

The Peace Journey

Stories of Women from the
Women's Peace Collective (WPC)



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“Women should be in the peace process and participate in politics and governance. The first that we should do is to protect women affected by conflict and violence. We should engage in the peace processes as civil society and women. And this can be done by: supporting peace negotiations and citizen’s participation, engaging in local peace actions, highlighting the situation of women and their communities (monitoring and reporting) and building consensus on and advocating women’s agenda.”

Karen Tañada

Executive Director, Gaston Z. Pease Ortigas Institute

Delivered during the consultation on the Roll Out of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

November 16, 2015, Miriam College

The Beginnings



Prof. Aurora Javate-De Dios

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Co-convener, Women's Peace Collective
(formerly WPT)



For several decades, the Philippines has contended with armed secessionist movements in southern Philippines. The Government of the Philippines (GPH) had entered into a Peace Agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1996, but peace remained elusive with the formation of a breakaway group from the MNLF, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the largest and most recent group claiming to represent the interests of the Muslim Bangsamoro people. A series of ceasefire agreements between the GPH and MILF began in 2003, and negotiations with the government resumed in July 2009, as they seek to obtain a new autonomously-governed region inside the southern Philippines.

After the 21st round of Peace Talks, on October 12, 2012, the GPH and MILF a Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro, which outlines the general features and points of consensus of the political settlement between the GPH and the MILF led to the call for the creation of the Bangsamoro autonomous political entity. The Framework Agreement also presents an opportunity for the women in Mindanao, especially those from conflict-affected communities to have their voices heard in peace negotiating tables. There are two direct references to gender under the rights to be guaranteed by both parties: “the right of women to meaningful political participation and protection from all forms of violence; and the right to equal opportunity and non-discrimination in social and economic activity and public service, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender, or ethnicity.” The inclusion of these rights are critically important as they serve as entry points to increase women’s involvement in the peace process and recognize women’s contribution in social and economic development of their communities.

These rights are also anchored on the Philippine National Action Plan, which is the response of the Philippines in implementing international instruments on women, peace and security such as UN SCR 1325 and 1820. It also supports other national mandates on women’s human rights, gender equality, and peace and development.

In light of these developments and persistent clamor of women to have a voice in peacemaking, the Mindanao Commission on Women (MCW), the Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), and the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID) initiated the formation of a Women’s Peace Table (WPT) to consolidate the voices of women in

achieving a just and lasting peace in Mindanao. A Conveners' Group, composed of 10 prominent women leaders (Aurora de Dios, Amina Rasul, Irene Santiago, Socorro Reyes, Ambassador Delia Albert, Bo-I España, Sr. Mary John Mananzan, Myla Leguro, Samira Gutoc, and Margie Moran Floriendo), was formed to decide on the objectives and activities of the Table.

The conveners envisioned the Women's Peace Table as bringing the voices of women into the peace negotiations and in peace building, giving the women's perspective on the issues not only currently on the table of the peace negotiations but also on what women deem to be critical to a successful post peace agreement reconstruction and recovery. They described the Women's Peace Table as a connecting, educating and mediating table.

The WPT tried to connect the table of the formal peace negotiations with the tables of the women in the communities, especially those who have been affected by war and who long for peace to come soon. By organizing series of dialogues and consultations, the WPT acted as a bridge among the different sectors, including those whose support for the final peace agreement is crucial such as, business, international institutions, the religious sector, media, labor, the academe, and the youth.

Since 2013, the WPT was able to connect with and educate women from ARMM communities about the latest development on the peace process including the legislative advocacy for the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). Among its key accomplishments include:

1. Strengthening and expanding the Women's Peace Table that lobbied for a strong gender inclusive Bangsamoro Basic Law. It also established close partnerships with peace advocates and peace groups through its active involvement in the All Out Peace Movement.
2. Conduct of the baseline survey on Increasing Women's Participation in Conflict Affected Areas – Issues and Status of Women in Mindanao where 640 women participated in a baseline and gender assessment survey in the six conflict areas

(Jolo, Southern Basilan, Isabela, Zamboanga City, Cotabato City, Marawi City), and 40 women attended 6 focus group discussions on women, peace and security in these areas.

3. Conduct of series of sectoral peace dialogues targeting various sectors such as, business community, academe, media, youth, women and peace networks, legislators, and other civil society organizations. The dialogue with the youth commenced with a community dance for peace participated by 250 female students from Metro Manila and Mindanao.

4. Holding of an all-women Mindanao-wide conference with the theme, “Uniting for Peace: Women Call for Humanitarian Ceasefire and the Resumption of Peace Talks.” The conference was concluded with a unifying statement on issues confronted by women in Mindanao within the context of conflict, as well as, their recommendations.

5. Strengthening the commitment of the women leaders in ARMM to advocate beyond the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), but for gender and conflict responsive governance in general. Such is particularly important given the pending 2016 elections that can either result in a status quo in the area or a more lasting change.

In 2015, the lead conveners (WAGI, PCID, and CLD) decided to change the name of the Women’s Peace Table to Women’s Peace Collective (WPC) as the latter evokes more personal commitment to the long term struggle for peace. The newly renamed network will focus on organizing, engaging, and strengthening capacity building for Muslim women groups, young women leaders and professionals and other peace advocates and community leaders, particularly in the 5 ARMM provinces (Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao), as well as, Zamboanga City, Iligan City (Lanao del Norte) and the National Capital Region.

The Engagements



Launching of the WPT
February 6, 2014
Miriam College



Training of WPT Core Group on conflict, gender and development

February 7-8, 2014

Miriam College





Research Training for Field Supervisors and Enumerators

June 6-9, 2014
Zamboanga City





SECTORAL PEACE DIALOGUES
Peace Dialogue with the Business Sector
September 23, 2014
Intercontinental Hotel, Makati City





Women, Peace and Security Dialogue with the academe

October 25-26, 2014
Miriam College



Interfaith Dialogue

January 12, 2015

Miriam College





Young Women's Forum in support for the BBL

March 2, 2015
Miriam College



Dialogue with the Media

May 13-14, 2015

Discovery Suites

Ortigas Center, Pasig City





**Peace Dialogues
with Civil Society
Organizations**

September 8, 2015
Miriam College



Legislative advocacy for the BBL

2014 - 2015

House of Representatives
Congress of the Philippines





Consultations with Moro, Christian and Indigenous women towards a gender responsive BBL culminating in a “Mindanao All Women Conference”

March 27-28, 2015 | Davao City





**Capacity Building to influence
the passage of gender responsive BBL**
November 14-15, 2015 | Oracle Hotel, Quezon City



**Forum on Strategies for an Inclusive,
Democratic Peace and Governance Process**
November 16-17, 2015 | Miriam College



WOMEN LEADING PEACE MOVEMENTS: THE WOMEN'S PEACE COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE



Prof. Aurora Javate-De Dios

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“From the ancient days of Lysistrata to those of Women for Mutual Security, women have believed in, demonstrated about, and struggled for “another way,” for an attainable and viable alternative to war. Women’s visions, their strivings, sufferings and frustrations, are the very substance of the struggle for peace, a universal aspiration of multiple and varied character” (Betty Reardon, 1993).¹

