



“Lives Destroyed” Attacks on Civilians in the Southern Philippines

List of Major Attacks	1
Case Studies	3
Balobo Killings in Basilan Province, August 2, 2001.....	3
Davao International Airport Bombing, March 4, 2003	5
Sasa Wharf Bombing, April 2, 2003	8
Koronadal City Market Bombing, May 10, 2003.....	10
Superferry Bombing, February 27, 2004.....	12
Bombing at General Santos Market, December 12, 2004	13
Valentine’s Day Attacks, February 14, 2005	15
Bombing at Sulu Cooperative Store, March 27, 2006.....	17
Decapitation of Workers in Jolo, April 20, 2007.....	18
The Perpetrators	19
Justice Stalled	22
Recommendations	25

List of Major Attacks

Major bombings and other attacks on civilians in the southern Philippines since 2000 include:

- **Ozamis City** ferry bombing (February 25, 2000 - 39 killed)
- **General Santos City** multiple bombings (May 3, 2000 - 3 killed)
- **Metro Manila** megamall bombing (May 21, 2000 - 1 killed)
- **General Santos** multiple bombings (June 24, 2000 - 2 killed)
- **Metro Manila** Rizal Day multiple bombings (December 30, 2000 - 22 killed)
- **Basilan** beheadings near Lamitan town (August 2, 2001 - 11 killed)
- **Pagadian** bus terminal bombing (September 4, 2001 - 3 killed)
- **Zamboanga** Puericulture Center bombing (October 28, 2001 - 5 killed)
- **General Santos** bombing at Fitmart store (April 21, 2002 - 15 killed)
- **Zamboanga** karaoke bar bombing (October 2, 2002 - 4 killed)
- **Kidapawan** bus terminal bombing (October 10, 2002 - 8 killed)
- **Zamboanga** shopping mall bombings (October 17, 2002 - 6 killed)
- **Metro Manila** bus bombing (October 18, 2002 - 2 killed)
- **Zamboanga** Fort Pilar bombing (October 20, 2002 - 1 killed)
- **Maguindanao** bombing in Datu Piang town (December 24, 2002 - 16 killed)
- **Tacurong City** (December 31, 2002 - 9 killed)
- **Kidapawan** bombing (January 28, 2003 - 1 killed)
- **Kabacan** North Cotabato bombing (February 20, 2003 - 1 killed)
- **Cotabato City** Awang Airport bombing (February 20, 2003 - 1 killed)
- **Davao** international airport (March 4, 2003 - 22 killed)
- **Tagum** bombing (March 4, 2003 - 1 killed)
- **Davao** wharf (April 2, 2003 - 17 killed)
- **Koronadal** public market bombing (May 10, 2003 - 10 killed)
- **Koronadal** second public market bombing (July 10, 2003 - 3 killed)
- **Parang** stadium bombing (January 4, 2004 - 24 killed)
- **Superferry Bombing** outside Manila Bay (February 27, 2004 - 116 killed)
- **General Santos City** public market bombing (December 12, 2004 - 15 killed)
- **Valentine's Day Bombings** (February 14, 2005 - 8 killed)

- **Zamboanga** multiple bombings (August 10, 2005 - 30 injured)
- **Basilan** Lamitan Wharf bombing (August 28, 2005 - 4 killed)
- **Jolo** videoke bar bombing (February 18, 2006 - 1 killed)
- **Jolo** Sulu Cooperative Store bombing (March 27, 2006 - 5 killed)
- **Digos City** bus terminal bombing (March 29, 2006 - 18 injured)
- **Maguindanao** province bombing in Shariff Aguak (June 23, 2006 - 5 killed)
- **North Cotabato** province bombing in Makilala (October 10, 2006 - 6 killed)
- **General Santos City** public market bombing (January 10, 2007 - 6 killed)
- **Cotabato City** bombing (January 10, 2007 - 1 killed)
- **Jolo** beheadings of workers (April 20, 2007 - 7 killed)
- **Tacurong City** bombing (May 8, 2007 - 8 killed)
- **Cotabato City** bombing (May 18, 2007 - 3 killed)

Case Studies

Balobo Killings in Basilan Province, August 2, 2001

11 killed

On the night of August 2, 2001, ASG fighters attacked Balobo village, a predominately Christian village in Basilan, kidnapping 32 villagers, 11 of whom were ultimately executed. Human Rights Watch spoke with Balobo villagers Gliceria Ramos Ramirez, age 55, and her husband Cesar Ramirez Sr., age 62, who lost two sons in the attack, and with their nephew Jeffrey Ramos, age 27, who was among the villagers kidnapped.

Gliceria told Human Rights Watch that shortly after sundown a group of about 40 ASG fighters entered her family's compound, set just outside Lamitan town, among fields of coconut palms and rice. Gliceria said the men were dressed in military fatigues, but their appearance was "too rough" for soldiers. The men entered the Ramirez house and started shouting, ordering everyone outside. Gliceria managed to jump out a window, and lay in a field nearby for a few hours, before cautiously making her way towards Lamitan town.

