Waging Peace in the Philippines: Strengthening Peace Movements and Instituting the politics of a Just Peace

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Preface

Professor Ed Garcia, International Alert, January 2006

WAGING PEACE 2005 brought together peace advocates from different parts of the country engaged in the major peace processes involving the National Democratic Front, (NDF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and the forces in the Cordilleras. What made the 2005 edition significant and rewarding was the considered focus on the following:

1. Assessing the Processes of the Past: Participants reflected on the experiences of previous efforts to bring about peace, analyzed the processes, highlighting their shortcomings and identifying opportunities. In the particular case of Mindanao, the experience in the decade since the 1996 peace agreement shed light on what lessons could be learned to ensure that a forthcoming accord with the MILF achieved its hoped-for outcomes. Analysts stressed the importance of full implementation with adequate resources, the right leadership and political will to tackle the underlying factors which gave rise to the protracted conflict in the south.

2. Focusing on the Longer View: What distinguished this edition of what has become an annual review of peace strategies by peace advocates was the "longer view perspective". Rather than the traditional focus on the negotiations, the participants devoted their energies largely on the longer-term issues that in the end will ensure the sustainability of the processes in place — though negotiations were still viewed as critical to transform the deteriorating human rights situation on the ground.

3. Re-examining the Nature of Peace Constituencies and Coalitions: Participants expressed

an abiding belief that only by strengthening the capacity of peace constituencies and coalitions can the pressure for peace provide the leverage it must have to influence policy. At the same time, they acknowledged that the "usual suspects" (namely the veterans of past peace efforts) must be joined by a new generation of peace advocates to ensure that the movement remains vigorous and creative. This new cast of characters in the peace process could provide new blood and a renewed momentum now needed to advance processes that seem either hesitant or stalled.

4. Refocusing on the Local Such as Communities, Local Authorities, and People-Focused Efforts: Major achievements have largely taken place at local levels involving local communities, local authorities and experiences that have been conceived by and propelled by people in diverse provincial and regional localities. However, to gain traction there needs to be support and solidarity, and the creation of viable networks.

5. Returning to the Basics, and the Underlying Factors of the Conflict: In the end, unless the basics are in place (sound socio-economic, electoral-political reforms) there can be no significant movement forward that will arrest the deep downturn that has taken place. Even the attempts at constitutional reform currently in motion seems meaningless if not tied in to the political realities and the peace process which have largely been ignored in the deliberations of the consultative commission and the drafts now submitted to congress. It is an opportunity squandered when a mechanism for possible change is derailed for political interests other than the long-term objectives of harnessing resources for sustained economic development, good governance, reforms in basic services and in the armed forces, that can in the end lead to a durable peace.

Confronting the Escalating Violence

The Waging Peace gathering took place during human rights week, as it annually does. However, this year perhaps more than at any other year demonstrated the glaring deterioration in the country's human rights situation which was most dramatically brought home to all when the traditional people's ceasefire usually declared during the Christmas season did not effectively take place (though the government made a unilateral declaration of two separate 48-hour ceasefires covering Christmas day and New Year's day, not reciprocated by the New People's Army which conveyed the message that it was meaningless while the killings of progressive militants seemed to continue with impunity).

Even at the outset during the preparatory period prior to the gathering, it was clear that the most urgent imperative was to confront the escalating violence in the country manifested in the pattern of killings involving political activists and grassroots militants. This was the clear human rights imperative that had to be addressed, if the climate for any possible negotiations was to be improved. Both panels believed that their mandate to negotiate was tarnished by what was occurring on the ground. This was proof, if any was needed, that negotiations cannot take place out of context, without paying close attention to the realities communities confronted in the villages and barrios.

Engaging a New Generation of Peace Advocates

While the diversity of participants in the Waging Peace international conference and other similar peace gatherings taking place at year's end was apparent (including the UNDP sending a large delegation of 17 participants from Bangladesh to observe and learn from the proceedings), there were other observations to be made.

People came from Western, Central and Northern Mindanao, from Eastern and Central Visayas, from Northern Luzon, from Bicol, Quezon and the Cordilleras, and from Metro Manila, the capital region. The breadth of the gathering was impressive, but equally important was the predominance of

youthful voices strongly articulating their aspirations for peace. They demanded to be heard, and to participate meaningfully.

Employing music for peace was one such dimension the youth felt was required to bring more young people on board. Dialogue had taken place with one of the leading rock bands in the country (Dikta-License) that had artists who played award-winning music with thought-provoking lyrics awakening social concern for the environment and for a more peaceful future.

Negotiations with local radio stations and other artists with support from national and international sponsors are now taking place to explore the possibility of a peace concert tour during the coming years – not merely an event but a process of mobilising a youthful peace constituency.
Another arena discussed was inviting the involvement of personages in the world of sports and the arts: an example was the communication with the coach of the national basketball team who was urged to embark on a "play for peace tour" to demonstrate that supporting the cause for peace can be "as exciting as engaging in the country's national sport."

These efforts, however, would require strengthening capacities of actual and potential organisations as well as the building of credible and effective networks and coalitions while learning from the experiences of recent years (dealing with these themes were the presentations made by the Third World Studies Centre of the University of the Philippines, Cordillera Peoples' Forum, Balay Mindanao Foundation and Balay Rehabilitation Center, Peacemakers' Circle, the Pikit Sanctuary for Peace, the Al Mujadillah Foundation, the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers, Catholic Relief Services, Paghiliusa sa Paghidaet of Negros, Mindanao Peoples' Caucus, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, and the CORDAID research team on peacebuilding networks.) The participants were joined at one point by Bishop Antonio Ledesma, SJ, and John Paul Lederach who had taken part in a peace building workshop for 12 Bishops from Burma. They had expressed the hope that collaboration with peace advocates from Burma could one day take place.

Promoting Peace Platforms as Essential Elements of Party Politics

In the sessions dedicated to advancing peace-oriented politics, representatives from political parties and party list groups were asked to analyse the place that the peace agenda occupied in the formation of party platforms. It was strikingly apparent that in a season dominated by political opportunism and the lack of principled politics that members of congress or key political leaders merely wished to align themselves with the issues of supporting or undermining the current holders of political power. It was a demonstration, if any was needed, that the "survive" or "resign" divide still prevailed in Philippine politics.

However, peace advocates who wanted to give the peace process a place of pride in the parties' programmes of government argued for the inclusion of elements directly related to peace included in their party manifestos. It seemed rather ironic that in a period characterised by some debate on the merits or demerits of the parliamentary versus the presidential system that most parties did not seem to be distinguished by their party manifestos (if indeed a number of political parties had drafted one) but rather by the nature of their personal allegiances and the patronage that sustained their existence which perhaps again demonstrates the importance of a focus on governance to lay the ground for the sustainability of agreements or to advance peace negotiations.

Identifying the elements of a "National Peace Policy" was another focus of discussions as well as how to better professionalise the agency tasked to serve the peace process, namely, the office of the presidential advisor on the peace process where staff are largely contractual and without security of tenure.

Reflecting on Options to Advance the Peace

In brief, the Waging Peace Conference's 2005 Edition has once again underlined the importance of reflecting on developments on the ground to be able to reflect on viable options to advance the peace. The previous year has proved more difficult, at least, in terms in improving the human rights situation on the ground and reducing levels of violence thus creating conditions conducive to engendering trust. However, peace advocates have demonstrated resilience and a collective will to re-energize their ranks, revise their strategies, and involve principled leadership in reshaping a peace-oriented politics. In the end, the pursuit of paths require keeping alive a vision to better the lives of people and to construct a more peaceful future – that will differ from the past!

Strengthening Peace Movements: Welcome Remarks

Fr. Jose Magadia, S.J., Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs, Ateneo de Manila University

First of all, I thank you for coming over to this conference on Waging Peace in the Philippines. And certainly to our foreign friends, the UNDP delegation to observe experiences on peace-building, you are very welcome.
As you know, peace continues to be an elusive prize in our country. This is the reason why every year we have to come together in pursuit of this very elusive and very valuable cry for peace. This has been made more difficult by deep socio-economic inequalities that undermine mutual respect among our people. It can also be undermined by abuse of power by up to the highest leader of this land. It creates profound distrust among many people. It causes a lot of weariness among our people that diminishes our faculty of tolerance and leads to quick-fix solutions, that are palliative, violent and sometimes really undermine the very fabric of our society.

It is an effort to try to look with hope to the future because it can look very bleak and it can sound very hopeless sometimes, but I think with our coming together, we can get closer to peace. The most important part of this gathering is that we talk. That we actually discuss things and that we enter into dialogue. This becomes the basis for a lot of movements that have to take place if we are going to come closer to this very elusive peace.

Truth-Telling: Peace From Within and From Below

Sometime ago, a book called "Down from the Hill" was launched in this campus. It was a modest launching for a modest book. It is a story of what happened in Ateneo, here in our campus during the period 1972 to 1986, when Martial Law was declared. The peace that we had in our hearts was very much bothered by a lot of things that were happening. That book was a product of a process called "Truth-Telling", with which the GZO Peace Institute was very much involved. In that process, we realized that if we are going to have some kind of healing, if we are going to have some kind of peace, there has to be a lot of truth-telling. There has to be a lot of bridging gaps from past to the present. When we went through this process of searching, we realized that peace has to start from within. A peace that does not begin from within is very hard to sustain.

This is the reason why it has to involve a lot of catching up and telling the truth honestly. But the other part of it is that we realized that this process has to come from below. It is from within and it

is from below. In fact, people coming together and talking it out and telling the truth could be the process of building the bridges that could be the beginning of making peace in the communities. This is what I mean when we talk about Waging Peace in the Philippines, that we also mean rediscovering what peace is. What it is inside and what it is below, so that from those building blocks, we can move forward.

I would like to tell you about this campus. It is a huge campus with several units. You are in this little corner called the Social Development Complex, in which a lot of NGOs that work in different sectors of Philippine society are located. The NGOs within this community are precisely committed to peace, peace based on a just society, and a just society that works toward a better quality of life and better dialogue and relationships.

So welcome to Waging Peace in the Philippines Conference and I hope that these two days will become very fruitful in sharing our experiences, in truth-telling in our own areas, I hope that in this process a true peace based on justice and reconciliation can be built. Welcome and Magandang Umaga uli.

Assessment of the Peace Process and Peace Movements in the Philippines

Maria Lorenza Palm-Dalupan, CORDAID Researcher*

Moving the Peace Process Forward

I will focus on 2 points: 1) How can we move the peace process forward; and 2) How can we strengthen the peace movement? Moving the peace process forward refers to the peace process not only in terms of peace negotiations but rather a holistic process that involves many tracks that we have to address simultaneously. It includes reforms, which is the most critical track because it addresses the root cause of conflict. The other track is on peace reconciliation and justice, and building a consensus among the constituency for peace.

How would we describe the current state of the negotiations with CPP-NPA-NDF? I do not know how to call it—is it a suspension or a stalemate? Suspension is a more optimistic term. It is difficult to propose programs for the advancement of the peace process because the most critical factor, the leadership, is weak. If the leadership refuses to move then the negotiation will not move.

We are seeking a shift from protagonism to some kind of pragmatism, and in the future from pragmatism to a real paradigm shift. However, peace negotiations are dubious from the perspectives of both parties. I doubt if anyone can propose a recommendation to address this although there are probably a lot of things going on behind the scenes such as civil society organizations that work toward negotiations. The most important thing, regardless of where the negotiation process takes place, is that the peace process must move forward. The reform track has to be addressed very intensively both by the government and the civil society organizations.

Engaging the Government

It is also important that we have to re-understand the policy process of the government, specifically because the issue of policy advocacy leads to structural reforms and reforms define the negotiation

process. We must consider the entire political terrain in our peace efforts. The government is composed of many different sectors and there are a lot of characteristics that have to be understood if we are to engage via policies and the peace agenda.

The government is composed of many sectors by which it operates. These sectors function autonomously but there are instances where interests and policies within the government are contradicting. We should also be proactive in bringing the judiciary and the legislative branches in to the advocacy. There is a continuing dynamics between the peace building perspective and the internal security perspective. We have to understand how it works with the government so that we can advocate properly.

The other point is that the government is made up of national and local governments. Our challenge is to link the national and the local. An interface between the two is difficult because the national government takes political positions while the local governments units experience armed conflict situations. Unless we bring them together, sustaining the peace negotiation will be an insurmountable task.

Sustaining the Peace Movement

Being a peace advocate formerly working from within the government is a very sensitive ground to tread, so I have to engage in different ways. I have some suggestions on how to strengthen the civil society and the peace movement. One of the problems with the government is that we have a constant change of administrations, which means a constant change in policies. Even if policies are legislated, the government still suffers from a regular change in policies depending on the position of the President. That is the reality of our system. Presidents want to be known for their flagship programs. Flagship programs are pioneering programs that serve as a trademark of a certain administration. For instance, when the Estrada administration took office, the social reform agenda was moving forward but they decided to change the policy because it was from the previous administration of President Ramos.

The Role of the Civil Society

The advantage of a civil society peace movement is that it brings constancy to the peace process. That is the value that civil society brings into the peace process. Although the government changes constantly, we have a civil society that remains. It is within the civil society that we have the capacity to sustain the values, the goals and the vision of the peace process. This is the primary contribution of civil society. We need both the government and the civil society working together toward peace efforts. Therefore, I would like to suggest that we push the engagement with the government regardless of how we feel about the current administration.

The engagement of civil society with the government must continue, and it must continue strategically. It means that we must target key sectors within the government for our advocacy. In addition, our ideas must be long term, because advocacy should not only make an impact in the present administration but in the succeeding administrations as well.

The times call for reformists within the government that can work with the civil society. Another challenge is on making a larger impact of building a peace movement. In the same way we have to think of a more targeted and a strategic advocacy. When we push for our peace advocacy, our challenge includes strengthening our peace constituency. We must also cross boundaries and start advocating with others who are indifferent and unlike-minded. Unless we have a holistic approach, our efforts will not bring about the social change that we seek.

There are many sectors that are yet to be converted for peace advocacy. I think we can learn

something from the lessons in Mindanao. We have to congratulate the peace movement of Mindanao because ten years ago what we see in Mindanao today was just a dream. A couple of years ago, we had someone from the Mindanao Business Council standing right here and talking about their efforts to work with Muslim small business entrepreneurs. Ten years ago, we did not have that kind of concern from the Mindanao Business Council. If we think of the larger society, a major sector that needs to be on board is the business sector because the business sector represents many interests reflecting the interests of the government.

Civil Society itself is divided along an ideological line. At some point we have to cross this line. For instance the advocacy for ceasefire breeds varied opinions from the civil society. Effort in crossing the ideological boundaries should also be a priority in strengthening the peace movement.

In relation with the CPP-NPA-NDF, one important development is Sulong CARHRIHL. I would like to commend Miriam Ferrer and all those involved in this effort. One of my observations concerning Mindanao is that there is a growing sense of shared identity among Mindanaoans. Despite the many difficulties that they have in Mindanao, they have developed a sense of community. Irregardless of who you are—a Muslim, Christian settler or a Lumad—there is a growing sense of a shared identity for the region.

I think that Mindanao already started to cross boundaries and the vision for peace is already shared. The geographic boundary of Mindanao is a key factor in the mainstreaming of the peace agenda. When you look at the CPP-NPA-NDF the movement does not have that kind of geographic boundary. The conflicts erupt all throughout the country while the peace movement in support of that peace process remains fragmented, dispersed and scattered.
The government and the MILF were able to set up a ceasefire because they were united. Muslims and Christians were both asking for the ceasefire. It was sought after by the ordinary people and the momentum of this peace initiative is starting to solidify. We do not have the same elements in the CPP-NPA-NDF-GRP peace negotiation. The conflicting parties may demand support for their peace policy so the peace constituency is very critical in strengthening the movement for a peace process. Sulong CARHRIHL is a good start.

In terms of strategic and targeted advocacy, the idea is to bring in more people, but you also have to bring in key people. The beauty in the Waging Peace Conference is that we come together and share what we are doing, and we can find out from others what they are doing. We can find where the gaps are and fill them in. I think if we can do that and address these gaps, then we can be an effective network waging peace.

* Member of CORDAID Research Team conducting policy study on networking for peace building and conflict transformation.

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*Josephine Dionisio, Third World Studies Center**

Allow me to start by identifying the distinctive character of a coalition as a form of organization. Coalitions are described to be an organization of organizations, a combination of social actors acting on the basis of common interests and common benefits. What distinguishes a coalition from other forms of organization is that it is supposed to embody the different social actors and it is expected to harness the synergy of different organizations.

Laying the Ground Work for Firmer Peace-Building

The core area of action of peace coalitions in the Philippines has been the building of the infrastructure of peace through advocacy and through engaging the national leadership of the state and non-state actors. So through consistent advocacy work from 1986 to 2004, peace coalitions have successfully placed peace into the national agenda of the different government administrations.

Many of the government policy documents like the "Six Paths to Peace", and the Social Reform Agenda have been largely based on the advocacies of the peace coalitions. In both documents, the need to address the structural causes of violence, pursuing a just and more lasting peace, and the search for undertaking social reforms are recognized. However, concretization of these agenda and the consistent pursuit of the peace track of the government is dependent on the focus and commitment of each administration.

By the government's adoption of these policy documents, peace coalitions have already laid an important groundwork for further peace-building. Peace coalitions and peace advocacy efforts combined with effective public advocacy have also led to the institution of the important mechanisms that would encourage the pursuit of more peaceful solutions to the armed conflict. Government agencies and commissions were created or appointed to focus on peace matters. For example we have the Office of the Peace Commissioner which eventually became the Office of the Presidential Adviser for the Peace Process; the National Unification Commission, which conducted nation-wide consultations towards the formulation of the National Peace Agenda; and the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), which is the mechanism to move the implementation of the SRA.

Human Rights and Protection of Non-Combatants

Since 1986, the efforts of the peace coalitions to bring the parties in conflict to the track of peace talks and negotiation, though hard and protracted, had generally resulted in explorations by both parties of the possibilities of talks and negotiations. Either side declares unilaterally, periodic events such as ceasefire. Through advocacy interventions by peace coalitions with either party, they were able to insert the concept of human rights and the protection of non-combatants in the public consciousness.

Peace coalitions have facilitated the institution of mechanisms that help minimize human rights violations. An example of this is the signing of an important agreement, the "Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law" (CARHRIHL) . Other landmark mechanisms include the establishment of peace zones and other similar spaces for peace, and the recognition of Muslim holidays at the national level.

Citizens' Participation in the Peace Process

Consistent advocacy by peace coalitions regarding citizen's participation in the peace process has also yielded important gains for the peace movement in the country. Citizens' participation in the peace process is the distinctive contribution of peace coalitions because peace coalitions have consistently been the major vehicle through which such advocacy has been voiced out. Negotiating panels representing the government have included leading negotiators from the ranks of civil society, who have been accepted by both parties. Representatives from previously unrepresented sectors like women, and indigenous peoples specifically the Lumads have been appointed to the government peace panel. Some of those participatory mechanisms achieved at the national level eventually trickle down to the ground level. For example, the declaration of ceasefires and the signing of peace agreements have contributed to preventing violence and destruction at the community level.