Historically, women have always been involved in struggles for peace through individual and collective action in the struggle for freedom, as well as, in anti-war and anti-nuclear movements. At the beginning of World War I, women from thirteen countries came together in Hague to protest the war, to start the Women International League for Peace and Freedom, which celebrated its one hundred years in 2015. In 1981, the Women of Greenham Common in Wales marched 125 miles to protest against the cruise missiles that government planned to install in all of the 102 NATO bases in Britain. At the foot of Mount Fuji in Japan, some Hibakusa women built a cottage where they maintained a permanent peace and protest camp (Brock-Utne, 1985).²

Women are highly visible in peace movements. Polls show that women oppose increases in military expenditures and deployment of new weapons more

frequently than men (Brock-Utne, 1985). They have also been highly visible in the forefront of movements for nonviolence and peace worldwide and in opposing dictatorships in the Philippines, Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, South Africa, to name a few. Women usually assume roles of peacemakers in families, in communities and in societies even though they have often always been victims (Brock-Utne, 1985). Having experienced martial law myself, I saw how women journalists, activists, women in communities, and women religious struggled against and led many critical campaigns against martial law at the cost of their own lives. In the narratives of war, women are often portrayed as “victims” in war and armed conflict and rarely as leaders. Documentation, as well as, analysis of women’s leadership roles has only come to light recently. The issue of “comfort women” unravelled the shocking ways

women's sexual slavery was perpetuated during the Second World War. Thousands of Asian women and men--led by the Japanese journalist Matsui Yayori organized the Women's Tribunal Japanese Military Sexual Slavery, which recognized the legitimate claims of women sexually enslaved by the Japanese military and held the Japanese government accountable. Having been part of this long standing struggle for the recognition of the comfort women, issue have led me to believe that one of the most important role of women in peace building is to correctly document and give credence to the missing history of women in conflict.

Through the 70's, women's movements working on development issues asserted that there is a decisive link between equality, development and peace. This became the central thematic focus of the series of world conferences on women since 1975. The declaration of the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-85), as well as, the four International Women's conferences in Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi and 1995 Beijing Conference on Women were vital fora for promoting the connection between development and peace, especially as it impacts on the status of women. But why include women in peace "work" at all? From the

experiences of many countries, women's inclusion is critical to the success of any peace process because their participation brings in a new perspective that enhances the effectiveness of any peace agreement.

Women's Contribution to "Peace Work"

Just like every other aspect of women's life and work, women's contributions in peace efforts are often ignored, unvalued and undervalued. In the Philippines, the women's organizations became very active and visible, especially after the People Power revolution in 1986 that resulted in the election of the first woman President of the Philippines, Pres. Cory Aquino. Under her leadership, peace talks between the government of the Philippines, with both the Communist Party and the Moro National Liberation Army, were started. Pres. Aquino immediately appointed Maria Serena I. Diokno as one of the negotiators representing the government in the GRP-NDF peace talks. This openness to assigning women negotiators has been the hallmark of the Philippine government's high regard for the leadership capacity of women leaders to lead in the government negotiation with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

My own personal involvement in the peace process was borne out of my own role as one of the Commissioners appointed to the National Commission on the Role of Filipino women in 1992. On several occasions the Commission have connected with women's groups in Mindanao for several training sessions and important women's events. With the setting up of the Women and Gender Institute (WAGI) - a training, research and advocacy center at Miriam College where I taught for many years, peace issues became part of our regular research and advocacy programs. WAGI was interested in developing a feminist analysis of war and militarism and how they impact on the lives affected by situations of armed-conflict. The opportunity to intensify WAGI's engagement with women from the conflict areas started when Sen. Santanina Tillah Rasul, the only and most distinguished woman Senator from Mindanao, who requested WAGI to join in their training of Aleemat (Muslim women religious) on human and women's rights. For almost three years, PCID, led by Amina Rasul-Bernardo, held sustained training sessions and conferences to increase the awareness of women on some of the key critical issues of women such as, women's human rights, UN Security Council Resolution 1325, reproductive

health and Islam and human rights. These efforts led to the formation of Noorus Salam, a network of Aleemat and Muslim professionals working at the community level in conflict areas. This was significant because this is the first time that such a network has been established among women who are leaders in their communities and thus, have a very critical role in helping to develop a culture of peace at the ground level.

With funding support from USAID, the Women's Peace Table, a network of three organizations, namely, the Mindanao Commission on Women, the Women and Gender Institute and the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy, started a sustained program to increase the political participation of women from six conflict areas (Marawi, Zamboanga, Sulu, Maguindanao, Basilan and Isabela), the group was able to sustain its engagement with Muslim women for the process.

Women's Leadership and Visibility: Building a Peace Constituency In Support of the Bangsa Moro

Perhaps one of the most important milestones in the history of the women's movement is the increased role of women in the peace process both at the formal peace table and through the active involvement of the NGOs in the context of the GRP-MILF peace talks. Significantly, and as far as I can recall, this is the first that women's groups have become totally involved in supporting and monitoring the peace process. Several factors can account for this development. For one, the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is a landmark international legal framework that addresses, not only the impact of war on women, but more importantly, the role that women can play in conflict management, resolution, and sustainable peace. This was followed by a series of resolutions including the UNSCR 1820 where state parties are expected to take measures to protect women and children from all forms of sexual violence, which has been condemned as crimes against humanity under the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Following the Philippines' adoption of these two resolutions, a National Action Plan 1325 was adopted by government with the full support of women's groups. Subsequently, many women's groups from Mindanao and Metro Manila formed WEACT 1325 and Women's Peace Table, which sought to organize women around UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and to monitor and support the ongoing peace processes. The enabling conditions for the growth of these networks can largely be attributed to the open and democratic space for NGOs that has become the policy of government since 1986. The strong advocacy for gender equality, espoused by the Philippine government, also contributed in no small measure for the active participation of women in the peace process. Most of all, both the GRP Negotiating Panel and the MILF Peace Panel ensured their accessibility to all interested parties of the peace process paving the way for the broadest consultative process that I have seen.

Since 2001, five women were appointed by government as members of the peace panel and two have been appointed as presidential advisers on the peace process. Since 2003, 16 women have participated in peace negotiations. The appointment of Sec. Teresita "Ging" Quintos-Deles as

OPAAP presidential adviser in the peace process and the appointment of Miriam Coronel-Ferrer as chief Negotiator of the Philippine government during the peace talks with MILF, marks a watershed in the leadership role of women in the Philippines. It is also important to note that 4 out of 15 members of the Bangsa Moro Transition Commission on the BBL were women. Though not in the forefront, two women lawyers were consultants of the MILF during the negotiations.