Jeffrey Ramos says he was kidnapped along with his cousins Alvin, Alex, and Cesar Jr. (Gliceria and Cesar Sr.'s children), and other relatives and friends at the Ramirez compound. Fourteen in all were taken from the Ramirez compound.

Gliceria and Jeffrey said that ASG then moved through the village "harvesting civilians." Ultimately, 32 villagers were abducted. Jeffrey said the group of hostages was marched out of the town, with arms tied behind their backs, and he remembers the group getting smaller as it moved into the hills. Jeffrey described to Human Rights Watch how some hostages were led into the bushes to be killed; he could hear the hacking of bolo knives (machetes) as ASG fighters killed and decapitated victims. At some point, when he was separated from his guards by about five meters, Jeffrey broke away from the group on an impulse. Flashlights followed him as he

ducked and wove, expecting to be shot, but no shots were fired and he escaped. The scattered heads and bodies of 11 murdered villagers were recovered over the next seven days.

On August 5, 13 surviving villagers were released, including Cesar Jr., Glicería's grandchildren Maya and Joey Esteban, ages 9 and 11, and her son-in-law Joselito Esteban, age 28.

Cesar Jr., just eight years old at the time, remains traumatized by the events. He witnessed the beheading of his two elder brothers Alvin and Alex, along with the killings of relatives and neighbors. Now he rarely leaves the Ramirez family compound.

The full list of those killed in Balobo—all men—includes:

1. Elmer Reyes Natalaray, 26, farmer, married
2. Eutequiano Cristobal, 67, farmer, married
3. Ronald Fernando Rojas, 25, farmer
4. Feliciano Ramones, age unknown, farmer, married
5. Alvin Ramos Ramirez, 27, farmer
6. Alexander Ramirez, 26, farmer
7. Tereso Santos Ramirez, 41, farmer, married
8. Rodolfo Cristobal Francisco, 32, farmer
9. Edgardo Revillas, 43, farmer
10. Noel Ibanez, 30, farmer
11. Hassim Alih, age unknown, rickshaw driver

Numerous ASG members implicated in the attacks were arrested in Mindanao and Basilan in 2001 and 2002, but many later escaped from detention in a large-scale jail break on Basilan in 2003, including Mubin Ibba, alias Abu Black, the alleged ring-leader of the Balobo killings. In August 2004, 13 ASG members, some of them implicated in the killings, were convicted on separate kidnapping charges, and six other ASG members implicated in the Balobo case were convicted in June 2005 and

sentenced to death (their appeals are pending). Abu Black and other alleged perpetrators remain at large.

Davao International Airport Bombing, March 4, 2003

22 dead, 143 injured

The Davao airport bombing took place on the afternoon of March 4, 2003. A bomb was placed in a box or bag in a covered waiting shelter just outside the airport terminal. The bomb blew off the shelter's roof panels, and shrapnel from the bomb blast tore into those waiting in or near the shelter. Twenty-two people were killed and 143 injured.

Dr. Joselito Cembrano was one of the lead doctors at Davao hospital when the wounded began to arrive. He told Human Rights Watch that his staff struggled to cope with the incoming casualties, and had to convert hospital conference rooms into intensive care units.

“The flesh wounds we saw were similar to what one sees with military casualties,” he said. “The force of these bombs pushes objects off the ground, and objects are flying, with the shrapnel. The shrapnel shreds the flesh, the blast burns the skin.”

Dr. Cembrano said that the hospital was in a “severely stressful situation” because of a lack of resources. “Our blood bank—you know how they call it a blood *bank*? Well, we went bankrupt; we were out of blood. It was a run on the blood bank; they broke the bank.”

Human Rights Watch interviewed Mary Beth Elivera, a mother in her 20s, who was badly injured in the bombing. At the time of the attack, Mary Beth was waiting to pick up her younger sister, who was flying into Davao from Manila. She was chatting with other family members when the bomb went off, sending numerous pieces of shrapnel into her lower body.

“It was painful,” she told Human Rights Watch, “Very painful. I was screaming and screaming because of the pain. People were shouting and screaming.”

“My leg was already severed, about halfway up the lower part. They had to cut it at my knee because it was so badly damaged. . . . [Her other leg was significantly wounded as well.] It was very, very painful, and at the hospital they gave me an injection, to make me lose consciousness.”

Mary Beth was two months pregnant at the time of incident, and doctors were concerned that the fetus might be harmed by the stress of her injuries, as well as by the high levels of blood coagulates and pain medication that were administered to her. Mary Beth’s baby, Mary Grace, was born prematurely, several months later, but without significant problems, an event Mary Beth calls “a miracle.”

Human Rights Watch also spoke with Mercy Degala, age 39, who was at the airport with her young son Olmer, to pick up her husband Olie. Olie was in the bathroom when the bomb exploded. Mercy said the explosion burned the left side of her face and peppered her lower right with small metal shards, which left visible scars years later. Olmer was not wounded, and Mercy says she remembers him standing upright—in the middle of the wreckage, blood, and bodies—physically unscathed.

