

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 4676



INTRODUCED BY Hon. John Marvin "Yul Servo" Nieto and Hon. Edward Vera Perez Maceda

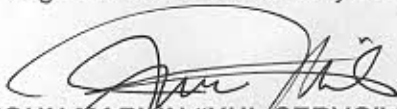
EXPLANATORY NOTE

As an acknowledgement to the previous authors of this House Bill in the 15th and 16th Congress of the Philippines, the undersigned refiles this House Bill to express the urgency of providing special protection to children who are in situations of armed conflicts and victims of violence. The lack of legislation to cover and focus on the rights and dignity of children is tremendously alarming because the perpetrators of violence, who demoralize and exploit the innocent children, are not penalized.

The core of the proposed measure is to ensure that the human rights of children shall be respected at all times, and that utmost consideration shall be in the best interest of the child in case of armed conflicts and displacement. Moreover, children are entitled to dignity and respect as human beings in need of protection from degradation, humiliation, maltreatment, exploitation, and assault.

The following are the major features of this bill. First is that it provides well-defined terminologies within the purview of the measure. It serves as a declaration of the rights of children in armed conflicted, particularly the declaration of children as zones of peace. It also enumerates unlawful and prohibited acts and their corresponding penalties and manner of prosecution. Lastly, this bill provides for the prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration as well as the rescue and demobilization of the children in situations of armed conflict.

Consistent with the principles of *parens patriae*, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



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AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR THE SPECIAL PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN SITUATIONS OF ARMED CONFLICT AND
PROVIDING PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS THEREOF

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

CHAPTER 1
GENERAL PROVISIONS

SECTION 1. Short Title. – This Act shall be known as the "*Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act*".

SEC. 2. Declaration of State Policy. – It shall be the policy of the State to provide special protection to Children in Situation of Armed Conflict (CSAC) from all forms of abuse, violence, neglect, cruelty, discrimination and other conditions prejudicial to their development, taking into consideration their gender, cultural, ethnic, and religious background. For this purpose the State shall:

- a. Fully implement the protection guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocol on the involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (CIAC) and all other core human rights treaties, particularly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment; other pertinent international instruments such as but not limited to the ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labor; the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols ratified by the Philippines; the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, take into account the Paris Principles on the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the United Nations Security Council Resolutions related to CAAC and other pertinent international instruments in the implementations of its treaty obligations and of this Act;
- b. Respect the human rights of children at all times. It shall be recognized that children are entitled to dignity and respect as human beings in need of protection from degradation, humiliation, maltreatment, exploitation and assault;
- c. Consider children as Zones of Peace who are entitled to special protection during armed conflict. The State shall consider as paramount the best interests of children and treat all children involved in, affected by or displaced by armed conflict as victims;
- d. Take all feasible measures to prevent the recruitment and use of CIAC and shall take all necessary measures to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of the provisions of this Act;

- e. Take all necessary measures to address the root causes of armed conflict that result in involving, affecting or displacing children, which include poverty, lack or absence of quality basic psycho-social services, belief in the ideologies of an armed group, secessionist advocacy, affiliation of family members in armed groups, pursuit of alternative justice for atrocities, abuses and injustices experienced, and persistence of armed conflicts;
- f. Continue to recognize its primary role in providing effective protection and relief to all CSAC;
- g. Continue to fulfill its responsibilities to end impunity and to prosecute those responsible especially for grave child rights violations in armed conflict; and,
- h. Ensure the right to participation of children in all its policies, actions, decisions concerning CAAC.

SEC. 3. Scope of Application. – This Act shall apply to all children involved in, affected by or displaced by armed conflict.

The application of this Act shall not affect the legal status of any party to an armed conflict.

SEC. 4. Interpretation of this Act. – Nothing in this Act shall be construed as precluding provisions in existing Philippine laws, international human rights laws and related instruments, and international humanitarian law that are more conducive to the realization of the rights of children.