As representative of the Women's Peace Table (later called the Women's Peace Collective), I had the privilege of meeting the whole MILF panel personally, to explain the objectives of our group. Though reluctant and perhaps suspicious at first, the members of the MILF responded to our request for a meeting, giving me sufficient time to explain our agenda. Both the government and the MILF held numerous consultations in schools, public fora, and other activities both formal and informal, which provided them with the platform to explain the peace process as it progressed. In two critical junctures – after the Mamasapano tragedy and before the end of the Congressional sessions where the BBL was obviously not going to be passed, both the MILF and the GRP relied heavily on NGO support.

The Women's Peace Collective: Learning to Embrace Flexibility, Diversity and Unity

The Women's Peace Collective conducted numerous activities such as, seminars and fora among students, religious, media, business people, and other NGOs to expand, broaden, and enhance the support base for the BBL. An important centerpiece of our work was the development of a gender sensitive Bangsa Moro Law, the provisions of which the WPC seriously lobbied in both Congress and the Senate. I, and my colleagues Soc Reyes, Salma, and Amina, took turns in attending important sessions and hearings talking to legislators and touching base with those who may influence the shape and form of the BBL. We attended rallies, organized consultations, and conducted training on the BBL among Muslim community leaders in the provinces affected by the BBL. The most innovative strategies were developed by our young women leaders who conducted "dance for peace," dramatizations, and discussed the peace agenda from the perspective of young women. The Inter-religious dialogue was more than just a discussion of commonalities between Islam and other religious; it gave birth to another campaign



called MARY/AM, the focus of which is the centrality of Mary in both religions.

We attended regular meetings of WEACTION 1325, other peace groups and participated in their activities. When it became obvious that gender provisions were making headway more than the other strategic provisions of the BBL, we learned how to listen and tone down our advocacy. With several lobby groups such as, the indigenous groups who were pushing their own agenda, along with our women's agenda, we willingly sat down, discussed and arrived at important unity

points for the sake of the whole project of getting the BBL passed in both houses.

The value of these meetings proved indispensable when we were all faced with the backlash against the BBL after the Mamasapano tragedy, which killed members of the Special Action Force, as well as, members of the MILF. The subsequent negative public opinion reignited old prejudices and biases against the Muslims by the media, legislators and the general public. This low point gave birth to the formation of an alliance among all the groups supporting

the BBL, called the All Out Peace, which came out with unity statements in support of the BBL. While it became clearer that Mamasapano ultimately influenced the non-passage of the BBL, this did not and will not deter the WPC and all the peace groups in pursuing and continuing the struggle for peace in Mindanao.

Beyond the BBL:

The invaluable lessons learned by the women in the last three years during the peace process have shown us that peace is a long and difficult process. The business of safeguarding their communities from possible resurgence of hostilities, as well as, from crime and trafficking and drugs, making ends meet and supporting family's daily needs are continuing concerns that Muslim women will continue to do on a daily basis. The challenges —of fighting prejudice, stigma, and marginalization of Muslims, including women; the spectre of a new unsupportive government; and the radicalization of Muslim men drawn to terrorist activities; are threats that already exist and are bound to remain for some time. There is an even greater need now to support Bangsa Moro women and their communities and their NGO partners such as, the Women's Peace Collective to be steadfast in their long term struggle to get

the BBL passed and restart the process for building the long awaited Bangsa Moro political entity.

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From awkward waltzes to celebratory encores: personal reflections on feminist and peace advocacy



Anna M. Dinglasan

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I became involved with the project at its earliest stages, when the concept of women's peace tables aimed at connecting, mediating and educating women towards peace in Mindanao was being finalized. I cannot remember exactly how long the entire process took, but I do know that it involved numerous discussions among the convenors, often in informal spaces or in between various official meetings. It also involved quite a bit of shuffling between Manila and Mindanao, where we reviewed and revised draft proposals, carefully and painstakingly formulated objectives and strategies, as well as, planned project activities, and meticulously prepared the budget. Between finalizing numerous versions of the proposal, we also had to sort out administrative and logistical concerns before the project gained final approval. It was most certainly a complicated foot work—a step forward, a few steps back. So imagine my relief when the project was finally launched. It had been a festive gathering of women from different walks of life—feminist academics, peace and women's rights activists and members of civil society, students, professionals, Christians, Muslims—who were all very excited about prospects and opportunities this two-year endeavor would bring.

Indeed the approval of the project deserved a celebratory dance for certainly, all those working weekends and late nights at the office paid off. Then again, my excitement and relief was short lived. I knew that the real work was only just about to begin. The Monday following the project launch, I sat on my desk and stared at the list of the milestones we were supposed to achieve twenty-four months hence. I began to feel a sense of panic. I took a deep breath and let all the hows and the whys float in my head.

The conflict in Mindanao has a long history. Over time, it has become witness to decades of violence, dispossession and deprivation that, in turn, have resulted in multiple forms of oppression and injustice for many of its peoples. In the recent years, a spotlight has been shone on the experiences of women in conflict areas, and naturally, how they have been able to mobilize so that their issues are brought to the table and given attention as part of the peace process. Indeed there is much evidence to prove that a lot has been gained in terms of raising women's voices and addressing women's concerns in war-torn Mindanao. Opportunities to participate in all levels of the peace process have been available and accessed

such that women have played various and significant roles, making them increasingly visible, both in formal and informal spaces. Documents borne out of the peace process reflect and guarantee conflicting parties' commitment to women's rights, women's empowerment, and gender equality in peacebuilding and in the post conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction of Mindanao. Our conversations with community women leaders also tell us that they are profoundly aware of their rights and are now, more than ever, committed to make these rights a reality in their communities.

As the project nears its completion, I contribute to this volume with my reflections as someone coming from quite a peculiar place. As I left WAGI shortly after the project commenced in 2014, I am no longer directly involved in it. Yet, neither am I completely detached as I return to play a small part, having been asked to write the final report for the project's research component. To me, it feels like I have come full circle—I saw its beginnings, observed its progress from a distance, and now I am helping in its final stages of completion. As an observer, I acknowledge that much work was done in attempts to restore peace, and this project has contributed what it could so

that the rewards would be more inclusive, benefiting those who have suffered tremendously in silence through decades of violence and war. Yet I also recognize that much more still needs to be done, and the journey to genuine, lasting and inclusive peace might continue to stretch for miles on end.

“Our conversations with community women leaders also tell us that they are profoundly aware of their rights and are now, more than ever, committed to make these rights a reality in their communities.”

I have always thought that conversations about women's rights, women's empowerment and gender equality have been wrought with fear and negativity. When these conversations happen in a more specific context—in this case, when the conversations are compounded by war and violence occurring in a particular cultural or religious setting, it becomes all the more daunting that often times, the very words that should be part of the

conversation are muted and/or edited out. Perhaps this might be understandably so because most of such conversations require participants to forcibly unpack and unlearn most, if not all, of the things they know, learned and believed for most of their lives. Such negativity and fear comes from the necessity of challenging culture and tradition, and questioning religious beliefs and practices. Such conversations mean that we essentially question who we are and what we live for.

