The Women of the NAP

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

WHEN WE DECIDED to launch Kababaihan at Kapayapaan as a regular, twice yearly publication last March, we knew it was not going to be easy. In pursuing a long elusive mandate to bring all internal armed conflict in the country to a just and peaceful closure, OPAPP has needed to focus on five peace tables, initiated but unfinished through the four administrations which followed Marcos, each with a multi-dimensional and complex history, which includes the multi-layering and morphing of interests and agenda as well as shifts in, even factionalizing of, leadership and their followings in the course of protracted and often circuitous, sometimes shattered, peace processes.

Certainly, the work of OPAPP has been very much subject to stress, with twists and turns which are sometimes beyond imagining and have too many times caught even our seemingly best prepared selves by surprise. Surely, the pace and pressure of our pursuit of a just and lasting peace have hardly provided a conducive environment for the reflection and writing that a regular publication requires.

And so it is with a sense of awe and immense gratitude that we find ourselves preparing to bring our second issue to press in time for release this September!

Seeking to promote and enhance the interlinking of Kababaihan (women) and Kapayapaan (peace) through this magazine, we chose March and September as our publication months: March is National Women’s Month in the Philippines, expanded from the commemoration of UN International Women’s Day on March 8, while September marks National Peace Consciousness Month, expanded from International Peace Day marked by the United Nations on September 21. Six months apart, March and September constitute perfect bookends for our publication’s theme.

This year’s celebration of the 11th National Peace Consciousness Month carries the theme “Nagkakaisang Bayan para sa Kapayapaan” — One Country United for Peace. The Philippines is diverse in so many wonderful ways. Despite our differences, our nation, communities, and families are united in our aspirations for peace, democracy, and a just and better way of life. This is our celebration and an act of faith.

September brings remembrance of past milestones achieved along different peace tracks in our people’s journey towards lasting peace. This September, we join remembrance with firm resolve to ensure that the promise of every milestone achieved, whether in the past or those still to come, will be completed.

Indeed, much more work remains to be done. With faith and persistence — at peace tables, in communities, crafting policy, building infrastructures, enhancing bureaucracies, weaving narratives of hope and inspiration — women work and persevere wherever needed to make the promise of peace come true.

Happy Peace Consciousness Month!

TERESITA QUINTOS DELES
One of the historic crimes committed against women is in the context of war and armed conflict — crimes that are perpetrated when governments are not able to protect their citizens, or when states themselves perpetrate violence. There are abundant stories of women experiencing violence and atrocities in armed conflict in different places at different times. Yet they are not known — their stories are dismissed, unacknowledged, because it is what happens during conflict and the victims are women who, in much of the world, are subordinated, dependent, voiceless.

Thus, when the conflict ends and society tries to rise from the ashes of war, the women remain as they are: perpetually devoid of agency.

Within this grim picture of reality came a glimpse of hope with the world’s belated focus on women in conflict situations. In concrete form, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the most powerful organ in the UN system, declared that the situation of women in armed conflict and their vast potential to contribute to peace, are central to international security. The Security Council formalized this concern in a milestone resolution on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) known as the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000.

In the first quarter of 2010, towards the end of the consultation and re-validation process of a draft National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325, then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo signed Executive Order 865 that created the National Steering Committee on Women, Peace and Security (NSC WPS) composed of nine government agencies to implement the upcoming NAP. Chaired by the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), with the head of the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) as co-chair, the NSC is comprised of the Department of National Defense (DND), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) and the Office on Muslim Affairs (OMA).

The NSC Executive Committee, composed of the OPAPP, DSWD, DOJ and PCW secretaries, is today, a high-powered all-woman committee run by OPAPP Secretary Teresita Quintos Deles, PCW Chair Remedios Rikken, DSWD Secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman and DOJ Secretary Leila de Lima.

The Philippine National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCRs 1325 and 1820 was launched by a network of civil society groups and government agencies in Miriam College on March 25, 2010. It was the first national action plan on UNSCR 1325 in Asia and the 26th in the world.
The NAP consists of four pillars: protection and prevention, empowerment and participation, promotion and mainstreaming, and capacity development and monitoring/reporting. Complementing the government mechanism to implement the NAP is the civil society group, Women Engaged in Action on UNSCR 1325 (WE Act 1325), a network of 27 peace, human rights, and women’s organizations.

In November 2010, now under the new administration, the NAP was further fleshed out with the identification of implementation targets and indicators. “This isn’t like a declaration only. These are concrete plans that will yield results. This is not a plan that you will keep in your cabinet and leave to rot,” says OPAPP Undersecretary Ma. Cleofe Gettie Sandoval who, as head of the technical working group, is the workhorse behind the implementation of the NAP.

The beginning: Dialogic and collaborative politics

It was transnational peace and women’s groups that brought women’s security concerns to the Security Council. They established the NGO Working Group on Women and International Peace and Security that actively worked to getting WPS in the Security Council’s agenda.

In 2007, Mavic Cabrera-Balleza, then involved in the Human Rights and Peace and Human Security Program of the International Women’s Tribunal, asked Professor Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (then a professor at the University of the Philippines and Executive Director of Sulong CARHRIHL) about Philippine efforts in the implementation of UNSCR 1325, which requires states to develop a national action plan for its operationalization on the country level.

Coronel-Ferrer’s response was: “There isn’t any.”

“There was no shortage of policies in the Philippines about women,” says Balleza, though there seemed to be weakness in policy when it came to implementing guidelines. “At the time, only two or three countries had national action plans.”

