, lessons learned, and key areas to be strengthened will also be identified. The evaluation is expected to be completed in September 2009, before the program enters into its third fiscal year.

Participation in other human rights activities. The Foundation continued to participate in related activities to deepen its understanding of the Philippine human rights landscape and enrich program implementation strategies.

In April 2009, the Foundation attended the launch of Human Rights Watch’s report “You Can Die Anytime: Death Squad Killings in Mindanao.” Based on in-depth research and interviews among insiders, the report exposed how the death squad in Davao operates and the failure of local authorities to investigate and bring perpetrators to justice.

The Foundation joined the Commission on Human Rights in its 22nd founding anniversary celebration on May 4, 2009. The celebration welcomed the recent appointment of the CHR’s fifth Commissioner, former CHR Western Mindanao Director Atty. Jose Manuel Mamauag. The anniversary also provided the new Commission an opportunity to present its accomplishments and to call for greater support in strengthening its capacity to address human rights violations. On June 4, 2009, the Foundation also participated in the forum organized by the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearance on the occasion of its 11th anniversary. Salient provisions of proposed measures to criminalize enforced disappearance were discussed in the forum.

The Foundation continued to convene regular coordination meetings among donor institutions working on human rights. With its own resources, the Foundation organized the Third Human Rights Donor’s Meeting on June 10, 2009. Sixteen representatives from the American Bar Association, Australian Embassy, Australian Agency for International Development, British Embassy, Canadian Embassy, European Commission, Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, Hanns Seidel Foundation, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Netherlands Embassy, Spanish Embassy, and USAID attended. The meeting featured the Working Group for the Establishment of an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism²⁰ and developments on the establishment of the ASEAN Human Rights Body.²¹ Another agenda during the meeting was the previous proposal to create a mechanism similar to the World Bank’s Development Marketplace Competition²² for screening and supporting human rights programs. A number of donors expressed

²⁰ The Working Group is a network of government institutions, parliamentary human rights committees, the academe, and non-governmental organizations working towards the establishment an intergovernmental human rights commission for the ASEAN.

²¹ The ASEAN Foreign Ministers approved and adopted the final draft of the Terms of Reference for an ASEAN Human Rights Body during the 42nd ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Thailand on July 20, 2009.

²² Development Marketplace is a competitive grant program that identifies and funds innovative and early-stage projects with high potential for development impact. It is administered by World Bank and supported by various partners.

interest to participate in such endeavor and agreed to meet separately to discuss details of the activity.

PLANS FOR THE NEXT PERIOD

The Foundation will continue to closely monitor and coordinate activities among partners to consolidate project impact. The Foundation will remain sensitive and responsive to developments in the local human rights scene to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of program components.

To **promote respect for human rights**, the University of the Philippines Institute of Human Rights will facilitate more multi-sectoral consultations and writeshops to develop local human rights action plans in Calapan City and Naga City.

On **protecting human rights**, the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) will continue to update its online database of media killings and conduct a seminar on human rights reporting in Cebu City for community journalists from Visayas and Mindanao. The Commission on Human Rights will begin trainings to equip its personnel and civil society organizations on the use of the new Martus-based executive Information System (MAREIS) platform.

Breaking the pattern of impunity and **prosecution of human rights violations** will remain a priority. The Foundation will continue support for the last round of trainings to build the capacity of the justice sector to investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate cases. A final Basic Orientation Seminar-Workshop for New Prosecutors (with emphasis on human rights) will be organized with the Department of Justice in Tacloban City. Judges will undergo parallel training with public prosecutors, public attorneys, and other human rights advocates in another Multi-Sectoral Seminar-Workshop on Extrajudicial Killings that the Philippine Judicial Academy will conduct in Zamboanga City. In coordination with the Supreme Court and the Philippine Judicial Academy, the Foundation will support the development of a self-help book for judges on the adjudication of human rights cases.

Two human rights manuals will published and launched: one on handling human rights cases for private prosecutors and attorneys, and another on training paralegals and lawyers to avail of civil and administrative remedies for human rights abuses. The in-depth analysis of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines' legal audit of extrajudicial killing cases is expected to be completed and provide concrete recommendations on how to address challenges in prosecuting cases.

At the local level, the Ateneo Human Rights Center will conduct more probing visits and focus group discussions with community stakeholders to organize Multi-Sectoral Quick Reaction Teams (MSQRT). In Leyte and Albay, where MSQRTs have been established, team members will continue to meet to plan future activities.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAM

A key challenge encountered during this reporting period is the initial attitude of the participants during the forensic trainings. At the start of the trainings, CHR investigators and lawyers did not seem eager to learn, quickly dismissing the instructions as “that’s not how we do things here” or as completely inapplicable to Philippine context. Through the active participation and encouragement of CHR commissioners however, participants were able to open their minds and appreciate the value of new knowledge and skills for their work. The trainers’ hands-on approach particularly in the field work exercises likewise helped cultivate greater willingness to learn among the participants.

Force majeure events such as rainy weather and unexpected closure of the venue for the forensic training in Pampanga slightly delayed the outdoor exercises. But prompt action of the CHR regional offices (setting up of tarpaulin covers, relocation to a nearby site) properly addressed these concerns and ensured the successful completion of the activities.

In developing local human rights action plans, the UP Institute of Human Rights (UP IHR) noticed that during the consultations, most participants did not find it easy to articulate issues relating to civil and political rights. Most of the concerns raised pertained only to social, economic, and cultural rights. The UP IHR seeks to address this by holding education sessions on the concept of human rights and on the entire spectrum of rights protected by the Constitution and international instruments. These will be done before the next consultations. The UP IHR will also hold separate workshops for local government and civil society for a more candid and comprehensive discussion of each sector’s human rights concerns.