Human Rights Watch spoke with another survivor, Lolita Latonio, age 32, an accounting clerk who was at the airport to pick up a relative. When the blast hit, Lolita says she started running away. She recounted blood running down her face and her clothes shredded; her face, arms, and legs were all cut by flying debris. Her right eardrum was also severely damaged; years later she continues to hear a buzzing sound. Lolita also recalled seeing a foreign woman just before the attack. This was Barbara Stevens, just arrived on a flight from Manila, carrying her two children Nathan and Sarah, accompanied by her husband Mark. The Stevens family was met by American William Hyde and his wife Lyn, and the group had just exchanged greetings when the bomb detonated, wounding William Hyde and Barbara’s son Nathan, as well as the infant Sarah and Barbara. The four were taken to Davao hospital, and William Hyde died there later that day.

Also among those killed was Armand Picar, a former professional boxer. Picar won several titles in the Philippines in the 1990s and a title in the Orient Pacific Boxing

Federation, and fought in a 1994 World Boxing Association title fight in Las Vegas. He retired in 1997 and was working at Davao airport at the time of the attack.

Twenty-two people total were killed and almost 150 people were wounded by the bomb. Those killed were:

1. Dariusa Lafuente, 39, female, medical technician
2. Miguel Alcaria, 37, male, airport porter
3. Gregorio Pusta, 47, male, merchant sailor
4. Samuel Ramos, 44, male, taxi driver
5. Cecilia Aligato Tsuboshima, 25, female
6. Ailene Galo, 29, female, security guard
7. Cayatano Calesa Jr., 31, male, security guard
8. Armand Picar, 38, male, former professional boxer
9. Leonardo Laborte, 72, male
10. Julius Maunas, 21, male
11. Felimon Lantapon, 58, male
12. Celeste Aruta, 22, female
13. Mary Ann Carnecer, 21, female
14. Lowedie Marilao, 20, male
15. Chonadale Parilla, 18, female
16. Kenneth Rasay, 19, male
17. Montasser Sudang, 23, male
18. William Hyde, 59, male
19. Ronieta Odog, 34, female
20. Ledona Lumanda, 10, female (younger sister of Ronieta, above)
21. Adela Fugata, 64, female
22. Reina Fideliz Juan, 1, female (granddaughter of Adela, above).

Within days of the attack, an ASG commander claimed responsibility for the blast. While government authorities initially alleged that MILF members were involved, they later retracted the claim. As of June 2007, no one has been tried for the Davao airport attack.

Sasa Wharf Bombing, April 2, 2003

17 killed, 56 injured

Less than a month after the Davao airport bombing, a bombing hit the Davao Sasa Wharf, the main dock for Davao City, where cargo ships and passenger ferries land. In the late afternoon, a bomb detonated at a barbeque stand near the wharf entrance, killing 17 people and wounding almost 60. The food stand where the bomb detonated was operated by the Espera family. The bomb was apparently placed under a table at their stand.

Bryan Espera was working at the food stand on the day of the attack, with his grandmother Pablita Espera, his mother Aurelia Espera, his aunt Felomina and her son Bonnel, and a baby cousin, Jemarie Grace Espera. Aurelia's children Laiza, Mark and Gadilyn were also at the stand at the time of the attack. The attack killed five members of the Espera family: Pablita, Bonnel, the two young children Mark and Gadilyn, and the baby Jemarie Grace.

Bryan told Human Rights Watch that he saw two men just before the attack whom he believes were involved in the bombing. Bryan said that the two men approached the Espera's stand with a cardboard box, then sat down at a table and ordered chicken kebabs. The men ate the food and left, apparently leaving the box behind. Because of the rush of business, no one noticed the box, and it detonated a few minutes later.

Mark and Gadilyn's mother, Aurelia, saw her two children lying dead in front of the food stand after the attack. "I can never forget this incident," she told Human Rights Watch. "Even if I'm just doing chores, sweeping, I think of that incident . . . I just can't forget what happened to my children."

Besides Mark and Gadilyn, another cousin, Bonnel, was killed in the bombing. Archita Chatto, a woman in her 50's who worked with the Esperas, said Bonnel was standing near the bomb when it detonated. Bonnel's mother, Felomina, herself wounded, said that her son survived but was lying on the ground after the attack, screaming. Felomina says a taxi was flagged to take him and other victims to the hospital, but Bonnel did not survive the trip: he was declared dead on arrival at the

hospital. Human Rights Watch spoke with medical staff at Davao hospital, who described a terrible day similar to that of the day of the Davao airport bombing, the hospital filled with injured victims and relatives.

Human Rights Watch spoke with Lilia Tiongko, age 39, the owner of a food stand next to the Espera stand. Lilia was knocked down and severely wounded in the bombing, and said she remembered a “sad, chaotic scene”: bodies lying on the road, and people screaming. Lilia says she tried to crawl away from the blast site, and that she saw the headless body of one of the Espera children after the attack.

Human Rights Watch also spoke with Redo Batulan, a guard in his mid-30s, who described the scene after the bombing: “There was dirt coming down from the sky, like it was raining . . . There was a smoky, burning smell.” Batulan said he remembers dead bodies lying on the road after the attack, including one of the Espera children, decapitated, and two nuns, whose bodies he helped load into a taxi. “There were two nuns who were hit, they were covered in blood, one of them was dead already when I saw her; she was hit in the eye. The other one died later, in the hospital. . . . But it’s lucky the attack was here. If it had been at the other gate [where passengers were disembarking from the ferry] many more people would have been killed.”