Balleza, Coronel-Ferrer, and Jasmin Nario-Galace of the Center for Peace Education at Miriam College were later joined by Emmeline Verzosa, executive director of the PCW in December 2007. They conducted initial consultation workshops for government agencies and civil society groups. It was Verzosa who suggested that the OPAPP be invited to join the process.

In her introduction to “WE Act for Peace: The Philippine National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 & 1820”, Coronel-Ferrer wrote: “We had by then resolved that OPAPP, with whom peace advocates have had regular engagements, was the logical government agency to lead this initiative... Annabelle Abaya, who assumed leadership of OPAPP in 2009, was a peace and gender advocate. She immediately worked to secure Executive Order 865 adopting the CSO-driven draft NAP, creating an intergovernmental body for its implementation, and defining the relationship with CSOs as a ‘partnership.’”

Secretary Deles returned to OPAPP as its head in 2010. A leading peace and gender activist from civil society, she fully understood and shared the goals of UNSCR 1325.

The involvement of the governmental peace institution is one of the unique aspects of the Philippine National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. As Balleza says: “The common trend is (the involvement of) ministries of foreign affairs, including defense, from donor-member states, and for post-conflict member states, ministries of gender, in terms of identifying implementing agencies.”

In 2009, PCW and OPAPP began to involve relevant government agencies in the formulation process. “Most of those participating in the workshops were technical people who had ground-level experience on the issues faced by women in conflict-affected areas so the consultations with both government and civil
society enriched the content of the plan,” Balleza recounts.

Coronel-Ferrer wrote that the other unique element in the development of the Philippine NAP WPS was “networking — among professionals, activists and personal contacts across the islands, across the social movements organized along peace, women and human rights, and between government and civil society organizations.”

By and large, she wrote, it “was a form of dialogic politics that integrated the voices of those who were part of the consultation processes.”

According to Nario-Galace: “We looked into the sources of conflict in communities, the effects of conflict, especially on women. [And then] we asked, ‘What is your vision of peace?’, ‘What kind of security would you want to have?’”

In her foreword to WE Act for Peace: The Philippine National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 & 1820, Secretary Deles wrote, “We know how women bring a different perspective to the peace process and how women have continued to stand up and insist on staying the course, persist in drawing lessons, in affirming capacities and hopes, in celebrating faith and fortitude.”

Soon after the NAP’s launch on March 25, 2010, targets and indicators were identified.

The initial steps: Building blocks to implementation

The NAP Steering Committee became operational in July 2011. A technical working group (TWG) composed primarily of focal persons in Gender and Development (GAD) from each member agency, was established in 2012. In addition to the nine-member National Steering Committee, partner agencies of OPAPP’s Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan (PAMANA) program were also tapped to implement the NAP, and their GAD focal persons were included in the expanded TWG.

Integrating women, peace and security in the agencies’ planning process necessitates that gender analysis and mainstreaming in

OPAPP Secretary Teresita “Ging” Deles: Gender and peace advocate

Marking well over five decades of advocacy and action in civil society and government, Teresita Quintos Deles, 65, stands fast on her twin moorings of gender and peace. She has led and founded at least a dozen organizations during her pioneering three decades of NGO work, mostly focused on women’s organizing and peace advocacy. Those were halcyon years for NGOs that were at the cusp of something new — legal equality and gender rights, social reform, to name a few.

Then as now, no task was too small, or too daunting: it simply had to be done. One of her earliest initiatives was a national study on child care systems which affirmed a fundamental truth in Filipino women’s lives — that without child care, children shackled women to their homes. Hence the imperative to make equal rights and equal opportunity a reality for all Filipino women and not just for middle class professionals like herself. Her decades in NGO work brought to the fore various skills, including the mentoring, nurturing and birthing of women’s groups and coalitions, and of new conceptual frameworks.

At the turn of the millennium, Sec. Deles crossed over to government, first as head of the National Anti-Poverty Commission and then as Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, resigning in 2005 along with nine other cabinet members over gross election irregularities. With the victory of President Noynoy Aquino in 2010, Sec. Deles found her way back to OPAPP, coming home to roost, with peace tables flush with new faces – many of them female – and peace and goodwill slowly, but surely, gaining ground. Tough hurdles still lie ahead but just maybe the best is yet to come.

Sec. Deles is the chair of the Executive Committee of the National Steering Committee on the NAP WPS.

- Jurgette Honculada
conflict areas be accompanied by an analysis of the conflict.

Says Undersecretary Gettie Sandoval: “We said, if you look at it with a conflict lens, you should, in fact, give more help to conflict-affected areas, precisely because they have less yield due to the conflict.”

Localizing NAP

To ensure that the nationally-implemented program reaches the grassroots, especially the conflict-affected areas, NAP is being localized with the drafting of local national action plans (LNAP) on women, peace and security. As Secretary Deles explained in her foreword, “We have asserted time and again that peace is not made just on the negotiating table but must be vigorously pursued on the ground. Let us work together to close the gap between what happens at the negotiating table and what happens in communities affected by armed conflict.”

Balleza emphasizes the importance of WPS legislation at the local level so that NAP implementation is not at the mercy of changes in the leadership of local governments. When WPS is legislated in the form of a local ordinance, it becomes local law. For this purpose, in its earlier initiatives, WE Act concentrated on building the capacities of LGUs (in Calbiga, Samar; Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija; Marawi City; Real, Quezon; and Tabuk, Kalinga) in WPS and assisting them in crafting local legislation or action plans.