Affecting Behavioral Changes of Both the State and Non-State Actors
Peace coalitions also have facilitated the delivery of medical, relief and social services to the conflict communities. Through their efforts, the welfare of children, indigenous people, and other non-combatants are now seriously taken into account by the warring parties.

Obviously, peace coalitions have influenced the observable changes and behavior of the state and non-state actors. Both the state and non-state actors are now compelled to recognize the option of engaging in dialogues, the necessity of involving citizens in the peace process, the importance of implementing confidence building measures, and the crucial role of third party mediation in conflict resolution.

Changes in behavior and attitudes at the community level have also become observable. The growing number of provincial and community networks of peace organizations and individual advocates who participate in various peace building activities indicates the broadening of the community's peace consciousness. For example, recently in Mindanao, evacuees or internally displaced persons gained enough confidence in themselves that they were able to undertake an unprecedented protective action to insist on their rights.This was aptly known as "bakwit power".

Putting Substance to the Concept of Peace

Over the years, peace coalitions have clarified the substance of peace. Peace is now understood not just as the cessation of hostilities but also the absence of structural barriers and the root-causes of rebellion. Most notably, peace involves the power to end injustice. People talk about the benefit of a just and lasting solution to the country's insurgency problem as compared to a military solution.

In the campaigns of peace coalitions, the role of international politics in the country's peace situation has also been revealed. And the transnational dimension of peace issues has become more apparent.

Expanding Constituency for Peace

The significant contribution of civil society in peace-building and in the peace process is putting it under the framework of the deepening of democratization. Peace coalitions as participants in the discourse must try to focus on the creation of a constituency for peace. This effort can be concretely indicated by a "peace vote". However, this is not the only material indication of the strong constituency for peace. The active participation of communities in peace-building at the community level and their ability to organize themselves into a peace-oriented organization is also an important indicator of the growth and development of the constituency for peace.

The rarity of this challenge makes it imperative for peace coalitions to stand guard for the community of peace advocates and consciously develop a crop of future peace-building leaders. While the peace coalitions remain the important vehicles to expand the reach and intensify the impact of peace advocacy and coalition work, sustaining this effort still rely on the ability of the peace coalitions to facilitate the emergence of more regular forms of organization as a concrete gain from their campaign and mobilizations efforts.

The vision of peace coalitions should be how to bring forth a peace organization. Peace coalitions could be a take-off point for a more regular peace organization and structure. There should also be room for consensus building among peace coalition leaders to come up with appropriate study and activities that will facilitate greater involvement of the youth in peace-building. Activities that would facilitate the sharing of experiences and ideas between generations of peace activists or human rights advocates and contemporary youth activists need to be pursued.

Other Strategies That Can Be Pursued

The history of gender and justice and peace movements in the Philippines needs to be systematically documented and actively disseminated through various media. Peace coalitions should continue to generate interest in peace research and in enhancing their capability to come up with popular forms of publication.

There was a mapping exercise done by the Philippine Political Science Association where they did mapping of political reform advocacy. They found out that for civil society organizations, their main areas of interest are in political reform advocacy, statutory reforms and constitutional reforms. In terms of category, they identified these to be voluntary reforms meaning efforts by the public sector to introduce new practices in democratic governance.

The mapping exercise yielded significant results. This is an area in which peace coalitions can venture into, documenting specific practices at the community level in terms of peace-building that could serve as basis for further institutionalization. It might be helpful if in the future, peace conferences like this can also be replicated at the local level.

* based on the study made by the speaker on Peace Coalitions for the UNDP Learning Experience Study on Civil Society Peace Building in the Philippines, 1986 - 2004

Undersecretary Ramon Santos, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process

What I will share with you briefly is how I have experienced the problems of peace in the battlefield. I recently joined OPAPP, but for twenty-five years, I have been on military field operations so now I am in the process of unlearning many things. Let me just give a quick list of some of my observations and new lessons in the field. Binky Dalupan's description on the current issues of the peace processes and movements in the Philippines is true. It will happen again in the future if we do not give it our attention. I have been working in a mechanism (the joint Coordinating Committee for the Cessation of Hostilities) for stopping violence, particularly in relation with the MILF. Prior to this, I was a brigade commander in an infantry unit undertaking combat in the field.

Let me focus my presentation on my experiences in working on the MILF issue.

Difficulties in the Field

First relates to the difficulties in the field. There are some developments on the peace process, but it is very, very broad. On the ground, every time we see the combatants of both sides, it strikes us how little they know about the peace process. All they know is the presence of the armed component in their area.

I believe there should be something tangible for the community to see. It should be the community defending themselves and defending peace. The challenge is making the individuals in the community take an active role in peace building and peace keeping. It seems to me that they do not have the luxury of time to wait for peace dividends.

Differences Between Theories and Grassroots Practice

Another observation relates to my recent OPAPP connection. Without any offense meant, I think

there are just too many meetings, too many conferences. In these conferences, I see that everyone is very committed and very idealistic. In contrast, one discovers the lack of articulation in the grassroots. Sadly, in my involvement with the OPAPP, I feel the lack of new ideas and the lack of integration of ideas.

I have been with friends from Bangladesh who were rebel returnees, and we are trying to talk about what to do. The most important thing is the sincerity to make an effort for peace, but I do not have new ideas and my skills are of a different nature. We know how to wage war but find that we lack the skills and abilities to wage peace. We are now learning how to acquire leadership skills for the peace process. Combatants on the ground level yearn for the conflict to end, but ending the battles lies mostly on the skill of the negotiator.

The Need for Peace on the Ground

We have so many explanations about the root causes of the conflicts, but I do not see any fresh ideas coming in terms of policies to solve it. For example we are quite successful with the MILF peace efforts but it is largely because of the personal relationships we have established. It is our trust and sincerity from both parties that cemented the peace talks together. However, you might notice under close scrutiny that the problems are not being directly addressed. If I go to the field and tell the people, "Okay, we're having this peace talk," I also wish I have ten sacks of fertilizer to give to them. We do not have tacticians on the ground.

Peace talks are very strong on the upper layers but on the level of the grassroots, there are no tacticians to implement the strategies formulated on the top. As a military officer on the field, we rely solely on our acquired knowledge and unfortunately we also rely on our ignorance. In the process, we commit mistakes. This is our problem.

Ladies and gentlemen, salamat po.

Zenaida Brigida Hamada-Pawid, Cordillera Peace Forum

Introduction

We are in uncertain and challenging times and we are facing a lot of issues in our country at the moment. So it is good that we come today as one and see both new and old faces still waging peace. The experiences that I will share from the Cordillera (CAR) are distilled from 27 learning experiences or manuscripts on the experiences of former combatants from the region. We are currently finishing this learning experiences study (LES) funded by UNDP, involving various individuals and organizations.

We would like to emphasize, after one hundred and fifty years and another dimension, that we have geared audaciously to bring the grassroots to face the academe in UP Baguio and to involve the South for the first time, in our beautiful city of Baguio.

For some of us who are here and may not know much about the Cordillera, allow me to give a brief background. Cordillera is well known for the indigenous people's successful resistance to the World Bank dam project in Chico River in the 1970's.

We are also equally proud to have survived the martial law regime with the closing of the Cellophil

paper company fiasco. Because of both efforts, we have brought to the forefront the issues of these "spurious" peoples who are up to now undefined but are usually identified with skin color and difference—the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera.

The Cordillera is an area where we have accepted the ideological presence of the National Democratic movement but, in the wise words of a fellow peace builder, "acceptance on the Cordillera terms" that has deepened and sustained the resistance to both the traditional left and traditional right, with the Cordillera's sharp insistence on the indigenous people's history and cultural reality. We have therefore arrived at and been able to put forward innovative, creative and sustained peace-building structures and processes. These are drawn from the cultural base, defined by the current and changing reality, distilled in less than dramatic, but consistently community-based dialogues and consensus-building.

Lastly, we have hosted discussions recently, and we have learned from dialogues and discourses with the academe and with our brothers in the South that the Cordillera experiences are far from being sufficiently documented, despite the LES, much lee understood.

Three thematic clusters have emerged from the findings and insights of our 27 manuscripts from the Cordillera:

1. Indigenous structures and processes are vital peace building blocks in the grassroots level in Cordillera.

What do we mean by this? Our indigenous structures and processes of dialogues, mediations, consensus-building, management and/or resolution of conflicts are still our best peace building blocks. We are flattered to know that these same words are stated by the panel members with national and international perspectives but we would like to point out that using the terms such as dap-ay, bodong, and tontongan are very far from the realities of all those peace builders in the levels of indigenous peoples of Cordillera;
Current conflicts and extraneous/non-indigenous factors must be seen in an historical context. Interpersonal conflicts, clan vendettas, intertribal conflicts and even conflict with the state—are influenced by previous unresolved extraneous structures. The resolution of conflicts is made more difficult because these indigenous structures and processes should be accepted by the majority in order to be valid. What do we mean by this? There are no conflicts that do not have a history. Short-term bandage and immediate surgery never applies in the resolution of conflicts. In addition to that, quick-fix solutions have already been tried bring more complications than answers to the problems.

Conflicts of whatever form — personal conflicts, clan vendettas, intertribal conflicts and even conflict with the first and foremost enemy, the state—are influenced by previous unresolved conflicts, complicated by extraneous and non-indigenous factor. They are made less or more difficult in terms of management and /or resolution by the pressure to fit these indigenous structures and processes into the mold to make them valid and accepted by the majority. What do we mean by this? There are no conflicts that do not have a history. So short –term bandage and immediate surgery never applies in the resolution of conflicts. In addition, shortcutting of processes that have already been tried and tested for centuries bring more complications than solutions to the problems.

And last but not the least; we do not live in a vacuum. Many of us may have never seen a comfort room, and we certainly do not have an idea of government from the way imperial Manila rules. But we have Nike shoes, we wear Giordano shirts, and we have intrnational fashion compliments of the wagwag industry.

2. Every peace building attempt is grounded on a complex and changing cultural landscape.

This governs which conflict resolution methodologies are appropriate. I'm proud to say that indigenous peoples in Cordillera do not always look for the resolution of a conflict. Sometimes, it is better to look at the management of conflict rather than its resolution. The issue of land tenure and management remains at the heart of most conflicts in the Cordillera Administrative Region and in the other IP areas. . A non-understanding of, or a misunderstanding of conflict rather than solves it. Culture defines the prejudices and misunderstanding that miss or discolor Cordillera or IP culture, dimension, solution and implications for just and lasting peace. Prejudices and misunderstandings are not only against the IPs. It is also among the Cordillerans, against the non-Cordillerans.

3. A majority-minority relationship could lead to mal-adaptation and rejection unless there is acceptance of diversity.

The third cluster of experiences illustrated in the manuscripts are on adaptation, interphased with rejection and even a concept of secession by a cultural minority from a cultural majority. This is a function and consequence of this insistent majoritarian- minoritarian rule that leads minorities to simply begging or yielding totally. Until and unless there is acceptance that what we really need is not one gray sky but a colorful rainbow, I don't see peace sustained in the Cordillera or in the IP areas.

Government continues to play the most crucial role in any peacebuilding effort. However, what surfaced again from the sharings of this manuscript is that first of all, the government can, it should recognize, its primacy and crucial role, oftentimes that of major peacebuilder but also most prominent war hawk.

Second, peacebuilding in government as a movement, a commitment, or even a key result area has been marginalized and minoritized in the main. Policies of peace on the ground have remained uncertain in the least, and conflicting at the worst. This is especially true now that an attempt again of a circus called federalism and parliamentarism is being foisted among the people. Because the definition of a local and national relationship should really be addressing disjunction and disfunctions between the two levels of government. As the manuscripts very clearly indicated, the Cordillera and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao do not fit into the federal plan because they have already gone beyond the proposed transition.

Third, during the South and North dialogues, peoples from Mindanao asked their counterpart in CAR to speak out and articulate issues toward the government regarding peace building efforts. The CAR is still a huge bloc that can facilitate the interfacing of the IP's as a minority and the majority. However, the pervasive national government is oftentimes obtrusive of grassroots peace initiatives.

From an earlier paper then, allow us to quote what we think as the appropriate development agenda and at the same time explanation of the dilemmas in the Cordillera.

First, there is clearly a need for an appropriate development in the Cordillera. What is appropriate must be defined from the point of view of the Cordillerans. For us, for instance, what the national government is bannering as its major program, the 1995 Philippine Mining Act may be the second Chico River front in the Cordillera.

Clearly, there is need to address the dilemma of two or more systems, laws, processes governing peoples and places. Interphase, which is a government word, is not simply harmonization but should.find a way to resolve conflicts of interest and contradicting policies within government.

Number three, poverty among IPs and in the Cordillera, especially, is the consequence of injustice that deprives peoples of their ancestral domains, the ownership, the use and the management of their natural resources. In 1965, for instance, the Ambuklao-Binga dams which are now being decommissioned and now no longer functional still remain the heaviest debt that has to be paid in

the CAR.

Number four, asset reform is key to addressing the root cause of conflict in the Cordilleras, and resolving the twin issue of poverty that arises from minoritization and majoritization.

Number five, that Cordilleras are partners and participants, not mere beneficiaries in the progress of the Republic of the Philippines. The region and its peoples are not merely a resource base and a beneficiary of " foreign-funded projects."

Number six, convergence—and here I use government's key phrases—of national policies, programs and resources is a national strategy that must be consciously and relentlessly adopted by all units and agencies and supported by civil society. Oftentimes, government is as many offices as there are present in the room. Crucial to this forging of convergence is dialogue and consensus-building that must allow civil society and all stakeholders room for participation in decision-making in policy and accountability, rather than be limited to accepting dole-outs.

There is precious little time left to be able to reverse the cynicism and distrust in institutions and processes of governance among the ordinary Cordillera folk . Lingering presence of armed partisans should be a reality check for all that poverty and injustice persist. Poverty has to be eradicated so that peace and development will have a chance.

Charlito Manlupig, Balay Mindanao Foundation

Backgrounder

Balay Mindanao Foundation is a non-governmental organization based in Cagayan de Oro City, Mindanao. It is part of the Balay Mindanao Group network, which is directly involved in peace processes involving armed groups such as the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Mindanao (RPMM) or the Revolutionary Workers' Party of Mindanao.

RPMM is the former Mindanao component of the Communist Party of the Philippines- New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF). Upon its breakaway with NDF, it formed the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (RPMP) or the Revolutionary Workers' Party of the Philippines with other Visayas and Luzon groups but then the RPMM also separated from the RPMP. Recently, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) has been conducting peace talks with RPMM.

This presentation attempts to introduce to us the GRP-RPMM issue; discuss the developments with regards to the peace process; and lastly, present the different strategies that were deemed effective in creating and promoting peace.

Introduction

The presentation is regarding what is called the "Other" Peace Process. This is not as well-known as the other peace processes but looking into this peace process can give us a glimpse of the possibilities of peace initiatives. As director of Balay Mindanao Foundation, I hope to inform you about some of the gains that have been achieved.

This other peace process involves the GRP and the RPMM. The GRP-RPMM peace talks is

considered as the fourth peace process in relation to the communist insurgency. These four peace talks involve: (1) the GRP and the Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA); (2) the GRP and the CPP-NPA-NDF; (3) the GRP and the RPMP-RPA-ABB; (4) the least known is between the GRP and the RPMM.

The peace talk formally started when President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued Presidential Memorandum (PM) 108 on July 19, 2003. It created the GRP Panel and mandated the panel to formally start the peace process with the RPMM. The issuance of PM 108 was the culmination of a long process of informal activities. Our involvement started when some representatives of the RPMM and the Mayor of Iligan approached me and explored the possibility of peace negotiations. A series of meetings and exchanges of communication ensued and finally, the President issued the order.

The first GRP panel was composed of Iligan Mayor Franklin Quijano, Atty. Froilan Melendrez who was then the Chair of the Philippine Counselor's League, and Sec. Teresita Quintos-Deles. When Sec. Deles was appointed as the Presidential Adviser on Peace Process (OPAPP), Sec. Corazon Juliano-Soliman took her place as the third member of the GRP panel.

The first RPMM panel is headed by Alicia Bulosan. The other members are Frederick Montes and Armando Ortis. The panel's political adviser is Ike De Los Reyes, who used to be the first negotiator of the NDF for Mindanao during the first peace talks in December 1986.

On the Facilitation of the Peace Process

A new feature in the GRP-RPMM peace talk was the creation of an independent NGO secretariat. The government panel and the RPMM panel independently and jointly appointed me to head the secretariat. Prior to this involvement, I and Balay Mindanao had absolutely no experience in managing peace talks. Given the zero-experience, we relied on our experiences as a community-based development NGO. To facilitate the peace talks, we formed two teams. The first team focused on the local consultations while the second team is responsible for the formal peace talks. The second team consists of members from law groups of Saligan Mindanao and Balaod-Mindanao.

This peace process institutionalized stakeholder participation through local consultation. This is also the only peace process that tapped an NGO as its secretariat. The peace framework which was jointly formulated by both panels and the secretariat in December 2003, states:

"Empowered and sustainable communities are the real foundations of lasting peace. The process itself will already allow these communities to win victories, and bring peace by and for themselves. The final resolution of the talks is important, but communities need not wait for these."

We had not invented anything new here: going through the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) and Local Government Code (LGC), we will find the assertion that the planning process should start at the lowest political unit which is the barangay. If we succeed in making things work on the ground, the signing of a final agreement will follow. The final resolution of a peace agreement is of course very important but its strength and sustainability depends upon empowered communities that are able to analyze their situation, appreciate their resources, identify their needs, formulate and implement their own development plans, and link in peace and harmony with their history, culture, and nature.

We received PM 108 in July 2003 and by September, we were able to hold our first formal round of talks. Immediately, the two panels signed three documents: the standard agreement entitled "Joint Commitment to Pursue Peace and Development in Mindanao"; an agreement on "The Rules of the Conduct of the Formal Peace Talks"; and an agreement on "Rules of the Conduct of Local

Consultations." Local consultations were incorporated as an integral part of the peace process, which effectively institutionalized participation and more importantly, effectively transferred the lifeblood and momentum of the peace process to the communities.

Barangay Peace Consultations

The first local consultation was held in Barangay Mahayahay in Sultan Naga Dimaporo, Lanao del Norte in November 2003. After this, the two panels agreed to conduct more consultations and came up with an initial list of 100 barangays. Another consultation was held in Tupi where it was finally recognized that there is an armed group operating in this area. For so many years, the local government had denied this. By October, local consultations were held in 69 barangays, 49 of which were within ancestral domain claims. The barangays are located in ten municipalities, five provinces and four regions in Mindanao.

