

The Legacy of US Military Bases

Saturday 17 December 2005, by [CULLEN Father Shay](#) (Date first published: 15 December 2005).

The Philippine press gives almost daily TV and front page coverage to the plight of a 22-year old woman, a college graduate who has accused six U.S. Navy servicemen of raping her in a van inside the former US Naval base at Subic Bay, Olongapo City last November 1, 2005. However the hundreds of Filipino women and children raped and sexually assaulted in the Philippines weekly gets no such attention. How unfair, many are dismissed arbitrary for "lack of evidence".

The reason for the special interest when U.S. Servicemen are accused of gang rape is because of the legacy of the bases and the love hate relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines. That sad legacy is worth looking at again because it is blamed, rightly or wrongly, for the ongoing rampant sex tourism and trafficking of women and children that shames Filipinos and decent people everywhere. The lack of prosecution of suspects puts the Philippines on the lower level of the US State department's watch list of erring nations.

In all fairness we must note that the U.S. military has officially adopted a zero tolerance and strict prosecution towards servicemen who molest women or frequent prostitutes. They say they are enforcing this but it failed to deter the Subic Six as I call them. Last 23 November, the preliminary investigation of the alleged rape took place between lawyers for the accused and the defence and the Olongapo City Prosecutor. The media filled the hearing room. The complainant neither the six accused did not show up and a new hearing was set for November 29.

Ironically the preliminary investigation of the Subic Six took place on November 23rd a day after the 13th. anniversary of the departure of the last US marine ship, the Belleau Wood, from Subic Bay on November 22, 1992 and the Subic Bay Naval base and the sex industry closed down after almost a hundred years of servicing the sailors. Mayor Richard Gordon (now a senator), stood on the wharf and waved good-bye and wept as Olongapo City faced economic collapse.

That historical event, which I witnessed, marked the end of a spectacularly successful ten year campaign begun in 1982 by the Preda Charity and other organisations to end the exploitation of women and children.

This was spurred by the shocking revelations that children as young as four and five, six and eleven years old and older were trafficked for sexual abuse and prostitution as discovered by dedicated US Navy investigators and reported to the city officials. The identified pimps and traffickers were never prosecuted.

Olongapo City officials denied any wrong doing claiming the reports were isolated incidents and exaggerated. However the Navy records optioned through the Freedom of Information Act reveal grave systematic child abuse.

The alleged tolerance and silence and easy access to a financial settlement allowed a climate of impunity to grow that emboldened both US servicemen and Filipino would be abusers to sexually assault women and children. Today private financial arrangements negotiated by police and barangay officials are common.

The campaign to remove the bases began in 1982 when thousands of throwaway Filipino-American children were left in poverty, countless aborted babies, a drug culture and a spreading pandemic of HIV-AIDS is what Filipinos remember most.

I made the unthinkable proposal that all the bases in the Philippines be closed and converted to economic zones to provide work with dignity and sustainability for the Filipino people. The eruption of Mt. Pinatubo doomed Clarke and the common-sense for the Filipino people closed Subic Bay. Working together with many organisations, patriotic senators and church people that goal was achieved in 1992 and the era of US Military occupation. Today the economic zones are realities but so is a revived sex industry thanks to gutless and greedy politicians.

The Visiting Forces Agreement between the Philippines and the US was passed some years later allowing US troops and ships to return for training and exercises and once again we have sex starved sailors roaming about looking for women - and allegedly abusing them. [End]

P.S.

* Preda Information Office (Published in the UK, Ireland, Hong Kong, Philippines and Worldwide by Internet).