For its part, the government is couring local NAP implementation through PAMANA projects in LGUs and in areas where the peace process has led the closure of the armed conflict. To date, various NAP localization initiatives have taken place in PAMANA areas such as the ARMM provinces of Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Marawi City, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi; non-ARMM areas with Moro constituencies in Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Davao del Norte, Lanao del Norte, North Cotabato, Sarangani, and Zamboanga del Norte; and CPP/NPA/NDF affected areas in Camarines Norte, Oriental Mindoro, Masbate, Quezon, Sorsogon, Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental, Northern Samar, Western Samar, Compostela Valley, Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur.

DSWD Secretary Corazon “Dinky” Soliman: Unflinching, unstoppable

When major disasters hit the country, it is a diminutive, irrepressible, and high-spirited woman and her mostly female ‘troops’ who are the first on the scene. Through storm and rain, Sec. Corazon “Dinky” Juliano Soliman is there, unflinching and unstoppable.

Responding to calamities are all in a day’s work for Sec. Dinky who has headed the Department of Social Welfare and Development since 2010 (and earlier in 2001-05). But Sec. Dinky’s choices have never been for the faint of heart: helping farmers “save native rice strains ... through a pioneering program” in 1973; plunging into community organizing (CO) in Bukidnon in the mid-70s, soon after college, with martial law stalking young activists; setting up a CO training program and, later, a “CO Multiversity;” and leading an agrarian reform coalition in the late 80s that “united the entire agrarian community of the country”.

After three decades in community organizing and agrarian reform advocacy, Sec. Dinky ventured into public service as social welfare secretary under the Gloria Arroyo administration where she spearheaded the KALAHI-CIDSS program which made inroads in tackling poverty. She left government in 2004 to protest electoral fraud involving President Arroyo, co-founded the International Center on Innovation, Transformation, and Excellence in Governance (INCITEGov). She also designed and implemented programs to enhance social accountability with CSOs as World Bank program coordinator in Cambodia.

With the Noynoy Aquino presidency, Sec. Dinky reprised her role as social welfare head, this time with a vengeance. The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program which started during Arroyo’s term is now more rigorous and expanded. Providing health and education-based subsidies for poor families, CCT is reaching a critical mass and has started to make a dent on poverty statistics. - Jurgette Honculada
The Closure Areas covered by peace agreements with the Cordillera People’s Liberation Army (CPLA) and Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Pilipinas-Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPM-P/RPA/ABB) are in Apayao, Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental.

PCW chair and NAP-WPS steering committee co-chairperson Remmy Rikken notes that NAP localization concretizing its programs dovetails with the PCW’s localization mandate.

Protection and prevention

The pace of NAP implementation by government picked up in the last quarter of 2013, mainly in the area of capacitating NAP duty bearers and service providers involved in protecting women and preventing conflict-related violence against them.

In the first and second quarters of 2014, NSC WPS and PAMANA partner agencies conducted capacity development through basic NAP orientation for the Philippine National Police (PNP), National Electrification Administration (NEA), Department of Health (DOH), and the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo. The security sector — Department of National Defense (DND), the Philippine Army, Air Force and Navy, the National Defense College of the Philippines (NDCP), the Philippine Veterans Office (PVO), and the Government Arsenal — underwent seminar-workshops on integrating the NAP in their GAD plans and budget.

As a result of capability training, gradually but systematically, the operational framework of NAP implementation has begun to take shape. With the strategic framing that WPS is a form of gender-mainstreaming in the context of armed conflict and peace building, awareness in government of the relevance of the NAP has expanded. Its straightforward focus on women in conflict-affected areas and their role in peace building has enhanced its relevance.

Remedios Ignacio Rikken, 80, is a visionary with her feet planted on terra firma. Doubly gifted with light and heat, her dreams take flight and take root by sheer force of will and longevity.

Consider the “babies” she has nurtured: a landmark socio-economic survey by the Asian Social Institute in the late 70s; a new kind of cooperative-building among farmers in Tagum in Davao; the overhauling of the Philippine Educational Theater Association in the late 70s; with three other women, birthing Pilipina, the first Filipino feminist organization, in the early 80s; turning the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women on its head in the mid-80s as executive director and pushing for gender mainstreaming (GM); essaying Women in Politics through Pilipina and the Center in Asia-Pacific for Women in Politics; and currently, chairing the PCW and traipsing the islands to talk shop with LGUs, RDCs, government agencies, NGOs and the military, on PCW’s expanded gender mandate under the Magna Carta of Women.

During her first stint at NCRFW, the rudiments of GM were developed: policy through the 5% GAD fund, tools and technology, training and piloting (see Transforming the Mainstream: Building a Gender-Sensitive Bureaucracy in the Philippines 1975-1998). Two decades later, Chair Remmy has gone full circle, going full steam ahead on GAD localization and targeting state colleges and universities, and the military and police to spearhead the implementation of the NAP blueprint.

Remmy Rikken likens gender and development to a virus that must hit you hard because “It’s not just commitment, it’s lives we’re talking about.” Remmy’s bottom line is “bringing the issue home” and in the past three and a half decades, she has helped women across the spectrum bring the issue home, that is, draw out the gender problem and its call to action. The NAP poses the double challenge of marrying gender with the peace lens.

PCW Chair Remmy Rikken: A force of nature

Remmy Rikken likens gender and development to a virus that must hit you hard because “It’s not just commitment, it’s lives we’re talking about.” Remmy’s bottom line is “bringing the issue home” and in the past three and a half decades, she has helped women across the spectrum bring the issue home, that is, draw out the gender problem and its call to action. The NAP poses the double challenge of marrying gender with the peace lens.