But how do we talk about genuine, inclusive and lasting peace without raising high expectations? How do we infuse these discussions with informed knowledge about gender, gender equality, women's rights and empowerment while making sure that the conversations progress and not merely go around in circles? How do we respond to criticisms and negativity, from our partners and even among our colleagues, without being confrontational, defensive and adversarial? How do we build confidence in each other? How do we learn to trust—others and even ourselves after experiencing so many setbacks?

I think that for any conversation about gender, gender equality, women's rights and empowerment to be meaningful, it is necessary to keep coming back to

ourselves, to keep reflecting on our own positionality. Being able to do so reminds us that our realities are very different from the realities of those with whom we have these exchanges. When we acknowledge this difference, I surmise other participants in the conversation are forced to do the same. Needless to say such reflection is necessary because we can never force our versions of reality on others. This is expressed in a favorite adage for those in social movements—we must agree to disagree --for the moment anyway. As such, these conversations must be continuous no matter how much of a broken record we must already sound. For after the unlearning and unpacking, we have to help each other put things back together in a way that makes much more sense not just for us, but alas, for everyone involved in the conversation.

We know that gender equality, women's rights, and peace are goals that could not be achieved overnight, nor in a week's time. It will not happen within the next two years, nor at the end of this project. It may not even happen in our lifetime. We also know that not all participants to the conversation will be convinced of our cause and be converted. Yet, we remain determined and continue to tread the tumultuous path. As we do, we

learn to choose our battles along the way, reminding ourselves to choose carefully and strategically because our resources and energies are limited. Therefore, we must remind each other to be kind to ourselves and assure each one that we are doing all we can to the best of our abilities. When conversations start to heat up and our tempers begin to flare, we should also know that taking a few steps back is crucial so as to give each other breathing space and time, to once again reflect about ourselves, what we are doing or perhaps what we are not doing.

I once considered myself a dancer. I took dance lessons for a good number of years and while my lack of musicality and shyness did not allow me a dancing career, I must admit that the discipline and dedication I developed while learning to move gracefully continued to fuel my endeavors long after I hung up my tutu and put away my dancing shoes. Needless to say, my experiences in women's rights and peace advocacy reminded me of the first few dance lessons I took as a shy little girl. When projects start rolling what becomes of it may be likened to an awkward beginnings of a waltz. First, a reluctance to move into our partners' arms because we aren't sure if they can support us (or if they even know how to dance!). At the

same time, a hesitant gait because we fear an encroachment to our personal space. It takes time to build trust so that we can work with each other. It takes a lot of trials and a few more errors because it takes practice to learn how to gracefully move together without stepping on each other's toes.

The music urges us to take the first steps and binds our movements together just as our common goals in women's rights and peace advocacy propel us to keep working together. Music and movement may create a powerful performance just as our commitment and tireless pursuit for justice can lead us to many victorious moments as we make tiny steps and dare to take big leaps. Yet, there are times when we take miscalculated moves leaving us frustrated and confused, our audience gasping at a poorly timed jump or a step taken too soon. While these are major setbacks, I prefer to see those moments as necessary breaks that allow us to catch our breaths and reflect back where we have miscalculated. These are opportunities to begin again as the dance only ever ends when we let the music, even the ones in our heads, stop playing.

Indeed, this project had us taking steps forward but also a few steps backward. Truly an awkward waltz, but it ends not without us taking huge bows for what we have accomplished so far. We have, through tiny steps and big leaps, connected, mediated and educated towards inclusive and lasting peace in our beloved Mindanao. We applaud each other for all our hard work and for a job well done! We bow and allow the curtains to close but only because we are certain that it shall open again for certainly, our performance entails an encore! Because yes, there is still a lot more dancing to be done—a few more steps to take forward and... well, evermore forward!



Women's meaningful role towards the attainment of lasting peace



Mary Kathleen Bueza

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My involvement in development work, particularly in research on gender and peace, began almost a decade ago. From 2006 to 2012, I have been with friends in the academe and in the development sector to do research on gender and peace with the hope that our recommendations will inform leaders across various levels and eventually shed some light for social change to take place. It was in 2013 that I was introduced to the Women's Peace Table (WPT), its goals, and the work that it plans to do so that women's voices are not just acknowledged but also listened to.

Getting onboard the WPT Secretariat sparked the idealism in me. Learning about its activities for the next two years got me excited because unlike doing pure research, being with the WPT entailed regular interactions with real women from conflict-affected areas in Mindanao for various reasons-- research, training, consultations, or even for other matters beyond the scope of the project. Engaging with WPT women was always a fulfilling experience. I would find myself in awe while listening to their candid thoughts, opinions, and experiences during training sessions or workshops that I had the privilege to witness. While I can say that my opinions on some specific matters differ from them at times, their openness

to share their part of themselves, as shaped by their culture and faith, is something that I learned to appreciate and admire throughout my stint as a member of the WPT Secretariat.

Being in the constant company of these outspoken women from conflict-affected areas made me realize that perhaps

“...their openness to share their part of themselves, as shaped by their culture and faith, is something that I learned to appreciate and admire throughout my stint as a member of the WPT Secretariat.”

the reason why their meaningful role is often overlooked is that people have always assumed that the capacity to care for others in many different ways automatically comes with being a woman. When you are a woman, you should perform your “role” as a woman, according to the standards of society-- that role of caregiving and of nurturing, which women fulfill without being demanded

from them by their families and even other community members, especially during times of emergency, evacuation, and displacement. Many people are unaware that these very same acts make women instrumental in finding the way towards peace. Amidst fear and trauma, the uncertainty of the future, and the absence of the most basic necessities-- women are there to provide shelter and support, doing their best to foster a positive atmosphere despite their own anxieties and tribulations in the face of war. Without being asked, women will themselves to face reality with toughness of mind and heart more for those they love and care about than for themselves. Women's selflessness is at the core of their meaningful role in peacebuilding.

The primary objectives of the Women's Peace Table are to connect, mediate, and educate various sectors of society about the unsung roles of women peacebuilding. In the past two years, the WPT has made tremendous strides to recognize women's efforts which have been lurking in the shadows of peacebuilding discourses. First of all, the formation of its core group helped identify potential women leaders who could be "champions" to empower local women conflict-affected communities. It

also helped these "champions" to network amongst themselves and with other groups that support the cause of peace. Second, the baseline research provided the government (OPAPP, Senate, and Congress) and other development organizations a clearer picture of issues and concerns on the ground. Finally, the conduct of training, workshops, and consultations enhanced the understanding and appreciation of women leaders about their role in peacebuilding, increased their confidence and conviction in asserting themselves as active members of their communities.

The journey of the WPT does not end with the accomplishment of all activities planned by the WPT Steering Committee and Core Group for the past two years. In fact, much more work is ahead for WPT women to open the hearts and minds of policy makers and key stakeholders in the peace process about the unseen costs of war, particularly among women and other vulnerable groups. Women's meaningful role in peacebuilding as providers of courage, strength, and fortitude shall continue as lasting peace may only be achieved if we never stop working towards it.

