



MESSAGE

*(To be delivered by Vanessa Tobin, UNICEF Country Representative
during the Educators' Forum on Walk for Life Campaign
on November 12, 2010 at McKinley Hill International School and
Leadership Academy for Children)*

May I congratulate the McKinley Hill International School and Leadership Academy for Children and I Am S.A.M. Foundation, Inc. and Sam [Rayla Melchor Santos], its Founder and President, for organizing this Educators' Forum on Walk for Life Campaign Against Human Trafficking: Stand Up for the Rights of the Child. We are elated to have a growing number of advocates and champions for the rights of the child particularly from private education sector. Indeed, education plays a very crucial role in fulfilling not only the child's rights to be educated but also their rights to be healthy, to be given opportunities for play and leisure, to be protected from harm and abuse, to express their views freely, and to participate in decision-making according to their evolving capacities.

This event is very timely as the whole world will be celebrating Universal Children's Day on November 22.

UNICEF Philippines has been in the forefront supporting the government in the fulfilment of the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Specifically, through the Sixth Country Program for Children, UNICEF continues to expand advocacy to mobilize political leadership in realizing the rights of children while increasing efforts to target and

converge interventions on the most disadvantaged children in the most under-served communities of the poorest provinces, municipalities and *barangays*. The Programme has six sectoral components which aim to address children's rights and well-being within a rights-based approach.

Two of these components which are relevant to this forum are Education and Child Protection. UNICEF has been a major partner of the Philippine Government in ensuring that children have access to quality and relevant basic education and children who are vulnerable to and are victims of abuse, exploitation and violence are identified and provided with protective environment. We are humbled to play a significant role in assisting the government's implementation of the *National Child Protection Law* known as *RA 7610* which declares the policy of the State to "provide special protection to children from all forms of abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation and discrimination, and other conditions prejudicial to their development."

As educators, what would then be your role in preventing, and protecting children from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect? It is very alarming to know that 500 to 800 cases of child abuse were committed by teachers each year according to the Child Adolescent Psychiatrists of the Philippines Inc. (CAPPI). In 2006, the CAPPI survey also revealed that 50 per cent of the perpetrators of child abuse in schools were teachers. On the same year, the UP-PGH Child Protection Unit alleged that 5 per cent of physical abuse and 3 percent of the sexual abuse cases could be attributed to teachers. Statistics cited refer only to reported cases which mostly involved serious physical and psychological damage on children.

In response to this pressing problem on violence against children in school, UNICEF commissioned a study in 2008. It highlighted three major aspects of violence against children (VAC) in Philippine schools. One, that violence against children in schools is perpetuated either by teachers, non-teaching staff or peers. Two, that certain forms of violence, specifically corporal punishment, are not always recognised as such even by children who experienced them. Three, violence results from a mix of factors within and outside schools. More than 60 percent of the children surveyed in this study experienced verbal forms of violence such as being cursed, shouted at, ridiculed and humiliated in school, at home and in other contexts. Almost half the children were deliberately ignored or not spoken to which made them feel rejected and socially isolated by people in school. Physical violence is the second most prevalent form of VAC in schools. Children experienced their teachers pinching them in different parts of the body, ear tweaking, things thrown at them, standing under the sun for long periods of time, or locked in an enclosed space. Experiences of sexual violence ranged from verbal sexual harassment, undressing, and being forced to have sex.

Moreover, a study commissioned by Plan Philippines revealed that 50 to 70 percent of children in elementary schools and 60 percent in high schools have experienced violence in school. The other findings of this study are almost similar to the results of the baseline research commissioned by UNICEF.

Why am I sharing these facts and figures with you? Because these are not mere numbers. These statistical figures have individual faces of children who have been expecting to experience a loving, caring and nurturing learning environment. These suffering children might be in your own school. If teachers, other school personnel and fellow learners who are supposed to be their families in the school are the perpetrators, who then can they turn to?

It is for this reason that we are pursuing further our partnership with the Department of Education in this area. UNICEF will be conducting a baseline school climate survey among 10 selected schools in Cebu City, Manila, Mountain Province, and Camotes Island in Cebu. The said research aims to determine the school climate and prevalence of bullying and peer violence in the target sites, which is part of the “Let’s Talk” initiative and provide data that will serve as the reference point or basis for comparison in evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the programme. We will also support training of teachers and guidance counselors on positive discipline; train student leaders as peer mediators; and test an intervention programme dubbed as “Let’s Talk.”.

These efforts are geared towards creating healthy, safe and protective environments for children, one of the seven goals of the UNICEF Child Friendly School System (CFSS). We have been supporting the Department of Education in introducing and deepening the implementation of CFSS in selected public schools in UNICEF-assisted provinces. And we are happy to note that the implementation of the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda of DepED is paving the way for the mainstreaming and institutionalizing CFSS, not as a project nor a program, but as a culture that every school, public and private, should cultivate and nurture.

But what exactly is a Child-Friendly School and how can our school become one? A Child-Friendly School has the following five traits:

1. It is inclusive, gender –sensitive and non-discriminating.
2. It is effective with children
3. It is healthy for children
4. It is caring and protective of all children
5. It involves children families and the community.

In an assessment of the CFSS implementation in six Asian countries including the Philippines, the American Institutes for Research found that although child-friendly schools have been successful in creating welcoming classroom environments and providing academic and emotional support to children, they have been less successful in creating conditions in which many students feel emotionally and physically safe – factors which have been demonstrated to affect attendance, academic performance, and school drop-out. Although having well-built, safe schools that provide comfortable learning environments is important, this alone is not sufficient to make a school child-friendly. Other less tangible aspects like child-centeredness, engagement of parents, and mutual respect among students and teachers help predict school climate and determine whether a school is child-friendly.

In our continuing effort to promote CFSS, we have introduced the Student Tracking System which will not only track education outcomes of every learner but “sensitive” issues as well that negatively affect each child’s performance in school. This is proven to be a powerful planning and monitoring tool at the classroom level which prompted

DepED to institutionalize the STS as part of the School Information System.

There are other rights-based innovations which UNICEF is in the process of modelling or expanding. And I am sure you have your own good stories to share. Our challenge is how to engage a critical mass of schools and educators to advocate and champion the up-scaling of these proven effective rights-based innovations to benefit more children. One concrete step is to continue this conversation. I hope there will be more organizations like “McKINLEY HILL” and “I Am SAM” that will lead us in this endeavour.

I am enjoining everyone , let's take a long but enjoyable and productive walk together to ensure that every child will experience quality life in not so distant future. Let's start our journey in our schools and I am looking forward to be with all of you until we reach the finish line.

Good day.