- Jurgette Honculada
the agencies’ plans and programs on Gender and Development. These thematic agenda points were not explicit in the mainstream GAD and even in earlier discourses on violence against women (VAW).

On actual protection and prevention, the DSWD has established a facility to provide assistance to women displaced by the 2013 Zamboanga crisis. It also provides post-conflict support to 4,619 and 4,301 women in the ARMM and Region 12 respectively. For its part, PhilHealth, in close collaboration with OPAPP, has provided health insurance to 754 women and enrolled 3,698 families covered by projects in Sajahatra Bangsamoro Program areas. The DFA helped mitigate conflict-related trafficking when it conducted mobile passport services in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi in 2013.

**Empowerment and participation**

On empowerment and participation, government has concretized its commitment to increase women’s roles in peace negotiations by ensuring gender balance in the composition of its peace panels and increasing the number of women involved in support functions.

In the GPH panel for talks with the MILF, 40% of the peace negotiators, including the Chair, 69.2% of the secretariat (including the secretariat head), and 60% of the legal team (including head of the team), are women. It is therefore not surprising that the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) between the GPH and MILF explicitly stipulates “the right of women to meaningful political participation, and protection from all forms of violence”. Other gender-sensitive provisions can also be found in the annexes on Revenue Generation and Wealth-Sharing, Power-Sharing, and Normalization.

In the GPH panel for negotiations with the CPP/NPA/NDF, 40% of the negotiators, 54.5% of the secretariat (including the secretariat head), and 66.7% of the technical committee are women.

**DOJ Secretary Leila de Lima: Fierce, feisty, focused**

Justice Secretary Leila de Lima is one of the fiercest, feistiest, and most focused members of the Aquino cabinet, taking on critical and risky tasks in her short but sterling career in government.

“It’s always been my tack to focus on a particular thing or challenge that confronts me, and I really try to do the right thing. I gather enough will to do what I believe I am supposed to do,” Sec. de Lima said in a recent news interview.

Placing 8th in the 1985 bar exams, Sec. de Lima made a name for herself as one of the toughest professionals in the country. As an election lawyer, she tackled high-profile cases, braving hostile Ampatuan territory in 2007 to investigate a case of large-scale electoral fraud.

When President Gloria Arroyo appointed her to chair the Commission on Human Rights, the gritty Bicolana went about applying the law equally to everyone, including government and its agents. She boldly investigated the infamous Davao death squads, and came into direct confrontation with the equally feisty Davao Mayor Rodrigo Duterte.

In 2010, Sec. de Lima was handpicked by President Benigno S. Aquino III to head the Justice department serving as front person in his anti-corruption campaign. She barred former President Arroyo from leaving the country to escape charges; investigated the pork barrel scam that led to the arrest of its mastermind, three senators and their aides; and pursued countless other cases involving the once high and mighty, including the prosecution of 2009 Maguindanao massacre case.

At the end of the day, Sec. de Lima wants to be remembered as “a fearless fighter for the rights of the people.” - Jason Marges
Counting women and making women count has been a lifelong mantra for both Chair Rikken and Secretary Deles. As leaders of the feminist organization Pilipina, the issue of women and power came to the fore when they asked themselves, after a decade of consciousness-raising, lobbying and organizing, why the women were still “relegated to picking up crumbs from the table of the patriarchs”. Hence, Pilipina began focusing on women and politics: women must take their place at the table of power and decision-making.

In a statement at the High-Level Round Table on “Elimination and Prevention of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls” at the United Nations in March 2013, Secretary Deles asserted: “We believe that the task of ending armed conflict should not be left just to the combatants and not just to men who have led in the fighting and perpetration of these wars among our own people. In the past couple of years, the Philippine government has achieved great strides in ensuring women’s presence on our peace tables – in what has been referred to as Track 1 of the peace-making process. Specifically on our peace table with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) which has been fighting a four-decade rebellion against the Philippine government, women have been on the front line of our peace-making work.”

Coronel-Ferrer wrote for WE Act 1325 about her own experience: “I find it amazing that when I spoke at the launching of the NAP in March 2010, I stood from the ranks of civil society … In November 2010, at the launching of WE Act 1325, I found myself in government, a member of a government peace panel, and a new addition to the statistics on women in Track 1 of peace building.”

Miriam “Iye” Coronel-Ferrer is university professor, a campaigner for peace and human rights, and chair of the GPH panel for talks with the MILF. As GPH panel chair in the predominantly male world of the GPH-MILF peace negotiations, Iye became the poster girl for UNSCR 1325, which calls for women’s participation in peace processes. She graciously, quietly and firmly asserted her mandate and leadership, and in 2014, with her largely female team, she brought home the historic Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). The agreement was doubly historic as it was signed by three women from both sides of the table.

In 2005, she co-founded Sulong CARHRIHL, a national network that promotes the observance of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law signed by the GPH and the National Democratic Front in 1998. It was as lead convenor of Sulong CARHRIHL that Iye, with other women leaders, helped facilitate the drafting of the National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on the role of women in peace and security, which was adopted by the government in 2010. - Paulynn P. Sicam
Promotion and mainstreaming

Actualizing commitments in the promotion and mainstreaming of the NAP WPS, involves the integration and mainstreaming of NAP activities in the plans and budgets of agencies and LGUs whose programs are located in conflict and post-conflict areas. Versoza notes that introducing women, peace and security concepts and issues entails a deeper level of capacity development among relevant agencies, which is not easy to accomplish.

