

**Mitigating Localized Conflict in Mindanao and Sulu through
Rapid Response of Local Non-State Actors**

ANNUAL REPORT FY09

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Submitted by



The Asia Foundation

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This report covers activities from October 1, 2008 to September 30, 2009 under the “Mitigating Localized Conflict in Mindanao and Sulu through Rapid Response of Local Non-State Actors” Program of The Asia Foundation. The project is supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under Cooperative Agreement No. AID 492-A-00-08-00008-00 and runs from October 1, 2008 to September 30, 2010.

I. Project Background

In the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, violence is a frequent, unpredictable, and often highly localized phenomenon. The region has multiple insurgent movements, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Moro National Liberation front (MNLF), New People’s Army (NPA—the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines), and the *Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa sa Mindanao* (Revolutionary Party of Workers in Mindanao or RPMM). The presence of these insurgent groups poses a serious threat to stability in the region, and the heavy military presence in the region is a response to this threat. Although the Muslim separatist conflict dominates the media, research supported by The Asia Foundation shows that clan violence (or *rido*) in Mindanao is actually more pertinent in the daily lives of the people. Small-scale, local conflicts stemming from *rido*, political rivalries, or inter-communal tensions complicate an already volatile environment mixed with separatism, banditry, and military involvement.

One of the major challenges in addressing conflict in the southern Philippines is this constant threat of localized violence, and the lack of state and local capacity to intervene at the critical point of escalation. Violent conflict can erupt when there is an incident or unresolved dispute between local actors – clans, political leaders, military units, police, insurgent groups, and criminal networks – that cannot be resolved or mitigated through existing local mediation or state intervention. When armed conflicts flare up between the military and the major insurgent groups, it is usually between local units and is triggered by a local incident or grievance that may have little to do with the larger state-insurgency conflict.

Peace talks with the MILF have been sporadic for some years now. As witness the events after August 2008, the main threat to peace and stability lie in the rupture of the cessation of hostilities. The first danger, which came to pass in late 2008, was the withdrawal of the international team of monitors due to the lack of progress in the peace talks. The second danger lies in the localized outbreak of hostilities that have been discussed, along with their potential for spreading into a more generalized conflict. The ceasefire mechanisms have been designed to maintain peace between the two mainline forces—MILF and the Armed Forces of the Philippines—and are much less effectual with respect to localized conflicts. Both these dangers can be addressed by the strengthening of community-based mechanisms. Should local communities become more effective in mitigating localized conflicts, they are unlikely to spread into more generalized warfare. And, to the extent that self-reliance in maintaining a cessation of hostilities is generated, reliance on foreign monitors is reduced.

Meanwhile, the aborted signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in August 2008 as a result of a Supreme Court injunction and the

subsequent armed encounters involving three MILF base commands in Central Mindanao, Sarangani, and Lanao del Norte, resulted in the dissolution of the GRP Peace Panel, a hiatus in the peace process, and growing displacement of communities as a result of the hostilities. In the face of renewed hopes for peace talks, there is more reason to mitigate localized violence to prevent its escalation, which will hopefully improve the environment for the reconstituted Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) Peace Panel and the MILF to return to the negotiations table.

II. Goal and Objectives

Goal: To mitigate conflict in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago by enabling local, non-state actors to quickly and effectively intervene in localized conflicts and crises.

Objective 1: To strengthen the capacity of civil society actors and community-based leaders to manage crises and prevent the escalation of localized conflict.

Objective 2: To improve rapid response mechanisms and interventions for outbreaks of hostilities that may occur between armed combatants.

III. Expected Impact

The program will achieve a number of important outputs, notably: the creation of a core group of capable, community-based leaders with the expertise required to effectively mobilize their communities to respond to crises with effective time-sensitive interventions; the creation of a pool-fund system that will allow trained civil society organizations and community leaders to quickly respond to conflicts and more effectively implement existing local conflict resolution mechanisms.

Project activities will also achieve more far-reaching outcomes, as follows:

- Greater community engagement and cooperation with local and central government among citizens of Mindanao;
- Reduced conflict, greater responsiveness among community groups in responding to conflict when it arises, and accelerated development within the region as the intensity and longevity of conflicts is reduced;
- An improved environment for peace and reconciliation in Mindanao;
- Strengthened capacity of the community to respond to and minimize conflict; and
- Facilitation of a more conducive environment for the GRP and MILF to resume the peace talks.

