



Filipinos Abroad Helping Filipinos At Home

Seeking Fairness and Justice:

Toxic Wastes Left Behind at the former US Military Installations in Clark and Subic, Philippines

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

The United States acknowledged that both its former military installations in the Philippines, Clark Air Base and the Subic Bay Naval Facility, have significant environmental damage and if the US unilaterally decides to clean up these bases in accordance with US standards, the costs for environmental clean up and restoration could approach Superfund proportions (U.S. General Accounting Office Report, January 1992).

Brief Timeline

- In 1902, at the end of the Philippine-American War, the US consolidated control over its new colony, the Philippines and immediately established a military stronghold and for almost one hundred years, the US enjoyed an almost unobstructed military presence (Institute for Policy Studies, 199, page 39).
- In 1904, the US established a naval facility in Subic Bay and became the center of the US Seventh Fleet due to its geographic location, rapid projection of naval power and quick logistical support anywhere in the world (Mercado, 2001: page 11).
- In 1945, the US also established Clark Air Base, 65 miles north of Manila, the capital, with Mt. Pinatubo located just 8 miles west of the base; it became the second largest base in the US Air Force (Allen, page 7; Mercado, 2001: page 10).
- In 1945, the United States gave the Philippines its independence.
- In 1947, the United States and the newly formed Republic of the Philippines jointly signed the US-Philippine military bases agreement that gave the US a 99-year rent-free contract to establish a continued American military presence in the Philippines (Institute for Policy Studies, 199, page 39; Mercado, 2001: page 2).
- In the 1950s, with the growing Cold War against the Soviet Union, the US found a greater sense of urgency to extend its military presence in Asia and in the Philippines to contain the spread of communism (Carroll, 1996: page 17; others).
- From the 1960s to the 1990s, the US depended heavily on both bases, Clark and Subic, for all its international military operations from the Korean War in the 1950s, to the Vietnam War in the 1960s and early 1970s, to the Persian Gulf War in the 1990s (Institute for Policy Studies, 199, page 39; Mercado, 2001: page 9-10).
- In June 12, 1991, Mt. Pinatubo erupted and forced the immediate evacuation of Clark Air Force Base as well as the surrounding areas (Allen, 1991; page 7).
- In September 16, 1991, the Philippine Senate refused to extend the 1947 US-Philippine military bases agreement, ending a century-long military presence (Institute for Policy Studies, page 39; others).
- In 1991, many displaced residents from Mt. Pinatubo's eruption, were temporary resettled at the CABCOM military area of Clark Air Base. Resettled residents complained of the contaminated drinking water. Many pregnant women suffered

miscarriages and spontaneous abortions; numerous children were born with disabilities with their central nervous systems severely affected (Institute for Policy Studies, 199, page 43; others).

- In November 24, 1992, the last US military troops shipped out. The US left behind land and facilities tainted by hazardous wastes and neglected toxic waste victims (Pimentel and Lasola, page 173; others).
- In 1992, the Philippine government set its sights in redeveloping the areas into “special economic zones” as an answer to the ailing Philippine economy (Institute for Policy Studies, 199, page 40; others).
- In 1993, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed the initial findings of the US General Accounting Office (GAO) that certain areas in Subic Bay were affected with considerable pollution such as those which used or stored toxic chemical, fuels, pesticides, polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), chlorinated solvents, unexploded ordnance (UXO) and hazardous wastes (Mercado, 2001: page 23).

“Nowhere in the US are we able to use our military bases with less restrictions that we do in the Philippines,” a US commanding officer said (Institute for Policy Studies, 199, page 39; Mercado, 2001: page 9-10).

The US failed to undertake any cleanup despite knowledge of environmental contamination in Clark and Subic prior to the formal turnover to the Philippine government (Mercado, 2001: page 3, 18).



US Rear Admiral Eugene Carroll, Jr. (retired), outspoken expert and witness to the toxic wastes left behind by the US military installations in Clark and Subic, Philippines.