The first part of the consultations involved an appraisal of resources within the communities. It also tackled the problems and their analysis of the problems, and an identification of how the communities can respond to the problems. The consultations yielded a list of ten priority programs in response to the problems of the communities. These communities are mainly found in Western and Central Mindanao, but one consultation was held in the Caraga region with the Higaonon tribe.

A stakeholder's forum was held in October where the communities presented the results of the consultation. Basic development projects were presented for implementation such as: roads, school buildings, health centers, electrification, water installation.

On the RPMM side, they also had their own internal strengthening processes because an ongoing peace process can cause division of the group into smaller factions. The internal dissension and debates during the negotiation with the Estrada government served the RPMM a lesson.

Finally, in October 28, 2005, the two panels signed the fourth agreement which was "The Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities." The ceasefire became formal and official. The joint Secretariat, the Technical Working Group and the Peace Committee formed by both panels met in October at the Balay Mindanao office to formulate the details of the implementing guidelines of the ceasefire agreement.

Then, the Chair of the GRP Panel and the political adviser of the RPMM went on a peace journey which was an opportunity for us to reflect and deeply analyze the Mindanao situation—our conflicts, gains, and challenges to move forward. They realized the need to facilitate more stakeholder conferences to complement their resources.

On Peace Process Strategies

In summary, the main strategies were to: (1) Keep the parties talking; (2) Institutionalize community involvement; and (3) Hold more stakeholder conferences. In order to achieve tangible results we need to (1) Help package community proposals; (2) Mobilize internal community resources; (3) Mobilize external resources; (4) Follow-up commitments; and (5) Process implementation.

We would like to mention that we received absolutely nothing in terms of funds from government and from RPMM.

Thank you very much.

Learning from Community-Based and Sector-Focused Efforts

Fr. Roberto Layson, OMI, Mindanao People's Caucus

Introduction

After the four wars in Pikit within the span of six years, we realized that peace is too important to be left alone in the hands of the government and the MILF, especially when those wars took place when the peace talks were going on and ceasefire mechanisms were supposed to be in place. We realized that we—specifically those people who suffered the harrowing experience in evacuation centers—must collectively involve ourselves in the peace process. We also realized that any peace agreement will not necessarily bring peace to the people as long as there is an unseen war going on in the hearts of the people of Mindanao.

The realization of these dilemmas compelled us to bring the peace process down to the grassroots level, and at the same time process it at the horizontal level in support of the official talks between the government and the MILF at the negotiating table. Ours is just a very small contribution to this process. This is the story of seven barangays which formed themselves into peace zones.

There used to be a jihad or an all-out war in the battlefields of Pikit but we recognized that we have to continue working for peace because it is our only hope. Once we give up on peace, then there is no hope for us especially for our people who live in evacuation centers. We know that there is no future in the evacuation centers. The only future they have is when they go back to the farms and start tilling their lands again. It was not possible in the beginning because there was an all-out war.

Lessons and Challenges on Waging Peace in the Communities

1. Peace efforts must be based on a vision that is holistic and inclusive.

Mindanao is a pluralistic society – with 13 Moro tribes, 19 indigenous peoples' tribes, and about 9 Christian tribes. Any peace effort, given this setting, will therefore require an inclusive vision. The resolution of conflicts must benefit not just one group or sector but all. Only an inclusive vision will have the chance of being owned by the community. Only with ownership of peace can it be sustained even under the most adversarial circumstances.

2. Addressing the damages of war is crucial in starting peace.

It is not possible to just start a peace process without addressing the physical damages caused by the war. Infrastructure, potable water, electricity, farm rehabilitation are part and parcel of feasible beginnings.

3. Engage the principal actors through negotiation by making them partners.

The MILF and the military wield so much power. Power in itself is not necessarily evil; it depends on how one wields it. The MILF and the military could easily turn an area into a battleground, so the community urged both parties to listen. The communities considered them as partners, not as enemies. In Barangay Nalapaan, for instance, the combatants were not driven away. Both the military and the MILF soldiers have relatives there, so the people didn't feel like treating them like

enemies. In effect, the people have direct natural access to the combatants and their leaders, which facilitated ease in dialogue and communication. This dialogue between victims and perpetrators is actually a healing process for both.

4. The invisible damages of war must also be addressed.

The more difficult aspect in waging peace is addressing the invisible damages caused by war. The process of healing and reconciliation drains not only the local economy. It also has emotional and psychological damages that must be tackled using other forms of intervention. The invisible aftereffects are more destructive than the visible. Relationships among neighbors are important, and it takes time and a lot of processes to restore these into peace and normalcy.

Part of the invisible damage is doubt in the peace process. It is very difficult to wage peace in the communities where there is unbelief in the concept of peace. It helps to have peace education which uses the perspective of the history of Mindanao. History is a process of telling the truth. It helps people to understand the roots of their conflict.

5. Respect and recognize existing structures in the community as part of local governance.

The creation of extra structures and mechanisms other than those existing in the barangays weaken the communities. Local peace processes must work through the local governments and the existing people's organizations.

6. Culture is an important element.

Traditional culture is a very important element in the framework, the process, and the implementation of the peace process. The peace education process must be anchored on indigenous and not on colonial values. Indigenous ways of conflict resolution use dialogue, maximize the role of elders in the community and promote restorative justice.

7. Encourage convergence of all stakeholders.

The problem in Mindanao is so complex and the impact of war is so great that a single group or sector cannot single-handedly address it. No single group can totally rehabilitate and address the damage inflicted on communities. It requires a collective and collaborative efforts of all stakeholders. From AFP, MILF, MNLF, PNP, LGU, academe, media, local and international NGOs, religious leaders down to the grassroots communities – they are the stakeholders. The role of each sector is recognized by giving certificates of appreciation. The success of the community is also the success of other stakeholders.

8. Adversarial approaches are ineffective in addressing conflicts.

We found out that restorative justice is more effective than retributive justice. Dialogue has contributed much to this lesson. The adversarial approach doesn't work, only dialogue does. The people on the ground know that the combatants are as much victims as the civilians. Through dialogue, the community gets the support of the AFP and the rebels. As a strategy, it facilitates all sectors to live harmoniously in a society without compromising human rights.

9. Believe in the basic human goodness of every person.

There is basic human goodness that lies in heart of every person – soldiers, rebels, government officials, religious leaders, those in the academe, media, local and international NGOs, and the community itself. The challenge is how to harness this basic goodness for the benefit of the

community and society in general.

10. Link with other peace movements.

The Space for Peace cannot exist by itself. It continuously links with the OPAPP, AFP, MILF, International Monitoring Team (IMT), Joint Ceasefire committee. It also links with friends in the media for its advocacy such as the Mindanews and NDBC.

It establishes close partnership with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) which has a strong Peace and Reconciliation Program in Mindanao, with Mindanao Peoples' Caucus (MPC) and Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) which are actively involved in the ceasefire monitoring, with Balay Inc. and GZOPI which have strong lobbying initiatives in Manila. It accepts exposurists, both local and international, as part of its regional and global solidarity program.

Marites Guingona-Africa, Peacemakers Circle

Introduction

I am supposed to present the initiatives of faith and interfaith dimensions of peace-building initiatives among peoples. I come from Mindanao, but I'm based here in imperial Manila. Work here in imperial Manila is just as difficult. We need a lot of support.

My involvement in peace dialogue and peace-building started in 1998 when I came across this book by Bishop William Swing of California. He said, "Of the 32 wars going on in the world, religion is involved in virtually every one of them". This struck me. And then the theologian Hans Kung wrote: "There can be no peace among nations without peace among religions." Religion is really a powerful force. It defines the identity of peoples, communities and even nations. It influences how people see themselves in relation to others, and the choices that they make in response to the world around them.
The Peacemakers Circle was inspired in 1998 by the Global Community United Religions Initiative. This is not based on a religion but is instead a bridge-building organization. It is composed of people of diverse religions, personal expressions and indigenous traditions around the world who are working together to promote enduring interfaith cooperation to put an end to religiously- motivated violence, and to create cultures of peace, justice and structures of healing for the world.

The Peacemakers Circle was founded here in Metro Manila in 2000 and it is enlivened by the compelling words of Mahatma Gandhi himself: "We must be the change that we wish to see in the world."

Key Result Areas

Our focus are on three key areas:

1) First is on developing the self as peacemakers, as instruments of peace in our own respective fields of work so that we can be truly peaceful persons. It is a daily event, an inner work program. We meet weekly as a support group for each other. These meetings are participated in by Muslims, Christians, Hindu, Buddhists, people of different faiths.

2) The second area is the area of building a safe space or an area where people can come together to

dialogue and feel safe. Women, youth, different groups talk about different concerns and learn from each other's beliefs and experiences.

3.) The third area refers to the Mindanao conflict. We adhere to the saying "Think globally, act locally." I was talking in 2003 with someone who was very concerned about the ongoing conflict at that time. He wanted to go back to Mindanao and help Fr. Bert Layson. I told him we don't have to be in Mindanao to help people in Mindanao.

Muslims in Manila

There are many Muslims in Metro Manila, actually. We wanted to find them so we asked the Office of Muslim Affairs but they didn't have the data. So, we started to communicate with our Muslim friends. We found a community of about 5,000 families in Tala, Caloocan. There are three mosques in that area.

We found that peacebuilding is not really difficult. After one year, we looked back at the efforts and we said, "You know what, in one year, we can do so much." Even a single day can make a huge difference.

Projects in Muslim Communities

We found in our linking with the grassroots people how eager they were to work with us. We met with the leaders and we talked about peacebuilding. Of course, peacebuilding is not just about talking but peacebuilding also involves tangible and concrete results.

Our projects include raising funds for water systems in the mosques. We conducted a tree planting activity near the mosques because it was beside the river and the water overflows when it rains. We were also able to conduct medical and dental missions. These are all part of peacebuilding in a holistic approach. Trust was built and the people felt cared for. We also conducted dialogues - every Friday from 1:00 to 3:00 PM, we would don the malong and go inside the mosque for a dialogue about faith and community concerns. For a number of Christians, it was the first time they were able to enter a mosque or the home of a Muslim. We also conducted monthly workshops on peacebuilding, conflict transformation, fear management. After a year, they founded Muslim-Christian Peace Association as a result of the workshops. The Muslim leader who organized this group also reached out to his own community and organized the Muslim Solidarity of Associations of Peace.

On Challenges and Setbacks

Let me just list the challenges that we are facing now in Metro Manila. On August 13, 2004, the Manila Bulletin published a news item that announced the construction of a mosque inside the Greenhills Shopping Complex. This news caused a fear among officers of the predominantly Catholic Federation of the Greenhills Association of San Juan who represent the upscale residential villages in the area. The owners and developers of the shopping complex protested against the construction and circulated their letter of complaint among the members of their community. The mosque, they said, will serve like a magnet that will attract Muslims of questionable persuasions, thus making Greenhills an enclave of criminals. The Greenhills controversy surfaced attitudes of prejudice against Muslims among the devoutly Christian populace, it shifted public attention temporarily away from Mindanao to a new frontier, Metro Manila. This highlights the fact that the Muslim-Christian confrontation in the Philippines is not confined to the far-flung areas of Mindanao. Acts of violence in the grassroots community within the metropolis brought about by clan wars and tribal rivalries only exacerbated the already negative perception of Muslims among Christians and further aggravated

the conflicts in Muslim-Christian relationships.

Unbeknownst to many, there is today a considerable number of Muslims now settled in various communities that are outside of Mindanao. In the 2000, the Philippine National Statistics Office recorded over 30 mosques in Metro Manila. In 2005, the Office on Muslim Affairs recorded at least 70 mosques in the NCR. The presence of mosques is an indication of the presence of a community of Muslims. A more comprehensive profile of Muslims in Manila is imperative, and a survey is yet to be conducted to determine the actual size of the Muslim population which seems to be significantly on the rise.

The urgent issues therefore include addressing the broad condemnations leveled against Muslims, the illegal arrests, the abuse of human rights by some members of the police force and SWAT Teams, and other issues of discrimination. There are many instances cited where Muslims would be turned down by their potential employers upon knowing they were Muslims. These are the reasons why Muslims seeking a new life outside of Mindanao continue to live a life of poverty in Metro Manila. Many have taken the course of engaging in illegal businesses. These could swell into negative sentiments and could escalate into violent actions with little provocation.

Many cases of illegal detention and arrest have been brought to my attention. One incident recently happened in Barangay 188 in Caloocan City. At 10:00 in the evening, there was a SWAT Team that fired on the community and one person was killed, a Muslim. We brought this to the attention of officials. Two Christians who witnessed the incident were arrested without warrant. Here is another instance. Office of Muslim Affairs Director, Mohammad Tanggol, was subjected to disrespectful treatment by police officers in Camp Karingal. It happened when Director Tanggol and his staff proceeded to the camp to assist two Muslims. Those two Muslims were arrested by plainclothesmen without due process. They were detained for over 12 hours by investigating officers who were allegedly drunk.

Conclusion

For over a year of working with the Muslims, we had glimpsed from their stories the frequency of horror they experience here in Manila. When I was at the Saudi Arabian Embassy, the Charge d' Affairs asked me, "Why is this happening? You are supposed to be brothers and sisters in this country." Saudi Arabia is importing billions of dollars of Halal food from Australia and other countries. Why can't they import from the Philippines where there are Muslims? There's a big problem there because of lack of understanding.

They would like to ask for support from you. Let me just read their statement:

"We would like to promote Muslim-Christian dialogues in all forms. We can involve all sectors of society, from the higher echelons of leaders in our society to the grass root individuals in the baranggay level.In addition, we would like to establish a training program for a Muslim-Christian peace team that will be conducted for Muslim and Christian leaders in the greater Manila area who will serve as catalysts of change in promoting active ways of dialogue, conflict transformation and peace-building."

The grassroots people are very eager so we need to support them. They need your help in implementing the Angat-Buhay project. We are going to educate the Muslim women and youth, and also help feed the children of Muslim communities such as in Maharlika, Quiapo and also Caloocan City.
Finally, we hope to spread the vision of peace in colleges and universities to help them recognize that despite our differences we can help and respect one another. We need to bring Muslims in

Metro Manila together to dialogue with their counterparts in the education, business and the religious sectors. These are the things that we need to do. Thank you very much.

Norania Acmad, Al-Mujadillah Development Foundation

Introduction

The Al Mujadillah Development Foundation (AMDF) is a non-governmental organization in Muslim Mindanao that promotes social and community development among impoverished communities and recognizes the active role of women in the peace process.

I would like to discuss a brief history of AMDF. In the early 1990's then Executive Director of AMDF, Yasmin Lao conducted a Gender Sensitivity Training (GST) for Muslim women. After that, we continued developing our women's organization until it was formally registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1997. In 1996 to 2000, we undertook researches that enabled us to go to the communities. We realized then that doing researches is not enough. We have to directly get involved with the issues within the communities. We have to start with community organizing and deal with the problems of women and children in the community by engaging with neutral programs like health campaigns.

Before the war in 2000, the group was already conducting interfaith dialogues with participants from Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte. We did researches and we tried to work with women in the communities. However, we encountered major setbacks in 2000. At that time, we entered Marawi which was not yet prepared for the influx of evacuees. Thankfully several NGOs and government agencies tried to work together in addressing the problem. However, only a few organizations remained to sustain the support. We engaged in relief, psychosocial healing, reconstruction work, linking and networking, engaging with the local government units (LGUs), and peacebuilding activities.

Currently, we are focused on three areas: peacebuilding, women's rights, and governance. We were assigned to answer two questions here: Why work with women in peace building?; and what are the initiatives and lessons learned?

Women's Crucial Role in Peacebuilding

Women are peacebuilders. According to the Koran, men and women have the same spiritual natures - Surah 7:189 and Surah 42:11. The Koran also states that men and women are both recipients of the Divine Breath. The Koran states that Allah has invested both genders with an inherent dignity and has made men and women collectively the trustees of Allah on earth. Women must be responsible in peacebuilding and peacekeeping.

The Maranaws of Lanao del Sur and Marawi City recognize women's role in effectively settling rido or conflicts. Women are given traditional as well as Islamic titles which give them the power to help settle rido.

Peace Initiatives and Lessons Learned

A. Interfaith and intrafaith dialogue

Women interfaith mechanisms started in the 1990's which include women theologians. The interfaith dialogues include men and women, theologians and non-theologians. We also participated in two international intra-faith dialogue, namely in Yogjakarta in 2004, and in Bali in 2005. Muslim women discussed issues of gender, peace and development within the Islamic context.

Civil society organizations attempted to arrive at a consensus on the role of women thru gender sensitivity orientations (GSOs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). This included their role in the conduct of gender-sensitivity trainings, focus group discussions in the ARMM in 2004, roundtable discussion with women theologians and Islamic students, and women and development in 2002 and 2003. By the way, civil society gatherings within Marawi City and Lanao del Sur have become a venue for discourses as well as consultations among the CSOs in the area, which create space in the community for a meaningful and continuing dialogue.

B. Active Involvement on the Peace Process

The organization is involved in analyzing options and finding long-term solutions regarding the GRP-MILF peace talks. As a result, the participants and stakeholders recognized the role of women in peacebuilding and development.

C. Post-Conflict Activities

As we went into contact with communities during our research work, we were thrown into many other activities after the war. We were involved in internally displaced persons (IDPs) , post-conflict emergency relief, medical services, rehabilitation and construction of core shelters, water systems, latrines, mosque, and madrazah.

D. Capability-building on Peace

Fourth is capability-building on peace such as the barangay justice system that trains barangay justice advocates (of which more than 50% are women) regarding conflict resolution, counseling, mediation, negotiation (using a combination of indigenous and Philippine justice system) and youth training on Building Transformative Communities and Peace and Gender-Responsive Governance. We have also conducted fora on early warning and response, participated in the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute trainings as well as helped facilitate peace trainings of the Local Government Support Program (LGSP-CIDA).

E. Gender and Development Researches

Baseline data gathering and researches about community mechanisms to address violence against women and children in the community within Lanao del Sur have also been done. This has been translated into a handbook. Another research is a "Study on the Cause of Conflict in Marawi City" commissioned by the Human Development Network for the 2005 Philippine Human Development Report. There is also a research on the impact and consequences of armed conflict on the reproductive health of women in Mindanao, which is sponsored by the Mindanao Working Group of the AMDF where we are a member and a fellow researcher. Another research was taken on linking and networking for resource generation.

Conclusion

There is a need for sustained participation of women in decision-making. Women should not be mere beneficiaries, but take part in the decision-making process to influence policies that shape the behavior and thinking of the people.

Women should be able to capacitate themselves in matters of religion and culture and must project power and influence, take leadership positions in all aspect of community life such as in schools, religious groups and council of elders.

Women should have the courage and bravery to fight against backlash from conservative members of the community, take unpopular position on issues like that of polygamy. Women must take roles as judges, as political leaders on family planning, reproductive health, reproductive rights, sexuality and others. Unless we implement a community-based response to violence and call for peace, women, children and victims of war and conflict will remain wounded and unhealthy individuals.

