



**Question and Answer with 2008 Child Rights Award winner:
Jay Taruc, documentary producer with GMA Network, Inc**

This year's winning documentary centres on a 14-year-old girl, who acts as both mother and father to her five younger siblings, and is the family breadwinner. The camera follows her and other very young porters in the village lugging the weight of the huge logs under heavy downpours from the mountains where illegal loggers slash trees. The children trek along muddy paths up to four-hours a day to the valley where buyers await to hand over a few coins for their endeavours.

Jay Taruc is a documentary producer with GMA Network Inc from the Philippines. This programme was broadcast as part of their I-Witness series.

What inspired you to make this documentary?

The inspiration for this documentary came from our drive to put an end to this unacceptable crime against our children. In 1998, we did a story on a group of minors who worked in a vinegar factory in a province North of Manila. They were made to live in subhuman conditions and were exposed to toxic chemicals used in making vinegar. We chanced upon these minors in the factory during a raid conducted by the authorities on reports of child abuse and labour malpractice. I will never forget the expressions on their faces while pleading for help from us.

Our documentary which documents and exposes another form of child labour in the mountainous region of Agusan del Sur in the Southern portion of the Philippines, brings back the memories of the minors who were "employed" from that factory — only under a different setting and circumstances.

The issue of child labour has been exposed and tackled many times in the media. But we want to focus more on the countryside, where many cases of abuse are left unnoticed or unheard of.

How did you develop the ideas?

The more information we get surrounding the children's plight, ideas on how to approach the documentary progressed. We carefully studied the elements we needed to be able to present the story in the most comprehensive and balanced way we could think of. We had to learn more, we had to experience what was going on. The most crucial element of the documentary would be the immersion element. When we followed the children to 'work' in the mountains, we were able to experience one of the worst cases of child labour firsthand.

How did you find the character whose story you tell?

Choosing the people to interview for the documentary is one of the most important parts of the process and it is not an easy task. We had to choose the resource person or case study that would best represent the plight of the children. And that he or she could articulate what was happening or what were they going through. Or at the very least, willing enough to talk to us or entertain our queries. The locals were speaking a different dialect, so, the language barrier increased the difficulty in explaining to them our mission and purpose why we were there and what we aim to achieve.

What are your impressions when filming and producing the documentary?

In our documentary, the children were put into a lot of stress and abuse. They walk several kilometres of mud trail to the mountains to become willing preys to illegal loggers. They are made to carry lumber down from the mountains to the customers waiting for their orders in exchange for a measly fee of eight pesos or less than one US dollar for each lumber they bring. What is appalling is the fact that some of the parents allow and encourage their own kids to perform this. Lack of education and information may be the most obvious reason behind this but it could be more than that. Based from what we know and have observed, some children belong to dysfunctional families that could clearly complicate their situation.

What has been the reaction from audiences after watching the film? In light of a gloomy global economic future, how do you think this theme of economic hardships being shouldered by children will resonate?

We received several feedbacks through emails after the airing of the documentary from both our local viewers and international audience as well. Most of the reaction was that they want to extend help to the children. Some of them said the plight of the children brought tears to their eyes. It was unsettling and it was not acceptable.

With the global financial crisis serving as a backdrop to yet, another child labour story as this one, we only hope that through this documentary, we were able to contribute to the growing awareness of how vicious this crime against our children is.

Are you working on another documentary project now? What are your plans for the future?

We are currently working on a documentary and will continue to focus on stories, which concerns the plight of the children.