

Bearing Half the Sky: The Quest for Peace amidst Gender Stereotypes (Philippine Women's Experience/Perspective)

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Introduction

Women have been living under a shadow of violence for many centuries now. The male-dominated societies throughout the world have constantly ensured that women are relegated to playing mere supporting roles in many instances. But this has not always been the case for Filipino women.

The so-called primitive Philippine communities before the Spaniards came to the Philippines did not have a rigid form of gender divisions. The land was owned by the community, men and women were both in production. There was high regard for women as mothers, and in their role in production and religion. Their leadership was highly recognized. There were no biases for children.

But now an average of 1 woman is battered every one hour and 24 minutes while one child is battered every three hours. The fact that these forms of violence exist should be sufficient enough to alarm people.

The areas of concern based on the Beijing platform for action include the protection and promotion of human rights of women and the girl-child; eradicating their poverty, elimination of all forms of violence against women; and promoting their economic autonomy and their access to productive resources.

While we have made quite a dent in improving the gender situation the traditional concept of 'men go to work and women stay at home' is still deeply rooted in Asian society. There are still women who are either apathetic, who care less about what is happening to them and to society, and women who would rather just mind their own concerns or their families. A lot of women have no power to improve their lot primarily due to their lack of education on women's rights and the

ingrained culture that women have no voice. There are still many, including those in the professions and the academe, who still perpetuate their own oppression in the name of tradition and so-called morality.

Local Situation

Central Visayas is composed of 121 towns or municipalities with only one deemed as 1st class municipality (>P20M). It has a population of 5,689,814 (2002); a population growth rate of 2.79; a population density of 359 and a total fertility rate of 3.7. As of April 2004 we have a labor force population rate of only 68.9 and an employment rate of 86.3% and an increasing poverty gap of 39.3 (1998).¹

The status of women and girls vis-a vis the men and boys, at home, school, offices, other institutions and in the community is open to debate. Observation shows women and girls occupy the lower rung, below men. They are subordinated, marginalized, and regarded as less equal to men and boys. This phenomenon results from social ascription to women and girl's roles, functions, and kinship relations. They are deeply rooted, and religious traditions, cultural practices as well as policies and political decisions perpetuate this view.

Not only is the status of women and girls put in question but also their basic rights as human beings. Their right to full development as persons and participation in production and reproduction are adversely affected.

Gender and peace issues are interlinked and could not be taken apart with several other issues. I will try to discuss with you some of the major issues that bring about the peace that we long for amidst the gender stereotypes that we experience in the Philippines.

Gender Issue

From the report of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the international community has fallen short of its commitments to empower women

and achieve gender equality. Of the 188 member states only 8 have met global agreements to achieve gender equality in secondary education enrolment, and at least 30% share of women's seats in parliament during the last decade.² The assessment was based only on three indicators: gender equality in secondary education enrolment; increase in women's seats in parliament; and women's share of paid employment. Not a single country has reached the level of gender accountability! "This raises the need for greater accountability, calling for more concentrated attention to three areas: targets and indicators that are needed to track progress, individuals and institutions to be held accountable, and measures that need to be taken towards accelerating progress for women."³

The beginning of the feminist movement

The period of the 60's was a time of social and political upheaval. The worsening conditions of poverty and economic injustice, of political repression, awakened an unprecedented social awareness and social involvement. It was during this period that women's organizations with feminist perspective began to appear.

In 1984, the Concerned Women of the Philippines (CWP) called for a consultation of the existing women's groups to work out a common orientation of a Third World's Women's movement. In this consultation, a federation of women's organizations called General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Liberty and Action (GABRIELA) was formed.

Many more women's organizations of different ideological orientation and political lines have sprung up. Service offices such as crisis centers, legal bureaus, migrant women centers, women's health services, etc. have been established.⁴

It is of the women's interest to participate in the national struggle for democracy and sovereignty. Women's freedom cannot be fully achieved until the nation is free. Women's freedom is based on the level of freedom that the citizens can achieve. The struggle for national democracy is the key to solving the nation's main problems. When the people can make decisions for their country, progress

and freedom can be pushed through. We can build a society where the welfare of the many is prioritized and not that for a few.