Lastly, I asked our own community organizer regarding possible ways of addressing issues of peace in the communities. She pointed out several concepts that must be taken into consideration in the peace efforts which include: consultative leadership; participatory and people-centered development; gender sensitivity; collaboration with LGUs and CSOs; principles of community organizing and; respect for human rights and the development of a culture of peace through the Six Paths to Peace.

We must start where the people are but must not end where they are. Everything must be anchored on the spiritual aspect of groups and individuals concerned.

Thank you very much.

Marco Puzon, Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers (PCSUCS)

My journey to peace began in 1969 when I was born. The most important leg of my journey to peace began in 1998 when I was taking a tricycle ride in Mindanao. I bought a scarf from Marawi and went to a Christian area, forgetting that I was still wearing a "Muslim" scarf. I was trying to flag down tricycles but no one would pick me up. So, I removed my scarf and finally, a tricycle driver gave me a ride to my hotel. That incident made me ask, "What is happening here?" The third leg of my journey was when I did a research in Basilan and lived among the Yakans.

I am now working for and with children toward peace. The Philippine government defines children as human beings below 18 years of age, and young people as those 35 years old and below. The Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers (PCSUCS) began only in 2001. It is composed of four organizations: Amnesty International - Pilipinas, Balay Integrated Rehabilitation Center for Total Human Development Foundation (Balay), Philippine Human Rights Information Center (Philrights), and University of the Philippines Center for Integrative Development Studies (UP-CIDS) Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights Program. We came together in 2003 in Misamis Oriental for a second Consultation-Workshop on the Use of Children as Soldiers. Our first meeting was in 2001 in Davao. At this consultation workshop, we came up with an 11-point action plan. We came out with several plans, such as to develop a standard framework for demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of children, to do research and documentation and develop a database, among others.

Awareness Raising on CIAC

Our partner-organizations came out with a primer in 2005. It is written in Pilipino, with the title "Tungkol sa Opsyonal Protokol ng UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Itigil ang Paggamit ng

Child Soldiers." With this primer, we hope to raise advocacy and awareness on children in conflict situations. We call them child-soldiers and also children in armed conflict situations. It is an evolving terminology—we're trying to not use the phrase "child-soldiers" though this was the terminology used when our organization was just starting. We try to call them now as CIAC or children in armed conflict situations, because not all children are armed. Some children join armed groups, some are gofers, spies, and, in the case of Africa, some are sex slaves.

We met in October with UNICEF for a conference in developing a community-based demobilization, disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR). We wanted to develop a framework. What are we going to do with children when they are captured, freed from capture, and/or surrendered? Children are used by the CPP/NPA/NDF, the MNLF, the MILF, and the Abu Sayyaf. With the help of Germany's Bread for the World, Philrights came up with a book entitled "Deadly Playgrounds: The Phenomenon of Child-Soldiers in the Philippines. This caused quite a stir when recently the CPP/NPA/NDF through Roger Rosal and Joma Sison sent us a letter denying that they use children. We are not scared of the NDF, rather we would like to take this golden opportunity to talk to them. We are going to have another conference in December 13, 2005 on the DDRR framework, but this time we will involve the children themselves. We want to involve the children in the entire process, not only as sources of information. We want to involve them in analyzing the data. Their presence should not be just a token participation.

The Philippine Coalition, thought its partner Birthdev Foundation, shall be doing a national database project on the number of CIAC next year. It will cover Basilan, Bicol, Bohol, Mindoro, Maguindanao and Lanao del Norte. We really do not have exact statistics on this. Based on the study two years ago by Rufa Cagoco-Guiam, about 10 to 13% of the population in CPP/NPA, MILF, or MNLF-influenced barangays are members of the armed groups.
Another part of this program is the conduct of school symposia for awareness-raising beginning next year. This will be done in partnership with Christian Children's Fund (CCF) in Basilan, Social Action Center in Bicol, Free the Children in Bohol, with either UNYFIL or UNYPAD in Maguindanao, the UCCP in Mindoro, and Birthdev in Lanao del Norte. Instead of we from Manila going to the provinces, we intend to empower those groups that are already in Mindanao to take the lead in these activities.

My own organization had its set of activities. In 2003, we released a teaching and training manual entitled "Human Rights and Conflict Resolution: A Teaching and Training Manual." This was undertaken in partnership with the British Embassy, the Notre Dame University in Cotabato, and teachers from different areas. These modules are for public and private schools and are meant to promote non-discrimination. The bulk of the printed copies of this manual were sent to Mindanao. The manual intends to teach children ways of conflict resolution by instructing them with ways to work out their differences. It is based in the Makabayan curriculum and it uses games and other fun ways to learn, such as poetry writing and interpretative reading.

PCSUCS Projects

With Prof. Miriam Ferrer, we undertook a project on peace-building for civil society organizations to address the psycho-social consequences of armed conflict and violence. As Fr. Bert Layson said, we are paying an invisible price because of war. When we were doing this project, I was invited by the Christian Children's Fund to Basilan to witness the Pumalen Children's Peace Festival. This was the brainchild of the late Ms. Elisa del Puerto. The main idea was to give the children a chance to have fun. Before she died, Ms. Del treating the children to Jollibee. Puerto told me that the next Pumalen will just be a simple event of Imagine how good this will feel for a child living in a remote barangay, and who never before had the chance to eat in a Jollibee fast-food outlet. Jollibee recently opened in Isabela City. Elisa was able to treat some children to Jollibee and this brought them a lot of good

memories. It was a very simple act of giving the children a treat and letting them have a good time, which is really a part of psycho-social healing. I hope you can have a chance to go to Basilan sometime this May to see the children at their festival, with their bands, indigenous dances, and music, and shouting peace, "kapayapaaan, kasangayangan, kahapan kapiah". For me, it was such a good experience seeing the children enjoy themselves.

We also documented the "Twinning Schools" project by Balay in Mindanao. To quote Balay, "It was an attempt to cross boundaries, tear down walls of prejudice, an initiative to bring young people and adults in conflict-affected areas in Mindanao and counterparts in Manila towards a reciprocal understanding and sharing of experiences, exchanging ideas, and mutual encouragement in the promotion of children as zones of peace." Balay acted as a conduit to have children from the Rajah Muda area, mostly Muslims from Pikit, to come into contact with children in Manila's exclusive schools. They started by exchanging letters (probably by now, exchanging text messages too) as penpals. You could imagine that the sense of ownership is not with Balay but with the children themselves, and the high school teachers from Rajah Muda and Miriam, among other schools in Manila. There have been wonderful exchanges of letters.

There is also a project in Basilan which is called "Recycling War Trash for Peace." In Lantawan and other areas in Basilan, there are so many spent bullets and war materials. (Some people though, have reservations about even using these.) These were collected and turned into flower pots, chandeliers, vases, spoons, and other stuff. This was to train children in enhancing their skills in creative arts; and to integrate peace-building values among out-of-school youths, stressing on understanding, trust, cooperation, and promotion of a culture of peace. Initially, I also had reservations when I saw the spent bullets, but when I saw what the young people of Basilan had produced, I was impressed.

Notre Dame Foundation and Women in Enterprise Development in South Cotabato, along with Nokia and Consuelo Foundation, worked on a program to promote understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity and respect for self and others, and to help develop life and leadership skills. So, what they did in NTF-Skyweb was to go to certain areas in Cotabato and gather young people from Teduray, Maguindanao and Iranun tribes. They taught them life skills and leadership skills. We saw this as a very good opportunity to prevent children from joining armed groups. Why do children join armed groups, anyway? I could give you a litany of reasons why, but we're trying to find ways to prevent this.

How do we really involve children in our work? It was good to hear many of our speakers talk about what they do, but I rarely heard of programs that included children. Is it because we still live by the Victorian adage, which is that children are supposed to be seen but not heard? Why do we have to involve children? Well, technically, in fifty years, most of us will be dead and they're the ones who will be still living.

Conclusion

I could summarize most things by saying, "Involve children in a 'GIMICCC." A 'GIMICCC' project is one that is G – Gender sensitive, I – Imaginative but, M – Meaningful. A Mandaya boy once told me that the government remembers them only when it has to ask them to perform in the townhall, but after that, they are forgotten. Integrative, like Manang Bridget said, start with what's already there instead or reinventing the wheel. All that has to be done is to allow them to integrate what they have. C - Culturally-sensitive - There was one activity which required participants to kneel and then stand repeatedly, that Muslim participants found offensive so that they walked-out. C- Contextual and Community-based, understand the context before undertaking any endeavor in a community. For example, there are different worldviews among the tribes and we can't just lump them together.

I guess what's more important is that any peace initiative has to be community-based. And of course, at the forefront of these are Children. Does involving them mean just having them around? Or do we give them the tools that will allow them to plan things for themselves? One of the coalition's main thrusts is to involve CIAC in the peace process. In the peace talks with the MILF, CPLA, the MNLF, there's hardly a mention of what we're going to do with children in the community. Focus has been mostly on adults. We hope that with your help, we could include CIAC in the peace process, in the peace negotiations - because if we don't, what will we do with the children?

Workshop Recommendations on Strengthening Peace Movements
Policies to Support Peace Movements

Tony Salvador, legal adviser of Akbayan –Citizen's Action Party, presented the highlights of a draft Peace Policy bill to be sponsored by Rep. Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel, which aims to institutionalize the peace process. Director Romulo Halabaso of OPAPP followed with a presentation of the critical peace policies being implemented by government. The group discussed on how to ensure stability and sustainability of the peace process.

Recommendations
– There must be a policy that clearly stipulates that negotiated political settlement must be the preference over an all-out war policy for addressing conflicts. The peace process must be legislated and not placed on the whim and mercy of political leaders. The peace policy must be institutionalized so that it will not be subject to presidential prerogatives, and thus transcend the lifespan of administrations
– There are gaps on national laws that must be filled. For instance, RA 7160 has no provisions for punishment of crimes committed against children in armed conflict. A child is defined as anyone below 18 years old, but if one considers the indigenous laws, there are different approaches in defining a child.
– Researches and laws should be translated into local dialects of indigenous peoples' communities and an inclusive framework of understanding must be developed.
– The peace negotiations must tackle the substantial causes of conflict. Land redistribution and other vital structural reforms that address poverty must be priority policy handles. We must look into other economic burdens that can have a direct impact on peace (i.e. Expanded Value Added Tax). The extra-judicial killings especially of political activists and growing violation of human rights must be condemned.
– Strengthen structures in government that are frontrunners of peace process such as the OPAPP. At this point the government is fragmented so instead of creating many bureaucratic structures, policies and programs, we must strengthen existing frameworks.
– Security of tenure for government workers labouring for peace must be provided so that peace efforts are sustained. In addition, the House and Senate Committees on Peace must be strengthened by limiting the influence of partisan politics and by making politicians cross their party borders to unite on peace. · All agencies of government must be sensitized to peace issues and advocacies via a peace education course, etc. Furthermore, local government units and the military must be incorporated in dialogues and discussions on peace.
– Explore opportunities for engagement with the government in the areas of policy discussion on human security and transitional justice.
– Revive the Tripartite Ministerial Committee (re GRP – MNLF Final peace Agreement of 1996), to look into weaknesses of implementation of the peace agreement concerning the Bangsamoro. The

president's declaration of a state of lawlessness in some areas like Sulu, which became an excuse to the "de facto" suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, should be lifted.

– Human rights must be reaffirmed. The wounds of the past must be healed and a just compensation to the victims of human rights must be ensured.

– The program for rebel returnees must be reviewed. Sustainable programs must be in place and should have resources in order to be implemented effectively.

– There must be strong mechanisms for people's participation in the peace process. For example, we must try to explore the possibility of opening up the OPAPP and other basic sectors for the extensive participation of civil society. The people must be consulted in defining policy issues such as the proposed peace draft bill.

– Mainstream peace and cultural sensitivity. The culture of violence must be stopped. Peace activities must be popularized as well.

– The youth should be a vital sector that must be empowered if we are to sustain our peace efforts. We should also convene a Youth Waging Peace Conference.

Strengthening Capacities of Peace Movements

Capacities of peace movements are very much interrelated with capacities in policy. We need to define our vision of peace: its breadth and focus. In order to proceed and solve the peace question, we need a process that is holistic and community-based, we need training not only to improve skills but also to heal relationships. We have a lot of processes to unlearn and relearn. We harbor ancient prejudices, beyond merely the Muslim –Christian divide.

In order to improve our capacities, peace education and training should not just be limited to the local level. We can explore exchanges among peace centers and the training of peace professionals. We have to form alliances and engage with government. At the same time, we need to increase peoples' awareness of their rights that will empower them, and enable them to take more roles in local governance. Here are some recommendations that would strengthen peace movements:

Recommendations

– Design a high level, "Track 1" education program, targeting key actors and developing "peace professionals". There are a lot of initiatives already on grassroots peace building programs but very few for those in other leadership roles.

– Create opportunities for exchange between peace centers that are already established. This should also help to link peace movements in Mindanao , Visayas and Luzon

– Develop the capacities and enhance the environment for effective engagement with the government.

– Provide for capacity building in local governance.

– Involve the youth by developing creative programs for the youth and peace building (e.g. peace camps, peace festivals, arts and literature programs with peace as focus)

– Involve influential people in the efforts in order to mainstream peace issues. Popular education of peace advocacy—thru media, celebrity support, sports, entertainment, music, etc—is an effective means of mainstreaming peace advocacy.

– Understand how peace is embodied in diverse cultures so that peace concepts and learning will reflect indigenous peoples' perspectives.

– Challenge the academe to expand into peace education courses such as peace building leadership programs, peace institutes, peace seminars, etc. The academic sector plays a vital role in the acculturation of peace and in battling the culture of violence.

Community and Sector Based Peace Initiatives

In Mindanao, the tripartite people—the Lumads, Muslims and Christians—are all striving for peace.

The challenge is not to allow the Armed Forces and the armed groups to have the monopoly of settling the peace issues in their communities. There were horizontal and vertical consultations until breakthroughs were seen. As narrated by Bapa Jose Acmad, an initiative called Bantay Ceasefire was launched which established a grass civil society ceasefire monitoring as well as lobbied for the formation of an international monitoring team on the peace process.

Kaloy Anasarias of Balay Rehabilitation Center shared experiences on their services on psychosocial and humanitarian assistance. This work had helped put faces and humanize the life of civilian victims of war who had formerly been termed as "collateral damage". Civilians should not be seen as victims by the wayside but need to be recognized as human beings with rights.

Recommendations

The challenges that were identified were: the challenge posed by recurring war, the external sources of dole out aid, and institutional elements. The workshop group proposed the following:

– NGOs must build trust at the community level. Otherwise, they may be accused as either a spy or advocating the agenda of the other party.
– NGOs must assert independence in the context of development work but they must not remain neutral because the core of their efforts must be led by the community
– NGOs must provide services that address expressed needs of communities without encouraging dependence.
– Grassroots participation should be encouraged at all times. Allow empowered communities to generate their own resources, and to express their sentiments on the issues in the peace process.
– Support formation of consultative bodies to strengthen advocacy on peace. These should be in place so that the communities' coping and advocacy mechanisms have a venue.
– Encourage local government units to enact common ordinances in cluster or contiguous barangays so that effective joint implementation and monitoring will take place.
– Regarding networks: there is a need to reactivate proper community channels, coordinate different peace groups and the need for other NGOs to disseminate information to address human rights violations.
– NGOs should advocate the understanding of the root causes of conflicts. They can facilitate and process the conflict issues for the consolidation and collective action of the community.
– Deepen and broaden the concept of human security. Peace must not be viewed merely as the absence of war; initiatives must be comprehensive and holistic in the approach to peace building and peace keeping.
– Peace and development aid must not arrive as dole outs.
– Harness and maximize indigenous traditions in resolving disputes.
– Agrarian issues, mining and logging policies are key factors that contribute to armed struggles and conflicts, and these policy areas must also be reviewed.
– Veer away from the use of the phrase "collateral damage". Humans have rights that must be upheld. Military operations must not view the public simply as accidental casualties of armed conflicts.

Instituting the Politics of a Just Peace

Peace Process and Political Parties

Rep. Lorenzo Tañada III, Liberal Party, House of Representatives - Special Committee on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity

The Liberal Party and Peace

The Liberal party, as stated in its Constitution, pushes for peace issues but the translation of the document into reality is different. I think this is due to the fact that the issue of peace within the political party is not yet very popular. It is popular with the few senators and congressmen who have participated in the parliament of the streets, and who know the issues revolving around the peace and conflict situation. The majority of the congressmen would have to go through discussion groups on peace, especially because we are in the legislative branch. The discussion groups would influence ways of pursuing or pushing for the issue of peace within congress.

As vice chairman of the House Special Committee on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity we initiated such discussions. We had briefings on the problems of the MILF, MNLF and NDF when we convened last year and early this year. As a matter of fact, last June, Representative Satur Ocampo, Representative Art Defensor and I went to the Netherlands to have a dialogue with the National Democratic Front.

Efforts on Peace Negotiation

The committee aims to try to find ways to jumpstart the peace negotiation with the NDF because the GRP-NDF peace talks have been stalled for about a year and there has been no movement. Satur and I, in consultation with Speaker De Venecia, think that the house could act as a catalyst in reviving the peace negotiations. The discussions with the NDF were a success. As a matter of fact we went to so many drafts of a joint communiqué and we felt that we had achieved a communiqué that would have started the stalled peace talks.

Our position in the House is that it will always play an important role in peace negotiations. If ever there would be a need to legislate laws in resolving the basic issues that confront the problems between the GRP and the NDF, we must be there. That is our objective. The last document between our panel and the NDF, before De Venecia interfered was to supposed to contribute to efforts to return to the formal talks in the GRP and NDF peace negotiations. As per mandate by the House of Representatives, as defined by Speaker Jose de Venecia, we must seek to achieve within six months the objectives of an honorable negotiated political settlement of the 35-year old conflict.

If we will look into the negotiations between the GRP and NDF, the problem started from NDF's demand for a revision of the terrorist lists of the US and EU, and the removal of CPP and NPA from the listing. The position was that if this will not be acted upon, the NDF will not continue with the negotiations. When we went there, they were agreeing to continue with the peace negotiations, without requiring the dropping of the terrorist tag. As long as the signed documents—the Hague documents, the CARHRIHL, Oslo 1 and 2—which were signed by both the NDF and GRP, be complied with. This is a reasonable demand since these documents were already signed and agreed by both parties. We went through the trouble of numerous drafts and the communiqué was already signed.

When Jose De Venecia came into the picture, everything was shattered. What the House Speaker wanted (this was the marching orders from Malacanang), was that they would only agree on

restarting peace talks if NDF agrees to a ceasefire, which is totally unacceptable to the NDF. The NDF backed off yet agreed that a separate panel could be constituted specifically tackling the issue of ceasefire. This is how far they are willing to compromise with regard to going back to the negotiating table but Speaker De Venecia insists that he will not sign the agreement unless it is stated that a ceasefire will take effect upon the resumption of the peace negotiation.