IV. Approach and Strategy

The Asia Foundation's rapid response project has established mechanisms for urgently responding to outbreaks of hostilities in the conflict-affected regions of the southern Philippines, through a network of civil society organizations and respected community-based leaders. The project utilizes several multi-pronged and context-

specific approaches involving a collaborative process of assessment, capacity-building, networking, actual conflict interventions, community reconciliation, and evaluation. Specifically, this approach involves:

- Enhancing the wide range of community-based peace initiatives and indigenous, or alternative conflict resolution mechanisms existing on the ground in managing flare-ups;
- Supporting the efforts of various NGO coalitions and civil society groups in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago in preventing and deescalating conflicts;
- Enhancing cooperation between NGOs skilled and experienced in ceasefire monitoring and more localized civil society groups;
- Utilizing the Foundation's ability to work with local conflict dynamics and mobilize a wealth of networks on the ground;
- Applying the Foundation's experience in successfully mitigating clan feuding (*rido*) in Mindanao and the success of its 2007 and 2008 electoral reform programs in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The Foundation's experience has shown that, in cases where localized violence is prevalent, local civil society organizations and community-based leaders are the most critical actors for monitoring and responding to outbreaks of hostilities. Working in partnership with these key non-state actors has enabled the Foundation's previous projects to achieve high levels of credibility and respect within Mindanao communities. These non-state actors also derive significant benefit from the Foundation's capacity-building programs and are well placed to deliver enhanced conflict mitigation, resolution, and monitoring services to Mindanao citizens.

The Foundation believes that the only people who can effectively mitigate localized conflict are those that have the credibility and respect within the local community to negotiate with, or on behalf of, the community in times of crisis. When conflict escalates at the local level, there are few local groups or leaders that can intervene to negotiate or mediate between the parties. These local NGOs, community and religious leaders, local government officials, and occasionally members of the security forces stationed in the area are most often the ones that must manage crises related to conflict (e.g. movement of internally displaced persons, relief operations, fact-finding inquiries, dispute resolution) and, at the same time, engage with other state actors or policy-makers to avert escalation of hostilities. The problem is that many of these actors require resources and expertise in order to mobilize communities and respond to crises with targeted, time-sensitive interventions. In many cases, local actors that are very well-placed to mediate between combatants lack the skills or networks to effectively manage disputes and crises.

The rapid response program closes these gaps, leading to a more coordinated response to conflicts and effective conflict mitigation by local actors. This can be primarily achieved by implementing a two-pronged strategy of capacity-building that helps strengthen civil society actors and community-based leaders to manage crises and prevent escalation of localized conflict; and supporting the mobilization of local actors to rapidly respond and intervene during outbreaks of hostilities and other emergencies. While the first strategy is done through the Foundation's usual grant mechanism, the second approach involves a rapid response funding process.

V. Project Accomplishments for FY 2009

The accomplishments in this annual report are organized along the two objectives of the Mitigating Conflicts Program: (a) to strengthen capacity of civil society actors and community-based leaders to manage crises and prevent the escalation of localized conflict; and (b) To improve rapid response mechanisms and interventions for outbreaks of hostilities that may occur between armed combatants.

Partners under this project include: Ateneo de Zamboanga University, Bangsamoro Development Agency, Bangsamoro Center for Justpeace in the Philippines, Inc., Ginapaladtaka Inc., Magungaya Center for PALMA Inc., Mindanao ComStrat and Policy Alternative, Inc., Mindanao Tulong Bakwet, Sakayan Mindanao, Tribal Coalition of Mindanao, United Muslim Professional for Peace and Development Association, and the United Youth for Peace and Development.

During the first quarter of fiscal year 2009, a Conflict Management Program Assessment and Planning Workshop paved way for identification of management-related issues and concerns resulting to more consolidated efforts and effective implementation of the program. In the same period, a work plan for the project was also drafted and submitted which was consequently approved by USAID.

A series of meetings and project orientations were conducted in the cities of Cotabato and Marawi, in Midsayap, North Cotabato, and in Sulu to introduce and present the project not only to conflict management partners but also to a broader range of non-government organizations, civil society coalitions in conflict-affected localities, and key representatives of grassroots communities. A partners meeting in Manila was also held among eight Mindanao-based non-government organizations in relation to their proposed rapid response initiatives.

During this period, critical areas where potential flare-ups may occur were identified and prioritized in consultation with project partners. This information was further validated by The Asia Foundation's list of critical areas based on documented incidences of violence after the August 4, 2008 injunction issued by the Supreme Court against the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). The documentation includes news reports and fact-finding reports of violence after the MOA-AD incident.

As of 30 September 2009, a total of 22 interventions were supported under the Mitigating Conflict Program covering conflict hotspots across the provinces of Maguindanao, Cotabato, South Cotabato, Saranggani, Agusan del Sur, Zamboanga, Sulu, and Basilan. Half of these interventions were capacity-building activities to proactively prepare local stakeholders and their leaders in managing crisis, while the other half supported rapid response initiatives of local actors that mitigated actual flare-ups and prevented the escalation of conflict.