Health cost of US military presence in the Philippines: evidence of environmental hazards and toxic wastes left behind

Some of the toxic wastes identified:

- Seepage from underground storage tanks Both Clark Air Base and the Subic Bay Navy Facility have underground storage tanks and fire-fighting training facilities that do not comply with US standards; they do not have leak detection equipment and have nor drainage systems. The fuels and chemicals seep directly into the soil and water table, and at the Navy facility, the overflow goes directly into the Subic Bay and

unfairly polluting the water (U.S. General Accounting Office Report January 1992: page 5).

- **Lack of sanitary sewer system** The Subic Bay Navy Facility did have a complete sanitary sewer system and treatment facility and all sewage and process wastewaters from the naval base and air station industrial complexes are discharged directly into Subic Bay (U.S. General Accounting Office Report January 1992: page 5).

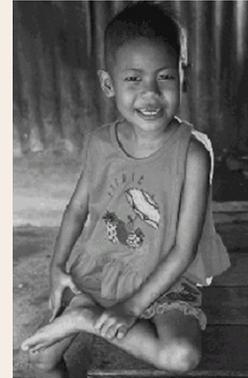


Villager from Kinabukasan Village, Subic Bay holds unexploded ordnance (July 2011).

- **Lead and other heavy metals** from the ship repair facility's sandblasting site drain directly into the bay or are buried in a landfill. Neither procedure complied with the US standards which requires lead and heavy metals be handled and disposed of as hazardous wastes which left the Philippines the unfair advantage to clean up (U.S. General Accounting Office Report January 1992: page 5; Bloom, et al, page 1).
- **Polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB)** The Subic Bay Navy Facility's power plant contains unknown amounts of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) but no official testing has been performed (U.S. General Accounting Office Report January 1992: page 5; others).
- **Aviation fuel** Thousands of gallons of highly corrosive aviation fuel were left behind in a decrepit 42-mile underground pipeline connecting Subic and Clark and unfairly polluting the ground water (Pimentel and Lasola, 1992: page 173).
- **Unexploded ordnance** Unexploded ordnance or UXO were left behind in firing ranges in Subic and Clark and scarred hundreds of innocent victims (Pimentel and Lasola, 1992: page 174; Woodward, page 1). See Bayanihan Foundation's testimonies of 21 victims of unexploded ordnance (www.fdnbayanihan.org).
- **Runoff and migration** Many contaminants are not stationary but migrate beyond the initial area of contamination source. Toxic materials may also be absorbed on soil particles and bio-concentrated by animal or plant life and move up the food chain (Bloom, et al, page 2-3; Institute for Policy Studies, 199, page 45).

Filipino workers and residents affected

- ED PUGAY, 33, a former worker at the ship repair facility, said that the base officials never told him of the dangers of asbestos and other heavy metal wastes that he inhaled while cleaning Navy ships. “If you wanted to, you could cover your mouth and nose with a handkerchief,” Mr. Pugay said (Pimentel & Lasola, page 177).
- EDGAR MAGALANG said workers soaked their gloved hands in PCB contaminated fuel and they did not use respirators (Pimentel and Lasola, 1992: page 177).
- SALVADOR DE OCAMPO thought he was doing another harmless job. He was assigned to take in samples from electric transformers. Salvador said that his American boss gave him a pair of rubber gloves and a mask for protection but he was never told that he would be handling PCBs. Right afterwards, he was suffering from headaches and nausea (Pimentel and Lasola, 1992: page 177).
- ANDING VELONZA, 13 years old, was severely burned in the face and body when a UXO exploded. Anding survived but his eight-year old brother, Dante, was not that fortunate. He died in a separate UXO explosion incident. “The wound was so deep, I couldn’t get to the metal. That was it. In less than a minute, he was dead. The shrapnel was so huge. I couldn’t do any thing. Maybe that’s the kind of luck our son had. I surely couldn’t hit back. So I just had to think if of it as an accident. That’s all I could think of,” Fernando Velonza, Dante’s father, said appealing for justice (Pimentel and Lasola, 1992: page 175).
- ABRAHAM TARUC, was one of the children born with disabilities; his family lived in the CABCOM military area of Clark Air Base. He could not walk, talk or eat solid foods (Institute for Policy Studies, 199, page 43; Orejas, Philippine Inquirer, page 16).
- CRIZEL JANE VALENCIA, six years old, quickly became the symbol and rallying cry of many supporters seeking for fairness and justice. She was stricken and died of leukemia tied to the mercury and nitrate contaminants from the groundwater at the CABCOM military facility (Orejas, Miles Apart, page 1; others).