Our initiative in June collapsed so there is an attempt to meet again this August. The 3rd party facilitator, Norway, asked both panels to start the process of peace negotiations again. Until now, the talks are yet to be resumed. The NDF panel is hoping for people who could be reasonable and logical as negotiators. Speaker De Venecia told us that the agreement is partial to the NDF panel because the negotiators from the GRP panel are all leftists.

Conclusion

We are looking for ways to re-start the peace talks. We have no power to negotiate for the GRP. Our role is to facilitate and look for means to jump start the talks. The NDF has prejudicial questions, but we were able to get certain points, where they even compromised with us.

We think that we have achieved something for the committee, but then our efforts were wasted. We are looking for ways to approach the issues and we are refocusing our efforts because the MILF negotiation is almost complete. This is the program of the peace committee last year. I am hoping that there will be another attempt to jumpstart the talks with the NDF.

As we can see, the number of politically motivated killings is escalating. The victims are not just from Bayan Muna, Anakpawis, Akbayan, but even the Movement for Nationalism and Democracy (KPD). Violence is escalating so we must look into the root causes that further perpetuate the hostilities. You can count on us, although our political party is not very active in the struggle for peace, there are many of us within the Liberal Party who pursue peace initiatives.

Rep. Mario Aguja, AKBAYAN Citizen's Action Party

Introduction

We need to wage peace to put an end to wars now being waged in the different places throughout the country. Many of those who experienced and still experiencing war will not only tell us of the horrors of war. They know that war solves nothing. They will tell us that wars bring misery and agony to an already agonizing people. Moreover war does not victimize rich people but rather the poor.

One of the major problems of peace advocates in this country is that media and the general public take a passive stance on the issue of peace because they are already confused and desensitized regarding the real meaning and definition of peace.

As a representative of Akbayan, I have 3 points to share with you today: first, our party platform relative to the question of peace; second, current party's initiatives on peace and lastly, how Akbayan, as a political party, can be part of multi-partisan peace efforts.

On Akbayan's Peace Platform of Governance

Akbayan Citizen's Action Party as a mass movement-based political party is deeply committed to the principles of democracy, equity, humanism and internationalism. These principles are enshrined in our party's constitution and by-laws and continue to guide our actions since the founding of the party in 1998.

Humanism

Of particular relevance to our topic today is Akbayan's adherence to the principle of humanism. Our party constitution states: "Humanism which underscores the fullest dignity due to all human beings across and within generations, families, clans, ethnicity, gender, nations, cultures, spirituality as well as our relationship to Mother Earth asserts the autonomy of the free association of social movements in civil society and works towards the full self-expression and self-realization towards resolving social alienation."

This principle of humanism continues to guide us as a party and it serves as a point of reference of the party to reflect on what we are doing and what we are supposed to do. We are trying to shape ourselves as a mode or as a new form of a political party that stands on programs and principles rather than as a political party only during elections.

Akbayan believes that a just and lasting peace can only be achieved thru respect for human rights and adherence to social justice. The various insurgencies in the country, such as the Mindanao conflict and the communist movement should not be seen as problems in themselves but rather as symptoms of bigger social ills like poverty, disenfranchisement and oppression. It is only when we address these issues that we can achieve a genuine and sustainable peace.

The insistence of the government in foisting its own version of peace—more often than not understood as peace equals capitulation—has only worsened the situation and deepened the conflict. Akbayan believes in participatory democracy, wherein all stakeholders are given a forum to air their grievances and seek redress. Taking a hardline stance and adapting a policy of attrition will only result in further marginalization and therefore further radicalization.

Demilitarization

We in Akbayan condemn the state's penchant for militarization not only because it is not the way by which peace can be achieved. We experienced in Mindanao that the militarization never contributed to peace. In fact many of the advocates in Mindanao are saying that you have to demilitarize Mindanao if you are interested in peace.

For example, from January 21, 2001 to December 5, 2004, there were 3,560 documented cases of human rights violations involving 198,000 victims, 18,977 families or 123 communities. The types of violence range from killing or physical assault, to destruction of properties, desecration of places of worship or offending religious rites, and food and other economic blockades. The highest number of cases pertains to threats, harassment and intimidation committed on individuals and of forcible evacuation and displacement of families.

The wanton execution of journalists and leftists in this country is also alarming. We in Akbayan are already alarmed about the leadership being provided by Gen. Jovito Palparan of the AFP. He was in Mindoro, he was in Samar and now he is in Nueva Ecija, moving near Metro Manila. His record is undeniable such that his presence in an area is proportional to summary executions of activists in the legal fronts. This is a very dangerous sign of our times.

A Multi-faceted Approach

Akbayan also believes that the peace agenda should also incorporate other issues brought about by the conflict. Non-state actors must be constantly monitored. Children and the youth must be a main concern in a holistic peace agenda. Taking an active position against atrocities and maintaining vigilance are imperatives in waging peace.

The pernicious practice of hiring child soldiers must be addressed. In our last conference, this was one of the issues that was also raised. If you want to fight, recruit the older ones. Give time for children to think, play and enjoy life before they finally decide to fight, if ever they decide.
On the other hand, non-state actors must also be checked. One such case is the case in Bondoc Peninsula involving the series of atrocities committed by the New People's Army against farmers in San Vicente, San Narciso, Quezon. These farmers have been clamoring for land reform under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). According to the report of the humanitarian mission made by Task Force Bondoc Peninsula, the landlord family Uy collaborated with the members of the Maria Theresa de Leon command of the NPA to intimidate and threaten the farmers. Akbayan also experienced harassment when we called for a campaign against the requirement of "Permit To Campaign" (PTCs) by the NPA in certain areas during elections. Now, we are passing a legislation to criminalize the PTC because it is the right of people and individuals to campaign during elections. The electorate has the right to know who the candidates are. We have to protect the fundamental rights of the people.

Peace Monitoring

Moreover, the commitments made in various peace agreements should go beyond lip service. At present both the NDF and GRP are violating the provisions of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL). Both sides should demonstrate the necessary good faith and political will to carry out the terms of the agreement. In fact the GRP and NDF agreement is stalled. Notwithstanding that nobody seems to remember the GRP-MNLF final peace agreement.

The peace initiative should also be context specific. It should take into account the cultural milieu of the people. The problem of Rido is one of the biggest causes of deaths in Mindanao but it is impossible to solve it without tracing and understanding its roots and origins. The issue of ancestral domains in the on-going GRP-MILF peace negotiations is also contentious. The negotiation is also based on fear rather than facts.

On Peace Initiatives

Akbayan is continuously laboring towards peace. Peace must be a priority of every political party. What are these current peace initiatives of Akbayan?

1. A Bill for a Philippine Statute on Crimes Against International Humanitarian Law.

This is the law against armed conflict. The purpose of the law is to protect non-combatants and civilians during armed conflict. We are now on the level of the Technical Working Group (TWG) in Congress.

2. Prohibition on the Use of Landmines.

We filed legislation on the Prohibition of the Use of Landmines. The use of landmines is resurging; there are many cases of landmines this year.

3. A Bill on the Protection of the Rights and Welfare of Internally Displaced Persons.

Based on an Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) convention, we demand for (a) the rights and protection of IDPs (we have so many IDPs especially in Mindanao) and (b) the state's responsibilities to the IDPs. Recently, civil society raised funds for the IDPs in Quezon instead of the state developing a mechanism to address the plight of IDPs.

4. National Peace Policy Bill.

The previous frameworks for peace negotiations are deemed inappropriate in addressing the needs of the current situation. We have to develop a new and better framework to guide our peace negotiators and the public as far as the conduct of peace agreements and processes is concerned.

5. Akbayan is actively involved in organizing dialogues, discussions, conferences with other stakeholders.

We are continuously in dialogues with different group such as those in the business community, peace movements, and also with the MNLF and MILF for the promotion of sustainable peace. We are undergoing a continuous peace education within and outside the party. In addition, during the second congress of our party, the constitution of the party was amended to include a specific provision on peculiar problems and issues on Mindanao. It is a provision for a Mindanao Commission.

A Multi-Partisan Peace Effort

How can Akbayan be part of a multi-partisan peace effort? These are some approaches that we can undertake:

1. Participating in information dissemination and consciousness-raising on active non-violence as a policy superior to armed conflict focusing on human security (peace is more than silencing the guns);

2. To contribute in the broad effort to bring peace is a continuous vigilance, especially with regard to state-sponsored violence and those committed by Non-State Actors;

3. Promotion of human rights and social justice in all aspects of the Akbayan's activities and consciousness-raising of our membership;

4. Joining peace missions, dialogues and advocacies for a just and lasting peace;

5. Forging alliances with like minded groups who are working for peace, and engagements with different levels of civil society, political parties and government;

6. To develop an open channel of communication among actors and stakeholders as we forge a deeper partnership.

Conclusion

Finally, as we celebrate Human Rights Week this year, let us remember those who have once led our fight for peace and justice, and commit ourselves to continue their advocacy. May this conference further strengthen our resolve that never again will we let our voices stifled, never again will our rights be oppressed, and never again will we allow the interest of one or the interest of the few to rule over the welfare of many. May we all continue to be warriors for peace!

Local Governance and Peace - Lessons, Gains and Challenges

Atty. Juanito Cambangay, Provincial Planning and Development Office, Bohol

Provincial Profile

Bohol is a province in Central Visayas with a land area of 411,726 hectares, with a population of 1,137,268. Its population growth rate is 2.9%. Given this rate, its population will double in 24 years, so that in 2024 there will be 2 million Boholanos. The statistics is very significant because today, roughly each family has about a hectare of land. So by the time our population doubles, the population-land ration would be reduced by half. Of course the main sources of income in our province are fishing and farming. Our per capita income as of year 2000 is roughly P20,000.

Challenges

Like any local government unit we are faced with a number of problems, one of which is poverty. Bohol is ranked as one of the 20 poorest provinces in the country. As a matter of fact our ranking as of the 2000 census was 16th among the 79 provinces in this country. We also have a rising insurgency problem. Perhaps this is brought about by poverty, lack of government presence, and the lack of resources in the municipalities and barangays.
Bohol also lacks adequate infrastructure support particularly in the areas of water and sanitation. The management of land resources is far from the ideal. Therefore this has resulted in soil erosion and degradation of marine habitats.

Employment opportunities and sustainable livelihood in the province is very scarce. Unsurprisingly, Bohol suffers from out migration. As a matter of fact, it is said that there are more Boholanos in Mindanao than in Bohol. A good indicator of the out migration is the number of ship calls from Tagbilaran (and most of our port towns) to Manila. The presence of numerous shipping companies is a proof of out migration of people from the province.
The level of empowerment among the communities is very poor particularly in poverty groups. Understandably, the level of revenue generation in the province is quite low. Like most LGUs, Bohol is dependent on the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA). Like other provinces, we have a vision of becoming the number one tourist destination and we want to be a rich agro-industrial province. As we pursue our programs and focus more on investments in infrastructures, we were confronted with an immediate challenge which is poverty. Poverty incidence rose from 37.3% in 1997 to 47.3% in 2000, in terms of families, and from 43.1% in 1997 to 53.6% in 2000, in terms of population.

During the social reform agenda of the Ramos Administration, we were not even included in the top 40 poorest provinces. 30% of our barangays are in various stages of insurgency—categorized as infiltrated and influenced.

Response: The Bohol Poverty Reduction Program

We shifted to a more holistic development agenda. We looked at the areas of: governance, environmental management, social welfare, peace and security, urban management, education, health, rural improvement, population management, sustainable livelihoods, infrastructures and economic management. These development sectors are tested in relation to its impact on poverty

reduction and in the same manner, poverty reduction is also tested against these development sectors.

We formed the Bohol Poverty Reduction Management Office primarily addressing issues of poverty and insurgency situation and areas that could not be reached by government services. The project sites and beneficiaries of this program were 41 insurgency-affected barangays with 14,654 individual beneficiaries and an expansion of 40 more barangays and 20 municipalities which is the mandated coverage of the office. The program strategy is convergence of services, community organizing and capability building.

Gains and Lessons Learned

These are the lessons learned and gains achieved by the poverty program:

1. Social Impact

– Communist guerilla fronts activities reduced from 5 fronts in 2002 to only 1 in 2005.
– Decreased number of insurgents from 283 in 2001 to 64 in 2002.
– Further decreased the number of armed rebels from 64 in 2002 to 42 in 2005.
– Decreased the number of insurgency-affected barangays from 305 in 2000 to 46 barangays in 2005.
– Bohol is awarded the "Outstanding PPOC Award" in 2004 by the National Peace and Order Council.
– Decrease in the cases of individuals affected with water-borne diseases.
– Elementary and secondary completion rates increased.
– The mortality rate is significantly reduced.

2. Economic Impact

– Investments in the province increased from Php993M in 2003 to Php2.05B in 2005.
– Unemployment rate decreased. A total of 36,114 individuals employed in established investments from 2003 to 2005.
– Of the 3,727 animals distributed with P76.5M funding under the LETS HELP BOHOL PROGRAM, 660 animals have already been passed back/on
– 32 Cooperatives in insurgency-affected barangays were established.
– Skills and livelihood training birthed small scale enterprises

3. Gender Equity

– Women as proponents of projects and livelihood beneficiaries. There are 7 women out of 10 livelihood participants and actively involved in decision making and management of projects.

4. Promotion of People Empowerment

– In insurgency areas alone, the convergence strategy has effectively pooled assistance in the amount of P10M from different providers from the international, national, provincial, municipal, barangay and community levels from January to November 2004.
– Joint efforts of military and government increased the awareness of barangay people on the efforts of government to address poverty. The people now report presence of armed groups in the area.
– Effective convergence of GO and NGO as community service providers.
– Provincial political culture of building upon accomplishments and policies of past administrations
– Poverty Reduction, Peace and Development agencies have been institutionalized

– Membership of rebel returnees in: Civilian Volunteer Organizations, Barangay Intelligence Network, and Integrated Territorial Defense System
– Thru the established Local Poverty Reduction Action Plan (LPRAP) Database, poverty groups can continuously assess and address their poverty situations
– Strong coordination is fostered among government and non-government service providers for effective convergent delivery of services
– Strong coordination is fostered among government and non-government service providers for effective convergent delivery of services

5. Efficiency of Program Service Delivery

– Structures and mechanisms put in place: Organized/Strengthened Puroks, People's organizations/Cooperatives, Barangay Poverty Reduction Action Teams (BPRATs), Municipal Poverty Reduction Action Teams (MPRATs), Provincial Poverty Reduction Action Teams (PPRATs), Provincial Poverty Reduction Committee (PPRC), and Program Framework on Poverty Reduction
– The Provincial Leadership adopted a culture of building upon accomplishments of past Administrations.
– Agencies which have to do with poverty reduction, peace and development have been institutionalized.
– A Program Framework on Poverty Reduction is in place to synchronize all poverty reduction, peace and development efforts in the province
– Maintaining a functional Poverty Database with the use of the LPRAP Software, a tool to track the poor and to prioritize interventions.

Let me end this presentation with a quote from Lakhdar Brahimi, "Peace-building does not work without the support of the population concerned. It is vital to involve local capacities and expand them. Basic needs have to be taken care of first, ranging from water supply to security and judicial reform. Speed is essential in winning the peace."

Omar Unggui, GINAPALADTAKA Space for Peace

How much is the influence of the barangay government when we talk about governance, particularly in the peace process? In the case of the GINAPALADTAKA the cluster of newly declared spaces of peace in the municipality of Pikit in Cotabato, it plays a very big role in the so-called grassroots peace process. We call this the horizontal peace process. It is a community- based support to the on-going GRP-MILF peace talks that we know as the vertical peace process. Perhaps it is not quite good for me to talk about governance but it is more fitting to say that this will be a sharing of the experiences on how we arrived at the Spaces of Peace Declaration last year and how it is today.

In 2003, the Buliok offensive was the last war experienced in Pikit that caused more than 30,000 number of internally displaced people. Most of these came from the barangays that are members of GINAPALADTAKA. (GINAPALADTAKA which is Ilongo for 'I bless you' combines the names of Barangays Ginatilan, Nalapaan, Panicupan, Lagunde, Dalingaoen, Takepan, and Kalakacan.) In this sense, the 7 barangays started to organize themselves looking for means to address the peace and order problems in their contiguous barangays. Then we started to seek the help of NGOs. This became a good partnership- the barangays and the community as the main actors and the support NGOs to provide material support and moral support as much as financial assistance.

What are the challenges? The clan wars, the Muslim-Christian relationship gap, the poverty, crimes like the cattle rustling, the military abuse, the unhealed trauma of individuals. We need to strengthen the commitment of both sides to maintain the space for peace..

Barangay Peace Responses

The barangay activated the following committees to work closely with the NGOs: the Barangay Peace and Order Council, Barangay Development Council, Barangay Disaster Coordinating Council, Council of Elders, the religious groups, the youth and the women. All of these worked hand in hand to remove religious barriers thru interfaith dialogues.

Food security and livelihood projects are essential in securing peace. The stakeholders—the civilian, the military and the rebels—were all beneficiaries of the culture of peace. Another important factor in achieving peace is the aspect of psycho-social interventions and healing. Balay Inc. and Balik Kalipay are some of the NGOs that facilitated psycho-social intercession activities and trained members of the communities.

We believe in the power of dialogue. The confrontational approach doesn't work with the problem of clan war. On the other hand, we had the experience of settling so many cases, including a murder case already filed in court, through traditional dialogues involving what we called restorative justice. The settling of such cases are among the things that the GINAPALADTAKA considers priority concerns. This is because these small clan wars are often causes of bigger wars and sometimes result in "all-out" national war.

Now after the declaration of the space for peace was supported by both the GRP and the MILF, the new challenges are on how to sustain the peace in the areas covered by the GINAPALADTAKA or G7.

After one year the G7 has continued and it has strengthened the respect for the declaration of the spaces for peace and the children as zones of peace. The continuous building of the culture of peace is the primary concern. The Barangay Sustainable Development Program supported by the NGO partners paved the way for some projects such as livelihood projects and support infractructure.

Participatory Governance

I think the best lesson learned in the G7 is that once everyone is given an opportunity to participate in the initiatives everyone becomes concerned and feels responsible. There is no record of unimplemented projects in the G7. This is because of the harmonious work relationship and respect among the community and barangay leaders and the NGO's. How can they trust the peace initiatives if they have no participation? Governance, means "pinag uusapan yan palagi" or constant discussion and consensus-building. We believe that most causes of the rebellion relate to dissatisfaction and deprivation of rights. The seven barangay captains decide always on the implementation and respect the consensus. Meetings are held every first Wednesday of the month and are attended by some NGO's and peoples' organizations (PO's).