The program was very flexible and adaptive to the range and complexity of Mindanao conflict allowing interventions to be responsive to the needs of a particular conflict situation. For instance, the support provided to the Bangsamoro Development Agency Satellite office in North Cotabato allowed the office to conduct the much-

needed quick assessments to ascertain the nature of conflict in the region, assess the situation of IDPs, and map out ongoing relief operations, and critical conflicts that needed to be prioritized. This was in response to several skirmishes that resulted to displacements in the area.

In many cases, the Foundation has anticipated critical areas for interventions and allowed local NGO partners to quickly respond to various types of conflict. The Mitigating Conflict Program has allowed partners and local actors to intervene in a wide range of conflict, such as those involving Muslim-Christian animosities in Pigcawayan and Polomolok, tensions between B'laan and Maguindanaon communities in Malapatan (Sarangani); insurgency-related conflicts among indigenous peoples in Agusan del Sur; and even conflicts caused by criminality such as kidnap-for-ransom incidences which polarizes citizens in Zamboanga, Basilan, and Sulu.

The resurgence of Kidnap-for-Ransom incidents in southern Philippines since 2008 has polarized communities because of increasing distrust among citizens. It has also severely affected development projects in conflict and poverty-stricken areas, especially with the abduction of community development workers from NGOs and INGOs based in the areas. The Asia Foundation initiated a number of efforts to address this menace by supporting confidential consultations with victims of kidnapping and their families as well as supporting a series of roundtable discussions and key informant interviews with NGOs, donors, civil society groups, and other key stakeholders in Zamboanga, Sulu, Basilan and Manila, to strengthen networks, draw out lessons learned, and come up with recommendations to address the problem. These series of consultations culminated in a security training for NGOs and civil society groups coming from Basilan, Sulu and the Zamboanga Peninsula which was conducted by Control Risks¹ in partnership and collaboration with British Embassy-Manila and the Ateneo de Zamboanga University.

Project-supported interventions have not only contained conflicts at a crucial period during the breakdown of the peace process, the strategic coverage of the program has allowed it to deal with brewing conflicts (such as in Agusan del Sur and Basilan) which are sometimes under the radar of the current peace process and away from media attention. This has allowed the Foundation and its partners to have a better view of the interconnectedness and complexity of the conflict landscape across different regions.

Objective 1: To strengthen capacity of civil society actors and community-based leaders to manage crises and prevent the escalation of localized conflict.

The following are the project's accomplishments under this objective:

- Conducted training on community preparedness and management of armed conflict in the municipalities of Datu Piang and Datu Saudi Ampatuan in Maguindanao.

¹ Control Risks is an independent, specialist risk consultancy with 27 offices on five continents that enables its clients to succeed in complex or hostile business environments

- On-going implementation of trainings on culture of peace and seminars on conflict preparedness in six conflict-affected barangays of Aleosan and Pikit in North Cotabato.
- Organized Roundtable Discussion on kidnap for ransom with donors and non-government organizations in Manila and civil society in Basilan and Zamboanga City and co-implemented a training for social development workers on personal security in Zamboanga City.
- Supported focus group discussions to strengthen the engagement of the ulama (religious scholars) in peace and development work in Sulu.
- Organized Grant Management Seminar for 66 representatives from 36 prospective partner organizations in anticipation of possible partnership under the project.
- Conducted a series of assessment meetings and consultations in the eight communities of Midsayap to introduce activities related to securing and emancipating civilians from unwanted and recurring armed conflict in Midsayap, North Cotabato.

Mindanao Tulong Bakwet (MTB)

The Asia Foundation partnered with Mindanao Tulong Bakwet to implement the project on community preparedness and management of armed conflict in Datu Piang and Datu Saudi Ampatuan in Maguindanao. As a result, a Quick Response Team, called *Bantay Bakwet* (Displacement Watch) was formed at the barangay level which among others, is tasked to assist civilians on emergency response during armed conflict and monitor the situation of internally displaced persons in the targeted areas. A total of 392 local volunteers are installed and trained by the project on conflict mitigation, crisis management, hazard risk assessment, and camp coordination and management.

The local volunteers composed of representatives from the academe and municipal governments as well as barangay and community leaders were also trained to document and report cases of human rights violations to concerned agencies. An Executive Order was already issued by the Municipal Government of Datu Piang in Maguindanao which institutionalized the involvement of the Quick Response Team during emergency response. In October 2009, a Bantay Bakwet Planning Workshop will be conducted in Davao City to map out emerging issues concerning the evacuees.

Table 1, below, shows the total number of people trained on emergency response in the two municipalities of Maguindanao.