Violence against women

Violence is an act committed with the deliberate or perceived intention of hurting another person. Gender assault is a specific form of violence committed against a person because of the person's being male or female.

Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power-relations between men and women, which have led to dominion over and discrimination against women by men. VAW is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

Reported cases of violence against women in Negros Oriental continue to rise, with husbands as the consistent top violator of women's rights. For 2003, some 779 cases of VAW were recorded at the Women's & Children's Concern Desk of the PNP. Of this number 471 involved physical injuries or wife battering. There are already 358 cases recorded for the first half of this year. Of the total, the highest reported crime against women is again physical injuries with 244 cases, of which 126 are wife battering and 16 rape cases of adult women. There were 21 rape cases last year.⁵ Of all the cases taken to court, none has been resolved.

The prevalence of cases of violence against women is the irrefutable proof that there is as yet no equality among men and women. These cases certainly show an inequality in the sense of security felt by men and women. Rape, incest, wife-battering are the most common abuses on women.

A lot of women are trapped in such a violent and humiliating situation because they are economically or emotionally dependent. Victims even often fail to realize the traumatic effect on the children when they see their mothers humiliated and beaten up.

Inequality and Discrimination

Although our Constitution includes an equal rights provision, the reality is that the Filipino woman is still discriminated against and subordinated in the home, in church and in society.

In the home, there is still a preference for boys and couples sometimes base their family planning on the birth of a son. An unwritten law in most Filipino families is for the eldest daughter to sacrifice her life for the sake of her brothers and sisters. In marriage, the man is usually considered the head of the house and makes the major decisions. The role of the wife is relegated to management of the household and the children's education.

Then there is the tolerated double standard of morality. A man who maybe known to have a *querida* or mistress somehow escape censure but a woman is always ridiculed.⁶ In the Revised Penal Code, sexual infidelity on the part of the wife is referred to as adultery, while sexual infidelity on the part of the husband is referred to as concubinage. Based on our laws' definition of adultery, a wife maybe penalized for a single act of sexual intercourse with another man other than her husband. Meanwhile, a husband may only be held liable for concubinage if he keeps a mistress in conjugal dwelling, has sexual intercourse under scandalous circumstances with a woman other than his wife, or cohabiting with her in any other place. The penalty for adultery is prison correctional in its medium and maximum periods, while the penalty for concubinage is prison correctional in its minimum and medium periods. There clearly is a disparity not only in the definitions but in the penalties as well.

In society, there are work discriminations against women. Job advertisements and opportunities are separated as "for men" or "for women" only. Advertisements use women as sex objects and identify them with commodities to be sold. The church is likewise discriminatory. Its teaching that men and women are equal is not consistent with practice. The church teaching on Christian marriage presupposes the subordinate role of the wife in the name of complementarity.

Population and development

The existence and survival of one species and system are closely related. While other species diminish in numbers, homo sapiens proliferate by the millions each day. In 1900, the world's population was 1 billion, in 1950, 2 billion, and in 1990, 5.2 billion. The Philippines alone is now 82.4 million and may balloon to 84 million this year. Few of us really understand the havoc we are wrecking on perhaps the only life system in the universe. As long as we have access to our creature comforts and can buy and sell what we need, very few think about the future.

On a small planet with finite resources, such reproductive behavior like that in the south of India where the Muslims try to outbreed the Hindus, is altogether inappropriate. Procreation and sexual rituals have for centuries figured prominently in the Hindu tradition, and polygamy is allowed in the Muslim faith. The Roman Catholic Church is run by celibate men who have never experienced copulation in priesthood, or at least never should have in their celibacy. In a world threatened with extinction because of overpopulation, the Pope continues to exhort people to have more babies⁷ (and in some cases, even their priests do contribute). It is noteworthy that the imams in the Philippines have issued a fatwah strongly encouraging family planning, including both artificial and natural methods of contraception, focusing on the welfare of mother and child.