Mainstreaming gender concerns in peace building has always been on PCW’s agenda. Republic Act No. 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women was passed before the adoption of the NAP, so several provisions related to women, peace and security were already integrated in the law. NAP then became the instrument to implement those provisions.

Director Versoza adds: “The challenge now is how relevant agencies understand the NAP vis-à-vis their current gender mainstreaming initiatives.”

Monitoring and evaluation

On monitoring and evaluation, OPAPP has taken the lead to streamline and further refine NAP indicators into more doable and measurable terms. The 2014 NAP WPS and its enhanced indicators are scheduled to be formally launched at this year’s Peace Month activities. In addition, a research project is underway to take stock of the implementation of the NAP in the country. In 2015, UN member states that have developed their NAPs are expected to submit their report on the status of their implementation.

Although various activities have been undertaken by government and CSOs, independently or in support of each other since the launch of the original NAP in 2010, there remain critical areas of concern, such as the further internalization of the NAP by government, in particular, the National Steering Committee on Women Peace and Security and PAMANA implementing agencies, the localization of NAP to benefit the women in conflict areas, and the institutionalization of gender and conflict analysis.

There is also a need to strengthen and protect the unique feature of the Philippine NAP, the partnership between government and CSOs. While the CSOs were the driving force behind its creation, it is the government that is the main engine of its implementation, accompanied

Jasmin Nario-Galace is the Executive Director of the Center for Peace Education at Miriam College and the head of the Secretariat of Women Engaged in Action on UNSCR 1325 (WE Act 1325). She is well-known as a peace advocate internationally and nationally, particularly in the campaign against the proliferation of small arms. Jasmin is considered one of the ‘mothers’ in civil society who spearheaded the drafting of NAP to implement UNSCR 1325.

Jasmin sees the uniqueness of UNSC 1325 as the peace agency of women. “UNSCR 1325 builds on the protection discourse that is already institutionalized in CEDAW and in the numerous documents on women, and thus the added value is focusing on women’s agency to build peace and security.”

WE Act 1325 is a network of women, human rights/international humanitarian law and peace groups at the forefront of advocating for WPS, capacitating municipal, city and barangay LGUs to understand the NAP and create local legislation to institutionalize WPS; building awareness of WPS in the security sector; supporting the ongoing peace negotiations, particularly the crafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law; and monitoring the implementation of the NAP, among others. - Ma. Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza
by distinct but parallel and interconnected actions by CSOs.

Nario-Galace says that while CSOs have a certain way of doing things, “there is recognition that government is the primary agency to implement the NAP”. Learning from the Philippine experience, Balleza adds: “While we recognize, celebrate and are very proud of the fact that it is really civil society that has kept this Resolution alive in the last 14 years, we could not do it without the government.”

She pointed out that the NAP is a government document, and “it should be owned by the government with strong civil society participation.” She added: “For its part, civil society must also have a change in outlook in engaging governments — that we could no longer take the usual adversarial stance towards the state because they are the ones that have the mandate ... If I were to look at the many country experiences that we’ve had, it is also challenging the policy-making culture. There is a consciousness from both government and civil society that we need to work together. We share a vision, we take different vehicles to reach that vision, but we need to find common ground to work on.”

At the end of the day, have the international norms that were adopted in the Philippine context made a difference in the lives of women affected by conflict? As claim holders, have they been given space for their meaningful participation in peace building and post-conflict rehabilitation and development? It may be too early to tell. But one thing is certain: on the matter of women, peace and security, Filipino women are no longer subordinated, dependent and voiceless. They are now regarded as an empowered sector with agency.

To fight vulnerability and victimization, women must be seen as vital actors in the political project of building peace. And this is what the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security has set out to accomplish.


Mavic Cabrera-Balleza: Bridging the international and the local

Mavic Cabrera-Balleza brought WPS to the country as part of a larger global initiative to create concrete mechanisms to implement UNSCR 1325. In 2005, she was with the Human Rights, Peace, and Human Security Programme of the International Women’s Tribune Center and was involved in the preparation for the 5th anniversary celebration of the resolution. At that time, there was a sense that something more was needed to be done to translate UNSCR 1325 at the national level. At the time, only Denmark had a National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS.

After a series of email exchanges with Professor Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, Mavic flew to Manila and met with Ferrer and Jasmin Nario-Galace on the drafting of the NAP and planned a series of workshops and identified CSOs and GOs that should be involved.

The Philippine experience in creating the NAP taught Mavic the value of ‘collaborative politics’ where civil society and government contribute to a shift in the policy culture where government integrates the insights of civil society in the formulation of a policy.

Now the International Program Coordinator/Director of the the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), Mavic helps to ensure the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in other countries. - Ma. Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza
Women, peace and security: A global perspective
By MARICEL C. AGUILAR

The National Action Plan (NAP) is the response of the Philippines to various international instruments on women, peace and security, foremost of which is the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325.

The UN Security Council is the main organ of the UN in charge of maintaining international peace and security. The only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states, it is composed of five permanent member countries – China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and the United States – all of which were victorious in World War II and who maintain the world’s most powerful military forces.

In 2000, the Council issued Resolution 1325 which recognizes the impact of armed conflict most especially on women and children and reaffirms the role of women in peace-building, conflict prevention and resolution. The resolution called on UN member states, such as the Philippines, to:

- Increase representation of women at all levels of decision-making in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms involved in conflict prevention, management and resolution;
- Adopt a gender perspective in peace negotiations and in implementing peace agreements;
- Respect international humanitarian law, applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls from all forms of gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict; and
- Consider the needs of women and girls in refugee camps and settlements, and female ex-combatants and their dependents in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

Other similar resolutions were issued by the UN Security Council – UNSCRs 1889 (2009) and 2122 (2013) – reiterating women’s participation in peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding.