Four soda salesmen were also killed in the attack: Ian Nicko Banal, age 26; Rene Oyami, age 22; Bryan Gesulga, age 27; and Noriel Juarez, age 24; along with several other passersby, including Jaylord Amarillento, a six-year-old boy.

The Sasa Wharf bomb may have been meant for a ferry that had just landed at the Davao port. Bryan Espera and other witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they saw the two men seen at the Espera food stand trying to gain entrance to the ferry dock about 10 minutes before the bomb exploded, but that they had apparently given up because they had to pass through a checkpoint.

Those killed in the attack were:

1. Pablita Espera, 57, female
2. Mark Gariel Espera, 8, male

3. Gadilyn Espera, 14, female
4. Bonnel Songaling Espera, 14, male
5. Jemarie Grace Espera, 2, female
6. Danilo Pandapatan, 43, male, policeman
7. Jaylord Amarillento, 6, male
8. Ian Nicko Banal, 26, male, salesman
9. Rene Oyami, 22, male, salesman
10. Bryan Gesulga, 27, male, salesman
11. Noriel Juarez, 24, male, salesman
12. Soledad Puno, 77, female, vendor
13. Christopher Morales, 28, male
14. June Rey Morales, 12, male
15. Rodito Asis, 32, male
16. Albert Gumata, 21, male
17. Sister Dulce De Guzman, 39, female, nun

Several alleged MILF and ASF members were arrested in April 2003 for involvement in the wharf bombing (as well as the Davao airport bombing). As of June 2007, none have been charged.

Koronadal City Market Bombing, May 10, 2003

At least 10 dead, 42 injured

A few minutes past 3 p.m. on May 10, 2003, a bomb detonated at the city market in Koronadal, a small city in southern Mindanao. The bomb, placed near a taxi stand, killed or wounded dozens of rickshaw drivers and their passengers. At least 10 people were reported killed. Narissa Gragasin, who was at the market and lost her mother in the attack, said the bombing “turned everything upside down.” Other witnesses said human flesh and limbs were scattered among the debris from the market and the tricycle stand.

Human Rights Watch interviewed Romeo Lumantas, one of the tricycle drivers at the scene of the attack:

I was sitting on my tricycle, waiting for customers, when the bomb went off, about 15 meters from me. I was thrown to the ground, and I was hit in the legs and in the right arm, with shrapnel. [Human Right Watch observed serious scarring and tissue loss in Lumantas' arm.] I had no idea what had happened. The next thing I know I was in the morgue, with dead people. They thought I was dead. I called out, "I'm alive! I'm alive!" Only then did they take me to a hospital.

Romeo believes he saw the bomber leave the bomb in front of the market about an hour before the attack—although at the time he did not realize the object was a bomb. He saw a truck driver stop and unload a large gas canister and place it where the bomb detonation took place. Police officials later determined that the bomb had, in fact, been hidden inside a metal gas canister.

The dead included:

1. Clarita Gragasin, 61, female
2. Dominador Acosta, 40s, male
3. Milagros Garcia (unknown age)
4. Romy Cristobal, 50s, male
5. Sergio Parba (unknown age) male
6. Alberto Dela Serna (unknown age) male
7. Ronnie Bergosa (unknown age) male
8. Rene Boy Ellama (unknown age) male
9. Emmanuel Locsin (unknown age) male
10. Luz Lazara (unknown age) male

Exactly two months later, on July 10, 2003, another bomb detonated at the same market in Koronadal, killing three people and wounding another 25.

The authorities later arrested several persons in connection with the Koronadal attacks, including suspected JI members from Indonesia, but as of June 2007 none had been charged.

Superferry Bombing, February 27, 2004

116 killed

At around half past midnight on February 27, 2004, just off El Fraile island, outside of Manila harbor, a bomb detonated on the *Superferry 14*, a passenger ferry bound from Manila to the southern Philippines. The blast and a subsequent fire killed at least 116 people, including six children less than five years old, and nine children between six and 16 years of age. At least 12 families lost multiple members, and at least 10 married couples died together.

In one case, three generations in a family died together, ranging from a 76-year-old grandfather to his three-year-old granddaughter.

Six of the children killed in the blast were students on a championship team sent by schools in northern Mindanao to compete in a journalism contest in Manila. They included Jessa Aventurado, age 12, Marion Baclayon, age 12, Alex Briones, age 12, Riza Blanca Ompoc, age 12, Clynn Paculba, age 16, and Montague Talasan, age 16.

Two of the students' teachers also were killed: Nancy Mabalos and Judy Baclayon, the mother of the student Marion Baclayon.

Lucille Tesoro, a school official who accompanied the students and survived the bombing, told Human Rights Watch that at the time the bomb went off she was getting ready to go to bed. "Our door was blasted off [its hinges] and I was thrown onto the ground. I didn't know what was going on. It was a commotion. I was on the ground looking for my clothes, glass lying everywhere; I cut my arms and legs. . . . Then we left the cabin and made our way down to another deck. . . . I had to jump off one deck onto another. . . . I was shouting and screaming."