Table 1: No. of People Trained on Emergency Response
(October 2008-September 2009)

Municipality	No. of Participants Trained	Male	Female
Datu Piang	230	187	43
Datu Saudi Ampatuan	162	117	45
Total	392	304	88

Ginapaladtaka, Inc. (G7)

As of September 30, 2009, a total of 297 sectoral leaders and select barangay officials of Barangay Peace and Order Committee were trained on conflict negotiation and mediation and armed conflict preparedness in the Municipalities of Pikit and Aleosan in North Cotabato. A group of local sectoral leaders in select barangays was formed to undertake training built on the concept of culture of peace and inter-religious understanding in community affairs and governance structures particularly at the barangay level. To complement the peace intervention, an orientation seminar on disaster preparedness, risk management process, and ceasefire monitoring was also held to identify and develop security measures that will assist the local communities during armed conflict. Last batch of similar training will be conducted in Brgy. Pagangan in Aleosan on October 2009.

As an output of the trainings, barangay-level contingency plans were already formulated and developed in Brgy. Tapodoc and in its neighboring communities in Pikit which include Bualan, Pamalian, Kolambog, and Silik.

Table 2: No. of People Trained by G7
as of September 30, 2009

Municipality	No. of Participants Trained	Male	Female
Aleosan	137	61	76
Pikit	160	85	75
Total	297	146	151

United Youth for Peace and Development

The actual figures and condition of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)² particularly in Maguindanao indicate that insufficient attention has been made to enable the communities to be prepared in the event of adversities. Most municipal governments in the province have become dependent on outside interventions from various local and international non-government organizations in terms of emergency and humanitarian response. At the barangay level, members of the Barangay Disaster Coordinating Council as well as local community volunteers have limited skills and knowledge of emergency response initiatives especially during armed conflict.

To address the need to build the capacity of local volunteers to be prepared during emergency response, the United Youth for Peace and Development is implementing the project, “Maximizing Community Participation in Mitigating Conflicts in Conflict-Affected Areas in Maguindanao”, covering nine barangays³ in the

² As of early September 2009, it was estimated that the total number of people displaced by the conflict ranged between 233,000 and 271,000, almost all of them located in Maguindanao province. At the end of September 2009, World Food Programme estimated that 320,000 people remained displaced in Central Mindanao (U.N. Coordination Office 2009).

³ Damatulan, Nabalawag, and Lumopog, in Midsayap; Kabpangi, Bulacaon, and Matilac in Pigcawayan; Tumaguinting, Sabaken, and Damatug in Northern Kabuntalan

Municipalities of Midsayap and Pigcawayan in Cotabato and Northern Kabuntalan in Maguindanao. The project has the goal of strengthening the skills of the communities on early warning system, conflict prevention, and ceasefire monitoring; conflict management, mediation, and resolution; and human rights documentation and community journalism.

As of this reporting period, consultations and project orientations were conducted in the target communities followed by initial batch of training related to establishment of an early warning system, conflict prevention, and ceasefire monitoring. The table below shows the number of the people trained under the project.

Table 3: No. of People Trained by UNYPAD
As of 30 September 2009

Municipality	No. of Participants Trained	Male	Female
Midsayap, Cotabato	30	21	9
Northern Kabuntalan, Maguindanao	30	21	9
Pigcawayan, Cotabato	30	25	5
Total	90	67	23

Magungaya Center for PALMA Inc.

As part of the Mitigating Conflict Program, the Magungaya Center for PALMA, Inc. is implementing “Securing and Emancipating Civilians from Unwanted and Recurring armed conflict affecting Pigcawayan, Aleosan, Libungan, Midsayap, and Alamada through Rapid Response and Capacity Enhancement” or SECURE thru RRACE. The SECURE thru RRACE project has the goal of empowering people at the grassroots level to participate in conflict transformation and local socio-economic development and management. It also has the goal of mitigating the devastating impact of current armed conflict in the 17 Muslim-populated barangays of Midsayap, Cotabato and preventing its escalation into larger conflict in the communities of PALMA (Pigcawayan, Aleosan, Libungan, Midsayap, and Alamada) areas. A series of capacity building activities at the community level will be held to transform local conflicts into local cooperation in terms of conflict-preparedness and security planning through the process of participatory planning.

As of this reporting period, a series of assessment meetings and consultations in the eight barangays⁴ of Midsayap, North Cotabato were conducted to identify potential volunteers that will form the Quick Response Team. The Quick Response Team is designed to be involved in emergency response during armed conflict. The Quick Response Teams will be composed of barangay officials and community leaders. The project will also support the institutionalization of the South Western Midsayap Coordinating Council which will be involved in local dispute resolution as recognized by local key actors and other stakeholders. Trainings on conflict analysis/management

⁴ Central Labas, Kadingilan, Kapinpilan, Lomopog, Mudseng, Olandang, Sambulaw, and Tumbras

and disaster preparedness, basic community organizing and para-legal documentation, organizational development and management, and gender sensitivity will be held subsequently in the first quarter of fiscal year 2010.