SEC. 5. Definition of Terms. – As used in this Act

- a. **“Abduction of children”** refers to the seizure, apprehension, taking in custody, detention or capture of one or more children either temporarily or permanently by force, threat of force, coercion, or deception for the purpose of any form of exploitation of such children in the situation of armed conflict;
- b. **“Armed conflict”** refers to armed confrontations occurring between governmental armed forces and one or more armed groups, or between such groups arising in the Philippine territory. These shall include activities which may lead to armed confrontation or armed violence that put children’s lives at risk and their rights violated;
- c. **“Armed group”** refers to an armed non-state actor or non-state entities engaged in armed conflict against the state or engaged in armed violence;
- d. **“Attacks on schools, hospitals, places of worship, evacuation centers and public places where children are usually found”** refers to the occupation, shelling, targeting for propaganda of schools, hospitals or places of worship; causing damage to such places, or harm or injury to their personnel; or causing the total or partial physical destruction of such facilities; or disruption of educational activities and health services. It also refers to attacks of such places, which have been temporarily abandoned by the community as a result of armed conflict, unless these places have been declared a “no man’s land”;
- e. **“Child protection”** refers to the measures, structures and activities that ensure the prevention and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children. It shall include the promotion of their development and psychosocial well-being;
- f. **“Child”** refers to persons below eighteen (18) years of age or those over but are unable to fully take care of themselves or protect themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation or discrimination because of physical or mental disability or condition;
- g. **“Children In Situations of Armed Conflict (CSAC)”** refers to all Children Involved In Armed Conflict (CIAC), Children Affected By Armed Conflict (CAAC), and Internally Displaced Children (IDC);
- h. **“Children Involved in Armed Conflict (CIAC)”** refers to children who are either forcibly, compulsorily recruited or who voluntarily joined in any governmental armed forces or any armed group in any capacity to participate directly in armed hostilities as combatants or as fighters, or take support roles such as but not limited to scouting, spying, sabotaging, acting as decoys, assisting in check-points, being couriers, messengers, porters, cooks and being used for sexual purposes;
- i. **“Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC)”** refers to all children population experiencing or have experienced armed conflict;
- j. **“Explosive Remnants of War (ERW)”** refers to unexploded ordnance and abandoned explosive ordnance. **Explosive Ordnance** refers to munitions that contain explosives, nuclear fission or fusion material, biological and chemical agents. This includes bombs and warheads, guided and ballistic missiles, artillery, mortar, small arms ammunition, mines, torpedoes, depth charges, demolition

stores, pyrotechnics, cluster munitions and dispensers, cartridges and propelled actuated devices, electric explosive devices and similar items that are explosive in nature. **Unexploded Ordnance** refers to explosive ordnance, which has been primed, fuzed, armed or otherwise prepared for use or used. It could have been fired, dropped, launched, projected yet remains unexploded either through malfunction or design or for any other cause;

- k. **"Food blockade"** refers to armed conflict tactic of forcibly cutting off entry of food supplies in a particular area where children can be found;
- l. **"Governmental armed forces"** refers to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) including the paramilitary forces, the Philippine National Police (PNP), and other law enforcement agencies;
- m. **"Grave child rights violation"** refers to the crimes committed against children that constitute flagrant violations of their human rights and have severe consequences in their lives. These crimes include those enumerated in Section 8 of this Act, such as but not limited to, killing or maiming of children, recruitment or use of CIAC, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, abduction of children, attacks against schools or hospitals, denial of humanitarian access to children;
- n. **"Hamleting"** refers to an armed conflict strategy that isolates a community of importance to the enemy which is inhabited by children including relocating said community away from crucial zones. This strategy could be used to control the activities of the people in said areas.
- o. **"Hospitals or health facilities"** refers to any structure recognized and known by the community as a facility where the sick and wounded are provided with medical and or health care services;
- p. **"Humanitarian access"** refers to the right of vulnerable populations to receive international protection and assistance from an impartial humanitarian relief operation to complement efforts of national authorities. Such action is subject to the consent of the State or parties concerned and does not prescribe coercive measures in the event of refusal, however unwarranted;
- q. **"Humanitarian assistance"** refers to aid that seeks to save lives and alleviate suffering of a crisis-affected population. Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the basic humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality. Assistance may be divided into three categories: direct assistance, indirect assistance and infrastructure support, which have diminishing degrees of contact with the affected population;
- r. **"Internally Displaced Children (IDC)"** refers to children or group of children, whether separated or together with their families, who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular, as a result of or in order to avoid the effect of armed conflict and situations of generalized violence.
- s. **"Improvised Explosive Device (IED)"** refers to a device that is homemade or fabricated, constructed and deployed in ways other than conventional military action; containing or having contents from indigenous materials or substances that are destructive, lethal, noxious, pyrotechnic or incendiary chemicals, and designed to destroy, kill, incapacitate, harass or distract. IEDs are diverse in design, such as but not limited to, packages, or landmine or road-side bombs, and contain many types of initiators, detonators, penetrates, and explosive loads. These include shrapnel-generating objects such as, but not limited to nails, ball-bearings, small-pieces of iron or steel bars, and alike that may be used individually or in combination. These are triggered by various methods such as by remote control or command-detonation;
- t. **"Killing of children"** refers to acts of all kinds in the context of armed conflict that result in the death of one or more children. Among others, they include the death of children as a result of direct targeting and indirect actions, such as cross-fire, use of landmines, cluster munitions, ERW, all forms and types of IED; or house demolitions, search and arrest campaigns, suicide attacks and torture; they also include murder, homicide and such other similar crimes as defined in the Revised Penal Code and other special laws, as amended;
- u. **"Maiming of children"** refers to acts of all kinds in the context of armed conflict that result in serious or permanent or disabling injury, scarring or defacing, or mutilation to one or more children. It shall cover *intentional maiming* of children where they are directly targeted, and *causal maiming* of children which results from indirect actions, such as cross-fire, use of landmines, cluster munitions, ERW, all forms and types of IED; or in the context of house demolitions, search and arrest campaigns, suicide attacks and torture;
- v. **"Other acts of gender based violence"** refers to physical, sexual violence other than rape, and psychosocial harm that is committed against a person as a result of power inequities that are based