Currently, an estimated 40% of Filipinos live below poverty line, which the government define as an income of P50.00 a day. The country offers only one hospital for every 113,040 people. We have a high maternal mortality ratio of 186 for every 100,000 women, an IMR of 249 for every 1000 births.⁸ All these are preventable deaths! Improved socioeconomic status leads to better prenatal and postnatal care, which leads to lower maternal and infant mortality.

This situation indicates that today and in the future, population and reproductive health issues will be significant variables in the attainment of our people's aspirations for equitable and sustainable development. The empowerment

of our women and the sensitivity of our men to gender concerns — especially on reproductive health, now becomes a matter of national priority.

The cure for overpopulation is not epidemics of disease, or nuclear war, as some people suggest. It is redistribution of wealth, compassionate politics, and caring societies. Logically, if men and women are well fed, well educated, and financially secure, their children will not die in infancy and the birthrate will automatically drop.

Poverty

The most debilitating force in our society is impoverishment. Poverty is when parents are unemployed and non-productive, when children are underfed and malnourished, when youth are unschooled and unskilled, when mothers do not have food to cook and feed her family, when children literally live in the streets. And poverty is further aggravated by the debt burden imposed on the general population thus reducing the supply of essentials due to high cost of commodities.

The economic crisis and war against terrorism that countries of the world are facing today are twin problems that have destructive impact to the toiling masses of people especially women. Violence, repression and exploitation of women are elemental to both.

“The impact of the Asian financial crisis in terms of employment and wages has been more severe on women than on men, who are heavily favored in the workplace.”⁹ Women comprise the majority of the unemployed and underemployed. Regarded as reserve labor force, women workers are first to be laid-off. The lack of employment opportunities force women to endure deteriorating working conditions, even sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace. “In the Philippines, women’s unemployment has risen to 15% compared to 12% for men.”¹⁰ Women toil amid job insecurity and without benefits such as children’s day care or basic health and maternity benefits.

Contractualization and flexibilization of women's work have become the order in the world of the working class – a scheme designed to squeeze even greater profit from women's labor. The financial crisis exposed the vulnerability of women especially since poverty tends to effect women more than men. The exploitation of women workers had taken a turn for the worst at a time of unparalleled recession and unabated crisis. Economic growth is essential but not sufficient to achieve gender equality in the world of work – both prevailing and cultural factors impede progress toward equality, and because policies have to be in place to transform the economic potential into equitable distribution of gains. In the Philippines, a family of 5 needs about Php 625.00 a day to survive or a monthly income of at least Php 18,750.00. Here in Japan, your “benchmark for guaranteeing an independent lifestyle is 7 million yen per year (\$58,333)!” Despite the fact that you only have “3% of women and 24.4% of men”¹¹ earning this salary, the discrepancy in comparison to the Philippines is way too high.

The gap between the rich and poor is not decreasing but increasing. Access to food is a preoccupation of 80% of the world's people, yet food in some countries is overabundant, and many consider it a difficult substance to understand and sometimes even poisonous. From a global perspective it is immoral that a small minority of people in the world are overnourished, while most are undernourished. We should also understand that severe malnutrition in childhood induces mental retardation, because the developing brain needs to be well fed. This means that millions of people are unable to improve their condition, because their mental capacity has been damaged.

The continued displacement of peasant communities to make way for mining corporations and agricultural estates hit women and children the hardest. At least 2.8M peasant women in the production of rice and corn are being displaced with the conversion of 3.1M hectares of land for rice and corn production into cash crop production.¹²

The huge foreign debt and negotiations with GATT, WB, IMF are having severe repercussions on the developing world. The IMF decided to impose severe

austerity measures that forced desperately poor countries to use more of their land to grow cash or luxury crops for export, such as bananas, coffee, cocoa, pineapples, and flowers, in order to help pay off the debt. Forests and virgin land are being destroyed and cultivated, producing ecological damage and leaving very little land on which the indigenous population can grow food. Women tend to bear the brunt of these IMF policies, for they spend more time and more of their day digging in the fields by hand to increase the production of luxury crops, with no machinery or modern equipment. It becomes their lot to help reduce the foreign debt, even though they never benefited from the loans in the first place. Their health suffers, and they become tired and anemic because of poor diets. Consequently, maternal and infant mortality is rising in many of these countries.