UNSCR 1820 reiterates that rape and other forms of sexual violence in the context of armed conflict are war crimes and crimes against humanity. It calls on all parties to prevent and protect women and girls from all forms of sexual violence in armed conflict and strengthen institutions providing assistance to victims of sexual violence. Similar resolutions such as UNSCRs 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), and 2106 (2013) on the prevention and protection from sexual violence in the context of conflict were issued by the UN Security Council.

Another important reference for women, peace and security is the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) which resulted from the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in September 1995. It identified 12 critical areas of concern, one of which is on women and armed conflict. This particular area of concern further identifies six strategic objectives, with concrete actions to fulfill such objectives, namely:

- Increasing participation of women in conflict resolution and protecting women living in situations of armed conflict.
- Reducing excessive military expenditures and controlling the availability of armaments.
- Promoting non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reducing the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations.
- Promoting women’s contribution to fostering a culture of peace.
- Providing protection, assistance and training to refugees and internally displaced women.
- Providing assistance to women of the colonies and non-self-governing territories.

While this is not legally binding among countries, member states are asked to report to the UN on their progress in achieving the objectives set forth in the BPfA. Civil society organizations may also submit shadow or alternative to state party reports to the UN.

In March 2015, the Philippines, together with other UN member countries, is due to report its progress in the implementation of the BPfA to the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW).
Balik Kalipay: Healing the wounds of war

By JURGETTE HONCULADA

WITH A PEACE PACT between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) so tantalizingly close at hand, and yet so tantalizingly far, three women hark back to a dozen years ago when peace took root and flourished in parts of the theater of war that was Pikit, North Cotabato in Central Mindanao.

From 2002 to 2004, a program was implemented in Pikit to help heal the emotional wounds brought on by war and conflict. Balik Kalipay — its name both wistful and imperative: Return to Happiness — was a pioneering program when it was introduced in Pikit by Dr. June Pagaduan Lopez, a psychiatrist with wide experience in psychosocial trauma healing.

Although trauma healing had been essayed in many conflict-ridden parts of the country in rudimentary form in the past (Davao for instance), Balik Kalipay was the first programmatic attempt to provide training in psychosocial healing in a systematic and sustained matter.

This is the Pikit story as told by Dr. Lopez, 63; Josephine Mamites, 40, Pikit municipal social welfare office administrative aide and former Balik Kalipay staff; and Grace Cadungog, 54, Pikit senior municipal social welfare officer.

All-out war

With the declaration of “all-out war” against the MILF by the Estrada administration in 2000, the population of central Mindanao and other parts of the island lived in a siege situation: constantly on the run, their landscape ravaged, their lives and homes uprooted, their children growing up as semi-permanent “bakwit” (evacuees or internally displaced persons, IDPs). The all-out war uprooted nearly a million people, mostly in Central Mindanao. In early 2003, these IDPs numbered 400,000. Half a year later, 175,500 of them remained in public evacuation centers or sheltered by kin.

North Cotabato is a predominantly Christian province but the municipality of Pikit has a majority Muslim population. Pikit has known half a century of fighting, experiencing four wars in six years (1997-2003). In 2000, fighting affected 28 out of its 42 barangays with similar statistics in the years preceding and following this period. Thus, Pikit was a cauldron of conflict for much of the decade, and its poblacion (town center) became a “bakwit” capital, providing refuge to tens of thousands of IDPs from outlying barangays.
The conjuncture

In 2002, Dr. June P. Lopez, who teaches psychiatry at the University of the Philippines, had just returned from East Timor as project manager of Regreso Alegria, a psychosocial healing project for children victims of the internal conflict with Indonesia. Dr. Lopez had earlier provided psychosocial training in other war-torn countries like Nepal, Myanmar and Cambodia. Upon her return, friends and colleagues badgered her about putting to good use her singular skills in her home country, underscoring the continuing devastation and suffering in Central Mindanao. An Oxfam video documentary “Bakwit” helped seal the decision to focus on Pikit which, by then, had declared itself a Zone of Peace out of utter necessity, like Sagada, Naga City and other conflict areas did earlier. A growing number of barangays in Pikit had become “Spaces of Peace” providing safe space for IDPs to rebuild their community.

Walking wounded

In congested evacuation centers filled mostly with women, children and elderly, the “walking wounded” (those unhinged by the trauma of war) had become all too common a sight. For example, a ten-year old Maguindanao Muslim boy became shell-shocked and unresponsive after witnessing aerial bombing at close range. And there were many like him.

Grace Cadungog says that the government’s response then was “stress debriefing” for trauma victims (also called critical incident stress debriefing or CISD in another form), especially children, that involved activities like singing and drawing. Graduation followed after a month of such activities. In one area, she says, soon after graduation, the war returned. Dr. Lopez calls stress debriefing “simplistic” because emotions are made to surface but the roots of emotional trauma are not addressed.

Enter Balik Kalipay

And so Balik Kalipay or BK was born, a three year (2002-04) program with Danish (Danida) funding that targeted young trauma victims in Pikit and proximate areas. It sought to bring back laughter to children who had stared death in the face. But to do so, it had to make sense of the conflict among their elders, help rebuild community among warring members, restore trust in the present, and help victims regain their selfhood.