on gender roles. These include, among others, sexual slavery, prostitution, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, or forced sterilization;

- w. **"Rape"** refers to the crime of rape as defined under Article 266-A of the Revised Penal Code, as amended by Republic Act No. 8353 or the Anti-Rape Law;
- x. **"Recruitment"** refers to compulsory, forced and voluntary conscription or enlistment of children into the governmental armed force and forced or voluntary membership into the armed group;
- y. **"Release of children"** refers to the process of formal and controlled disarmament of children and their release from an armed force or armed group. It shall likewise refer to the informal ways in which children leave the governmental armed forces or armed group. It entails a disassociation from the armed force or armed group and the beginning of transition to mainstream society. Release of children can take place during the situation of armed conflict; it is not dependent on the temporary or permanent cessation of hostilities; it is not dependent on children having weapons to forfeit;
- z. **"School"** refers to any structure that is recognized and known by the community as a learning space and marked by visible boundaries;
- aa. **"Zone of Peace"** refers to a site with sacred, religious, historic, educational, cultural, geographical or environmental importance protected and preserved by its own community and officially recognized by a governmental authority. It is not merely a "Demilitarized Zone", but a sanctuary that operates within ethical principles of non-violence, free from weapons, acts of violence, injustice and environmental degradation;

CHAPTER 2 RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

SEC. 6. *Children as Zones of Peace.* – Children are hereby declared as Zones of Peace. The treatment of children as Zones of Peace shall extend beyond territorial or geographical boundaries and focus on the person of the child whose rights shall be promoted and protected at all times, especially in situations of armed conflict or violence. The State and all sectors concerned shall have the responsibility to resolve armed conflict in order to promote the goal of children as zones of peace. As such, the community, governmental authority and, if appropriate, religious leadership shall preserve the peaceful integrity of children and shall exemplify mutual respect and non-violent behavior in the presence of children, and share their resources for furthering peace and cooperation.

SEC. 7. *Rights of Children In Situations of Armed Conflict (CSAC).* – Children in Situations of Armed Conflict (CSAC) shall have the following rights:

- a. the right of special respect and protection against any form of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violation, especially in the context of armed conflict;
- b. the right of all children involved in, affected by or displaced by armed conflict to be treated as victims. They shall be treated in accordance with this Act, and other applicable laws, consistent with the State obligation under international law, within the framework of restorative justice, social rehabilitation and promotion of their protection;
- c. the right to be considered as object of special respect and to be protected from any form of direct or indiscriminate attacks and acts of violence especially protection from the grave child rights violations as enumerated in Section 8 of this Act;
- d. the right to be protected from recruitment into the governmental armed forces or armed groups and from participation in armed conflict. This shall include the right to be protected from torture or any cruel, inhuman or degrading practices that compel compliance or punish non-compliance with recruitment or participation in armed conflict;
- e. the right to be immediately provided and have safe access to essential, adequate and culturally appropriate food and nutrition; basic shelter and housing; culturally appropriate clothing; water, sanitation, and hygiene; basic health services including essential drugs, medicines and vaccines, health professional evaluation and appropriate intervention; education, including religious and moral education; Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programs, psychosocial support and social services. All services provided for children must be child and gender sensitive or responsive;
- f. the right to enjoy their freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, opinion and expression; to associate freely and participate equally in legitimate community affairs; to communicate in a language