Human Rights Watch spoke to several relatives of victims, who described hearing about the bombing, and about the pain of losing their family members. Ritzelle Paculba, who lost her daughter Clynn in the bombing, told Human Rights Watch: "She wanted to be a lawyer or a journalist. . . . My husband is hurting now, he struggled a lot when she died."

Michael Asombrado, who lost both of his parents, told Human Rights Watch: “They were good parents, protective. . . . They taught us to be independent. . . . Abu Sayyaf better prepare a good explanation for what they did. Because they took good people; they killed good people. Not just my parents, but other people’s parents. They have to explain this.”

Police allege that Redondo Cain Dellosa, an RSM member, was among the primary perpetrators of the bombing; he held a ticket on the ferry for bunk 51B, where the bomb was placed, and disembarked before the ship’s departure from Manila. He was arrested four weeks after the attack, but has only been charged in relation to a separate kidnapping case. As of June 2007, he had not been charged in connection with the Superferry attack.

Philippine authorities believe Khadafi Janjalani and Abu Solaiman, senior ASG leaders killed in September 2006 and January 2007, respectively, were the masterminds behind the attack.

Bombing at General Santos Market, December 12, 2004

15 dead, 69 injured

At around 4 p.m. on December 12, 2004, a bomb detonated in the main public market in General Santos City in Mindanao. The bomb, placed near some food stalls where meat and sausages were sold, killed at least 15 people and injured over 60 others.

Among those killed were Ernesto Plasabas, who owned a meat store at the market, and his son Jemuel Plasabas, who was working with him at the time of the blast. Ernesto’s wife Marina Plasabas was also severely wounded in the attack. Marina told Human Rights Watch that the bomb detonated only a few meters from the Plasabas stand at the market: “The market went dark, and was filled with smoke,” she said. “I couldn’t see or stand up.” Marina said her husband Ernesto was killed instantly by a piece of debris or shrapnel that hit him in the back of the head, and that her son Jemuel was wounded and died after being taken to a hospital. Her cousin Jerson, a three-year-old boy, was killed instantly. Marina herself lost a

significant amount of tissue in her right arm and was wounded in the chest. She was hospitalized for a week.

Rogelio Sarno, a relative of Marina's, was blinded in one eye, and his daughter, Emily, was hit by nails in the arm and back. Marina said that over 80 people were wounded, an estimate which Human Rights Watch found credible. (Local authorities compiled a list of 69 wounded, but it was missing several victims we spoke to at the scene.)

Joemar Plasabas—one of Ernesto's other sons and Jemuel's brother—told Human Rights Watch that he and his family suffered heavily from their loss. He said his father was "strict, but in the right way," that "he liked to joke around," and that Jemuel was "jolly, a joker, like his father," a star volleyball player. Marina said Ernesto as a "supportive and respectful husband." She says he had wanted to buy a vehicle so the family could cut costs by transporting their own livestock. Since the attack, however, business at the market has been poor. Joemar and Marina said family life was difficult after Ernesto and Jemuel were killed, and that the family was struggling financially. Other survivors at the market confirmed that the attack had significantly slowed business at the market, and that incomes were sharply down.

Besides the Plasabas family, another 12 people were killed in the attack, including Rokmah Adam, age 35 and the mother of four young children, who was shopping at the market when the blast occurred.

The following is a full list of those killed in the General Santos market attack:

1. Jennymae Auditor Bantaculao, 8, female
2. Jerson Bonggolto Plomeda, 3, male
3. Marites Lacorte Auditor, 18, female
4. Eduardo Paderes Binas, 46, male
5. Jocelyn Bustamente Binas, 46, female
6. Teresita Morales Bustamente, 72, female
7. Rene Rosillo Causing, 24, male
8. Tomasa Almazan Villaver, 77, male
9. Maria Divina Calixihan Panaligan, 52, female
10. Rodrigo Uban Sabelita, 54, male

11. Rokmah Manimbat Adam, 35, female
12. Elizabeth Dahan Lamban, 42, female
13. Precious Jane Galo, 17, female
14. Ernesto Bernal Plasabas, 54, male
15. Jemuel Gomez Plasabas, 17, male

Several persons were arrested in connection with the General Santos market bombing, including Indonesian suspected JI members and a former member of MILF, but as of June 2007, none had been tried.

Valentine's Day Attacks, February 14, 2005

8 dead, 147 wounded

On February 14, 2005, between 6:00 and 8:30 p.m., three separate bombs were detonated across the Philippines, one on a bus in Metro Manila, another in General Santos City, and another in Davao City. Four people were killed in Manila, three in General Santos, and one in Davao; over 100 people were wounded. Human Rights Watch interviewed witnesses to and survivors of all three attacks.

Manila: Wilson Balceta, age 36, was working as a traffic aide at the site, in the Makati area of Manila. Balceta told Human Rights Watch he was about 10 to 15 meters from the bus, with his back to it, when the bomb detonated. He was hit by glass shards from the bus windows, and the blast dislocated his elbow and burned both arms. Injuries to his right arm, now withered, were especially severe. Balceta received skin grafts, and says his left hand is still very weak and that cold or wet weather causes extreme discomfort.