The Philippines is now PhP3.35 trillion (\$59.8 billion) deep in debt, meaning that every Filipino owes PhP41,000 (\$732.14). Foreign debt is a long –standing problem of the Philippines and a sign of the exploitation by foreign multinationals and foreign governments of the Philippines. However much we pay, our debt just keeps on growing despite as much as the equivalent of revenues raised is used to service foreign debt. 33% of the national budget for next year is for interest earnings, and 35% off-budget for amortization. There should be cancellation of parts of the foreign debt that are clearly fraudulent and anti-people, like the loan for the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant, for which we pay \$2.1 billion and \$655,000 interest per day. The solution of the foreign debt will require the firm upholding, defense, and assertion of the sovereignty of the Filipino people, because part of dealing with the foreign debt is asserting we have many natural resources which, if developed, will provide sufficiently for our population.¹³

Peoples' demands are basically struggles for the essentials of daily life and existence like rural and urban land reform, food and job security and access to basic services: housing, education, health, water, energy, etc.

Peace and Order

Peace and order is distinctively one of the contentious issues against the Arroyo government, it is a general view that peace and order is deteriorating and the government is not doing anything to improve the situation. It is not surprising therefore that all the seven items (hold-up, kidnapping, carnapping, rape, illegal drugs, gambling and threats of syndicates) under peace and order are failures. Every five minutes a crime against person or property is being committed.

It is always quick to point out a connection between the deteriorating economic situation and increasing lawlessness. We expect to see the peace and order situation worsen given the deepening economic crisis and inefficiency of the government. This is especially so where law enforcers are often involved in criminal activities, which lead to the difficulty in curbing crime. The fact is while crime has risen, effectivity rating which refer to the percentage of crimes solved for a specific period of time has gone down.

The protection given by the government to the citizenry is nil. Those who have the courage to air their grievances openly, in rallies and demonstrations, are dealt with brutal force.

Dwight D. Eisenhower once said: “There is no way in which a country can satisfy the craving for absolute security, but it can easily bankrupt itself morally and economically in attempting to reach that goal through arms alone.”

The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government. Eisenhower also said that “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed.”

Third world people are not just malnourished and deprived because of overpopulation, inadequate distribution of money, lack of education, or bad land management. They are poor and starving because financial powers in the developed world exploit them to satisfy their own greed and continued affluence.

The establishment of justice is inseparable to the issue of sustainable development. How can poor peasants have their own land to till when land is concentrated in the hands of only a few families? How can there be laws in favor of the peasants when the lawmakers are the landowners? How can there be peace when precious resources are poured to development of nuclear weapons and other military armaments rather than addressing the conditions which bring about 'unpeace'? Basilan has long cried out that they were neglected by the national government and this has caused social unrest. What would have happened if the budget for military operations to flush out the 35-strong Abu Sayyaf were spent to uplift the life of people in Basilan?

For so many Filipinos, militarization has become a way of life under the government of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. While her government offers peace, militarization in the countryside continue. And many of those victimized are women and children. In the first two months of 2003, more than 73,000 residents mostly women and children fled their homes in North Cotabato, Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur because of fighting between the MILF and the military. The initial reason for the military offensive despite enforcement of a ceasefire was that they were after the notorious kidnapping group Pentagon Gang which fled into the MILF territory. Later on the military did admit that it was the MILF that they were truly after. How can the government make the Bangsamoro people trust its offer of peace when it continues to wage war against them? So while Arroyo is busy backing Bush on his war against Iraq, her government is also waging war against its own people.