- they understand even in situation of armed conflict and whether or not they have been internally displaced or are living in evacuation centers or settlements;
- g. the right of the wounded and sick children to be cared for and provided with aid or assistance or medical services, whether because of their age or for any other reason;
 - h. the right of all children to be treated humanely in all circumstances, without any adverse distinction founded on race, color, religion or faith, gender, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria;
 - i. the right not to be interned in or confined in camp, especially IDC and their families;
 - j. the right of IDC, unaccompanied minors, expectant mother, children with disabilities, the wounded and the sick children to protection and assistance required by their condition, and to treatment which takes into account their special needs, such as but not limited to their health needs, reproductive health care as well as appropriate counseling, prevention of contagious and infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and access to psychosocial services;
 - k. the right of children to be with their families, especially with their mothers, during evacuations and in evacuation centers;
 - l. the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose their residence especially the IDC and their families who shall have the right to move freely in and out of the evacuation centers or other settlements, subject to existing rules and regulations in those centers or settlements;
 - m. the right especially of IDC and their families to: leave the country; seek safety in another part of the country; seek other service providers; seek asylum in another country; and be protected against forcible return to resettlement in any place where their life, safety, liberty or health would be at risk;
 - n. the right of all children to be reunited with their families in case of separation due to armed conflict;
 - o. the right to obtain necessary document/s to enjoy their legal rights. The State shall have the duty to expedite services in the issuance of new documents or the replacement of documents lost in the course of displacement, without imposing unreasonable conditions, and without discrimination against female child and male child, who shall have equal rights to obtain and to be issues the same in their own names;
 - p. the right of access to justice including free legal aid when filing cases against the perpetrators;
 - q. the right for the property and possessions of children and their families to be protected in all circumstances.

The rights enumerated in this Section shall not hinder the application of other rights recognized and guaranteed in the Constitution and other existing laws in keeping with the best interests of the child.

CHAPTER 3 UNLAWFUL AND PROHIBITED ACTS

SEC. 8. *Unlawful or Prohibited Acts.* –

- a. It shall be unlawful for any person, to commit the following acts of grave Child Rights Violations:
 1. Killing of children;
 2. Torture committed against children. For the purposes of this Act, torture shall include those enumerated in Section 4 of Republic Act 9745 or the Anti-Torture Act;
 3. Intentional or causal maiming of children;
 4. Rape of children;
 5. Cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment committed against children. For the purposes of this Act, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment shall include those enumerated in Section 5 of Republic Act 9745 or the Anti-Torture Act;
 6. Abduction of children;
 7. Taking children as hostages or using them as human shield;
 8. Recruitment, conscription, or enlistment of children into governmental armed forces and other armed groups;
 9. Other acts of gender-based violence against children;
 10. Refusal or denial of humanitarian access and /or assistance to children;
 11. Use of involvement of CIAC in any capacity as defined in Section 5(h) of this Act;
 12. Attack on schools, hospitals, places of worship, evacuation centers and settlements and other public places where children can usually be found.

- b. Likewise, it shall be unlawful for any person to commit the following acts:
1. Hamleting
 2. Food Blockade
 3. Intentional Delayed Reporting of a child in custody
 4. False reporting of a child in custody
 5. False Branding of children or labeling children as children involved in armed conflict
- c. It shall also be unlawful for parents, ascendants, guardians, step parents or collateral relatives within the third degree of consanguinity or affinity or any person having control or moral ascendancy to the child to allow, willfully encourage, compel, coerce, or influence their child or children to be part of an armed group or governmental armed force.

CHAPTER 4 PENALTIES AND PRESCRIPTION OF CRIME

SEC. 9. Penalties. – The following penalties and sanctions are hereby imposed for the offenses enumerated in this Act:

- a. Any person found guilty of committing any of the acts enumerated in subparagraphs 1, 2, 3, and 4 of paragraph (a) Section 8 of this Act shall suffer the penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of not less than Two Million Pesos (P2,000,000.00) but not more than Five Million Pesos (P5,000,000.00);
- b. Any person found guilty of committing any of the acts enumerated in subparagraphs 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 of paragraph (a) Section 8 of this Act shall be punished with an imprisonment of not less than fourteen (14) years but not more than twenty (20) years and a fine of not less than One Million Pesos (P1,000,000.00) but not more than Two Million Pesos (P2,000,000.00); *Provided* where the crimes committed resulted in the killing, torture, maiming, or rape of children in subparagraphs 1, 2, 3, and 4 of paragraph (a) Section 8, the penalty imposed shall be that of Section 9(a) of this Act;
- c. Any person found guilty of committing any of the acts enumerated in subparagraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 paragraph (b) Section 8 of this Act shall be punished with an imprisonment of not less than six (6) years but not more than twelve (12) years and a fine of not less than Five Hundred Thousand Pesos (P500,000.00) but not more than One Million Pesos (P1,000,000.00);
- d. Parents, ascendants, guardians, step parents or collateral relatives within the third degree of consanguinity or affinity or any person having control or moral ascendancy to the child to allow, willfully encourage, compel, coerce, or influence their child or children to be part of an armed group shall be punished with not less than six (6) years but not more than twelve (12) years. *Provided, However That*, parents, ascendants, guardians, step parents or collateral relatives within the third degree of consanguinity or affinity or any person having control or moral ascendancy to the child found guilty hereof may be allowed to serve the minimum period of imprisonment based on the sound discretion of the courts guided by the principles of *parens patriae*.