“USAID experience, through its work in conflict-affected areas in the Philippines and in other parts of the world, has shown that women are effective peace advocates, community leaders, and champions of civil and human rights. Women made significant contributions in negotiations of peace.

I am happy to note that the activity we have funded with the Women and Gender Institute has strengthened and expanded the Women’s Peace Table that lobbied for a stronger gender inclusive Bangsamoro Basic Law.”

Dr. Susan K. Bremms

Mission Director, USAID

Delivered during the opening of the 4th National Women’s Summit and consultation on the Roll Out of the National Action Plan

on Women, Peace and Security

November 16, 2015, Miriam College

BBL Legislative Advocacy: A Personal Journey



Dr. Socorro L. Reyes

Regional Governance Adviser
Center for Legislative Development
Co-convener, Women's Peace Collective



The rejection of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) by the 16th Congress goes beyond perceived constitutional infirmities, alleged lack of consultation and resurrected fears and suspicion of Muslims after Mamasapano. As a participant in the advocacy for a gender-responsive BBL in the past two years, I accompanied the BBL through the legislative mill in both Houses of Congress. In my observation, several critical factors contributed to the demise of the BBL: 1) lack of legislative support for the President's priority agenda; 2) weak enforcement of House and Senate Rules; 3) shaky administration coalition and the 2016 Elections ; 4) role of the Committee Chairs; 5) ineffective leadership in both Houses; 6) inconsistent push by the President for the passage of the BBL; 7) IP's interests and demands; and 8) ambivalent attitudes towards women negotiators.

Lack of Support for the President's Legislative Priorities

The legislative agenda is strongly influenced by the President's priorities presented in his annual State of the Nation Address. Whether this is crafted in consultation with the House of Representatives and Senate, leadership is another question. In the case of the BBL, it

seemed that the majority of Members did not share the President's prioritization of the BBL. The majority of the 75 members of the House Ad Hoc Committee on the BBL showed up on the first day of the Committee hearing but quickly dwindled to a few as the meeting progressed. It was also obvious that most of them did not read the proposed bill by the kind of comments and questions they asked. But some, mostly opposed to the bill, made

“In the case of the BBL, it seemed that the majority of Members did not share the President's prioritization of the BBL.”

very substantive interventions backed up by solid research. Among them was Congressman Celso Lobregat (First District, Zamboanga City) who assiduously studied every provision of the BBL and practically monopolized the committee hearing and the interpellation. It was quite plain from the start however, that his mind was made up in opposing the bill and no amount of explanation will convince him to support the bill.

The Representatives from Mindanao were divided in their support for the BBL. This tremendously weakened the chance of the bill's passage. If they themselves cannot agree on an issue that directly affects their region, how can they expect others from Luzon and the Visayas to rally behind the BBL?

Weak Enforcement of House and Senate Rules

The refusal by the majority of Members especially in the House of Representatives, to attend plenary sessions seriously delayed the legislative process as no legislative business can be transacted without a quorum. But even as they managed to constitute a quorum, the



unending interpellation by some Members in both the House and the Senate stalled the introduction of amendments and the final voting. The Presiding Officers were helpless as they watched their

colleagues make long and winding comments and questions. Nobody dared to end the debates and move to end the interpellation as they may not get the necessary votes for the approval of their motion. Celso Lobregat in the House and Vicente Sotto III and Juan Ponce Enrile in the Senate spent hours attacking the bill from all fronts!

Shaky Coalition, Mamasapano and the 2016 Elections

At the start, the President enjoyed a comfortable majority in the House and reasonable support from the Senate. He was confident he has the numbers to pass the BBL. But this rapidly dissipated when Mamasapano happened. Distrust and suspicion of Muslims were revived. The motives of the MILF were questioned. Some Members claimed that the MILF wanted an independent Bangsamoro with expanded territory, separate government, control over resources, etc. The 2016 elections also hovered in the consciousness of the legislators. How will their vote in favor of the BBL affect their political future, their chances of being re-elected or being voted to a higher post? The political dynamics has changed! Self-interest and political survival prevailed.

The Role of the Committee Chairs

The Committee Chairs steering the BBL discussions in the House and the Senate are a study in contrast. Representative Rufus Rodriguez (Second District, Cagayan de Oro City) , Chair of the AdHoc Committee on the BBL was totally supportive of the bill while Senator Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., Chair of the Senate Committee on Local Government was highly critical and opposed to the bill. While the former tirelessly explained the provisions of the BBL to dissenting Members, while remaining open to suggested changes, the latter made it clear from the start that his committee will conduct more consultations to be more inclusive. If and when necessary, his Committee will come up with a new bill to reflect the sentiments and opinions of diverse stakeholders. He also promised a bill that will be aligned with and not contradict the Philippine Constitution.

Congressman Rodriguez was always present to respond to the Members' questions during the Interpellation Period. On the other hand, in the Senate, the Interpellation Period was suspended several times due to Senator Marcos' absence.

Ineffective leadership in Both Houses

The House Speaker has promised the President that BBL will pass in the 16th Congress, Yet, he was not able to command the presence of the Members at plenary sessions during the critical period of the BBL's life. The Session Hall was frequently empty except for a few zealous supporters and serious opponents of the bill. There were in fact more people in the gallery than on the floor!

Congressman Lito Atienza of the Ang Buhay Party List consistently raised the quorum question and with the same bravado moved for adjournment when there was none. The All Out Peace (AOP) group tried several times to meet with the Speaker. At one point when our appointment was already confirmed and we were in his office waiting for our turn, his Secretary came out to inform us that he cannot meet us. A big group of local politicians just got out of his room. Can we come another time? His schedule is very tight, repeated his staff. That was of course a lame excuse. We never got to meet him.

The Senate President, Franklin Drilon also promised the President and the BBL advocates that the BBL will be approved by the Senate. But like the House Speaker, he did not have that clout and towards the end, admitted that BBL will not make it!

Inconsistent Presidential Push

The BBL advocates inside and outside Congress observed that the President's enthusiasm to push the BBL waned towards the end of the process. Many asked why the President did not use his power to make his coalition party mates toe the line and with full force, push the bill. Why didn't he certify the bill as urgent? "Depende na iyan sa Presidente (That now depends on the President)," some were heard to be saying in relation to Aquino's role in passing the BBL. "Mukhang mahina ang diskarte ni Presidente (It seems like the strategy of the President is weak)," others quipped.

As early as November, 2015, Bernie Sayoc, head of the Presidential Legislative Liaison Office in the House of Representatives already told the All Out Peace (AOP) group when asked about the future of BBL, that it will "make a graceful exit." During this meeting, Congressman Tupay Loong all of a sudden appeared and demanded that Bernie Sayoc arrange

a meeting with the President to ask him why he is not using his power to force a quorum in the House.