Kidnap for Ransom – Roundtable Discussion with Donors and NGO's in Manila and Civil Society in Basilan and Zamboanga City

A series of round table discussion were held in Basilan and Zamboanga City on April 21, 2009 and June 10, 2009, respectively to discuss the recent spate of Kidnap for Ransom problem in these areas. Part of the goal of the activity was to recognize the impact of kidnapping in terms of development assistance that is at risk of being lost because of the emerging threat it poses to donor agencies and non-government organizations. As a result, relevant information on the nature of the kidnapping was obtained from local stakeholders. Feedback on how to help minimize or resolve the incidence of kidnapping was also generated not only from the community level but also from the national and local government authorities, and external parties. Key representatives from the local governments such as the Vice Governor of Basilan, Zamboanga City Mayor Celso Lobregat, Congresswoman Isabelle Climaco, and other relevant stakeholders participated in the discussions.

Prior to the activity, a separate discussion was organized in Manila among select donor agencies and non-government organizations on March 6, 2009 in order to assess the impact of the KFR problem in the implementation of their respective projects in Zamboanga Peninsula, Sulu, and Basilan. Based on the discussions, some organizations revealed temporary suspension of their operation due to alarming threats experienced by their project implementers posted on the ground. Others were considering a complete pull-out of their project operations in Sulu and Basilan.

On August 9 – 12, 2009, 14 selected social development workers from Zamboanga Peninsula, Sulu Province, and Basilan Province undertook the training on personal security conducted by Control Risks. In the series of round table discussions organized by the Foundation, the need for capacity building on personal security both as a personal and organizational response was identified. Through the training, the participants among others resolved to create policies and protocols on personal security within their organization. The participants also proposed to design a mechanism for inter-organizational support during kidnap situations.

Focus Group Discussion – Sulu Ulama

In May 2009, a focus group discussion (FGD) was held to assess the training needs of the Muslim religious sector in Sulu. The discussion is the initial efforts to complement the goal of the project to engage the *ulama* (religious scholars) in peace and development works. Thirty-five *ulama* participated in the discussions which among others, identified the need to undertake a capacity building program related to crisis management and prevention, fiscal management, and on the aspects of facilitation, coordination, and networking with other stakeholders for possible partnership and collaboration on future projects. The results of the discussions are integrated into a comprehensive project proposal which will be supported by the rapid response program of the Foundation.

On September 23-25, 2009, key representatives from the Sulu Ulama Council and the Sabiel Al-Muhtadeen Foundation, an organization which also consists of prominent religious scholars in Sulu, attended the Grant Management Seminar in Davao City. The seminar (see additional information below) provided the religious leaders with necessary skills on grant administration and management and basic bookkeeping which complement one of the training needs identified during the FGD which will help them to better implement activities under the Mitigating Conflict Program.

Grant Management Seminar

For fiscal year 2009, a total of two grant management seminars were conducted in Davao by the Foundation's finance and audit unit for conflict management program partners. A total of 66 representatives from 36 organizations which are potential partners for mitigating conflict program were trained on grant administration and financial management. The Grant Management Seminar provided the participants with concepts on internal control and accounting system, and information about USAID standard provisions and policies. The table below shows the number of people trained on grant management:

Table 4: No. of People Trained on GMS
as of September 2009

Date of Training	No. of Organizations	Male	Female
March 9-11, 2009	18	10	22
September 23-25, 2009	18	17	17
Total	36	27	39

Objective 2: To improve rapid response mechanisms and interventions for outbreaks of hostilities that may occur between armed combatants.

The following are the project's accomplishments under this objective:

- Supported the conduct of dialogues and targeted messaging that averted the potential massacre of Muslim Internally Displaced Families in Brgy. Bulucaon, Pigcawayan, Cotabato;
- Supported consultations on alleged forcible closures of evacuation centers in Datu Piang, Maguindanao;
- Supported Multi-Sectoral Peace Dialogues in Brgy. Ginatilan, Pikit, North Cotabato to mitigate conflict arising from atrocities that occurred between Muslims and the Christians in the community;
- Supported conflict mitigation in Agusan del Sur through the conduct of *Kahimunan*, or general assembly among tribal leaders to control tribal feuding;
- Facilitated communication lines between the Moro National Liberation Front and International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) Crisis Committee in Sulu;
- Mitigated conflict in four barangays of Datu Saudi Ampatuan in Maguindanao;

- Conducted community consultations and dialogues in Polomolok, South Cotabato to resolve conflict related a series of killings that led to inter-clan violence between Muslims and Christians;
- Supported a fact finding mission and joint media coverage in conflict-affected areas in Maguindanao;
- Supported the Bangsamoro Development Agency to monitor and assess the state of Internally Displaced Persons and nature of conflict in North Cotabato;
- Provided support to the Southwestern Midsayap Community Safety and Development Forum in Midsayap, Cotabato.