SEC. 10. Non-implementation or Violation of any other Provisions of this Act or the Rules and Regulations in General. – Any public officer, who shall knowingly and maliciously prevent, prohibit, refuse or discontinue the implementation of any provisions of this Act or any rules and regulations promulgated in accordance thereof, or in any other way violate them, if such officer has the duty to implement shall be punished by imprisonment of not less than six (6) years but not more than twelve (12) years and perpetual absolute disqualification.

Any such officer who shall prevent, prohibit, refuse or discontinue the implementation of this Act or its rules and regulations, or in any other way violate them by reason of inexcusable negligence or ignorance, shall be punished with an imprisonment of not less than one (1) month but not more than six (6) months and temporary special disqualification.

The public officer liable under this Section shall, in addition to the imprisonment, be held administratively liable under existing applicable laws.

Any person who shall commit any other act not covered in Section 8, which shall result in prejudicing the rights of CIAC, CAAC or IDC protected under this Act shall be punished with an imprisonment of not less than six (6) months but not more than six (6) years.

SEC. 11. Forfeiture of Proceeds, Property and Assets. – The court shall order the forfeiture of proceeds, property and assets derived, directly or indirectly, from the crimes defined and penalized in this Act, without prejudice to the rights of the *bona fide* third party. The court shall impose the corresponding accessory penalties under the Revised Penal Code, especially where the offender is a public officer.

The liabilities imposed in this Act shall not prejudice the application of other existing criminal, civil and administrative liabilities that may additionally be imposed upon the person.

SEC. 12. Non-prescription. – The crimes defined and penalized under this Act, their prosecution, and the execution of sentences imposed on their account, shall not be subjected to any prescription.

CHAPTER 5 PRINCIPLES OF CRIMINAL LIABILITY AND APPLICATION OF PENALTIES

SEC. 13. Individual Criminal Responsibilities. – Any person committing such as crime shall be criminally liable for a crime defined and penalized in this Act, whether as an individual, jointly with another or through another person, regardless of whether that other person is criminally responsible.

SEC. 14. Irrelevance of Official Capacity. – This Act shall apply equally to all persons without any distinction based on official capacity. In no case shall the official capacity exempt a person from criminal responsibility or constitute a ground for reduction of sentence.

SEC. 15. Responsibility of Superiors. – In addition to other grounds of criminal responsibility for crimes defined and penalized under this Act, a superior shall be criminally responsible for such crimes committed by subordinates where:

- a. That superior either knew or, owing to the circumstances at the time, should have known that the subordinates were committing or about to commit such crimes;
- b. That superior failed to take all necessary and reasonable measures within his/her power to prevent or repress their commission or to submit the matter to the competent authorities for investigation and prosecution.

SEC. 16. Orders from a Superior. – The fact that a crime defined and penalized under this Act has been committed by a person pursuant to an order of a superior, shall not relieve that person of criminal responsibility unless all of the following elements occur:

- a. The person was under a legal obligation to obey orders of the superior in question;
- b. The person did not know that the order was unlawful; and,
- c. The order was not manifestly unlawful.

For the purposes of this section, orders to commit grave child rights violations enumerated in Section 8 are manifestly unlawful and shall be punished by this Act and other applicable existing laws.

SEC. 17. Unknown Superior. – Where the crimes defined and penalized under this Act have been committed by a person pursuant to an order or command of unknown superior, any person who in fact directed the others, spoke for them, signed receipts and other documents issued in their name, or who has performed similar acts, on behalf of the armed groups shall be deemed the superior.

CHAPTER 6 INVESTIGATION, PROSECUTION AND COURT

SEC. 18. *Court, Prosecutors and Investigators.* – The Family Courts shall have original and exclusive jurisdiction over the crimes punishable under this Act.

The Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the Department of Justice (DOJ) and its attached agencies, the Philippine National Police (PNP) or other concerned law enforcement agencies shall designate prosecutors or investigators, as the case may be, for cases involving crimes punishable under this Act.

The State shall ensure that judges, prosecutors and investigators, especially those designated for purposes of this Act, receive effective training in human rights particularly on Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on involvement of CIAC and related international instruments, International Humanitarian Law and International Criminal Law.

SEC. 19. *Requirement and Procedures on Age Verification and Presumption of Minority.* – The child involved in, affected or displaced by armed conflict shall enjoy the presumption of minority and shall enjoy all the rights of a child recognized in this Act and other applicable laws unless proven to be eighteen (18) years or older.