IP's Interest and Demands

The indigenous people's groups objected to several provisions in the revised House version of the BBL: 1) the BM government's exclusive powers on ancestral domain and resources to "recognize, constructive or traditional possession of lands by indigenous cultural communities subject to judicial affirmation; 2) the definition of Bangsamoro People in Article II diminishing the distinct identity of the non-Moro Indigenous Peoples, by subsuming all the "natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and the Sulu" and their "Spouses and their descendants"; 3) the "Freedom of Choice" in Section 2 of the same article which says that "other indigenous peoples" can choose their identity. The Lumad leaders said that being Teduray, or Lambangian, or Erumanen Manuvu, is not a matter of choice. You are born with your identity. They also claimed that Rep. Act 8371 or the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) has a clear definition of who the Indigenous Peoples are. The IPs also believe that the GPH panel and the OPAPP (Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process) failed to defend Non-Moro

indigenous peoples' rights. This followed Mohagher Iqbal's statements that the MILF does not "accept in principle" the inclusion of IPRA in the BBL because it is "nowhere to be found" in any agreement signed between the MILF and the Philippine government.

Women Negotiators

In several committee hearings both in the House and the Senate, Professor Miriam Santiago, Chair of the Philippine Government Panel and Secretary Ging Deles were embarrassed, humiliated, harassed by the male legislators accusing them of giving too much to MILF, suggesting that as women, they did not know how to negotiate with rebels. The "Peace Ladies" as they were called by some should have been advised by "former military officials." There was clear gender bias and discrimination in the way they were treated. I often thought that had they not been women they would not have been subjected to such brutal cross examination. The two women however, maintained their composure and responded to questions and criticisms with level-headedness and clarity of mind. This undoubtedly demonstrated their "nerves of steel," competence and substantive knowledge of every single BBL provision.

Tight, Unrealistic Time Frame

Even had Mamasapano not happened, the BBL would have had difficulty passing the 16th Congress because of the unrealistic time frame. The House version was introduced in September 2014; expected to be passed in six months or the First Quarter of 2015 by both Houses; approved in a plebiscite on May 2015 and elections for the Bangsamoro Parliament simultaneously with the national elections of May 2016. That's a super fast time table that precludes debates and disagreements on a bill that repeals an existing law and redefines power relationships between the national and regional government. As we all know, any proposed legislation changing the status quo will be a protracted process!

Conclusions

The major challenge now is not so much reviving the BBL in the 17th Congress as in assuaging the hurt and dealing with frustration and anger of the Bangsamoro people. I have recently been to Cotabato City and North Cotabato, part of the core areas of the Bangsamoro territory and heard community leaders express their deepest feelings about the failure to pass the BBL:

1. “Bakit bawa’t administrasyon may iba’t ibang kasunduang inihahain: Tripoli noong 1976 panahon ni Marcos; MNLF Agreement nong panahon ni Ramos; ngayon naman FAB, CAB, BBL sa panahon nin Noynoy. Ano ito, lokohan na lang?” (Why is it that in every change in administration, there is a change in peace agreement: its Tripoli in 1976 during Marcos; MNLF Agreement during Pres. Ramos ; now its FAB,CAB, BBL during Pres. Noynoy? What is this, some kind of a joke?)

2. From a youth leader: “The youth are now more educated, aware, informed. We are very frustrated. What do you think should we do????”

Short of apologizing for government, I told them there are still several pathways open: 1) they can level up their advocacy from being POs/ NGOs to forming political parties that can and will get involved in future elections such as the Bangsamoro Parliament; and 2) continue to engage with the passage of the BBL in the 17th Congress.

But the day after I left, the Kidapawan violence erupted that killed three farmers and wounded 100 others. I wonder how this affected the people’s trust in the peace process!



“...as we see today, the government strategies tend to focus on the military approach to counter extremism, which is the easiest thing to do; we know that is a lose-lose situation; no one wins in a war. By the time you have put your military apparatus to fight, to counter violent extremism, you have already lost the fight. As you and all of our sisters in the interest of armed conflict know, the best way to stop it, is to stop it from the beginning; and who has the best key to that door? -- It is the women...”

Amina Bernardo-Rasul

President, Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID)
Delivered during the opening of the 4th National Women's Summit and
consultation on the Roll Out of the National Action Plan
on Women, Peace and Security
November 16, 2015, Miriam College

Reflections
from partners
and networks



A reframing of the lenses used in pushing for peace agenda

“The first time that I was invited to a WAGI organized event, it was also the first time that I have gotten a job from the ARMM government. The world between the nature of my work and the kind of activities I participated at WAGI and WPT

I have learned that the Bangsamoro people are not alone in this fight for achieving peace in Mindanao and that the advocacy for peace is everyone’s business including those outside of Mindanao

were not totally different from each other. The only difference is that the lenses I used in pushing for the peace agenda where I looked through the lenses as a Bangsamoro person when I’m at work

and as a woman when I’m participating at WAGI’s training and activities. The things I have learned at WAGI’s training and activities complements and enhances my work as a Consultant for the Committee on Transition at the Office of the Regional Chief of Staff. I have likewise learned that collective action is one of the efficient means to make the advocacy for BBL move forward, but there is still the need to make the greater public understand and appreciate the significance of the peace process. More importantly, I have learned that the Bangsamoro people are not alone in this fight for achieving peace in Mindanao and that the advocacy for peace is everyone’s business including those outside of Mindanao. I’m still looking forward to the means in sustaining the gains of the advocacy for the peace process despite the non-passage of the BBL.”



Norhalisa Salic

Consultant,
Office of the
Regional Governor
ARMM

Interesting and amazing experiences that enrich and expand knowledge and skills

There were approximately 4 activities that I participated in: Training on Gender and Conflict Responsive Governance, the National Women's Summit, the Multi-Stakeholders Consultation and Training on CEDAW, WHR and BBL, and the 1st ARMM Regional Women's Summit. All were very interesting and amazing. That was the first time I visited the Congress and observed the process on how our legislative body conducted their business. Moreover, it's my first time to attend the National Women's Summit and be part of the launching of the Women's Peace Collective (WPC). I was very impressed how WAGI got hold of the President of Chile as a guest speaker and the country's prominent leaders. One thing that really impressed me and left a mark on me is how WAGI made their activities organized and ran smoothly. The composition of participants for the NWS, the training and activities are also widespread – from Jolo, Tawi-Tawi to Lanao women leaders. Though there were minor hitches like the delay of flights because of the APEC Summit, but WAGI did a good job in making us free from worries. I thank WAGI for that.

The sharing of the resources and the experiences of the participants widened and deepened my understanding on women and peace. Lessons learned and examples of

good practices drawn from the workshops and sharing enhanced my knowledge more than what I acquired from reading books and articles. To achieve what we advocate, especially on the issue of BBL, we need a collective action and a unified voice. It is the only way to make our voices be heard and make an impact. I just hope that we, as participants, can translate those learnings into concrete actions because they should trickle down to the grassroots communities. Another interesting subject that I hope to learn in the future is the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation.