Balceta said he saw another victim, a saleswoman from a nearby store, in her mid-to-late 20s, who had major burns from head to toe. Balceta said her clothes had been completely burned off and her skin blackened. "Sir, help me, help me," she repeated, as she was loaded aboard a vehicle with Balceta to go to the hospital.

Another victim of the blast, Vivian Eugenio, a mother of three, was blinded. With bandages around her face and eyes, lying in her hospital bed in Manila, she told

journalists that she was in the front seat of the bus when the bomb exploded, and that the windshield had shattered and sent shards of glass into her eyes and face.

Davao: Skippy Lumawag, a photojournalist, took pictures of the bombing site; he told Human Rights Watch he saw the body of a 12-year-old boy killed in the attack. “The police thought there might be a second attack, so we were forced back, as the bomb squad arrived.”

General Santos: Mark Gil Bigbig, age 31, a medical nursing student and one of the victims of the bombing in General Santos City, told Human Rights Watch he had just finished one of his exams, and was having a snack at a local Jollibee’s fast food outlet, when a bomb went off outside. “We were surprised . . . people were shouting, ‘It’s a bomb!’ I looked down, and already I could see my blood splashing below me, and I dropped to the ground.” Bigbig had been hit by shrapnel and glass from the blast. “I was in shock, I couldn’t feel the pain [at first] . . . My classmates panicked, but some of the Jollibee crew helped me.” Bigbig suffered major trauma to his legs, and today cannot walk without braces and crutches, over two years after the attack.

Those killed in the attacks included:

- Jose Paulong, 22, male
- Rosario Mercado, 55, female
- Bernardo Rosarito, 24, male
- Ronnie Soriano, 27, male
- Three unnamed civilians in General Santos
- Unnamed 12-year-old boy in Davao

Members of RSM and ASG claimed responsibility for the attacks, saying the attacks were a “gift” to the government.

In the following months, three defendants affiliated with RSM and ASG were arrested and then convicted in relation to the bombing in Manila: Angelo Trinidad (RSM), Gamal Baharan (ASG), and Rahmat Abdulrahim (JI, an Indonesian national). The three were sentenced to death, but their appeals were pending at this writing. (A fourth defendant, Gappal Asali, an ASG recruit, made a plea agreement to be a

witness against the others.) This is one of the few recent cases in which bombing suspects have been convicted; however, no higher-level perpetrators or senior ASG members have been prosecuted in this case.

Bigbig, the man injured in General Santos, condemned the perpetrators of the Valentine's Day bombings: "Many civilian lives were ruined because of what they did. They destroyed a lot of good lives."

Bombing at Sulu Cooperative Store, March 27, 2006

5 dead, over 40 injured

A little after 1 p.m. on March 27, 2006, a bomb detonated in the front of the Sulu Cooperative Store, a grocery and supplies store on the island of Jolo. The bomb killed at least five people and wounded dozens more.

Oscar Sontellinosa, Jr., a store employee, was at work at the store at the time of the attack, weighing out sugar into bags. Oscar told Human Rights Watch that store staff told him on the same morning that threats had been made against the store, and employees had a meeting about the threats shortly before the bomb detonated.

Oscar was near the front of the store only a few meters from the bomb when it detonated. He was hit by debris, flying concrete, shrapnel, and the force and heat of the blast. He suffered serious burns and lacerations, and said his face was swollen, "really bad, big and black," and that he could see the bone in his ring finger. He remembers seeing one of his colleagues, Marivic, lying on the ground nearby with a severe head wound, gasping for breath, legs spread and apparently broken, and her bones clearly visible. Another colleague, Jesus, was dead at the scene; Oscar said his abdomen was "blown out."

Thelma Kasim, a 27-year-old mother, was also in the store, along with her daughter Nurfaisa. Thelma, who was three months pregnant at the time, told journalists that the bomb blast shredded her clothing, threw her into the air, and left her lying in the rubble, in her underwear. She suffered burns on her face, her arms and the trunk of her body, and her daughter Nurfaisa was blinded by fragments of flying concrete.

Those killed in the bombing included:

Marivic Manuel, 40, male, store employee
Jesus Cabrera, (age unknown), male, store employee
Nasser Hadjirul, (age unknown), male
Titing Napesa (age unknown)
Masser Saibuddin, (age unknown), male, teacher
Al Kissae (age unknown), male
Mocarsa Abdurahim, 18, male
Sahipa, 2, female
Unidentified woman (age unknown)

Decapitation of Workers in Jolo, April 20, 2007

7 dead

On April 16, 2007, on Jolo, ASG members kidnapped seven workers in two separate incidents on a road outside of Parang. ASG leader Albader Parad made a public ransom demand of one million pesos, approximately US \$21,500, for the workers' return. It is not known whether any negotiations were carried out. On April 20, ASG decapitated the seven, dumping six of the bodies near Parang, and leaving the seven heads in sacks at two nearby military posts.

The seven men killed were:

1. Roger Francisco
2. Nonoy Ampoy
3. Louie Teodoro
4. Toto Nillas
5. Dennis Delos Reyes
6. Wilmer Santos
7. Crisanto Petrocenio

The Perpetrators

Members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM) have claimed responsibility for numerous attacks on civilians in the southern Philippines, and are implicated in many others.