Crizel Jane Valencia, died of leukemia at the age of six years old in 2000, became the rallying cry and symbol of the toxic wastes left behind.

Other Social Costs of the US military presence in the Philippines

The US military service personnel fathered thousands of Amerasian children whose mothers are Filipinos; only less than 25% are acknowledged by their American fathers (Mercado, 2001: page 13). Amerasian children, especially those with African-American fathers, unfairly suffer severe prejudice and discrimination in education, employment and in all aspects of their lives due to their physical appearance and their mother's low social status perceived as prostitutes (Mercado, 2001: page 13-14). The US government has not taken responsibility and justice for the dire situation of America's forgotten children; they also do not have legal standing in the US, as their births would not have been registered in the US (Mercado, 2001: page 14).

Conflicting Reports

- In 1994, a report identified 14 known contaminated sites and more than a dozen potentially contaminated sites at Subic Bay and there significant potential risks of these contaminants to human health (Bloom, et al, page 1; others).
- In 1997, a participatory health survey revealed that a high proportion of growth retardation and respiratory problems were present among children and that many women unfairly suffer from reproductive system problems (Bertell, 1997; others).
- In 1997, the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) conducted an environmental baseline survey of Subic Bay and did not find widespread contamination of soils, groundwater or sediments as a result of former US Navy activities nor detected contamination of sites as a risk to human health and the environment if the land use of these areas remain the same (Woodward Clyde, page 1; others).
- In 1998, the reliability of the Woodward Clyde report was put to the test as Clearwater Revival Company (CRC), reversed its earlier conclusions, "the environmental base survey (EBS) does not accurately characterize contamination at the Subic Bay." (Clearwater Revival, page 1; Mercado, 2001: page 26; others).
- In 1998, the Clark Development Corporation (CDC) conducted another report and hired Weston International to undertake another soil and water baseline study. It confirmed the presence of 22 contaminated sites but maintained that the contamination was localized, identified and secure (Mercado page 26-27; others).
- In 1999, a separate report included 1,000 former base workers have been diagnosed with asbestosis, a form of lung cancer contracted from exposure to asbestos and were unfairly burdened by toxic wastes (Institute for Policy Studies, 1999, page 42).

Despite these conflicting reports, overwhelming research and anecdotal evidence point towards the continued presence of toxic wastes in the former military sites of Clark and Subic as the victims seek fairness and justice over this neglected issue.

US Denial of Responsibility

In the midst of all the scientific reports, the US continues to unfairly deny its responsibility of toxic wastes in their former military installations. US government officials do not deny the existence of toxic wastes in Clark and Subic (Mercado, 2001: page 90); they deny responsibility based on the military bases agreement that it does not impose any well-defined environmental responsibility upon the US to clean up after the withdrawal (U.S. General Accounting Office Report January 1992: page 6; Mercado, 2001: page 91). The U.S. alleges that both governments, US and the Philippines, have agreements that included “hold-harmless” clauses that hold the US harmless (U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) Report January 1992; others).