To achieve what we advocate especially on the issue of BBL, we need a collective action and a unified voice



Mariam Barandia
KAPAMAGOGOPA Inc.
Lanao del Norte

Opportunities for exchange and learning from past experiences

“Someone who is giving up the urban life for a tamer life with a baby cannot give up on a table called WPT. I have worked with the peace movement for a time while in UP and on the field in the southern Philippines. Twenty years later, WPT offers a realization that Utopian ideals are not dead. They live in women who have dedicated in the work more deeply in having written and represented the philosophy and the country in foreign and international platforms. I am thankful for the experience to exchange, engage, unload luggage, laugh, live and love more.”



Bae Samira Ali Gutoc-Tomawis

Former Sectoral Representative (Women)
Regional Legislative Assembly (RLA)
Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
Cotabato City

Strengthening and expanding of networks in Mindanao for sustainability of women leaders and the advocacy for gender, peace and security

"I have attended several activities organized by WAGI and WPT, among which include the Training on Gender and Conflict Responsive Governance, the National Women's Summit that featured women's political leadership for inclusive democratic governance, and the consultation and training on legislative advocacy for WHR, CEDAW and BBL. Through these activities, I was able to strengthen my organization's networking with other Mindanao CSO's and NGOs. Our training helped us to gain more confidence in doing our advocacies on the ground. As a woman peace advocate and a woman leader, these series of activities deepened my knowledge, skills and capacities on peace building; my engagement in governance (as a concerned citizen); and in community organizing. It also deepened my knowledge and understanding on CEDAW, UNSCR 1325, the Philippine National Action Plan on Women, the Magna Carta of Women, and other pertinent laws like the Reproductive Health Law (the different "Fatwa" being published in ARMM). And last but not the least, I was trained as a woman leader to be aware and engage on gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive governance in preparation for us, women leaders to be able to participate in the future when Bangsamoro political entity materializes.

I believe that collective actions can bring issues and concerns, voices and perspectives of women on the ground into the peace process. It can also help mainstream gender across all aspects of governance – be it political or economic issues. I am now looking forward to the sustainability of this kind of training, especially for the next generation. Hence, replication of these kinds of activities should also be done for our colleagues on the ground."

I believe that collective actions can bring issues and concerns, voices and perspectives of women in the ground into the peace process



Kausar Aming

Tarbilang Foundation, Inc
Tawi-Tawi

Strengthened and reaffirmed commitment to peace advocacy

“Malaking karangalan po para sa akin ang napasama o kaya ay napasali sa paglalakbay ng WAGI. Ang una kong nasalihan ay ang Bangsamoro Women Leadership Summit and Training for Good Governance, pangalawa ay ang “how to run and win the election,”

“It helped me to strengthen my knowledge, skills and determination in continuing my advocacy for peace.”

pangatlo ay sa PCID, “the role of women leader in peace and security.” Natuto po ako kung papaano palawakin ang kaalaman tungkol sa leadership ng isang babae upang makamit ang “*good governance*”. Nakatulong ito upang patuloy at mapalakas pa ang sinimulang layunin tungo sa tunay na kapayapaan. Ang kahalagahan nito ay nagpabuo ng

kaalaman, katapangan, karunungan at pagka-determinado sa panawagan or *advocacy*. Ako po ay umaasa na patuloy na mapasali o mapasama pa sa paglalakbay ng WAGI mula sa local, regional at national, lalo na sa *training*, at seminar na patungkol sa leadership ng mga kababaihan. Good luck po, WAGI.

(It is my honor to be part of the WPT activities. Among the activities that I took part in include, the Bangsamoro Women Leadership Summit and Training for Good Governance, the Training on How to Run and Win Elections, and the Consultation facilitated by PCID on the role of women leader in peace and security. My knowledge on women’s leadership widened, especially in relation to good governance. It helped me strengthen my knowledge, skills and determination in continuing my advocacy for peace. I am hoping that I will continue to be part of the WAGI and WPT journey from the local to regional to national levels, especially when it comes to women’s leadership. Good luck to WAGI and WPT.)”



Kerma Hji Abdulla
Municipality of Tongkil
Sulu

Importance of collective action in the promotion of peace and gender-responsive governance

“From the activities that I attended (the consultation and training on legislative advocacy for WHR, CEDAW and BBL, and the consultation during the ARMM Women’s Summit), my knowledge was deepened on CEDAW, UNSCR 1325, Magna Carta of Women. As a traditional leader, I was trained to engage in gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive gender governance and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women as central realization of women’s human rights. I also see the value of collective actions in bringing the concerns and voices and equitable representation of women on the ground into the peace process. Collective action can help promote long lasting peace and ensure gender-responsive approach in all aspects of security and peace building including the participation of women in decision-making. Women in the Bangsamoro are already active in a number of social and political fields, but their agency in public life still needs to be fully understood and normalized in a society, that largely holds

to traditional values that undermine women’s active participation. I am hoping forward to the sustainability of these kinds of training from WAGI and WPC and hope that I can re-echo these training to my community.

“Collective action can help promote long lasting peace and ensure gender-responsive approach in all aspects of security and peace building including the participation of women in decision-making.”



Quezona Naifah Sanguila Sulog
Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte

Self-transformation to serve others more

“My journey with WAGI/WPC began last year when I was in Basilan for monitoring task. My friend called me up and told me that she recommended me for a training in Manila. Since then, I had attended at least 5 activities with WAGI and became a member of WPC. The training tackled gender sensitivity, women’s rights, CEDAW, Magna Carta of Women, Philippine National Action Plan, etc. As WPC member, I was able to attend the National Women’s Summit

“Overall, my engagement with WAGI as WPC member helps me to where I am now, who I am and how I become – strong, determined, and fearless.”

that featured discussion on inclusive peace and security issues. WAGI also co-organized with the Regional Commission on Bangsamoro Women (RCBW) and sponsored us to attend the 1st ARMM Bangsamoro Women Leadership Summit on Transformative Governance. Then

my recent engagement with WAGI/WPC was the training on how to run and win elections in which strategic planning for preparing in election was provided for. The training on BBL enlightened me further to do more advocacy, I was able to learn the importance of the BBL to us Bangsamoro women. Even if the bill did not pass in the 16th Congress, the training helped us understand the importance of believing in the peace process and continue the intervention in the grassroots. The training also made me realized the importance of women in peace talks and peace processes.

Overall, my engagement with WAGI as WPC member helps me to where I am now, who I am and how I become – strong, determined, and fearless. It boosts my morale as a person, to value time, make use of it and use it in service to others. It made me realize that peace really has to start within us. I am still looking forward for more training/seminar specifically on GAD planning, GAD budgeting, and other training that we Bangsamoro women need to learn. Thank you so much WAGI!”