Some of the concerns now are poverty, and the poor production of local crops because of the lack of irrigation system. The Malmar irrigation system is still not functioning and may be not be finished soon.

This is the experience of GINAPALADTAKA – peacebuilding at the barangay, or grassroots peace process.

The Sagada Experience

Thomas Killip, Presidential Assistant on Cordillera Affairs

Thank you for inviting me to this occasion in order to share our small story of peacekeeping and peacebuilding to those who care to listen. I hope that perhaps a lesson or two could be drawn from our community's experience in order to further enrich the whole concept of peacekeeping in this troubled times.

I decided that the simplest way to present the peace initiatives in our small community is to recount even just one situation in the history of Sagada which has a bearing on the subject of conflict management, prevention, and resolution and at the same time to relate these events to the role of governance in the midst of conflict situations.

As a start I would like to take you back to that part of our history when the Spanish Crown ruled the Philippine archipelago for more than 300 years. It must be noted that during all those three centuries, the different tribal communities in the mountain region of the Cordillera were never subsumed into the mainstream socio-political system with its center in Manila. And for more than 300 years these communities enjoyed freedom from foreign domination. These indigenous communities lived independently of each other but at the same time maintained both socio-economic and socio-cultural intercourse with one another, and also with the lowland communities around them for barter and trade. Only in the late 1800s just two decades before the American colonial power took over was the Spanish colonial government able to establish a few military outposts in the interior parts of the Cordillera region. These "commandancia-politico-militar" as they were called were about the only Spanish presence in the interiors of the region.

The form of government in these traditional communities was basically a rule of elders who by virtue of their age had accumulated enough experience and wisdom, and had proven integrity and courage to be able to command respect and confidence among their village constituents. Such council of elders bore the important role of peacekeeping within and outside of the community. At an era where headhunting and tribal wars were the order of the day it was important that the council of elders initiated peace through peace pacts (peden or bodong) even with distance communities to ensure the safety of travel to far flung communities. Within the community, a vital role of the council of elders was to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts between individuals, families and clans. This is to ensure a united and strong tribal community at all times for its very survival. In those days it would be correct to say that governance was synonymous to peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

History of Community Survival

During the Philippine Revolution against Spain, the Spanish officer of the commandacia in Bontoc, a Commandante Eduardo Xandaru upon receiving reports that the people of Sagada were actively collaborating with the Ilocano Katipuneros organized 5 tribal communities which were traditional enemies of the Sagada community and on July 11, 1898 led a punitive expedition which resulted in the massacre of 84 men, women and children. As you should know even among tribal communities there were rules of war being observed during traditional tribal wars. It was the Spaniards that initiated wars which pitted several tribes against one tribe in the true fashion of divide-and-rule. The depredations continued even after the incident and it would have meant the decimation of the entire community if not for a twist of fate and the way that the elders thought of the community mechanism

for survival. At this time the American colonial power was entering the arena. The American army entered the Cordillera region to mop out pockets of resistance and later to pursue the retreating forces of President Emilio Aguinaldo which took refuge among different communities in the Cordillera. Close on their heels were American missionaries charged with completing the final pacification of the Cordillera by introducing Western education and culture. The elders took the bold step of offering 32 hectares of communal land to American missionaries for a hospital, a church, and a school which all exist to this day in exchange for the protection of the community from headhunting forays. It was not out of love for the Americans because how else would the people of Sagada know at the time if these new colonial masters would be more benevolent than the former Spanish authorities? Under the dark and uncertain circumstances of that time it was the most practical option that they could adopt for the community's survival. It was the community's mechanism for survival.

During World War II, the Japanese Imperial Army penetrated the interior parts of the Cordillera mountain region and in the case of Sagada, they took over and occupied the big mission buildings built by the Americans. Soon they introduced their brand of Japanese military rule. Civilians were shot and killed for various reasons. The elders and officials at that time instructed the people to physically evacuate the town centers and live in safer areas with relatives or friends where there was no Japanese presence. This while Filipino guerillas tied the Japanese to fighting in the town centers. This was the community mechanism for survival during the Japanese occupation.

Conflict Reaches the Community

The situation in the late 1980s and early 1990s was a far unique and different experience for the community of Sagada. Now in its 37th year, the insurgency situation in the Philippines still rages and continues to rage even in the remotest areas of the Philippines including our small town. A conflict of this nature had never before been experienced and thus the community had difficulty in managing such a type of conflict in its midst. Unlike in other situations where one can easily determine who are not from the community or who are hostile to the community, this conflict had no perceived enemy or friend and therefore there was no ready solution in sight. Most members of the forces in conflict would come from the same region, from the same ethno-linguistic background, the same community, or would be members of the same clan. In the late 1980's when the armed conflict between the AFP and the NPA reached even the town center of Sagada several civilians were killed in the crossfire and a climate of fear, tension, and suspicion prevailed. Farmlands were left untended and livelihood for the community became stagnant. And because many of Sagada's sons had joined the AFP and the NPA, it was the most difficult thought to entertain that one of those days, these fine sons would be killing each other in their own yards.

Perhaps we can owe much to the values imparted by our traditional elders that we human beings are born with a large brain to think of better solutions for even the worst situations. If we were born with large horns like the carabao then we can lock horns to settle our slightest difference, but we are not carabaos.

Emergence of a "Demilitarized Zone"

And thus in small groups, in large groups; in various institutions like the church and local government unit; among some sectors - elders, women - people started to talk about how best to address the situation to come up with a peace mechanism or a mechanism for survival. There were many proposals that were brought out from the entire processes of community consultations and dialogues, from the farfetched to the more reasonable and doable. Finally some consensus was arrived at with the following basic understanding and considerations such as the following:

a. that dialogue would be one of the community's main instrument for peace building

b. that internationally recognized rules of war should apply in this community

c. that there should be no armed encounters inside populated centers

d. that political pluralism should prevail

e. that a multi-sectoral community peace committee or council be formed to coordinate the peace initiative

f. that Sagada should be demilitarized of all armed groups except the local police

g. that at all times the interest of the civilian community is supreme over the interest of armed groups

The local peace body or committee was tasked to consolidate the community's plea for peace and articulate this plea to the parties concerned. Peace movements and institutions such as the Gaston Z Ortigas Peace Institute, and the government's Peace Commission, the National Peace Commission, and later the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process which got wind of the community's peace initiatives extended their assistance in various forms to the community. These are the bodies and agencies that helped facilitate meetings between the community and the different levels of the command of the Armed Forces in the Philippines. These are the groups also that popularized the term "peace zone" in reference to the Sagada community's overall peace initiatives. Thus in several occasions with the support and assistance of these peace groups and agencies, the community peace body was able to meet and negotiate for peace with the top brass of the AFP at Camp Aguinaldo and here at the Ateneo de Manila. The response of the AFP could best be summed up in the words of then AFP Chief of Staff Lisandro Abadia when he said.. .. ". . . the peace zone concept is the handiwork of local officials who are sympathetic to the NPA. . . the peace zone is meant to protect the NPA from pursuit operations by the military . . . the community of Sagada should stop being parochial on the issue and join the fight against the insurgents. . ."

Probably the only dissenting opinion at that time came from the late General Arturo Enrile, who saw some good points in the concept. Unfortunately, he did not live long to see and appreciate the return-on-investment. Meanwhile, the Sagada Peace Committee reached out to the NPA to push the community message across. The local command of the NPA acceded to many of the substance of the community declaration for peace. However, the regional command of the NPA declared that the peace zone is part of the AFP strategy of the low intensity conflict - of trying to separate the fish from the water.

Small and Self-Determined

However, from the community's end it was firm in its resolve that it had the inherent collective right to protect itself from threats and harm at all times. That this concept is its mechanism for survival. That while it may not be a perfect mechanism, it is always better to have one than none at all. The Peace Zone is not anti-AFP or anti-NPA but pro-community. And it is still better to do something than to watch helpless while its children are killed in the crossfire.

When the Peace zone was being conceptualized it was farthest from our minds and intentions that we were going to stop the war because we were aware from the start that this is a national phenomenon that needed a national solution of sorts. But I would think that a big measure of the quality, efficiency or success of governance is on how it responds to various crisis situations that affect the entire community. In the case of the Sagada experience, I would say that the strong

leadership and character of our traditional elders has much to do with the way that the community has responded to different socio-cultural, political and economic situations. Even as our communities are subsumed into the mainstream socio-political and economic system, some of the features of traditional village governance are present in varying degrees in many villages. Of course such features have greatly eroded over the years with the introduction of our local government systems, government and church institutions, and national laws. Perhaps it is still a great legacy for us that even as the forms have changed, the strong sense of community which was the strength of traditional communities is still present with us. It is that driving force that makes the members of the community come together and discuss the common good in spite of personal, family, clan or political differences. It is that self-determining force that makes us assert our rights and aspirations despite our smallness. It is our concept and practice of community empowerment and collective leadership.

In our community initiatives for peace we never thought that we have to wait for any constitutional provision in order for the community to come out with its peacekeeping or peacebuilding mechanisms. To the community the practice of peacekeeping and peacebuilding precedes the constitution. It is an inherent collective right that makes us determine our ways of self-preservation and directions in times of war and peace.

Having thus shared some of the community experience in governance and peace keeping I hope this would help others in implementation, including on:
– problems of getting different groups to have a better understanding and respect for the community's peace initiatives
– making the younger people and leaders aware of these initiatives so that the community reflection and response to certain situations may be maintained.

Frequently Asked Questions

Let me end by directly answering some questions that may be in the minds of listeners:

(a) What is the present status of the so-called Sagada PZ? Since 1988, when the community declared its peace initiatives it is already almost 18 years past and we have been enjoying relative peace for quite some time. But as part of our concept of peacebuilding we have opened our community as a venue and space for peace negotiations of various types: Let me recall that in 1994 it was the venue for negotiations for the release of seven PNP personnel who were taken prisoners by the NPA and it was the same venue for their eventual release. The Sagada PZ was also the venue for several inter-tribal peace talks. This includes the latest preliminary peace consultations between representatives of the warring communities of Bugnay, Kalinga and representatives of Betwagan, Sadanga for the eventual restoration of their broken peace pact which for the last two years resulted in the deaths of 12 people on both sides. So that even while there are no incidents involving NPA-AFP related armed conflicts, the Sagada peace mechanism still covers other social conflicts among nearby or even more distant communities whenever they seek our services and assistance. In 1997, a team of Philippine army soldiers based in Besao were ambushed at Danum area between the municipalities of Besao and Sagada. Four soldiers were killed on the spot and six were wounded. Our peace mechanism in Sagada was the first to respond perhaps because we were more prepared and more experienced for such eventualities. The six wounded soldiers were brought to the hospital in Sagada and were all given the necessary treatment.

(b) Are there outcroppings of the concept of the PZ in the province? The municipalities of Besao, Bontoc, Sadanga and Sagada have signified their interest to form a cluster area for peace and development. This is a broader adaptation of the concept. The members of the body called the "Peace Executive Council" that is charged to manage the affairs of the PZ, promote recognition of

the value of the community's peace initiatives. .Likewise, hopefully the experience would contribute in its small way towards the whole movement for true peace in this region and also in the country.

(c) Don't you think that the PZ would only transfer the armed conflict to other areas? That was the initial perception which both the armed parties at war reasoned out. But if I would recall all the armed incidents after 1988 when the community declared itself as an area for peace and development (PZ) took place in areas away from the residential areas. In other words, it was more a transfer of armed hostilities from the town centers into areas where the civilian populations are not directly or adversely affected.

(d) How successful is the PZ? I would say that all systems, or social mechanisms for peace or for survival are not total successes or total failures. Outsiders, even the protagonists in this on-going conflict may disagree with the concept or initiatives but paramount to us is our community well-being. To the community it is better to see one victim of a crossfire than to see ten people die somewhere without ever knowing what the war is all about.

(e) Are PZ in different parts the same or necessarily the same? Or would they remain the same over time? I would not hesitate to say that community PZ's are not necessarily the same. Many conditions and factors would influence the concept and initiative. The way that the whole community would understand their situation or the issues confronting them at a given time, the kind of conflict that is in their midst (tribal or political conflict), and the capability of their elders, officials and leaders would determine how their mechanism would be formulated. Nor would I say that PZ's or community peace mechanisms would remain the same in form and substance. Over the years different situations come and go - each situation with its own particular character, thus the approach would be different.

(f) What are the particular problems that your peace initiatives - or the PZ - encountered?

There were initial problems of implementation, considering that the Peace Executive Council of these cluster peace areas is comprised of the local chief executives of the member-municipalities and ministers of the mainstream churches residing in these municipalities. It is a unique body in the sense that it is a combination of statesmen-elders and church ministers. But at the same time this also reflects the community's ability to transcend political and religious colors for a higher objective. Some of the guiding principles of its inception were laid out with uncertainty, but all these would be enriched in time with experience and the whole practice of peace building and peace keeping.

Strategies in Advancing Critical Political and Electoral Reform Agenda for Peace

On Political Power

Ramon Casiple, Institute for Political and Electoral Reforms

What is the importance of political and electoral reforms? The essence of armed conflicts—waged by the NDF, MILF, and MNLF groups in the Philippines—is political in nature. Even socio-economic issues and specifically the crisis of poverty are fundamentally rooted in political power. All rebellions seek political power in order to put into effect their programs of development and socio-economic

transformation.

Political and electoral reforms, including constitutional reforms, address the core issue of power. Other countries with rebel groups would confirm that these changes are a prime ingredient in successful peace talks and in gradually attaining peace. Usually, when an agreement on the core political issues has been reached, the eventual settlement of the entire conflict is a step closer.

On Conflict Issues

In the Philippines the two active conflict groups are the Communist Party of the Philippines – New People's Army (CPP-NPA) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF pursues the framework of establishing an independent Moro state or at least achieving a status of relative autonomy (i.e. federalism). The MILF also demands that the State must recognize the Bangsamoro state and the rights of Muslims to self-determination.

On the other hand, the CPP-NPA envisions a nation built on the Communist worldview. It is currently waging a national revolution. The issues of the CPP-NPA are comprehensive. They range from political and electoral reforms to specific social, economic, and even foreign and local policies. In other words, the CPP-NPA is trying to juxtapose itself as an alternative State that would eventually replace the current Philippine State. The challenge for the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) is engaging finally in a peace settlement with the CPP-NPA.

Challenges and Opportunities

A major obstacle that impedes peace negotiations is the fact that both the GRP and the CPP have fundamental positions before engaging in peace talks. The GRP wants the CPP-NPA to recognize the legitimacy of the Constitution of the Republic. Conversely, the bottom line of the CPP is for the GRP to recognize a status of belligerency for the CPP. The belligerency status is important for the CPP in securing legitimacy in the international community. A belligerent state has the basic opportunities that are attributed to states such as establishing an embassy, rightfully bearing arms, and so on. With the contradictory pre-requisites of both the CPP and the GRP, peace negotiations will not come into a full circle. The danger is that if agreements are not reached, both sides will reinforce their political will in the battle fields.
For 40 years, the country has been suffering from rebellion from various armed groups because the GRP failed to accomplish peace initiatives. The GRP even employed strategies that are beyond the peace negotiations but were eventually deemed unsuccessful. This is the current peace situation in the Philippines. The peace issues can be considered as at an impasse because real issues were not fully solved.

On Political and Electoral Reforms

Peace has been an elusive issue mainly because both panels fail to recognize meeting points. One meeting point is the concept of the sovereignty of democracy. Democracy requires both parties to recognize that the power resides in the citizenry. The citizens must determine the status of rebel groups and the right to self-determination of the citizenry would logically require political reforms in the Philippines.

The type of government that was established after post-martial law Philippines is not a democracy where the majority can participate in the political arena but an elite form of democracy. It is a democracy for the rich and the powerful. The political trend must take on a new course by opening the political arena to the majority. Unless this takes place, rebels would never take part in real, serious negotiations.

In fact, the CPP-NPA capitalizes on peace negotiations for tactical gains such as propaganda or freeing of political prisoners. Strategic negotiations that focus on the completion of the peace process are never undertaken. Even the government's motives are trivial. The general perception is that the government utilizes peace negotiations as a tactical approach. The Philippines is characterized by one of the longest-running peace negotiations. The current peace negotiations started in 1991, but a final agreement has not yet been arrived at.

Another issue to be addressed is having open and clean elections. If the political and electoral systems are open, then many qualified leaders can run for public office. Credibility is a big factor here. Rebel leaders would use election as a mode of political participation only if elections are clean, just and orderly. A functioning democracy must be in place for peace opportunities to take place.

The electorate must also be empowered thru voter education. The citizenry must realize that their votes are crucial in national development. If there are no opportunities to participate in the democracy in place, rebels will remain rebels. They would never delve into the possibility of the realm of politics if there are no advantages in the system.

Another important consideration is GRP's political perception on rebel groups. Terrorists are commonly viewed as groups having no clear political agenda and exist to propagate fear and terror. If the government has a stigmatized view in dealing with armed groups in the Philippines, a common ground for negotiations will never exist. CPP finds it imperative to remove the terrorist tag before going back to the negotiating tables. By definition, terrorists cannot vie for a peace process because they have no clear political agenda. The political agenda of rebel groups such as the CPP must be recognized. Political reform is essential in creating trust and confidence so that other political actors can pursue their political agenda within a democratic electoral framework.

On Third Party Peace Advocates

Third party advocates for peace have a role to play in the peace process. Essentially, the rebellions of CPP-NPA and MILF are grassroots level rebellions. The strength of these groups depends largely on the support of citizens. Both the GRP and the CPP-NPA claim support from the people because only the citizens can grant legitimacy to either the rebels or the GRP's political agenda.

Third party peace advocacy plays a critical role in bringing out the political will of the citizenry in relation to the rebellions. Third party peace facilitators must present this will to both parties. I am confident that the political will of the people is for peace throughout the nation. Rebel groups must wage their programs in a realm where citizens are given the right to choose which framework for development should be adapted.

Another responsibility of third party peace advocates is safeguarding the people against coercive and abusive tendencies of all parties concerned such as permit to campaign (PTCs) or the insistence on the coalition government without the benefit of elections. These instances surface only on the course of engagement. A people's peace movement should be the impetus for genuine peace to take effect.

Thank you very much.

Atty. Jose Luis Martin Gascon, LIBERTAS

The idea of having a yearly coming together of peace advocates on the international, national, and local levels to assess the peace situation is important. The theme of this year's conference is critical. We come together to discuss two main issues: 1) Strengthening Peace Movements; and 2) Instituting the Politics of a Just Peace. These issues are related to each other and it is good that we are looking into these in the current context of political crisis that we find our country in today.

On Peace Frameworks

There are many approaches to peace, even the government articulates paths to peace, but the political aspect is an essential element of the peace process. One approach to peace is peace in terms of Resources; it is a belief that mobilizing resources will bring peace. Simply put, economic development in the villages solves the issue of peace. Another perspective is Containment, which is ultimately strategic. It is about balancing military power. However, it is important that the Political Agenda in the peace process be evaluated and returned to the agenda and the process.

