

## **Media Advisory**

*22 September 2000*

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### **Symposium -- Conflict in the Philippines**

*6-8pm, Tuesday 26 September 2000*

*Room B102, Brunei Gallery*

*School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)*

*1 Thornhaugh Street*

*Russell Square, London WC1 HOXG*

*As a direct result of the military offensive against the armed separatist group, the Abu Sayyaf in the southern Philippines, thousands of civilians have been forced to flee their homes on the island of Jolo. This adds to the hundreds of thousands of people already displaced in Mindanao.*

*There are reports that the armed forces have denied Jolo based medical and relief workers access to areas where innocent civilians, including children, are reported to have been killed or injured. A news blackout imposed by the government has made it impossible to confirm the numbers of civilian casualties.*

*Since April, there has been a serious escalation of armed conflict and peace talks between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have been abandoned, threatening to propel the region back into all out war.*

*The recent hostage crisis in the southern Philippines caught the world's attention because it involved the kidnapping of foreigners. Filipino citizens however have been suffering serious human rights abuses for decades.*

*Father Eliseo R Mercado, President of Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, and Chair of the Independent Fact-Finding Committee monitoring compliance with local ceasefire agreements, will be visiting the UK from the Philippines. He will provide an overview of the conflict at a Symposium on September 26.*

*Other speakers include; a representative from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on UK policy (the UK is biggest overseas investor in the Philippines), Tim Parritt from Amnesty International on human rights concerns and Steve Alston from Catholic Fund for Overseas Development (CAFOD).*

*Father Mercado will be available for interview. For more information please phone 0771 585 9483.*

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