The US also claims that the Philippines waived its right to a clean-up when the Philippine Senate Joint Committee refused to renew the bases treaty and declared that “nothing in the agreement and amendments thereto authorized the U.S. to unduly pollute the territorial waters with contaminants, destroy the environment by dumping toxic wastes within the bases, and endanger lives of residents in the vicinity” (Philippine Senate Committee Report, page 46; others).

Beyond the legal standpoint and international laws, toxic waste victims want to appeal to fairness and justice to US policymakers and that the US should honor its responsibility to clean up the toxic wastes they left behind.

Philippine Government Response

The Philippine government argued for fairness and justice that the 1947 military bases agreement did not grant any license or authority to the US to commit acts by indiscriminately disposing of toxic and hazardous wastes as it pleases, destroy the environment and endanger the lives of Filipino citizens (Philippine Senate Committee Report, page 46). In the Philippine Congress, at least 30 resolutions were passed to inquire about the environmental, health and other aspects of the issue (Institute for Policy Studies, others). The Philippine government recommended negotiating through diplomatic channels and even filing suit against the US before the International Court of Justice. However, in the end, a weak Philippine government lack the political will with the government’s “do not rock the boat” diplomatic policy stance and the fear of losing US foreign loans and military aid (Institute for Policy Studies, 199, page 45).

As a consolation, in 2000, both US and Philippine governments issued a joint statement that they would cooperate to increase the sharing of information and to enhance

Philippine institutional and technical capacity to address environmental and public health problems throughout the Philippines. This is as far as the US government can commit for now, which does not seem to be just and fair in the light of the effect of the toxic wastes left behind (Mercado, 2001: page 31 - 32).

Alliance for Bases Clean Up and Community Response

- In 1994, the People's Task Force for Bases Clean-up (PTFBC) started a public outreach campaign.
- In 2000, PTFBC evolved to become the Alliance for Bases Clean Up (ABC), a broader campaign that included national and international networks and alliances. Since then, ABC has been in the forefront fighting to bring fairness and justice and to bring this issue alive in front of policymakers both in the Philippines and in the US (Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, page 1).



In 2002, Princess Caroline of Monaco spoke on behalf of toxic waste victims.

- In 2002, ABC advocated for Princess Caroline of Monaco to visit the Philippines and she spoke on behalf of the toxic victims left behind and talked about justice for the children affected by toxic wastes (Orejas, page 14).
- In 2003, ABC put together a special concert at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, with veteran tenor Ramon Acoymo honoring the children and victims of toxic wastes (De Jesus, page 1; Red, page 1).
- In 2005, ABC and its partners presented to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights seeking fairness and justice on this issue (Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, page 1).
- In 2011, ABC partners with the Bayanihan Foundation to reveal 21 victims of unexploded ordnance in Clark and Subic. These personal stories of tragedy hopefully will bring to the forefront the need for fairness and justice despite the US' continued rejection of responsibility.

What's Next? How Can You Help?

In 2011, the Philippine case is still far from being resolved after 20 years of the closure of the bases. The US continues to deny responsibility because the US-Philippines military bases agreement that it signed in 1947 lacked any provisions on environmental protection. However, denial of its responsibility also ignores the US' core values of fairness and justice.

The Bayanihan Foundation, in partnership with the Alliance for Bases Clean Up (ABC) and other partners, will conduct an education and public awareness campaign and will appeal to Filipino Americans and to all for fairness and justice on this important almost forgotten issue.

You can help by:

- Keeping informed about this important issue. Sign up for our newsletter, Facebook updates and periodic conference calls
- Sharing this information to your friends and family
- Contacting your US Representative about the need for fairness and justice on this important issue
- Supporting toxic waste victims as they struggle to survive and heal by using BodyTalk Access
- Donating to the Bayanihan Foundation and increase their capacity to reach out to more people in this public awareness campaign www.fdnbayanihan.org
- Joining a coalition for Bases Clean-up in the Philippines



Filipinos Abroad Helping Filipinos At Home

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(Complete bibliography at www.fdnbayanihan.org)

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