Our framework, as we advance political and electoral reforms is essentially the deepening of democracy. Any proposals that we are making in the area of political and electoral reforms is about consolidating and expanding our democratic institutions, and therefore, participation of citizens in decision-making and intervening in situations of un-peace.

Democratic Institutions

Unfortunately, our democracy is threatened today. Many of you are fellow travelers for democracy; some of us have been at it since the time of the dictatorship. I no longer recognize the democracy that many of us fought for. Certainly, there is a fundamental governance issue. We see an undermining of already weak government institutions. Governance is a critical arena of struggle in the process for peace. The reality is the undermining of government institutions is happening on all levels and in all branches of the government. One example here is the response of the Congress to the impeachment process. The public demanded for truth, but sadly, the Congress participated in the impeachment trial as an accomplice to the hiding of truth.

Critical institutions or independent constitutional commissions have also been undermined. The COMELEC is an obvious example, but something that we must also continue to monitor is the Ombudsman and our anti-corruption courts. If we talk about the political and electoral reforms as they affect the peace process, these must involve confronting the issue of corruption. The tremendous corruption within the military must also be addressed as well as their violations of human rights and the code of military conduct.

Nine out of fifteen members of the Supreme Court are appointees of President Arroyo. The court faces difficulty in addressing fundamental political issues that have been raised at this point in time. The crisis of peace must be understood in these terms. We cannot isolate the peace processes outside the political dynamics of our country. Now, there is an agenda for political and electoral reforms and it involves System Reforms and issues of increasing citizen's participation. It also involves aspects of securing and guaranteeing free, honest, orderly elections. It involves strengthening of political parties and constitutional reform.

The agenda for political and electoral reform must also be taken from a conjunctural perspective. As soon as we removed the dictatorship and institutionalized the current 1987 Constitution, the process of refining and retooling our political institutions began. Now is the time for reforms. The reforms agenda have been in place for a decade, since the last major changes in electoral reforms were made under the leadership of the COMELEC. Since President Erap, and EDSA Dos, the recent elections and the Garci scandal, the political and electoral agenda has come back to the forefront.

There are many proposals and initiatives focusing on electoral reforms such as by the Consortium for Electoral Reforms.

On Peace Policies

In relation to the peace process, I would like to refer you to the "Key Political and Electoral Reform Agenda for Peace". This document, which is among the materials distributed at this conference includes the political agenda proposed in the Final Peace Agreement (FPA) of the government. In 2003, the peace panel prepared the FPA Draft for purposes of discussion only. The provisions in the FPA about political, electoral and security sector reforms are common set of agenda culled from civil society that is an on-going agenda.

The agenda involves system reforms but must be understood in a conjunctural manner. The reforms would have been implemented by now, if the government were sincere in executing them. Some of these reforms are: extend the right of suffrage to qualified Filipinos, amend the Party-List Law, implement sectoral representation in the local government, enact anti-dynasty and anti-turncoatism law, strengthen the role of genuine political parties, develop political finance regime to address the evils of money campaigning, including reforms in campaign finance, ensure and inform a politically aware electorate, introduce structural reforms in the institutions responsible for electoral management (the COMELEC), with the view towards improving levels of independence, integrity, efficiency and effectiveness.

This agenda is preferred because it came from the citizens themselves. The FPA however, was rejected by the NDF although not because of the intrinsic content of the proposals but because of the manner by which the FPA was proposed. These points could still constitute agenda for further negotiations. It is important for us to embrace these reforms and push it forward.

The President has articulated a parallel program in her 10-point agenda. This includes: termination of the conflicts; healing the wounds of EDSA; and improving the electoral system. These reforms should be pursued with or without peace negotiations. However, amidst the need for these reforms, can we trust a government which has lied to the people? Can we trust a president who has cheated in elections and has doubtful credibility and legitimacy? Can we support someone who has been charged with the highest levels of corruption, to pursue a reform agenda? Although the agenda is a valid agenda that we must all pursue, we must understand it in the current context of conjuncture we find ourselves in.

Rather than face the issues, the same government is saying that the problem is not its leadership because the commitment to reforms were made by the president in 2001 and these promises included political reforms. Sadly, not a single promise was pursued. Peace has always suffered the fate of being sacrificed for the sake of political expediency. This goes to the heart of peace issues, this goes to the heart of this conference. The issue of political will and commitment is at the core of political reforms and the peace agenda.

Can we expect the government to pursue reforms when the government neglects accountability and blames others for its faults? We need constitutional reforms because the Constitution is an imperfect document. However we must guard against that the possibility that the process might be hijacked by elite political interests for their own concerns.

Finally, I want to raise 3 issues on institutionalizing politics for a just peace:

1.) We must make peace a national agenda.

It is important to engage and to struggle for the development of a peace constituency that is also a political force. There must be a constituency that can affect votes. We are fighting a culture of violence as well. We have seen how the public psyche is manipulated by a culture of violence that

must be confronted by a culture of peace. Politicians do not win public office by being peacemakers. Contrary to this, it is easy to identify the pacifiers and warmongers who win elections. Therefore, peace must be a priority national agenda.

2.) Engagement of national political leaders.

The engagement must be in parties, congress and national policies. The peace process will continually to be sacrificed for the sake of political expediency unless we have real champions in these institutions in the bureaucracy.

It is not enough to influence platforms within political parties. It is important to develop champions in political parties and in congress. We need our peace champions elected in the bureaucracy.

3.) Build up and nurture local government.

Victories will come from our local government because transforming national policy and national politics will take time especially given the current conjuncture. We must build up and nurture people from the grassroots, enable and empower people, and encourage initiatives such as the peace zones, sanctuaries and spaces for peace. We must also ensure that there will be a participatory peace process both horizontal and vertical. These will happen if we work with the local governments.

Ultimately, we need to bring back politics to the issue of peace and make peace a political issue. Thank you very much!

Advocating Human Security and Security Sector Reform

Human Security

Toby Monsod, Philippine Human Development Report 2005 Team

The objective of the 5th Philippine Human Development Report (PHDR) was to examine peace issues in the Philippines as manifested by the ideological based armed conflicts and, from a human development framework, how institutional responses may be improved.

Security has been and is still understood simply as the preservation of the status quo. At a fundamental level however, what matters most is not the abstract security of a regime or state but rather the security of real people, or human security.

Human security consists of the freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from humiliation. While human development is the process that widens the range of people's choices, human security means that people can make those choices safely and freely. In other words, human security is the external precondition for human development. We are interested in HS not just for its spillover effects and interaction with human development outcomes, but also because it is a right in itself.

This report focuses on one particular source of insecurity, namely Ideology-Based Armed Conflicts (IBACS), conflicts which derive from the espousal of alternative state-visions. IBACS are a uniquely human undertaking and burden on both sides, differing even from other types of violence such as

common crimes.

The largest increases in IDPs seem to occur when government forces launch major offensives such as the "all-out-war" in 2000 and the Arroyo administration's 2003 "Buliok offensive".

Non-Monetary Cost: Discrimination and Diaspora.

Armed conflict in the Philippines has disrupted the lives of entire communities and in the extreme uprooted entire families and societies. Figures from the Office of Muslim Affairs suggest that anywhere from one-fifth to one-third of major ethnic tribes now live in areas outside their ancestral homelands, some reduced to virtual Muslim ghettoes. [These figures differ substantially from the figures of the National Statistics Office , which show a much smaller total population of Muslim peoples (about 50% less) and a smaller population living outside Mindanao (8% versus 30% from OMA).]

People of the Diaspora face a breakdown in social cohesion and traditional leadership, and the indignity suffered by previously productive people now reduced to penury, or compelled to engage in activities foreign or offensive to their traditions. Aggravating these difficulties is discrimination and prejudice from the majority, predominantly Christian, Filipinos.

Individual testimonies of prejudice are corroborated by a special opinion survey undertaken for this report. It points to a significant degree of latent anti-Muslim bias across the country. For instance, a majority of national respondents (55 percent) think Muslims are more prone to run amok, are terrorists or extremists (47 percent), and harbour hatred toward non-Muslims (44 percent). Typical of classic prejudice, such opinions persist although only 14% of Filipinos have had first-hand encounters with their Muslim brethren.

Equally telling are "social distance measures" that ask people to choose between people with Muslim sounding-names versus those with Christian-sounding names as possible boarders, domestic help, employees, or neighbours. Large pluralities systematically prefer the latter (only 10% or less choose the former.) The study unequivocally concludes that "a considerable percentage of Filipinos (33 percent to 39 percent) are biased against Muslims".

It may be argued, of course, that notwithstanding such aggravations, life in the diaspora may mean a significant improvement in the migrants' quality of life, especially if this facilitates a move to larger urban centers with greater economic opportunities.

Even in cases where this is true – it is not invariably so – care must be taken not to reduce the matter to a question of money or economics. It is often not abject material conditions themselves, but rather a sense of injustice and indignity in the face of violation of rights, that ignites the fuse of insurgency.

Economic Costs

The greater part of the direct economic cost of armed conflicts consists of losses in present and future production of these services to mainstream communities serves as an adverse point of comparison for neglected and desolate areas, turning experienced hardship into palpable grievances and making people receptive to competing state ideologies.

Relative deprivation becomes more acute with minoritization. If everything else were equal, the frequency of armed encounters would be less in provinces where a high proportion of the original settlers remains.
Average incomes (of the middle class) can affect insurgencies in two ways. On the one hand, the

poorer people are, the more likely they are to harbour grievances and a sense of injustice. On the other hand, low-income communities will also have more difficulty sustaining an organized insurgency in logistical terms.

The net effect is that beginning with low incomes, the incidence of armed conflict first rises before falling as the average income of the middle-class rises. That it is the average incomes of the middle class that seems to matter is also intuitively clear since students and professionals are typically the bearers of revolutionary ideology and provide the bulk of leadership.

Some implications: first, the lack of an active insurgency in some areas may not mean that such communities are not victimized. It may only mean they are not well-off enough to sustain an organized rebellion.

Second, there is a threshold of improvement, which intervention must clear before a difference in the atmosphere of conflict can be felt.

Finally, a history of past conflict and the rate of accomplishment of land reform are also good predictors of the frequency of armed conflict.

The result on land reform is not surprising. The extent to which the land issue is important remains an open question, however. One might validly ask whether the failure to fully implement the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) is as crucial an obstacle to the achievement of human development as other grievous failures of the current system - its failure to provide quality basic education or primary health care, for instance.

Indeed, a rough counterfactual exercise suggests that even in terms of reducing the incidence of armed conflict, the payback from a completion of CARP does less well than improving adult education or removing disparities in water supply.

Hence, if there is currently an 88-percent chance of an armed encounter occurring in a minority-dominant province, completing the CARP scope would reduce this chance to 84 percent over any year after 2003; but increasing adult education to 6 years and removing disparities in access to water, could reduce this to as low as 0 and 70 percent respectively.

Note that education investments are by far the most potent policy handle in reducing the probability of armed encounters.

Among the government's approaches to the ideology-motivated armed, it is only the institutional peace-building approach which potentially accommodates the human development framework.

The search for long-term peace requires the government side to re-examine itself and society's priorities against insurgent demands and agree in principle to be weighed and measured, using a metric against which the potential and outcomes of the existing state can be laid down. Human development and human security provide such a measure for progress the first principles of which should be difficult to dispute by either side.

Our first recommendation is to ensure policy consistency and coherence by formulating a common framework for peace and building a national constituency for peace. The incoherence of policy is evident not only across administrations – the "all-out war" policy against the MILF of President Estrada was reversed to an "all-out peace" policy by President Arroyo in 2001, only to revert back to "all-out war" in 2002-2003 - but also within administrations, with the "right-hand" (military approaches) frequently not knowing what the "left-hand" (socioeconomic development approaches) is doing (see Hernandez, 2005).

A common framework must be supported by a national constituency. The Moro conflict for instance

is depicted as an almost exclusively "Mindanao issue" rather than a pressing question of human development and human security that touches all Filipinos.

In relation to this, a national policy for peace with the force of law may be necessary to ensure government's continuing commitment.

As regards the Moro conflicts, the report suggests that the government exert efforts to implement all practicable and deliverable aspects of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement and RA 9054. The peace agreement was never given a chance since its stipulations were never fully implemented (although the MNLF's own political and management shortcomings cannot be overlooked either).

Further, as redress to the unilateralism by which the government has handled the matter thus far, the leadership of the ARMM should be encouraged to sponsor a wide-ranging process of consultation among its constituents, and then a referendum on the question of what political expression self-rule might take. The results of a referendum may or may not be binding, but such a powerful statement of the people's will certainly cannot be ignored by Congress.

The government should not rule out further enhancements to Moro autonomy implicit as and when a final settlement in turn is reached with the MILF. As the report argues that the conclusion of peace between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is the single boldest step to be taken for peace in our time.

Finally, while the government has done well to draw a formal line of distinction between the MNLF and MILF on the one hand, and the Abu Sayyaf and other terrorist groups on the other, it cannot be denied that a major impact of the globalized "war on terror" has been to heighten the importance of military and mailed-fist solutions in general.

In view of pending proposals for "anti-terror" laws in this country, extreme vigilance should be exercised to ensure that while a proper legal framework for terrorism is devised, the new legislation itself continues to uphold human rights and the rule of law.

Conclusion

It would be one of the greatest ironies if, in asserting the freedom from fear, other basic rights and civil liberties themselves were sacrificed.

With respect to the communist insurgency, there is a need for lines to be kept open, for negotiations to resume, for agreements already concluded – such as those on human rights and international humanitarian law – to be reaffirmed.

It should be clear however that any real resolution of the communist led armed conflict must involve an acceptance by the bulk of the movement's members that the present political system is at bottom a democratic system open to reform. Central to this is the conduct of elections. No genuine solution to the insurgency can be proposed without ensuring the equality, fairness and integrity of electoral contests as a precondition.

In truth, regardless of the progress and eventual outcome of the peace talks, it would still be a step in the path to peace to pursue key reforms such as electoral and governance reforms and reforms in the security sector.

That the current debate on constitutional change seems oblivious to the peace process underscores an important downside risk of the exercise - namely unilateralism on the part of the government and the majority population.

To avoid aggravating the conflict, effective consultation mechanisms with both sides of the panel must be provided for.

Much of this report has argued that the state of peace and security is indivisible, that sooner or later insecurity in one part of the population spills over and affects the rest, and that therefore it is in the interest even of those who feel secure at the moment to be concerned for the security of others. This argument must be used with caution, however, since it can be distorted into the interpretation that the majority should concern itself with the security of the minority only as and to the extent to which their own security is at stake. For the same wrong reason, a government may choose to emphasize and address the problems of only those minorities that constitute an armed threat, ignoring the problems of others who may be more powerless and less aggressive.

There is a second argument, however, the rights argument, which tempers such notions. Human security, like human development is an end in itself. From this perspective, socio-economic reforms that seek to address deprivations in health, knowledge, access to safe water, electricity, and other economic provisions that make for decent standards of living are both necessary and desirable in and of themselves. It is nonetheless reassuring, however, that empirical evidence does exist to show that investments in these same arenas—and most especially in education—are also the most potent policy handles to reduce the likelihood of armed conflict. This result simply gives the human development framework that much more validity.

Introduction to Security Sector Reforms

Aries Arugay, Institute for Strategic and Development Studies
Security Sector Reforms (SSR) is important to democracy and is essential in upholding the norm of the supremacy of duly constituted civilian authority. SSR ensures that certain democratic principles such as accountability, transparency and responsibility will be entrenched. The security sector composes of a big chunk of the government apparatus, and if it is well-maintained it can contribute to good governance.

In the literature that has been produced as far as the SSR is concerned, it is also linked with conflict prevention and peace building. First and foremost, it is the security sector that is at the forefront of internal conflicts. The security sector will also be the one implementing any agreements signed between the GRP and rebel groups. Part of the accountability to the implementation of agreements concerns the security sector.

There are two views of what the security sector is: the traditional (in which it comprises of the Police and Military forces) while in the expanded view security sector includes civilian oversight institutions that are mandated to manage and oversee the performance of duties of the core security actors. Other important factors are justice and law enforcement institutions; and societal institutions. Civil society could also perform special functions if civilian institutions are weak and unable to perform their mandates.

Security issue is seen as an area where there is a lack of participation by the civil society. Even though security is a public good and directly affects the individual, this is one policy theme that has not been penetrated by the very strong and robust Philippine civil society. Fortunately, we can do something about it. The reason this is not given as much attention lies on the nature of our civil society as a product of an anti-dictatorship struggle. We know that the anti-dictatorship struggle created tension and therefore a huge gap between civil society and the military/police forces. This is one hindrance to a fruitful, well-meaning discussion regarding security. We must not forget that the civil society we have is because of the ample democratic spaces that were given to us as reflected in laws and policies.

We have here a categorization of civil society actors that could engage security sector reforms. The first category is pressure groups. The main purpose of pressure groups is in performing, scrutinizing, oversight functions. These pressure groups include social movements, peace movements, human rights groups and media specifically those that engage in investigative and watchdog functions. On the other hand, the other category is policy support groups. Policy support groups are responsible for collaboration, inputs, consultation and participation. This category includes think tanks, public policy research institutes, academic-oriented NGOs, advocacy NGOs, other organizations that represent the interest of their members. I must note that the categorization is in fact a continuum because some groups perform both roles in certain circumstances.

Civil Society and SSR

Civil society performs an accountability function which we call societal accountability. Societal accountability must be strengthened especially when institutional accountability or the state's mechanisms for checks and balances is poor. It is the responsibility of civil society to perform especially when political institutions have failed in their functions. Civil society also functions as intermediaries and representatives of the unorganized populace. Civil society performs an informational role. It could contribute thru technical knowledge, competence, and expertise as alternative sources of information especially on issues concerning security. By involving the civil society in decision making concerning security and defense policies, there can be greater transparency. The balance of information and perspective is very important in crafting a truly well-meaning security policy. Lastly, civil society must be watchdogs and act as a civilian oversight. What could comprise an SSR agenda? There are short and long term items.

