

## 2008 William Wilberforce Award Winner

### Amihan Abueva | Philippines

Amihan Abueva's laugh can draw return laughter from just about anyone – even children who have survived sex trafficking and government ministers she is convincing to take action. Amihan has more than 20 years experience making survivors smile, helping communities become vigilant, and demanding action from governments around the globe to stop children from being sexually exploited.



#### William Wilberforce Award

is given to an individual who has moved a major institution, government, business or large groups of people to significant action to fight slavery. Named after the politician who successfully fought for three decades to abolish slavery in the British Empire.



#### Wherever She is Needed

Amihan lives out of a suitcase as she creates networks of unlikely partners in the battle against child sex trafficking. She is 'at home' in any setting, one day spending time in a trafficking-ridden shantytown, and the next day bringing real-world concerns to a national legislature. Throughout her career she has taken care to ground policy changes in the reality of people most affected by slavery and trafficking. Consistently over decades, Amihan has done whatever it takes to protect children from this abuse. Even when it was taboo to do so.



#### Breaking Taboos

She and her colleagues were frustrated that throughout the world, few people would even acknowledge that child prostitution was happening in their communities. It was seen as an embarrassment, something to ignore. Amihan knew that hundreds of thousands of children around the world were trapped, used as sex slaves, prevented from seeking help and left wondering whether they would ever be free. No one was talking about it.

#### Transformative Leadership

So Amihan began talking about it. Loudly. In 1991, she co-founded **ECPAT International** (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) to end sexual exploitation of children. Now ECPAT has a presence in more than 70 countries. The global organization has been responsible for getting a number of national laws passed to punish perpetrators and protect survivors. They have collaborated with the global tourism industry to prevent child sex tourism. By breaking the silence surrounding the issue of child sexual exploitation, they have unleashed the power of people around the globe who have been inspired to care, and to stand up for children being abused.

## **Just the Beginning**

In some ways, for Amihan, co-founding ECPAT International was just the warm-up. She is currently Chairperson of ECPAT International, co-founder and President of ECPAT Philippines, and Regional Coordinator of Asia Against Child Trafficking (Asia ACTs) where she coordinates the anti-trafficking initiatives of 8 governments. She was also appointed the Philippines national children's NGO representative to the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking.

When Amihan is not serving as a resource for the global anti-slavery movement, she spends time where she started in the movement – with survivors. They do crafts and they laugh.