Dialogues to avert the potential massacre of Muslim Internally Displaced Families.

Support was provided to United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD) to organize a responding team and conduct dialogues with targeted messaging between the Christian and Muslim civilians and their leaders which controlled internal conflicts and averted a potential massacre of internally displaced Muslim families. Separatist violence shattered community relationships when clashes between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) last December 24, 2008 in Sitio Margues in Barangay Bulacaon, Pigcawayan, North Cotabato, led to the displacement of 47 families, largely Muslims. The continued MILF-AFP skirmishes in the succeeding weeks led to heightened animosities between the displaced Muslim families and their host Christian community, resulting in threats to harm the displaced Muslim families. The timely intervention of UNYPAD resulted in a clarification of issues, prevented the escalation of violence, and helped develop protocols⁵ for both Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and host communities in case future hostilities and displacements take place (See Annex B and C).

This intervention culminated in a Community Peace Forum on February 5, 2009, where a Memorandum of Agreement among the leaders of the Muslim and Christian communities was presented and signed, and witnessed by Congresswoman Emmylou Talino Mendoza of the First District of Cotabato, as well as representatives from the municipal and barangay governments. More than 200 people from Muslim and Christian communities attended the Peace Forum to celebrate the newly-restored peace between their communities. To complement the initiative, additional support was also provided to facilitate the return of internally displaced families to their respective places of origin in some barangays in Pigcawayan, North Cotabato.

Consultations on alleged forcible closures of evacuation centers.

The project supported the consultations conducted by Mindanao Tulong Bakwet in 27 evacuation camps in the Municipality of Datu Piang in Maguindanao in relation to the allegations of the forcible closures of the evacuation sites and the forced return of IDPs to their communities in the midst of military operations in their areas. The results of the consultations were presented to various municipal government officials

⁵ The protocols contained in a Memorandum of Understanding were agreed upon and signed by barangay leaders, the Municipal Peace and Order Council Chairman, municipal officers of Pigcawayan, including, among others, Municipal Social Welfare Development Officer Mariam Joy Quilban, former board member Eliseo “Jun” Garcesa, the secretariate (UNYPAD), and representatives from the Muslim and Christian communities.

headed by Municipal Mayor Datu Samer Uy, barangay captains, select members of the Philippine Army, and key representatives of international non-government and humanitarian organizations.

The intervention provided a venue for discussions between the officials of the local governments and community leaders of internally displaced families on the issues of force returns and potential closures of evacuation centers in the target areas. It was also through the activity where the municipal government was able to inform the IDPs about identified areas where they could safely relocate while ensuring their protection in the displacement sites. For this reporting period, most of the IDPs have since left the displacements sites and returned to their respective areas of origin that were declared secure by the local government and the military.

Multi-Sectoral Peace Dialogue in Brgy. Ginatilan, Pikit, North Cotabato.

On March 25, 2009, a Multi-Sectoral Peace Dialogue was held in Brgy. Ginatilan, Pikit, North Cotabato which was attended by municipal government officials led by Mayor Datu Sumulong Sultan and Vice-Mayor Don Mangansakan. The dialogue was organized by GinapaladTaka, Inc. (G7) to discuss the issues of atrocities involving an alleged harassment against a military outpost that resulted to death and injury of two civilian volunteers. Barangay captains and some members of Barangay Council that were affected by the conflict were also present as well as officials from the Philippine National Police, Philippine Army, and key representatives from the academe and non-government organizations, including the Asia Foundation's County Representative. The dialogue helped pacify the tension among conflicting barangays through consultations and discussions of the nature of the incident. Outlets for collaborations and assistance among the key stakeholders in the conflict-affected barangays were also identified.

Mitigating conflict in Agusan del Sur through Kahimunan

On April 14-17, 2009, around 447 tribal leaders and members of various councils in some select ancestral domains of Lapaz, Talacogon, and San Luis in Agusan del Sur gathered to resolve the rising number of deaths in their communities due to tribal conflicts resulting from their interaction with the communist New Peoples Army (NPA) and the counter-insurgency campaign of the Philippine Armed Forces.

Through the assembly, ancestral leaders and members from the Manobo, Manobo Mamanua, Manobo Lapakan, Higaonon, Banwa-on, and Talaandig indigenous groups were able to identify and approve various measures that will help strengthen the capacity of the Council of Elders and traditional leaders of the Manobo Tribal Council. As a result of the discussions, the Manobo-Banwa-on Peace and Order Council was created and ancestral guards were organized. The series of activities also allowed the different tribal leaders to consolidate their position for dialogues with the NPA. Concepts related to the implementation of their customary laws, political structure, justice system, and conflict resolution was also discussed during the activity.