Both ASG and RSM are violent Islamist groups that emerged in the 1990s. ASG is primarily comprised of commanders and fighters who split off from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), ethnic Moro Muslim insurgent groups with a decades-long history of fighting for independence from the Philippine government. RSM emerged independently but has forged strong ties with ASG; its members are made up primarily of Christian converts to Islam. (RSM members call themselves “reverts,” on the grounds that the Philippines was predominately Muslim before the Spanish conquest of the sixteenth century; RSM members consider that they have “reverted” back to the Islamic faith.) Both groups claim to represent the approximately 4.5 million Muslims in the Philippines, the majority of whom live in southern Mindanao, the Sulu archipelago, Palawan, Basilan, and neighboring islands.

Both ASG and RSM are small in number, consisting of at most several hundred active militants. By most accounts, ASG and RSM forces are now largely confined to the island of Jolo, although they still move in other areas of the Sulu islands and the Zamboanga peninsula of Mindanao.

Both ASG and RSM are linked to Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the Indonesian militant Islamist group responsible for the 2002 Bali bombings and other attacks on civilians within Indonesia. Members of JI have provided training for ASG and RSM members over the last five years, and a handful of JI members continue to take sanctuary and actively coordinate with remaining ASG and RSM forces in the southern Philippines. Two JI leaders implicated in the Bali bombings—Dulmatin and Umar Patek—traveled to the Philippines in 2003 and continue to work among ASG forces.

The question of these groups' links to established Muslim separatist groups is more complex. Philippine government officials allege that elements of the MILF or MNLF have, in recent years, provided sanctuary or assistance for ASG, RSM, and JI members. Abu Sayyaf and the Rajah Solaiman Movement have stated their support for MILF and MNLF, although the two Moro groups do not publicly reciprocate this support.

MILF officials appear to have maintained links with JI and ASG operatives in the Philippines in the 1990s and as late as 2003. Since then, however, MILF and MNLF leaders appear to have largely cut ties with JI, denounced violence against civilians (and specifically ASG and RSM attacks), and provided active assistance to Philippine military forces in conducting operations against all three groups. It remains likely, however, that "rogue" MILF and MNLF commanders, and so-called "lost commands," have continued to provide sanctuary and assistance to ASG, RSM, and JI members at various times in the last several years. Both Philippine government and MILF officials have suggested particular commanders who appear to have provided support for extremists in recent years, such as Amelil Umbra (aka Commander Kato), a MILF commander, and Habier Malik, a MNLF commander. It is not entirely clear whether the MILF or MNLF have the capacity to control the actions of these commanders.

MILF and MNLF officials have repeatedly emphasized that their political goals—securing an autonomous Muslim region in Sulu and Mindanao—differ significantly from the extremist aims of ASG, RSM, and JI. Abu Sayyaf, rather than seeking autonomy or independence, aims to push Filipino Christians out of Mindanao and the Sulu islands entirely, while RSM hopes to "restore" Islamic rule over the whole of the Philippines. Both groups voice support for the goals of JI and like-minded groups, which seek to weaken the governments of Indonesia, the Philippines, and other Asian countries and—unrealistic as this might seem—work to establish a pan-Asian Islamic caliphate, or a pan-Asian component of a worldwide Islamic caliphate. ASG and RSM have also made statements indicating agreement with the aims of other violent Islamist groups outside of Asia, including the aims and pronouncements of Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Yet ASG and RSM's aims are not solely ideological or political. These groups have also been involved in numerous criminal extortion and kidnapping activities, and leaders have made large amounts of money on extortion payments and ransoms.

In the last two years, both groups have suffered military setbacks. With US assistance, Philippine military and police forces have captured or killed several of ASG and RSM's top leaders, and pushed their activities out of Mindanao and Basilan. In October 2005, RSM founder Ahmed Santos was arrested, and in September 2006, top ASG leader Khadafi Janjalani was killed during military operations on Jolo island. Another senior ASG commander, Abu Solaiman, was killed in January 2007.

Yet both groups have continued their violent activities, carrying out numerous illegal bombings and killings in 2006 and 2007. ASG commander Albader Parad appears to have taken over major ASG operations in Jolo; other remaining ASG leaders include Radulan Sahiron, Isnilon Hapilon, and Abu Pula. As for RSM, the group's main leader, Sheikh Omar Lavilla, remains at large, as well as Santos' reputed successor, named Khalil Pareja. Since April 2007, there has been renewed fighting between Philippine military forces and ASG/MNLF forces in Jolo. As of May 2007, approximately 60,000 people were displaced around Jolo because of the hostilities.

The impact of this fighting on ongoing peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF is unclear. Even as joint U.S.-Philippine military forces track down fighters from ASG, RSM, and JI, the Philippine government, with Malaysia as a mediator, continues negotiating with MILF leaders for a peace agreement. The talks aim to harmonize MILF's demands with the structure of the existing autonomous region in western Mindanao, and to create a new unified autonomous region in the southern Philippines. While the established MILF leadership is devoted to pursuing such a peace agreement, continued hostilities in Jolo may drive newer, extremist MILF elements to abandon the peace process and join ranks with ASG/RSM/JI and rogue MNLF forces.