Immediate/Short Term Goals

- Increase SSR Literacy of Civil Society and other relevant Stakeholders – educating and informing CSOs on the relevance of SSR (capacity-building)
- Build a civil society network for advocating SSR – with diversity and diffusion (with an SSR NGO as a hub)
- Generate a constituency for SSR across members of CSOs and peace movements
- Coordinate actions and parallel efforts with media and political parties
- Provide a venue for discussion and debate on issues related to security, defense, and peace
- Develop a diagnostic and monitoring tool for SSR
- Support ongoing reform agenda of the military and police
- Seek backing from allies in the legislature and local governments (political parties)
- Continue to give input and participate in the ongoing peace processes
- Advocate to restore the National Taskforce on Convergence (Left-Hand and Right Hand Approach)
- Take advantage of assistance and support from international and multilateral institutions
- Implement existing recommendations (i.e. Davide and Feliciano Commissions) and legal provisions of the Local Government Code (LGC)

Long Term Goals

- Include SSR as among the dimensions to be included in constitutional reform (clear definition of the role of the military in society and the political system)
- Revise archaic laws (National Defense Act) and harmonize all existing legislation related to the security sector
- Advocate and provide input for important legislation
* Anti-Terrorism Law

* RSBS, mandate of NICA

* Right to Public Information

* Local Sectoral Representation (LSR)
- Expedite AFP Modernization Program and Upgrading
- Exhaust all revenue sources for capability-building and in order to lessen excessive dependence on foreign assistance
- Undertake civilianization of security sector bureaucracies and oversight institutions
- Inclusion and participation of civilian agencies in post-conflict reconstruction
- Develop other military educational institutions (non-PMA) and review of existing curricula
- Institutionalize the monitoring of SSR

Challenges and Opportunities

- Resistance to SSR by core security actors
- Lack of knowledge, awareness, and competence of civil society on security and defense issues
- Obstacles faced by reform efforts in other advocacies (political party reform, judicial reform, local governance reform, electoral reform)
- Inability to comprehend the scope of SSR (half of which concerns civilian oversight institutions)
- Lack of political will, opportunities, reform allies in the military and other core security actors as well as among oversight institutions
- Enforcement of the law against wrongdoing by security sector actors
- Explicit commitment of the political leadership towards SSR – military reform, attainment of peace, and good governance
- Open democratic spaces for participation
- Robust and resilient civil society
- Increased interest of and commitment by international and multilateral agencies assisting SSR programs and initiatives
- Emergence of parallel SSR efforts from other countries

Workshop on Action Agenda

Seven themes were identified from the panel presentations, open forum discussions and workshops on the first day. These themes became the focus for discussion on action points on strengthening peace movements and instituting peace politics:

1. Advancing the peace process

1.1. addressing underlying factors of conflict

1.2. Employing third party facilitation both external and internal

1.3. Monitoring GRP commitment on 5-point peace process

2. facilitating negotiations with armed groups – MILF, MNLF, NDF, and others

3. Strengthening peace movements and policies

3.1. Expanding links across regions

3.2. Building a network of peace advocates among the youth

3.3. Promoting Peace Culture

3.4. Advocating for National Policies

3.5. Professionalizing OPAPP

4. Supporting community and sector based initiatives

4.1. promoting spaces, zones and sanctuaries of peace

4.2. involvement of women, youth leaders, youth and children

5. Encouraging Peace–related policies

5.1. incorporating peace agenda in programs of political parties and party-list groups

5.2. supporting champions

5.3. enhancing local governance

6. Promoting political and electoral reforms

6.1. advancing political party-reform

6.2. campaigning for financial reforms including budget reforms

6.3. deepening democracy through courts of justice

7. Advocating human security and security sector reform

7.1. pushing for policy consistency both in framework and constituency

7.2. advocating for a National Peace Policy

7.3. pushing for key reforms

7.4. advocating for genuine charter change

7.5. planning for Human Development investment

7.6. exploring consortium, task force on convergence

7.7. revising national defense act

7.8. providing inputs for legislations

Workshop Group Reports

Advancing the Peace Process and Facilitating Negotiations with Armed Groups

I am the newest but the oldest member of the GRP Panel. As you know, there are three women in the panel—three out of five members— a first for women in peace negotiations around the world.

We tried to discuss the peace negotiations at the very basic local level. For example, the problem of Abra is how to get the NPAs to dialogue with the community. The problem in Quezon, Bondoc Peninsula is political. The NGOs who are working against the people on agrarian reform are from the other side of the fence—Bayan. There is the situation of the NPAs harassing the community members who join the organization. The problems are very real and concrete. There is this very real need for communities to be able to dialogue with the other side. In Abra, the military has cooperated and there is already a SOMO (suspension of military operations) but the NPA has kept on postponing the dialogue. So how do we get them to come and talk? Maybe this is a role for a third party facilitator. To find a facilitator that would have the confidence of all parties – the military, the community, and the CPP/NPA/NDF—would be the challenge. The same challenge is true for Bondoc Peninsula. According to QUARRDS (Quezon Agrarian Reform and Rural Development), they can't find a third party to help them work on their problem.

We also have two volunteer lawyers who worked with the Monitoring Committee of the GRP Panel for the monitoring of CARHRIHL. Their problem is that 70% of the cases filed by the NDF panel don't fall under CARHRIHL. In the meantime, there is this numbers game: 400 cases filed against the government, only nine filed against the NPA. That doesn't help build confidence in the peace process. As well, they also realized that not all agencies of government are aware of the CARHRIHL and of government's commitments to the peace process. It's very important that everybody in government is aware, including the civil society so that they can push government.

So we came up with two recommendations: one is information dissemination for the benefit of both the bureaucracy and the civil society; and the second one has to do with the annual call of the Waging Peace Conference for a People's Christmas Ceasefire. We have to heed the people's desire and that has to be respected by both the NDF and the government. Right now, they feel that they are not being listened to by the NPA and that there is no recognition of the power of community. Our group would like us to call for a People's Christmas Ceasefire. If this is respected, it can be a basis or a reason for reopening the talks both on the ground and in the national level.

Supporting Community and Sector-Based Peace Initiatives

Our first recommendation is to continue the organizing and holding of interfaith peace prayers, ceremonies, rites and rituals. Yesterday, we were talking about policies but we were not able to discuss about prayers. For us in the World Peace Prayer Society, prayer is our ballgame. We can do this by region. Let us infuse our action with spirituality because this is the highest form of action.

For the youth, we that recommend they hold cultural presentations and express what they really feel about peace. Let us include the children too. Let us try to know how children at a young age feel about violence and peace. We cannot assume we know. They have various ways of expressing how they feel and what they think. They have crafts, dance, music and art. A concert or a caravan is a good idea. We can hold youth camps where there are story telling activities, games, and music. Let us appreciate the hope, the joy and the energy that come from the youth.

We recommend the holding of Waging Peace Conference for the children and the youth. We need animators in the work for peace.

We think there should be a continuing peace education toward a culture of peace among NGOs, stakeholders, our communities, people's organizations, and government agencies. Let us include armed groups in peace education. Let us also target the academe and universities. Let us call our

teachers the animators. They don't only teach peace but they also live it.

We recommend the creation of peace institutes. I think OPAPP is planning to consolidate efforts of peace institutes and curriculum of schools teaching peace education.

There is a need to reproduce materials for formal and informal sectors. How can we create education materials for non-violence that can be distributed in the communities?

A member of our group, a woman who is also a Muslim, recommended the holding of peace caravan from Mindanao to travel all over the country. In the caravan, let us have manifestos, cultural presentations, dialogues, just to let other people know that we really want peace. We can include relevant concerns such as the VAT, and we can make special mention of the vulnerable sectors and advocate their issues through the caravan.

Supporting Community and Sector-Based Peace Initiatives with Focus on Strengthening Peace Advocacy

On strengthening advocacy, we reiterated that advocacy should start at the barangay level going all the way to the national level. All stakeholders should be involved, especially the elders and other key leaders who play an influential role on the ground.

Information and education should also be localized, possibly up to sitio level. Language is most important, so that we can bring our message to audiences other than our own existing circles. We should be able to develop local information disseminators. We should be able to expand and strengthen our network of friends in the media.

We must also recognize, at the barangay level, the role of other stakeholders such as rebel returnees and service providers. The issuance of a barangay resolution acknowledging the role of various stakeholders will be most helpful. Also, the barangay officials have a key role to play in coordinating services to avoid duplication. The idea of a peace budget can also be promoted at the barangay level. Beyond the barangay level, the consideration of various possible mechanisms for settling disputes would be very helpful.

Congregations and religious institutions located near areas of conflict can study possibilities for creating sanctuaries for peace. Or, they can also be involved in the area of psychosocial intervention.

In terms of creative approaches to peace, the Pikit experience has effectively tried the holding of basketball games involving both the rebels and the military. To gain their trust, visits to camps and informal chats with them can go a long way in building peace.

We also see the value of creating Monitoring Teams to constantly check on the status of agreements. We also reiterate the value of reviewing lessons learned from the Pikit experience. Finally, let us try to learn the most effective communication approaches to youth and other sectors.

Encouraging Peace-Related Policies and Promoting Political and Electoral Reforms

We have agreed to adopt the CER agenda found in the kit. Just to highlight some:

1. Full modernization of COMELEC and election systems. We need to focus our work on this area which we consider the backbone of our democracy. There is a need to revamp the COMELEC. Chairman Monsod made mention of the need to replace even the COMELEC building which seems to be in danger of collapsing anytime.

Law on Political Party Reform and Development. The work of political parties must be sustained even after the election period.

Campaign Finance Reform. We know this is one of the root causes of corruption among our government officials.

Political dynasty. In addition to finding corrective measures against political dynasty system, political turn-coatism should be banned. There is a even suggestion to eliminate political parties altogether, although this may not be viable.

2. We must be vigilant on the Concom recommendations and have Chacha (charter change) only after Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's resignation or ouster

3. Establish a mechanism to ensure the stability of peace processes and programs

4. Revive the advocacy on Peace Budget

5. Advocate peace agenda to political parties

Advocating Human Security and Security Sector Reform

Our first recommendation is to review actions and proposals surfaced in the previous (Waging Peace) conferences. The purpose of the review is to check which of the recommendations have been accomplished and what follow-up actions can be done for continuity.

Second, we have to de-link the war on terrorism from our local conflict. We are referring, as example, to the involvement of US military soldiers in Sulu. This has not helped the situation and could only lead to a fuller scale war.
Third, something must be done on the invasion of MNLF territories by the AFP. This has caused major irritants and even cost lives of people.

Fourth, lack of transparency is another concern, particularly with regards to information on the extent and nature of involvement of US troops in military operations.

Fifth, the concept and definition of security is also important. The government must make a clarification in this regard.

Sixth, there is a need to advocate a more holistic concept of human security which includes human rights, sustainable development, and freedom from want, fear, and prejudice.

On the proposal by government for a national ID card system, we believe that this is discriminatory against the vulnerable sectors such as the indigenous peoples. This will also constitute a major threat to our privacy.
With regard to the national budget, we find the diversion of education funds to military and security budget as anomalous and deplorable.

We also note that something should be done against media's continuing stereotyped portrayal of the Muslims.

Strengthening Peace Movements and Policies

The first recommendation of the group is to consolidate and support the peace process. It is so general but I believe we all understand what that means. Second is to engage active participation of

sectors in the discussion of crucial issues such as the ancestral domain. The talks might break down or succeed depending on the outcome of discussions on ancestral domain. The third has to do with delineating the areas beyond the ARMM, for self-governing communities. What are self-governing communities? The Manobos for instance have their own system of tribal justice and governance.

Fourth is mainstreaming community and sector-based peace initiatives. And then there is also the recommendation for strengthening the role of civil society and religious leaders in strengthening social cohesion. There is also the concern for stability of peace policies, its continuity, coherence and constitutional reform. We are saying that even though governments change, there have to be stable peace policies. We should have coherence, legislative backing, and of course, constitutional reform. We have to put in the Constitution that mechanism for the pursuit of the peace process so that it cannot just be discarded by any President.

There is a recommendation for peace advocacy in Congress, media, business, private sector, and local government units. If we did well in the Southeast Asian games wth the support of the private sector, maybe we can just try it on the peace process. The Rotary Club, for instance, was our sponsor in the holding of the Second Mindanao Congress. I think we can do more of that in the future. For healing and reconciliation, Fr. Bert Layson is saying we should do more on this. It takes years to heal the wounds of division, and really now, when I talk to people in Mindanao, the pain is not going to go away very soon.

On the rule of law, we want a nation where the law is above all people. But we have a problem because we have a President who seems to be above the law and who wants to trample the laws of the country. And I think it is an embarrassment to our people that we have a government whose President cheated her way to power.

Strengthening Peace Movement and Policies

Our recommendation is to expand the peace movement to include other sectors – youth, farmers, businessmen and women, workers, and fisherfolk. While expanding to other sectors, we must also consider promoting the culture of peace. We propose to do this by first levelling off on information on peace with and among other sectors. Various sectors may have different concepts about the culture of peace. An educational campaign is also very important. I would like to mention the initiative of OPAPP and DepEd, funded by the UNDP, to produce Peace Education Exemplars which constitute modules which teachers can use to integrate peace education in their curriculum.

With regard to media, the use of multi-media should be explored because it presents huge opportunities for peace advocacy. We also would like to mention the initiative on peace journalism initiated by Pax Christi. Through such kinds of programs, we can help develop a more responsible media that will eliminate, instead of worsen, the bias that adds to the cause of conflict in our country.

Regarding arts and culture, we recommend maximizing the wealth of talents and creative energies of the Filipinos, specially the youth.

In support of NGOs working for peace, we need to provide venues in which they can interact among one another.

Exposure and immersion programs help ignite and sustain passion especially among the youth. So we should have such activities on a regular basis. This allows the youth to see realities on the ground which the media are often unable to accurately portray. We know that the youth tend to idealize media icons. Why not introduce to them the little known heroes on the ground?

Sustained training is also essential to ensure that we have empowered peace workers.

For those like us who are new to venues and conferences as this, it is very important to have a complete knowledge of the government policies and programs on peace. There is also a need to clarify the mandate of OPAPP and how it works for peace. Related to this, the information must be translated to local language.

I would like to share a piece of my reflection as a budding peace advocate.
Peace is possible.

How can we invite the youth, especially the generation of Harry Potter, to get involved in peace-building?

People would always ask us the question why are we reading Harry Potter and all sorts of fairy tales, I would like to answer this question through a quotation from G.K. Chesterton. "Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten."

Since yesterday, we heard so much about the statement that peace is elusive but we heard little if none at all on the statement that peace is possible.

We consider ourselves "newbies" - neophytes, novices - in peace-building, that is why we love to attend conferences, workshops, and seminars like this, not so much because we can go to other places but because we love to listen to your experiences. We learn much from your rich stories of triumph and defeat.

Some agents of the media were successful in introducing us in the culture of death and violence, we challenge you to use the same medium to immerse us in the culture of peace.

We look up to all of you as our mentors and inspirations. Hearing your stories of success urges us to deepen our commitment to peace-building. On the other hand, your stories of failures challenge us to do more and to exert more effort to empower ourselves.

Please forgive us if there are times when we can't even stay long in discussions on policies, policies, and more policies. Don't worry because we believe that soon, we'll get into it.

We beg you to teach us, the way Professor Dumbledore teaches the young Harry Potter. So that when our own time comes, we will be worthy to tread the sacred path to peace you have prepared for all of us, and with that, we are grateful.

Ellis Gil Garcia Luciano, Institute of Reconciliation

Closing Ritual

Ed Garcia

It was no accident that a young voice closed the conference. The youth reminded the rest that peace is possible and that the peace advocates need their words of wisdom. Sometimes the truth comes

from the mouths of young people.

This conference is world class. The Filipino is truly respected in this arena. Other countries are always looking for examples of sanctuaries and spaces for peace. The Filipino peacemakers have shown that it is possible to have peace despite difficulties.

The participants were then guided by Ed Garcia to form a big circle, linking arms in solidarity. Prayers were offered by five persons representing different ethnicities and faiths. The ritual closed with participants greeting and thanking each other, affirming their shared commitment to continue on the journey of peace.

Epilogue

To identify opportunities for peace in the coming years, one must explore the possibilities that may arise from the evolving political context and the calendar of significant events.

Emerging from the consultations with peace advocates and the main stakeholders at the Waging Peace Conference and beyond, it was clear that the current context in Mindanao involving the Moro Islamic Liberation Front as well as the Moro National Liberation Front required a strategic response from civil society peace advocates who in a consistent and sustained manner have helped advance the peace in the southern Philippines.

Mindanao's vigorous peace movement exemplified by the broad character of its peace constituency and the diversity of its peace advocates has pursued efforts on two fronts: the first, continued peace advocacy involving dialogue with members of the Government and its Peace Panel as well as the leadership and negotiating panel of the MILF and the MNLF; and secondly, involvement with local communities such as the spaces for dialogue and peace in different municipalities in the south and the citizens' network and caucus advancing creative and energetic efforts for peace.

Exploring Possible Priorities to Advance the Peace

At the same time, in the process involving the National Democratic Front, a number of priorities can be identified to help advance the peace on two separate but inter-related tracks.

Path One: Sustain Peace Negotiations

1. Enforce Human Rights! Encourage both sides to reaffirm commitment to human rights at the highest levels, and ensure compliance by troops on the ground that the killings of civilians will come to an immediate and full stop.

2. Harness capacities of local monitoring groups composed of local human rights advocates and other relevant institutions such as the human rights committees within the House of Representatives and the Senate.

3. Explore ways by which the Joint Monitoring Committee of the Comprehensive Human Rights agreement can work to prevent possible abuses rather than merely receive reports of past violations.

4. Overcome the high levels of mistrust. The singular move taken by the Norwegian foreign ministry to disengage from the EU and US "terrorist listing" has already helped to jumpstart the stalled process by helping along "thinking outside the box".

5. Convene consultations with the new Norwegian government. Both sides are certainly open to re-starting of discussions with members of the newly-installed government so that parameters can be

set and viable targets identified.

6. Reconvene the reciprocal working groups on socio-economic and on political and electoral reforms. This move is particularly urgent since the initiatives to amend the Charter doe not seem to take into account the inputs that may emanate from the ongoing peace processes.

Path Two: Broaden Support for the Peace Process

1. Energise the work of the relevant peace committees in the House of Representatives and the Senate which has largely taken a back seat after the fallout of the impeachment proceedings.

2. Explore multi-partisan peace initiatives, and the possibility of conducting hearings in aid of legislation regarding a national peace policy ensuring that the policy on peace is a bi-partisan if not a multi-partisan undertaking. International Alert has expressed readiness to testify in Congress regarding comparative peace processes and best practice on the ground.

3. Encourage collaboration with the Spanish Foreign Ministry through the engagement of the academics from the Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona.

4. Encourage formation of energised group of peace advocates, consisting of respected personages and fresh voices. Mobilise young people, and launch a peace concert tour with the assistance of the UNDP/UNICEF to gain greater leverage to influence policy – significant in the light of forthcoming electoral exercises where the youth vote will become critical.

5. Engage other sectors, such as religious leaders, in the continued pursuit of peace in the country including the advocacy of particularly-focused issues relevant to the process.

The sense of cynicism that the recent political developments have unleashed needs to be overcome. Although it may not be possible to insulate the peace process from the fall-out emanating from the present contentious climate given all the imponderables in the current political setting, nevertheless the twin objectives of taking modest steps related to the talks while preparing for the long haul in terms of strengthening peace constituencies and broadening support for the peace process as it addresses the underlying causes of the conflict — seem to be the most viable options for the foreseeable future.

Ed Garcia, International Alert, January 2006

P.S.

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