Facilitating communication lines between the MNLF and ICRC

On April 9, 2009, support was provided to Sakayan Mindanao, Inc. to facilitate improved communication lines between the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) Crisis Committee and the Moro National Liberation Front in relation to the military rescue operation of three ICRC staff held hostage by the Abu Sayyaf Group. A dialogue with top ranking MNLF commanders (Commanders Khaid Ajibun and Ustadz Habier Malik) was also held by the responding team to get their cooperation in the rescue operation by staying put in their respective camps and whenever possible, stopping troop movements in order to prevent the possibility of an encounter with the AFP and the Armed Civilian Emergency Force.

Mitigate Conflict in Datu Saudi Ampatuan

On July 14, 2009, the Bangsamoro Center for Justpeace in the Philippines, Inc. presented the results of the series of consultations and dialogues conducted among internally displaced persons in the four conflict-affected barangays of Datu Saudi Ampatuan, namely: Bakat, Ganta, Inaladan, and Penditen. Around 38 representatives from various local and international non-government organizations, academe, and government line agencies gathered in Cotabato City to attend the presentation that drew up collective preventive measures addressing the safety of the civilians to ensure their protection during armed conflict.

The intervention led to the identification of some “free zone” areas that will buffer civilians from any military operations and generated commitment from various international and humanitarian organizations to provide relief operation assistance in the evacuation centers. It also provided a venue for direct communication, delineation of services, and possible sharing of resources between the local governments of host and affected communities, and concerned government-line agencies in relation to responding to the needs of the internally displaced civilians. As a prelude to the activity, comprehensive consultations and coordination meetings were held among various stakeholders to assess the situation of the IDPs that led to identification of immediate and basic needs of internally displaced families in the evacuation centers up to the time of their return to their respective places of origin.

Mitigate Conflict in Polomolok , South Cotabato

On July 21, 2009, an inter-religious and inter-community assembly was held in Polomolok, South Cotabato as a result of constructive focus group discussions and community consultations about the killings that led to inter-clan violence in the area. The conflict started when two Muslims were ambushed which resulted to a spate of killings perceived as retaliatory acts from Muslim and Christian parties.

The United Muslim Professional for Peace and Development Association organized a responding team to conduct a series of consultations in the community to gather data on the nature and background of the conflict. Separate consultations among the Muslims and Christians were held to map out possible solutions with regard to the conflict to prevent any possible eruption of large-scale armed confrontation between Muslims and Christian communities.

The series of dialogues led to a compact signing between Muslim and Christian community leaders to foster inter-cultural understanding and restore peace and order in the conflict-affected barangays. A total of 347 participants attended the community event composed of traditional leaders and members of the Council of Elders, officials and representatives from the local governments, academe, and local MILF and MNLF commands as well as from the military and the police.

Joint Media Coverage in Conflict-Affected Areas in Maguindanao

On June 29-July 2, 2009, fifty-two Manila and Mindanao-based journalists participated in a joint media coverage that assessed and validated the plight of internally displaced persons (IDP) or *bakwits* in conflict-affected areas of Maguindanao. Site visits were held in the evacuation centers in the poblacion of Datu Piang and in a more isolated evacuation center in Barangay Libutan in Mamasapano. It was estimated that a total of 33,000 families were forced to resettle after fighting erupted between the military and suspected rebels in 2008.

As a result of the joint media coverage, the journalists set up a website (<http://press.bakwit.org> or <http://www.bakwit.org>) for reporting on internal displacements in Mindanao without project funds.

Monitoring and Assessment of Internally Displaced Persons in North Cotabato

Bangsamoro Development Agency was supported to assess and monitor the situation of the internally displaced persons in five evacuation centers in North Cotabato, which include: (a) Riverside Evacuation Center in Paido Pulangi, Pikit; (b) Binandal Primary school in Macasendeg Pikit, (c) Bulod and Bulol Conflict Incidents in Pikit, (d) Nasapian Evacuation Center in Carmen; and (e) Maybula Evacuation Center in Kanibong, Tulumun.

Based on the findings of the monitoring and assessment conducted, around 967 families were displaced in the targeted areas due to various conflict situations: (1) military operations against the suspected rebels, (2) socio-political rivalry of clans that led to a series of killings from feuding parties, (3) clashes that occurred between Muslim and Christian groups; (4) land disputes. To respond to the conflicts in the targeted areas covered under the project, a series of consultations, capacity building on conflict mitigation and prevention, and dialogues were suggested.