The age of a child may be determined from the child's birth certificate, baptismal certificate or any other pertinent documents. In the absence of these documents, age may be based on information from the child, testimonies of other persons, the physical appearance of the child and other relevant evidence. In case of doubt as to the age of the child, it shall be resolved in favor of minority.

Any person contesting the age of the child prior to the filing of the information in any appropriate court may file a case in a summary proceeding for the determination of age before the Family Court, which shall decide the case within twenty four (24) hours from receipt of the appropriate pleadings of all interested parties.

If a case has been filed against the child and is pending in the appropriate court, the person shall file a motion to determine the age of the child in the same court where the case is pending. Pending hearing on the said motion, proceedings on the main case shall be suspended.

In all proceedings, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges and other government officials concerned shall exert all efforts at determining the age of the child in armed conflict.

SEC. 20. *Protection of Victims and Witnesses.* – In addition to existing provisions in Philippine law for the protection of victims and witnesses, the following measures shall be undertaken:

- a. The Court shall take appropriate measures to protect the safety, physical and psychological well-being, dignity and privacy of child victims and witnesses. In so doing, the Court shall have regard of all relevant factors, including age, gender and health, and the nature of the crime, in particular, but not limited to, where the crime involves sexual or gender based violence or violence against children;
- b. The court shall protect the privacy of child victims and witnesses and observe confidentiality consistent with existing rules on examination of child victims and witnesses;
- c. Where the personal interests of the child victims are affected, the court shall consider the child victim's views and concerns in accordance with established rules of procedure and evidence;
- d. Where the disclosure of evidence or information may be prejudicial to the security of the child witness or the family, the prosecution may withhold such evidence or information and instead submit a summary thereof consistent with the rights of the accused to a fair and impartial trial.

SEC. 21. *Reparation to Victims.* – In addition to existing provisions in Philippine law and procedural rules for reparations to victims, the following measures shall be undertaken:

- a. The Court shall follow the principles relating to the reparations to, or in respect of, child victims, including restitution, compensation and rehabilitation taking into consideration the scope and extent of any damage, loss or injury suffered by child victims;
- b. The Court shall make an order directly against a convicted person specifying appropriate reparations to child victims, including restitution, compensation and rehabilitation; and,

- c. Before making an order under this section, the court may invite and shall take account of representations from or on behalf of the convicted person, child victims or other interested persons.

Nothing in this section shall be interpreted to prejudice the rights of child victims under national or international law.

SEC. 22. *Immunity from Suit for Persons Providing Assistance.* – Any person who shall take custody of children involved in armed conflict to ensure their safety or provide them any form of assistance shall be exempt from any civil, criminal and administrative liability; *Provided*, that the person shall report it to the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO), Philippine National Police (PNP) or to the Barangay office within forty eight (48) hours.

CHAPTER 7 PREVENTION, REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION, RESCUE, RELEASE

SEC. 23. *Prevention.* – The State shall take all feasible measures to prevent the recruitment, re-recruitment, use or displacement of CIAC. It shall take all necessary measures to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of the provisions of this Act. Towards this end, the State shall:

- a. prioritize children's issues in the peace program of the Government and include children's concerns, specifically the effects of armed conflicts, in peace negotiations;
- b. include peace, human rights, and protective behavior skills as fundamental subjects in the education system;
- c. provide educational assistance, whether formal or alternative learning system, that is child and culturally sensitive;
- d. develop and implement training programs and campaign towards promoting a culture of peace and respect for human rights in collaboration with civil society organizations;
- e. provide capacity building for Local Governance and Community Development, and ensure the participation of various organizations, especially of children's and people's organization at the community level. These organizations shall be involved in consultation and decision-making processes and in the development and implementation of programs, projects and activities established for them;
- f. establish livelihood programs which shall be made available to communities in identified priority areas in order to alleviate the living conditions of the people;
- g. make available basic health services in health facilities in identified priority areas. Culturally sensitive nutrition program and activities including but not limited to supplementary feeding shall also be made available. Efforts to support traditions health practices in indigenous peoples area shall also be initiated;
- h. establish basic facilities and infrastructure needed;
- i. ensure that child protection mechanisms are present and functional; and,
- j. establish a comprehensive, effective and efficient system for monitoring, reporting and response for violations as provided in Section 8 of this Act.

SEC. 24. *Rescue, Rehabilitation and Reintegration.* – The State shall institute policies, programs and services for rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of children involved in, affected by or displaced by armed conflict. The programs shall aim at providing services for children while involving their families, communities and other entities to facilitate the children's reintegration process.

These services shall include but not be limited to psychosocial support, health and nutrition, education, livelihood for families and other basic services, and legal services as may be necessary.