Dr. Lopez recruited four UP medical graduates and five local volunteers, ensuring a Christian-Muslim balance in the group. Josie Mamites was among the volunteers-turned-staff after a training period. Staunch Pikit peace advocate, Fr. Roberto Layson, gave invaluable help. Besides providing psychosocial services, Balik Kalipay trained volunteers and worked closely with other NGOs such as Save the Children, Balay Mindanao and UNICEF. Dr. Lopez says that all told, Balik Kalipay “touched the lives” of and provided psychosocial training to, in one way or the other, 40 persons, including 29 teachers, day care workers, staff and a core of children.

BK partnered with the Department of Education (DepEd) to produce a 16-module curriculum that was integrated with its Makabayan curriculum for six months. BK also teamed up with the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) to develop creative pedagogies that made use of art and music. Pikit primary school teachers, caregivers and volunteer workers among out-of-school youth were trained in the module series based on Judith Herman’s book “Trauma and Recovery” which posits five stages of trauma healing: re-establishment of physical and psychological safety, telling and retelling (remembrance and mourning), reconnection, and community action. (See sidebar.)

Prime beneficiaries

Balik Kalipay’s prime beneficiaries are, of course, the children. Ten of those who went through trauma healing formed BK’s core of children who formed the executive staff. One of them, a Maguindanao boy of nine when Balik Kalipay started, is now in his early 20s and works with a
community development NGO. Dr. Lopez was surprised that he chose peace work because many of his uncles died in the conflict and he could very easily have been recruited to be a fighter. He was under pressure to join his male kinfolk in the MILF but BK work led him to another path, and he is now connected with an international NGO. It became clear to him that his life’s purpose is “not to advance the armed struggle.”

Adults in the BK network benefited earlier, and as much as the children did. For psychosocial healing to succeed with children, it had to succeed with adults. How could adults presume to help heal children when they themselves were not healed?

As a child, Josie Mamites witnessed a Muslim shoot a fruit vendor, a Christian. Over the years, many more of these experiences developed in her deep anti-Muslim feelings. Her healing process was long and painstaking, spanning a decade. But now she says she bears no hatred towards Muslims, and she is, in fact, married to one, a Maguindanaoan, which was unthinkable in the past. When the program funding ended in 2004, Josie and her colleagues continued Balik Kalipay as volunteers working gratis.

She recalls that once, while undertaking a survey of evacuees with the fighting not far off, the tricycle she was riding overturned and she, another passenger and the driver were trapped underneath. Fortunately, someone helped them out and led them to safety. When the fighting subsided after half a day, they made their way through rice fields to the school which was also an evacuation center. But by then the fighting had resumed and reached the barangay hall nearby, so they crouched in the toilet dodging bullets that crisscrossed overhead. Mamites says that Balik Kalipay taught her to be calm in the midst of chaos.

Grace Cadungog trained in critical incident stress debriefing in 1995. Two years later, she was among 100 passengers in a Cotabato-bound bus that was intercepted by the MILF to pressure the military to stop its siege on the Rajahmuda complex, the MILF base. Forty of the passengers, all of whom were Muslim, were released, but 60 Christians remained hostage for over a day. Traumatized by the harrowing scenes of violence (including the killing of a soldier in mufti), and sleepless and dreaming of war when she did sleep, Cadungog sought psychiatric counseling in Davao. But full healing came only over a decade later with the training in psychosocial healing led by Dr. Lopez and her team.

**Partnership with DOH**

In 2009, compelled by the rise in natural and human-made disasters in the country and the magnitude of suffering, physical and emotional, of countless victims, the Health Emergency Management Staff (HEMS) of the Department of Health sought the help of the UP College of Medicine in capacity building on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS). Dr. Lopez agreed with HEMS that responders and caregivers in disasters and armed conflict are victims themselves and need these processes and programs, not only for training but also for their own healing. “In Mindanao,” Dr. Lopez wryly notes, “war is the biggest disaster.”

MHPSS capacity building took the form of three basic training workshops (Davao, Cagayan de Oro and Gen. Santos) and one trainers’ training (Tagaytay), and the publication of a “Manual for Trainers: Enhancing Capacities in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies and Disasters.” Dr. Lopez headed the project team responsible for both training workshops and production of the manual. A total of 120 participated in the training workshops mostly drawn from the Department of Health, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the military, police and local NGOs. Cadungog and Mamites were among the trainees, which was a refresher for the latter.

There was general consensus on the urgent need for developing psychosocial healing skills among participants as caregivers and first responders. The technology exists,
developed from the Balik Kalipay and other similar experiences, and is detailed in a training manual. Unfortunately, it has not been adequately integrated into government programs, particularly in social services — health, social welfare and education. This is confirmed by recent interviews with social welfare, health care and LGU personnel who say they need these psychosocial skills in their work.¹

**Twofold legacy**

The legacy of Balik Kalipay and its training in psychosocial healing is at least twofold: first, in the 40 or so lives that have been changed forever, and — if one acknowledges a ripple effect — in the transformation in some families and seeds of hope planted in their communities. One such ripple relates to a Kidapawan-based Japanese-funded NGO that provides educational scholarships to 500 children orphaned by the armed conflicts (the New People’s Army is present in Kidapawan). Some of the scholars who trained with Balik Kalipay as children have put its creative pedagogies to good use, such as story-telling, in dealing with the younger orphans.

Besides the personal and collective turnaround of those who have come under its care, Balik Kalipay’s legacy also consists in helping redefine war and peace, which is essential to clearing out the mental and emotional debris that undermine a lot of the peace initiatives of government and NGOs. One example is the dualism (Muslim vs. Christian, me/we vs. the other/stranger) that must be overcome by the fact of our “common humanity and our common suffering.”