Southwestern Midsayap Community Safety and Development Forum in Midsayap

A Southwestern Midsayap Coordinating Council was formed to assist in addressing the issues of human security in 17 conflict-affected Muslim barangays in Midsayap. The Council was the output of the community safety and development forum held on May 27, 2009 in Midsayap, Cotabato which was attended by around 65 participants who were from the local governments, non-government organizations, and heads of the local military and police. Through the forum, the issues with regard to the protection and security of non-combatants in the Moro areas and the need of an integrated community security framework were discussed upon by the community leaders, local government representatives, the police, and the military. The activity also provided a venue for the 17 barangays to discuss security and economic conditions in their

respective areas, share security and development concerns, as well as determine development initiatives.

VI. Issues and Challenges

- NGOs, civil society, and other local actors continue to be constrained in their interventions to mitigate conflict and secure internally displaced persons because of ongoing military operations, intermittent clashes between the AFP and MILF/MNLF, the presence of checkpoints, and threats to security (i.e. kidnap-for-ransom gangs and improvised explosive devices).
- The wider scope of interventions under the Mitigating Conflict Program and the different types of conflict encountered by partners made the Foundation realize that there is a lot more uncertainty about the nature and scale of conflict in the southern Philippines. Hence, there is a necessity for data-driven interventions on conflict. More opportunities are needed to analyze conflict dynamics to reveal conflict-generating activities and networks, especially with the uncertainties presented by a new administration in 2010 and the upcoming new round of peace talks.
- The presence of project partners in critical areas and their interventions to mitigate conflict are sometimes viewed negatively by the Armed Forces as they may be perceived as complicating the military operations.
- During the election season, it is foreseen that local partners may have difficulty implementing some rapid response interventions due to political realignments that might happen among stakeholders in their localities. We can also expect an increase of rapid response interventions related to election violence during this period.

VII. Plans for the First Quarter of FY10

In the coming quarter, the following rapid response initiatives will be conducted:

Mitigating Conflict in Brgy. Dasalan, Hadji Muhtamad, Basilan.

Support will be provided to Basilan Advocates for Peace, Environment, and Sustainable Development Association (BAPESDA) to mitigate the conflict in Hadji Muhtamad in Basilan where a series of killings took place in two neighboring barangays (Sangbay Small and Palahangan) which left a total of two deaths and one fatality and resulted to the evacuation of 100 families that are affected by the conflict. BAPESDA will conduct dialogues and targeted messaging in the community to negotiate for a settlement between the conflicting groups and to secure civilians by refuting inflammatory rumors of possible gunfights to prevent the escalation of violence.

Multi-Sectoral Round Table Discussions on Peace and Security

In response to the recent spate of bombings in Mindanao, a Multi-Sectoral Roundtable Discussion (RTD) on peace and security will be organized by Mindanawan Community Development Organization, Inc. in General Santos City. Discussions will be held to share the experiences and observation in various bombing cases and identify specific actions and recommendations to address the bombing incidents. Participants to the RTD include representatives from the academe, local governments, military, the police, religious and business sector and non-government organizations. A separate orientation on peace monitoring, early warning systems, and rapid reactions mechanism from security specialists will be conducted to equip the participants with the knowledge and skills in case of an emerging threat of bombing.

Mitigating Conflict in the Province of Sulu

As of this writing, thousands of families have been reportedly displaced due to the military offensive against the Abu Sayaff Group in Brgy. Marang, Indanan, Sulu in the wake of Eid'l Fitr Muslim celebration held last September 2009. The military offensive was in response to an alleged sighting and regrouping of Abu Sayaff members in the area. Around 2,000 local civilians from the surrounding barangays of Laum Saing, Kagay, Bud Timahu, Marang, Siunugan, Malimbaya, and Buansa in Indanan Sulu including six barangays in Panamao are also adversely affected. While there are allegations that some civilians have allegedly decided to take up arms due to abuses of the military, more civilians have already fled from Sulu to Basilan and Zamboanga in anticipation of a possible crossfire that may take place in the area between the reinforced Marines and the combined civilians, MNLF, and the Abu Sayaff Group.

As a response to the current hostilities in Sulu, a grant will be provided to the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society to conduct a fact finding mission to generate information about the internally displaced civilians in the conflict affected areas in the province. A series of dialogues with various key stakeholders in Sulu which include local community and MNLF leaders, local government officials, the police and the military will be held in order to discuss issues involving war prevention and cessation of hostilities. An interface dialogue with Sulu stakeholders which include covenant signing and a press conference will also be organized.

Annexes:

A: Activity Log

B: Success Story on Mitigating Conflict in Pigcawayan, North Cotabato

C: Memorandum of Understanding on Peace in Bulucaon, Pigcawayan, Cotabato

D: Photos