Any program interventions shall be designed with due respect to the culture of each child, family and community. The child shall, at all times, be provided with legal assistance and physical security upon rescue.

The State shall take into account the following in the rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of children:

- a. *Rescue*: The State shall provide for adequate measures and mechanisms to facilitate the recovery, either voluntary or involuntary, of children from armed groups or governmental armed forces. It shall

provide legal and physical security to children involved in armed conflict including services such as family tracing and system of referral or response on various psychosocial services needed by the victims;

- b. *Rehabilitation*: The State shall facilitate the normal development of children victims in their post-involvement phase. It shall provide services including therapeutic counseling, security and protection, educational assistance and livelihood opportunities to their parents, relatives or guardians or to the victims when they become of age;
- c. *Reintegration*: The State shall bring children back to their families or communities whenever possible. This shall involve services including provision of alternative parental care. Trainings aimed to enhance community readiness in the reintegration of these children shall be done with respect to their opinion. Interventions for indigenous peoples (IP) children shall be conducted in recognition of the traditional structures and institutions of their communities.

SEC. 25. Release of Children Involved in Armed Conflict (CIAC). – The State shall take all feasible measures to ensure that children recruited or used in hostilities contrary to this Act are released from service.

For the purposes of this Act, the release of children and other activities relative to such, shall be initiated independent of any negotiated peace agreements.

The State, through its concerned agencies, in coordination with other stakeholders shall have the following duties:

- a. Develop a child-specific release and reintegration program. This program should not make as a requirement the surrender of arms by CIAC who have assumed non-combatant roles;
- b. Monitor and document the status of CIAC who undergo either formal or informal demobilization process;
- c. With due regard to the right to privacy of CIAC, their security and safety, and considering the confidentiality of records, share data and information by both government and non-government organizations to assess the needs of released CIAC and to formulate ways to address these needs, and be informed of their status and updates of demobilized CIAC;
- d. Mobilize and strengthen networks for referrals;
- e. Provide free legal assistance to demobilized CIAC ensuring that the legal needs of the former CIAC will be addressed, such as, the prohibition or stoppage of filing charges or dismissal of cases against CIAC as criminal or political offenders irrespective of their association with any armed group or force;
- f. Ensure the formal release of CIAC through various approaches such as negotiating through the Government Peace Negotiating Panel (GPNP). Other criminal armed groups that utilize children and are not involved in formal peace negotiation with the government shall, however, be dealt with in accordance with peace and order or security policy as may be provided by the appropriate government agency; *Provided*, That in any demobilization action, the best interest of the child shall prevail.

SEC. 26. Rescued or Surrendered Children Involved in Armed Conflict (CIAC). – Where the CIAC have been rescued or surrendered, they shall at all times be treated in a child-friendly and sensitive manner. The State at all times shall consider the safety and security of the CIAC. The following procedures shall apply without prejudice to the application of other existing laws that will uphold the best interests of the child:

- a. The identity of rescued CIAC shall be protected. Any identifying information regarding them shall remain confidential;
- b. Rescued CIAC shall not be used for any political propaganda nor be unnecessarily exposed to media in violation of child rights to privacy, security and confidentiality of their cases;
- c. Upon the rescue or surrender of CIAC, the government agencies, in particular, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police (PNP), Department of National Defense (DND), Local Government Units (LGUs), other concerned government agencies and/or Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in possession of CIAC shall report immediately within twenty four (24) hours the incident to the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO) and Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC);
- d. The Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO) shall coordinate with the agency and/or NGO in possession of CIAC for the turnover of custody of CIAC to DSWD;

- e. The turnover to LSWDO shall take place within 24 hours or in cases where turnover is not possible within the prescribed 24-hour period due to valid reasons and without the fault of the person having the custody of the child, the turnover shall be done within the next seventy two (72) hours;
- f. The LSWDO shall facilitate the family tracing and coordinate with parents, relatives or guardian of the CIAC to inform them of the turnover;
- g. The Local Health Office (LHO) in coordination with the LSWDO shall check and assess the medical and physical condition of CIAC. In cases where medical needs are apparent, the LHO shall ensure that medical services or treatment are received by the CIAC;
- h. The LSWDO shall assess the needs of the CIAC and refer to concerned agencies to provide immediate assistance or appropriate services;
- i. The LSWDO, in coordination with other agencies, shall enter the CIAC into the child-specific demobilization programs;
- j. The CIAC shall be reintegrated into the community. In cases where reintegration to original community of origin is not feasible for reasons of the CIAC's security, a foster community or institution shall be identified.