Peace talks with the MILF and the NDF and not military offensives should be her response to the growing problem of armed dissent. Instead of dubbing these groups as terrorists, as the USA did against the CPP-NPA, Arroyo should resume sincere peace talks first by stopping all military operations against this group and by going back to the negotiating table.¹⁴ But the GRP-NDFP peace negotiations do not guarantee the end of the people's resistance to the US-Arroyo regime. The

people's resistance is justified so long as there is intolerable oppression and exploitation.

Without resistance, the people have no hope of achieving national liberation and democracy against US imperialism and the local exploiting classes. The socio-economic and political crisis of the ruling system is daily worsening. It provides fertile conditions for the vigorous growth of two forms of struggle against the ruling system of big compradors and landlord. One is the armed struggle and the other is the legal form of struggle.

The Communist Party of the Philippines has announced that it is intensifying the revolutionary armed struggle by unleashing tactical offensives from the centers of gravity of the New People's Army at the level of regions and guerilla fronts.

The legal form of struggle is expected to surge strongly because of the people's outrage over the continuance of a puppet, corrupt and brutal regime through massive cheating in the May 10 elections and the most corrupt misappropriation of public funds for electioneering. The crisis conditions and all-round bankruptcy of the reactionary government are favorable for the rise of unprecedented protest mass actions and for the development of a broad united front against the US-Arroyo regime.

Coming from a recent training with the Joint Monitoring Committee of the GRP and NDFP on the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL), it still makes me shiver to learn of the atrocities that the common people experience in various parts of our country. Who can have a much needed sleep at night when you are always afraid that your house may be strafed by the military for no reason at all? How can you work and till the land when you are always wary that armed men may come and pick your husband or your family and torture them in military detachments or shoot them right before your eyes? How can you think about a future when you are wary that anytime the landlord may come and demolish your shanty? The plight of some of our countryfolks is how to survive a day and if they're lucky they wake up to a new dawn, though still without hope. But, the broad masses are not cowed but are

incensed by the boasting of the Arroyo regime that it enjoys the support of the US imperialism and is ready to use brute force against the people who assert and exercise their democratic rights to speak, assemble and march.

There have been reports lately that Australian authorities are considering conducting pre-emptive strikes against countries which they have identified as terrorist havens, including the Philippines. We have to remember that when the US military attacks against Iraq began, these were called pre-emptive strikes. By standards set by the hegemonic US government, preemptive strikes involve not just an intervention in domestic military affairs but direct aggression and all-out war. The Australian government's statement maybe considered as a direct threat to the country's sovereignty.

Leadership

It didn't look good, whatever the official reason given.

First there was the National Treasurer Mina Figueroa tendering her resignation at a time when there is the fiscal crisis to attend to. Then followed NAPOCOR President Roger Murga, the man GMA handpicked to head the government corporation that is in debt to the tune of Php1.3 trillion, accounting for an astounding 42% of national government debt.¹⁵

Both came from the private business sector, highly recommended as qualified for the jobs they were about to undertake and presumably aware that they were not being asked to join a picnic considering the cash-strapped, debt-saddled state of the government.

Now if indeed the spate of resignations is merely coincidental as Malacañang claims, then it could be the meanest trick fate has played on this administration. For the public perception is that these high-level government functionaries who know the real score have lost confidence in the political leadership of Mrs Arroyo. Certainly the resignations do not help to build public

confidence in her government which is essential if it is to lead us through these hard times.

Unfortunately GMA is sorely lacking in both credibility and the high moral ground with which to call upon the people to sacrifice for the common good. Wasn't it just months ago, during the campaign period, that her administration was spending public money like there was no tomorrow? There was no talk then among her cabinet officials and her rah-rah boys and girls about a looming fiscal crisis. The opposition accused Mrs Arroyo of electioneering but the GMA camp insisted that she was merely doing what a president ought to be doing, and that is, engaging in "governance".

As late as her State-of-the-Nation address in July, even as she drew attention to the government's worsening fiscal and debt problems calling the deficit "our most urgent problem", she papered this over with the launch of an ambitious 10-point program promising the people food on the table, decent jobs, livelihood, housing, education and health care within her six-year term of office. She hardly gave any indication that things would probably get worse before these got any better.