Wahida Abdulla
Gagandilan Mindanao Women Inc.
Zamboanga City

Continue the work for capacity development of women

“Upon meeting the project team headed by Professor Oyie de Dios, gender specialist and trainer, Dr. Socorro Reyes, peace advocate Inday Santiago, and the WAGI staff Anna Dinglasan and Kath Bueza, I felt invigorated by the commitment the team showed...even at the initial stages.

Since then, the core team of Ma'am Oyie, Doc Soc and Ma'am Amina, have remained steadfast in their commitment to capacitate Muslim women in the impoverished and neglected communities in Mindanao. The WAGI staff have undergone personnel changes, with Mel, Rina and Jing continuing to provide much needed support for the activities developed for the program. The PCID also underwent similar personnel changes-our researchers Diane and Rani, who have joined government, are now replaced by Jasmine and Rowena. Even with these changes, our coordination has remained tight.

We have met obstacles in the implementation, delay in the conduct of the survey, and even the loss of Gigi, who spearheaded the development, conduct and analysis of the survey. But the results bear out the premises we had set at the commencement of the WPT project - the need to capacitate Muslim women as peace advocates, and to capacitate Muslim women religious leaders and scholars as agents of change in their respective communities.

There is still much to do. But I feel that WPT has made a marked difference in the lives of the women we have trained. Their perspectives have widened, their understanding of issues enriched, and we

earnestly hope, their commitment strengthened with purpose. We will still have to equip them with tools and skills to better address local concerns, but within the framework reflective of their culture, traditions, and existing realities.

“ I feel that WPT has made a marked difference in the lives of the women we have trained. Their perspectives have widened, their understanding of issues enriched and we earnestly hope, their commitment strengthened with purpose.”



Atty. Salma Pir Rasul

Executive Director
Philippine Council for Islam and
Democracy (PCID)

“But along with the BBL, we must ensure that women sit on the table as negotiators, sift through the fine print as lawyers, consult with constituencies as regional executives, and energize communities as project managers. This holds true, as well for the other peace tables, such as those with the CPLA and the RPA, to make sure that the women are up front and not left behind.

*Sustainability is the name of the game: to ensure that the gains from the peace tables and the gains of NAP are not reversed by what happens, or does not happen, in May. NAP has sought to cover all the bases, such as mandates and policies, structures and working groups, localization and training. But there is one base that is a condition **sine qua non**: the condition without which we cannot move forward.”*

Teresita “Ging” Quintos-Deles

Secretary

Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Process (OPAPP)

Delivered during the opening of the 4th National Women’s Summit and consultation on the Roll Out of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

November 16, 2015, Miriam College

Sustaining Peace... the way forward



Melanie Reyes

Co-Convener, CEDAW Youth Network
Member, Women's Peace Collective



The high hopes for the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law were shattered several times. The first was the Mamasapano incident (January 2015) where 44 Special Action Forces (SAF) were killed during a military operation that was supposed to capture several wanted terrorists.

Some MILF soldiers who were allegedly involved in the incident in an area believed to be controlled by the MILF further complicated the situation and cast doubts on the sincerity of the MILF.

In the weeks and months following the January Mamasapano incident, the atmosphere of openness and acceptance of the peace process eventually turned to uncertainty and suspicion of Muslims in general and MILF, in particular. Even the Philippine peace negotiators particularly Prof. Miriam Coronel Ferrer and Sec. Teresita “Ging” Deles were viciously attacked in the media. Supportive NGOs and the international community however, considered this a temporary but serious setback, which affected the timeline of the BBL.

Several Mindanao and NCR-based networks have been working hard to support the peace process decided to

unite and lobby even harder for the resumption of the legislative hearings. An All Out Peace Movement was formed, which included the Women’s Peace Table, WeAct1325, and other networks collectively strategized and consolidated peace initiatives. These women peace networks intensified their lobbying efforts by attending hearings in Congress, as well as, in provincial consultations.

Despite the collective efforts of the gender peace advocates and networks in participating and monitoring the public hearings and plenary deliberations in the House of Representatives and Senate, the bill did not pass the 16th Congress. There are a number of interrelated factors that prevented the passage of the bill; these include the prolonged debates and interpellations that neither delayed nor stalled the entire process, the chronic absenteeism or lack of quorum in the House of Representatives, and the apprehension of majority of the legislators due to the upcoming elections.

Through the non-passage of BBL, many were frustrated, but this will not stop the gender peace advocates and networks such as the WPT/WPC to continue their work in intensifying peace-building efforts, information and consciousness raising

campaigns, because there is no other option but peace.

As Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, the chairperson of the GPH peace panel said, “It took a long time to get to this set of practical steps. We need to take away the fear and distrust of the Bangsamoro for our country to become whole.”

Thus, the WPT/WPC is looking forward to the refilling of the BBL as the 17th Congress opens on June 2016.

As MILF Mohagher Iqbal said, “the most immediate step is either the BBL will be refilled in Congress or, a new basic law, faithful to the letter and spirit of the CAB (Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro) will be crafted by the BTC (Bangsamoro Transition Commission), which will most likely have new faces as members. This is the only way forward.”

In light of this development, the Women's Peace Collective (formerly known as the Women's Peace Table) conducted a consultation with Bangsamoro women to solicit their real issues and challenges amidst the non-passage of the BBL in Congress. The consultation was held in conjunction with the 1st Regional Bangsamoro Women Summit organized by the Regional Commission on Bangsamoro

Women (RCBW) in Cotabato last February 1-2, 2016, which was attended by almost 1,000 women organizations and networks from Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga, Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao, Cotabato, and Sulu.

Among the important strategies that they recommended to continue the work on peace, justice and development in Mindanao include:

1. Educational reform as a strategic

entry point: Provide equal access to schooling, provision of scholarship, encourage girls and boys to finish school, integrate fully the concept of peace and development in the curriculum.

2. Community involvement:

Strengthened and sustained Bangsamoro organizations and be united in voicing out their issues and concerns – and specifically of what they want.

3. Show the power of women's vote:

There was a strong call to boycott those national officials who did not support the BBL; while campaign for those who supported the BBL and their cause.

4. Intensify media campaign and social networks:

This can be done through signature campaign to support the continuous legislative work for a CAB-based BBL. This also includes effective utilization of other multi-media such as, radio programs and social media networks.

5. Strengthen awareness raising on women's human rights:

There is a need for continuous advocacy for women's rights, especially in the context of Islam; and more importantly, targeting the grassroots and communities.

6. Provide opportunities for capacity building:

Sustainable development can only be realized if members of communities can meaningfully participate in governance and politics, socio-economic, cultural, and all other developmental aspects. In order for them to participate, they need to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge about the political system, governance, economic programs, and opportunities, among others.

peace process, but also the lobbying and advocacy for the filing of a CAB-based Bangsamoro Basic Law.

As for the Women's Peace Collective (WPC) led by the Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID), and Center for Legislative Development (CLD) will continue to provide capacity development program for women in ARMM and prepare them as they engage for meaningful participation in their respective communities.

Still, several meetings and consultations were held by other gender and peace networks to strategize on the next steps of sustaining or continuing not just the



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