CHAPTER 8 INVOLVEMENT OF GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

SEC. 27. *Involvement of Government Organizations (GOs) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs).* – To effectively address the issue of CSAC, the Council for the Welfare of Children together with its member agencies shall be assisted by the following government organizations (GOs) for the proper implementation of this Act:

- a. Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)
- b. Commission on Human Rights (CHR)
- c. Department of National Defense (DND)
- d. Local Government Units (LGUs)
- e. National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP)
- f. National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF)
- g. National Disaster Risk and Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC)
- h. Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP)
- i. Philippine Commission on Women
- j. Philippine National Police (PNP)

Child-focused non-government organizations (NGOs) in caring for CSAC shall take active part in and strengthen their programs on protecting these children.

For proper implementation of this Act, all GOs and NGOs including but not limited to those identified herein, shall provide their respective counterpart support including but not limited to technical, logistical and financial assistance relative to the implementation of programs, projects and activities for CSAC, in accordance with their mandate and in accordance with existing accounting and auditing rules and regulations.

All programs should be participatory and should ensure the involvement of children, their communities, NGOs, faith-based organizations or groups, and other concerned groups.

CHAPTER 9 MONITORING AND REPORTING

SEC. 28. *Monitoring and Reporting System.* – The State, through the CWC in coordination with other concerned government organizations shall ensure the implementation of the provisions of this Act and shall submit to the President and to Congress of the Philippines, the annual report thereof. CWC shall establish and maintain a database for the monitoring and reporting of CSAC concerns integrated in its monitoring system.

The CWC may hire additional personnel to complement its present Secretariat to perform its functions relative to this Act.

CHAPTER 10 TRANSITORY PROVISIONS

SEC. 29. *Children Involved in Armed Conflict.* – Upon the effectivity of this Act, criminal cases against children involved in armed conflict shall immediately be dismissed and the child shall be referred to the LSWDO. Such office, upon thorough assessment of the child, shall determine whether to release the child to the custody of the parents, or refer the child to prevention, rehabilitation, reintegration programs as provided under this Act. Those with suspended sentences and undergoing rehabilitation at the youth rehabilitation center shall likewise be released; *Provided*, That the Family Court shall, in consultation with concerned agencies determine and order the appropriate prevention, rehabilitation, reintegration programs the person shall undergo as provided in this Act.

SEC. 30. *Inventory of Custody of CSAC.* – The AFP, the PNP, the BJMP, the DSWD, the NCIP, NCMF, and the concerned LGUs are hereby directed to submit to the CWC, within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, an inventory of all CSAC under their custody.

SEC. 31. *Children Who Reach the Age of Eighteen (18) Years Pending Court Proceedings or in Suspended Sentences.* – If a child reaches the age of eighteen (18) years pending court proceedings, the Family Court shall dismiss the case against the person and determine in consultation with concerned agencies for the need to undergo appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration programs provided in this Act.

Those with suspended sentences and undergoing rehabilitation at the youth rehabilitation center shall likewise be released; *Provided*, That the Family Court shall, in consultation with concerned agencies determine and order the appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration programs the person shall undergo as provided in this Act.

SEC. 32. *Children Who Have Been Convicted and are Serving Sentence.* – Persons who have been convicted and are serving sentence at the time of the effectivity of this Act, and who were below the age of eighteen (18) years at the time the commission of the offense for which they were convicted and are serving sentence, shall likewise benefit from the retroactive application of this Act. They shall be entitled to appropriate dispositions provided under this Act and their sentences shall be adjusted accordingly. They shall be immediately released if they are so qualified under this Act or other applicable law.

CHAPTER 11 FINAL PROVISIONS

SEC. 33. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – The CWC together with its member agencies and OPAPP, with the involvement of CSOs, shall promulgate the implementing rules and regulations of this Act within ninety (90) days from the approval of this Act. All government agencies enumerated in Section 27 of this Act shall be consulted in so far as the drafting of their responsibilities are concerned.

NGOs involved in caring for CSAC shall likewise be consulted in the drafting of the implementing rules and regulations of this Act.

SEC. 34. *Appropriations.* – The amount of Ten Million Pesos (P10, 000,000.00) is hereby appropriated to the CWC for the initial implementation of this Act. Said amount shall be funded from the gross income of the Philippines Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR) and shall be directly remitted to a special account of the CWC. Thereafter, for the continued implementation of this Act, such sums shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act (GAA).

SEC. 35. *Repealing Clause.* – Article X Sections 22 to 26 of Republic Act 7610, all laws, acts, presidential decrees, executive orders, administrative orders, rules and regulations inconsistent with or contrary to the provisions of this Act are deemed amended, modified or repealed accordingly.

SEC. 36. *Separability Clause.* – If any part or provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the other parts thereof not affected thereby shall remain valid.

SEC. 37. *Effectivity Clause.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days upon completion of its publication in at least two (2) national newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,