



Voice Of The Free

Skoll Awardee Profile

## Organization Overview

### Key Info

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<b>Social Entrepreneur</b>	Ma. Cecilia Flores-Oebanda
<b>Year Awarded</b>	2008
<b>Issue Area Addressed</b>	Peace and Human Rights
<b>Sub Issue Area Addressed</b>	Human Rights
<b>Countries Served</b>	Philippines
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.voiceofthefree.org.ph/">http://www.voiceofthefree.org.ph/</a>
<b>Twitter handle</b>	VoiceOfFreeph
<b>Facebook</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/voiceofthefreeph">https://www.facebook.com/voiceofthefreeph</a>
<b>Youtube</b>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/TheVisayanforum">https://www.youtube.com/user/TheVisayanforum</a>

### About the Organization

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Established in 1991, the Voice Of The Free (formerly known as Visayan Forum Foundation)

(VF) is a non-governmental organization in the Philippines known for innovations in addressing modern-day slavery, especially human trafficking and the exploitation of domestic workers.

VF also provides residential care and community-based programs and services for women and children who have been trafficked. They strategically locate shelters along known trafficking routes, and partner with private sector and transport authorities to guard ports and airports.

VF aims to disrupt the viability of the trafficking business through effective interception, and it also aims to empower families and young people to guard themselves against new methods of recruitment.

They work to inspire leaders to innovate solutions that will put an end to modern slavery. Voice Of The Free advocates for policy reforms and effective implementation, leading towards lasting and durable solutions.

They also build strong social movements that share resources and expertise for the protection of victims, prevention of exploitation, and prosecution of perpetrators. Through partnerships, Visayan promotes solutions that can break the vicious cycle of exploitation and vulnerability.

## Impact

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- VF anti-trafficking strategies are now in force at eight major seaports and three airports, in partnership with 52 inter-island shippers, two airlines, and 2,000 bus companies.
- VF played a critical role in development and passage in 2013 of landmark national legislation protecting the rights of domestic workers, and of the Philippines' ratification of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 189, took effect globally in 2012.
- Since inception, VF and its partners, including law enforcement agencies and service providers, have helped some 70,000 victims and potential victims of trafficking.
- The 2013 CNN documentary "The Fighters" chronicling VF and its engagement of Manny Pacquiao in the fight against modern-day slavery launched an iFight campaign, giving new impetus to the cause.

## Path to Scale

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### Catalyze Involvement of Key Actors

VF seeks to embed its approach in the work of law enforcement, humanitarian, and service agencies.

## Social Entrepreneur

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Born into poverty in the Visayas region of the Philippines, Cecilia Flores-Oebanda was a child laborer, selling fish and scavenging garbage to help her family survive. She joined the fight against the Marcos dictatorship and was imprisoned with her husband for four years. When democracy was finally achieved, and Cecilia and her family were free, she found a new calling: addressing the forces that deprive people of their freedom to live a decent life. Living in Manila in the early 1990s, she observed how migrants were marginalized and joined the founders of the Voice Of The Free (formerly known as Visayan Forum) (VF) to improve their plight. Her steady leadership enabled VF to increase its impact locally and internationally, engaging and inspiring partnership in the struggle against human trafficking. VF's innovation was focusing on transport—crucial because it is the last point of visibility for victims and traffickers. VF catalyzed partnerships and pooling of resources by critical actors (some of whom, by inattention or corruption, were contributing to the problem). Task forces were mobilized to protect victims; private companies (including shippers, crews and passengers) were trained to spot and intervene in situations suggesting trafficking; and organizations engaged in coordinated efforts to rescue victims and support them to be safe and build a better life. At the time of the Award, VF had served 18,590 victims and potential victims and filed 35 legal cases on behalf of 116 victim complainants.

## **Ambition for Change**

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Targeted and wide-scale actions by the most critical actors—government agencies, source communities and transportation companies—address the factors that enable human trafficking, and drive traffickers out of the business. Strategies proved effective in the Philippines are replicated globally.