And then that state visit cum family outing to China with the entire Macapagal-Arroyo household in tow, grandchildren and yaya included. Mrs Arroyo just threw away whatever credibility she retained about imposing austerity measures – not only on government, but even on ordinary households – by flouting her very own pronouncements and making a mockery of her own appeals for sacrifice.

What kind of political leadership with the will to carry out drastic measures to tide us over do we need? We contend that such a leadership must first of all have the trust and confidence of the people. The people must be assured that whatever sacrifice they make will accrue to the benefit of the greater majority, if not to the entire nation. Clearly the Arroyo government fails to measure up to this critical standard.

How much more then on its capacity to uphold the national interest, to stand up to foreign policy impositions whether these be economic, political or military. Can Mrs Arroyo put the nation's survival ahead of paying blood money to the foreign multinational banks and kowtowing to the international financial institutions?

How much more on its commitment to the democratic process? Can she deal judiciously with the mass protests and the general social restiveness that her call for new taxes, higher rates for public utilities and more belt tightening measures will surely generate? Can she restrain the urge to resort to politically repressive measures to pre-empt and contain the people's impending outrage?

Sadly, the first three years of the Arroyo government does not give us reason to be optimistic.

Governance

The status of women's rights today varies dramatically in different countries and, in some cases, among groups within the same country, such as ethnic groups or economic classes. Despite the fact that in 1994 women headed the governments of 10 countries, more than 100 countries had no female members in their legislative bodies.

Women occupy less than 20% of all elective posts in the national and local levels. While women comprise more than half of government personnel, they constitute only 34.8% of positions in the highest level of civil services. Only 21% of the judges in the Philippine courts are women. Some women in politics are more like 'extensions' or 'heirs' of their husbands or fathers. Many women officers in formal organizations occupy positions that are 'extensions' of their reproductive roles (e.g. secretary, treasurer, budget officer). In labor unions, only 25.6% of the leaders are women.¹⁶

In Negros Oriental 3 out of 25 mayors are women, 2 vice-mayors, 39 out of 160 municipal councilors, 8 out of 50 city councilors, 16 out of 557 barangay captains, 2 out of 13 provincial board members.

Having two women presidents for the country should have been a fete but seating them there because of their gender doesn't suffice to bring about change for women's welfare. It takes a just president to rule justly and gender does alone cannot guarantee that.

For the militant women's groups, we have organized in October 28, 2001 the Gabriela Women's Party (GWP) – a women's sectoral party that aims to represent, pursue the rights and interests of women and the masses, in Congress, in the streets, in the community and in other fields of struggle. The women's sector is an important sector of our society; in fact, about half of the country's population are women. Women need to form their own strength for their voices to be heard and pursue their legitimate needs. GWP is important in broadening, pursuing and strengthening the women's movement in the country. Through GWP we can easily reach, awaken, organize and mobilize thousands of women in the country to protect their welfare and rights not only as women but as citizens.

The objectives of GWP are: pursue the rights and welfare of women; develop their capacity and skills in different fields; train women to lead in different levels of society; actively participate in all issues not only those of women's interest but including the nation's freedom and democracy, social welfare, human rights, social justice, environmental protection and economic welfare.

Twenty years of struggle, twenty years of triumph

Such is the spirit of GABRIELA's 20th year celebration. For twenty years, GABRIELA lived up to the character of its namesake, Gabriela Silang, in militancy and nationalism. Its history is a clear testament of its activism and commitment in upholding women's rights.

Gabriela was established during the dark years of the Marcos dictatorship. In October 28, 1983, women made their voices heard against the Marcos regime's intense political repression and the blatant violation of human rights. More than 10,000 women took to the streets in protest for the assassination of Sen. Benigno Aquino and for the other victims of the regime.

