

## CAWA - REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Connecting and Amplifying California Women  
Voices for 10 years!



## Pinay Power ("Filipina Power")

— By Marily Mondejar and Marilyn Fowler

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It is said that when God made the first Philippine island it was so beautiful that she decided to make 7,106 more. "The Philippines is probably the only country in the world where men call their women 'commanders.' We thought all along that this is just a ruse by husbands to get into the kulambo (mosquito net) after coming home reeking of booze until the World Economic Forum (WEF) released its gender gap report November 23, saying the Philippines ranks high — the only developing country — with those countries who give power and equality to women." (*Philippine Business Mirror*, November 24, 2006.)

The Philippines was ranked No. 6 among 190 countries for closing the gender gap between the sexes in four areas —

namely economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival.

In short, the Philippines is not going to stand idly by while her women are raped by visiting servicemen — they are respected as full participants in their democracy and economy.

While we were with the Sister City delegation we stayed in Makati City, with high-rise hotels, shops and cultural centers equal in beauty and design to any in San Francisco. We traveled out to Punta Fuego in Batangas to an awesome beachside chalet — riding past a continuous row of 'squatters huts' for two hours.

In Manila we attended several events at historic sites with the delegation and met Philippine movers and shakers. Mayor Newsom was impressive and humble in his remarks on the history and culture of the Philippines. From Manila we flew to Cebu, an island in the Visayas region, an international trade and tourist hub, with beaches rivaling the Mexican Riviera. (See URLs at the end of this article for more information about the Philippines, its culture, history and current conflict with the U.S.)

We focus this article on another aspect of the trip, however, our presence in support of Nicole (her court appointed pseudonym), the 22-year-old Filipina who was raped on November 5, 2005,



Marilyn Fowler (2nd from left) with Filipina activists from Kaisa Ka

by a U.S. Marine, Cpl. Daniel Smith.

After 3,000 reported rapes by U.S. servicemen in the Philippines, this young woman had the courage to speak out and accuse Smith and his three Marine accomplices of raping her. (See

[www.ffwn.org](http://www.ffwn.org) for the full background, briefing paper and updates on the ongoing case.)

We had the opportunity to attend the decision hearing on Dec. 4 at the Makati City trial court of Judge Benjamin Pozon. Marily was invited by the TOWNS Foundation, which, incidentally, FWN supported with proceeds from the all-Filipina production of *The Vagina Monologues* in conjunction with Eve Ensler's V-Day "Until the Violence Stops" festival held in New York City from June 12-27, 2006.

The courtroom was an intense collection of U.S. Military, U.S. Secret Service, Filipina activists, Nicole, and her lawyers — an impressive group of young Filipinas, former Senator Letitia Shahani who wrote the current rape law, and a lot of media reps all surrounded by police in riot gear.

Judge Pozon convicted Cpl. Smith of rape and sentenced him to 20 to 40 years in prison. The three accomplices were acquitted for lack of evidence.

In his conviction statement Judge Pozon said:

"Rape as a harrowing experience is not remembered in detail. It casts a stigma upon the victim. Rape is a grave physical violation and it subjects the woman's honor to scorn and wounds her soul for life."

We bring this case to the attention of activists and elected women in the Bay Area because of your history of support for social justice and human rights, and especially the issue of violence against women.

At this moment, the U.S. government is appealing, attempting to take custody of Cpl Smith in the name of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and making statements such as: "You all know that the VFA is what governs our military assistance in this country."

This landmark case brings several issues to the forefront besides rape and trafficking — it concerns a U.S. military 'occupying' presence and behavior in another sovereign country and the interpretation of a VFA among other foreign policy issues that Americans should be better informed about.

It begs the question: If U.S. servicemen can rape at will in any country, do men at war anywhere have the right to rape at will?

True to WIN's mission "to assure that the voices of all women are heard in public forums," and FWN's mission "to advance Filipina women in the U.S.," we made statements

at a press conference following the court hearing to stand with Nicole for her human rights for dignity and justice. No one should be violated against her will for any reason, in peace or in war.

In signing Proclamation #1172 declaring Nov. 25 to Dec. 12 of every year as the "18-day campaign to end violence against women," President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo reiterated her administration's bid to protect women's human rights as enshrined in the 1987 Charter and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which the Philippines is a signatory.

*The California Women's Agenda (CAWA) is an action network of the Women's Intercultural Network (WIN) and reports to BABW News directly from women working in the field at the grassroots in the Bay Area. CAWA works locally with a global focus and is connected to national and global action networks.*

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For details and ongoing news on Nicole's rape case, go to <http://subicrapecase.worldpress.com>. For more about the Philippines, go to [www.wowphilippines.com](http://www.wowphilippines.com).

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