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# Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

March 2006

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## Strides Toward a Landmine-Free World

By Valerie Santos

“Imagine returning to your home and not knowing what dangers hide within its walls, what could possibly detonate when you try to fetch water from your well, what could kill your children if they run in the nearby fields. Imagine a life restricted by landmines and the feeling that each and every cautious step might be your last. There would be no leisurely strolls, no deviating from the well-marked path, no playful game of tag with your children or grandchildren.”

Christine Nelke set the tone for this month's discussion on landmines with imagery that starkly contrasted the lives of most MFWF members. Christine discussed the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and her work in landmine education and assistance with Save the Children in Yemen. The meeting was held at Pilar Martinez-Miranda's serene home in Dasmariñas Village.

Christine is a native of Switzerland, mother of four, and grandmother of five. She worked for Save the Children for eighteen years before moving to the Philippines with her husband in November 2005. She continues to be engaged in development work even in retirement.

Landmines are often called the “hidden killer” because they are buried and not easy to detect. They are often planted in haste without a road map to easily retrieve them and remain active long after wars have ended. They maim indiscriminately, hurting civilians and soldiers, adults and children. An anti-personnel mine can detonate with the pressure of a footstep, a step that can result in the loss of limbs or even death. Landmines victimize 15,000 - 20,000 people per year or 40 new casualties every day. No one knows exactly how many landmines there are

worldwide, but some estimate that up to 100 million remain planted in about 80 countries. Even suspicion of one closes off entire fields to communities.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) is an umbrella organization of about 1400 organizations that began in 1992 to ban and clear landmines. By 1996, governments started listening and in the following year, they developed the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer or Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (also known as the Ottawa Convention). As the name suggests, signatories would not produce, use, or trade landmines, must dispose of any stockpile within four years, and must remove all planted mines within ten years. The treaty entered into force in March 1999. To date, 149 countries have ratified the treaty; Haiti most recently ratified it on February 15, 2006. The United States, Russia, and China have not ratified the treaty, to the dismay of those who support the campaign since they have the largest militaries in the world.

Since the treaty has been in place, there are signs of improvement and a steady reduction in landmines worldwide. Fifty countries used to produce landmines, but now only thirteen make them and none trade them. There are about five countries that have already completely cleared all known mine areas. Clearing the mines is a painstaking process and exponentially more costly than planting the mines. A team usually scans an area with metal detectors and trained dogs, then conducts a final sweep with machines to ensure that the area is safe for a community to use.

While it may cost about \$3 to plant a mine, it can cost as much as \$1000 to extract one.

Christine's work in Yemen began as a result of a two-month civil war during which landmines were planted throughout the country. In 1995, Save the Children began a peer-to-peer education program to teach Yemeni children about the risks of mines. The program evolved into a larger community-based program that involved clearing mines, assisting survivors, and fostering community acceptance of victims. Christine helped the handicapped children psychologically cope and physically adapt to their new situation. She shared stories of remarkably resilient children who learned to use their remaining limbs to produce beautiful artwork.

Christine also shared a situation closer to home for many of us. She pointed out that the Philippines is not mine-free, although the Government of

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### Next MFW Meeting

**When:** 6:30 p.m., Monday  
March 20, 2006

**What:** Marites Vitug, Editor in Chief of Newsbreak magazine, will speak about “Making sense of the news: GMA till 2010?”

**Where:** Mara Pardo de Tavera's home, 1188 Tamarind Road, Dasmariñas Ave., Makati City

**Bring:** Something to share for the pot-luck dinner.

**April meeting:** 6:30 p.m.,  
Monday April 17, 2006

In his book *Just and Unjust Wars*, Michael Walzer said that in sieges "...it is the women who last longest...the young men who soonest fall into that deadly lethargy that precedes actual death." "The goal is surrender," he says, and "the means is not the defeat of the enemy army, but the fearful spectacle of the civilian dead."



“When elephants fight it is the grass that suffers.”

African proverb

## KaWoMeNaN

Selected and Edited by  
Beulah Pedregosa Taguiwalo

“Wars have never hurt anybody except the people who die.”

Salvador Dali

“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 are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children... Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

### The Manila Women's Forum

The Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Cecilia Leung**, Programs. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 812-3932, Tel/Fax 813-0168, or at [lumbao@mozcom.com](mailto:lumbao@mozcom.com) for more information about MWF.

Visit our website – a work in progress  
[www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum](http://www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum)

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the Philippines signed the treaty in 1997 and ratified it in 2000. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) also signed and abides by the treaty, but some other insurgent groups such as the New People's Army and Abu Sayyaf Group may continue to lay landmines that continue to harm individuals. In 2003, 21 new landmine casualties were reported. The government remains dedicated to achieving a mine-free country and the Armed Forces of the Philippines conducts mine awareness programs for civilians in conflict areas.

For more information, see:

<http://www.icbl.org> or <http://www.savethechildren.org/publications/landmines.pdf>

*“I want a world where every child has a chance to wear two shoes. When I buy shoes, I have to hide one shoe because the empty shoe reminds me of my missing leg and the horror of landmines. Once I went to a shoemaker and asked, ‘Would you make me one shoe? Would you mind helping me by making me one shoe?’ ‘No,’ he said, ‘that would bring me bad luck.’”*

(Song Kosal, ICBL ambassador  
<http://www.icbl.org/>)

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