Justice Stalled

Prosecutions of those responsible for attacks on civilians in the southern Philippines have proceeded slowly over the last seven years. Although numerous suspects in bombing attacks have been arrested, very few have been successfully brought to trial. Indeed, prosecutions have been delayed in some cases for over four years.

The following detainees are among the many who are still awaiting trial:

- Ahmed Santos, head of the Rajah Solaiman Movement, was arrested in Zamboanga City in October 2005. Santos is implicated in numerous bombings including the Superferry attack, the Valentine's Day attacks, and the February 20, 2003 bombing of Awang airport near Cotabato City. He was charged with "rebellion" in November 2005, along with seven associates who were captured with him, but as of June 2007 there had been no further progress on his case.
- Redondo Cain Delloso, a RSM member with alleged ties to ASG and JI, was arrested in March 2004 in connection with the Superferry attack. Authorities allege that Delloso bought a ticket for Bunk 51B on the Superferry, where the bomb that detonated was placed, and that he disembarked before departure. As of June 2007, Delloso has only been charged in relation to an unconnected kidnapping case, not in relation to the Superferry attack.
- Ahmad Faisal bin Imam Sarijan, aka Zulkifli, was allegedly head of JI operations in Mindanao from 2000 to 2003, and is implicated in several bomb attacks in Mindanao from early 2002, including the Fitmart and Davao City blasts. Zulkifli was captured by Malaysian authorities in September 2003 and held incommunicado in Malaysia for almost two years. He was turned over to Philippine police in July 2005 and charged in the February 2003 bombing at Awang airport near Cotabato City, and the May 10, 2003 Koronadal bombing. A preliminary hearing was held in Koronadal City in the latter case in January 2006, but there had been no further progress in his case.

as of June 2007. A close associate, Ahmad Saifullah Ibrahim, aka Hudzaifah, was arrested at the same time, but it is unclear whether he is in Malaysian or Philippine custody.

- Taufiq Rifqi, a close JI associate of Zulkifli's, was arrested in Cotabato City in October 2003. Philippine authorities state that Rifqi confessed to involvement in bombings in Tacurong (March 2003), Kidapawan (January 2003), Parang (April 2003), and in several attacks in Koronadal (February, March, and May 2003). Rifqi was indicted, and is currently held in Koronadal, but as of June 2007 no progress had been made in his prosecution.
- Elmer Abram (also known as Elmer Emran), a suspected member of JI, was allegedly involved in two bombings in General Santos City: the 2004 public market and 2005 General Santos Valentine's Day attacks. He was arrested by Indonesian police in late September or early October 2006; it was not known as of June 2007 whether he had been extradited to the Philippines. He was previously arrested in General Santos City in June 2005; it is unclear how he had come to be at large in late 2006.
- Jordan Abdullah and Jaybe Ofrasio are both linked to JI. They are alleged to have handled financing and false papers for Zulkifli to travel to Malaysia under the name Donny Ofrasio. Jaybe Ofrasio was arrested in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in February 2004, and Abdullah was captured in the Philippines in April 2004. As of June 2007, the Philippine government could not update Human Rights Watch as to charges against Abdullah. Ofrasio, for his part, was arraigned in Belfast in October 2006 on charges of supplying funding and assistance for acts of terrorism. (It is unclear whether he will face charges in the Philippines.)

The cost of the delays in these prosecutions has been high. The justice system has not only failed the civilian victims of bombing attacks; the lack of successful prosecutions has caused conspiracy theories about the attacks to flourish. Throughout the Philippines, and especially in Mindanao and the Sulu islands, leaders from the Moro community, civil society, and opposition political movements

suggested to Human Rights Watch that the Philippine government itself was responsible for the bombing attacks of recent years. Proponents of these claims argued that the government had various reasons to carry out such attacks: to derail Moro independence efforts, to justify harsh crackdowns on political opponents, or to attract US military assistance.

Recommendations

To the Philippine government:

- Bring to justice persons responsible for attacks on civilians. Persons arrested for involvement in attacks on civilians should be promptly charged and fairly tried in accordance with international due process standards.

To MILF and MNLF leaders, and other Moro religious and civil society leaders in the southern Philippines:

- Continue to publicly denounce attacks on civilians by non-state armed groups, including the Abu Sayyaf Group, Jemaah Islamiyah, and affiliated groups, and continue to cooperate with Philippine government efforts to bring to justice those responsible for attacks.
- Ensure that MILF and MNLF commanders and officials are not providing assistance or sanctuary to groups or persons engaged in attacks on civilians.

To the leaders of the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Rajah Solaiman Movement, and Jemaah Islamiyah:

- Cease all intentional attacks on civilians and civilian property. Commanders and leaders of ASG, RSM, and JI should take all necessary steps to ensure that their group members never target civilians or civilian property for attack.

To the U.S. government and other countries involved in the Philippines:

- Provide assistance as requested to help ensure that agreements between the Philippine government and MILF and MNLF are enduring and promote respect for human rights, including the protection of the civilian population.