With such outstanding show of women power, pioneering women leaders like beauty queen turned activist Nelia Sancho, artist Petite Perredo, former Senator Tecla San Andres Ziga, among others, gathered these women into one voice to commemorate International Women's Day in March 8, 1984. Hence, GABRIELA, a national coalition of women's organizations in the Philippines came to be. Among its founding members are those from the marginalized sectors of our society such as women workers from the Kilusan ng mga Manggagawang Kababaihan, and the urban poor women from the Samahan ng mga Maralitang Kababaihang Nagkakaisa. A few years after, the coalition expanded to include the peasant women from AMIHAN, the National Federation of Peasant Women; women students from GABRIELA-Youth and the comfort women from Lila Filipina. We now have international chapters of GABRIELA plus the GABNet for professionals and of course our political party, Gabriela Women's party

GABRIELA showed the way in championing the cause of women, in particular, and the society in general through its various campaigns.

The organization particularly made its mark in issues concerning violence against women and children. GABRIELA conducted various actions against sex tourism, sexual harassment, sex trafficking, prostitution, etc. Particular issues that received maximum media exposure were the Aileen Sarmenta rape slay against convicted Mayor Augusto Sanchez, the rape case against former Congressman Romeo Jalosjos, the Flor Contemplacion death sentence, the Maria Theresa Carlson wife-battering charges against former Governor Rudy Fariñas, and recently, the Kris Aquino-Joey Marquez affair, and the sexual harassment case against Bishop Teodoro Bacani.

The issue of women political prisoners was and continues to be specially highlighted in GABRIELA's campaigns. Despite the fact that we have already formed the Gabriela Women's Party and have seated one representative in Congress, the persecution of women leaders continue.

With this present scenario, what hope do we have in improving our lot? We want concrete changes in our lives: jobs and livelihood, higher wages, affordable prices of public utilities and basic commodities, effective social service for all, equality, protection from lawlessness, and equity, among others. We are sick and tired of promises.

To get full support from the people, government should make these changes happen even if this means reversing government policies and changing economic direction. We, especially the women, are demanding that our leaders firmly commit themselves to the country's welfare and with courage to fight for the people's interests though this entails going against powerful institutions and nations including the United States of America.

We want peace with righteousness and justice. The presence of law and order and the absence of war do not bring peace. Silence does not bring peace. These are negative peace. We want peace with security, without sense of resentment and anger, without hunger and violence, with safe and sustainable environment, where righteousness and justice is served. Peace is the reign of the kingdom of God.

Therefore we dream and strive with Isaiah to make our planet Earth beautiful and livable when he said in Isaiah 65:19-23 "I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall enjoy the work of their hands. They

shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity; for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their children with them.”

¹ Metro Post, March 28 – April 3, 2004, p. 2

² Thalif Deen, “Only Eight States Close Gender Gap, Says UNIFEM”, 5 June 2000, TWNOnline

³ Ibid

⁴ Sr. Mary John Manansan, OSB, “The Woman Question in the Philippines”, Institute of Women Studies, 1997, p. 1

⁵ Daily Star, 16 March 2004, p. 1

⁶ Manansan, p. 12

⁷ Lester Brown, “The Population Challenge”, Encarta Yearbook, 2000

⁸ Jovy s. Taghoy, “Health Care’s Ills”, Sun Star Cebu, 22 October, 2004, p. A2

⁹ “Asia: Women Do Not Benefit Fairly from Economic Growth”, Manila, October (IPS), TWNOnline

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Suvendrini Kakuchi, “Japan: Steps in Gender Equality Come Too Slowly for Women”, Tokyo, 4 July 2001, (IPS), TWNOnline

¹² GABRIELA National Council Report, January 2004

¹³ Alexander Martin Remollino, “Foreign Debt: The NDFP View”, Bulatlat, October 2004

¹⁴ Ulat Lila, Center for Women’s Resources, Inc., February 2003, p. 10

¹⁵ GABRIELA Press Release, October 2004

¹⁶ Tito Nicolas, “Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Towards Poverty Alleviation”, 10 September 2004