Cadungog and Mamites talk about the dead-end posed by this dualism, and how historic violence feeds and fuels the hate and antipathy of younger generations. Cadungog observes, “The conflict is never-ending. Without trauma healing, old rebellions persist and expand. You see this among old people. Many among my grade school classmates from the early 70s remain rebellious, negative...”

Those who have not gone through psychosocial healing remain warmongers, she says, adding that many programs for Muslims are ineffective because they are viewed as coming from the other side and are therefore suspect.

**Package deal**

Credit for this rethinking belongs not only to Balik Kalipay or psychosocial healing, but to the rich discussions, dialogue and debate that have ensued from a new praxis of peace that engages not only the social disciplines but also the arts and theology, that peace begins with one’s self.

Dr. Lopez says that peace work “is not just negotiating but engaging people (like Mamites) to be your frontliners.” That is saying a lot because, indeed, people like social workers, day care workers, school teachers, volunteer NGO staff, and other public employees as in the Department of Health, are first responders and on the frontlines of the fray, tending to victims, building bridges, serving as shock absorbers.

Dr. Lopez rejects the reductionism of equating peace with disarmament. The peace process, she says, “is establishing a sense of commonality” among all those exposed to war whether as combatants or bystanders. The vision-mission-goal statement of Balik Kalipay (which is being registered as an NGO) says it all: “Katatagan, kaginhawahan at kapayapaan ng kalooban sa lahat ng Pilipino (Security, prosperity and peace for every Filipino).”

Psychosocial healing is a package deal of sorts, to paraphrase Dr. Lopez, because “part of the effort is to organize community, to build skills and develop solutions to problems, to locate the incident within the...”

¹ These include two senior DSWD social welfare officers in Davao City, a Davao City social services and development employee who deals with former rebels, and two supervisory staff in a rebel returnee program in Davao Oriental.
national context, to draw out its meaning in your life...”

Some years ago, non-traditional initiatives converged and brought peace to Pikit. That peace still resonates.

The challenge posed by Balik Kalipay and the psychosocial healing it pioneered boils down to this: for GO (and NGO) to understand and affirm that the wounds of war go beyond the physical and that healing must therefore target both body and soul. Psychosocial healing starts with being at peace with oneself and one’s neighbors, being at peace with the past, or coming to terms with it, so a future can be born. As one Pikit parish leader put it, although the war may be over, “it still rages in the hearts and minds of people.”

Three layers of trauma

Waging war is tough but winning the peace is even harder. The director of a rebel returnee program in Davao Oriental speaks of three layers of trauma that many former rebels suffer: the trauma of early poverty or family violence that drives them to the hills, the trauma of bloody warfare, and the trauma of being on the NPA’s hit list for surrendering.

Psychosocial or trauma healing does not have all the answers. But it is a condition sine qua non for people wounded by war to heal fully, for generations to stop passing on bitterness and revenge as part of the family legacy, for the false divide of Muslim vs. Christian to stop rending family, for the false divide of bitterness and revenge as part of the past, or coming to terms with it, so a future can be born. As one Pikit parish leader put it, although the war may be over, “it still rages in the hearts and minds of people.”

The five stages of trauma healing*

On the restoration of physical and psychological safety, Dr. Lopez debunks the grand leitmotif of GPH vs MILF to explain the violence. She says this is misleading because it is “small incidents that fuel lack of trust and lack of safety.” In one barangay, she recounts, the streets were emptied by 3 p.m. and they could not find youth volunteers for Balik Kalipay. The trick? Initiating basketball games for male youth and volleyball for the females. By the same token, she says, “Little attention to little things” is what leads to peace. She further cites the fact that while the first all-out war took a high toll in civilian deaths (in Pikit), the second all-out war had no civilian casualties because people were organized and had time to evacuate.

The next stage of telling and retelling is also called remembrance and mourning. Technically it is cognitive restructuring, a new way of looking at the same thing or making sense of an old experience. While telling tends to be negative, in retelling you answer the question, what is the meaning of the war in your life, you are able to verbalize your feelings so that “you are not trapped in your anger and fear”. Retelling makes you revisit the impact of the incident on your character and how it has changed how you look at the world.

Dr. Lopez notes that “the only thing in your control is how you choose to think or act in a particular situation ... the meaning you give to particular incidents”. Her ready example is that of a woman who had witnessed the killing of her parents (her father was with the CHDF or paramilitary) and had turned physically abusive toward her husband, finally leaving him, and venting the same anger on her children. The trauma had left her depressed, angry with the world, distrustful, aggressive. Psychosocial processing helped her understand that her parents’ death was not her fault, that there is a lack of justice and “we are all suffering”. The healing process helped turn her life around, she has since reconciled with her husband and per last report was taking an education course.

The third and fourth stages of establishing commonality and reconnection are the opposite of people succumbing to their pain, hopelessness, anger and feelings of revenge, according to Dr. Lopez. As with the entire process, this entails developing self-awareness and awareness of others, and leads to the realization that “we are all victims, there’s a bigger thing that has thrown us into the situation. We can coexist and live in peace while still in a war situation”. This belies the stereotype of “people perpetually in conflict”. The only way to have peace, Dr. Lopez maintains, is to have a sense of self-respect, and to recognize the humanity and dignity in every person.

The fifth stage is community action grounded in trust and a “sense of peace that is institutional,” and “an optimism based on how people perceive justice.” Dr. Lopez tells of a grenade blast in a community whose perpetrators were unclear (MILF or CHDF?), and threatened to divide the people into Christian vs. Muslim. Overcoming their fear and refusing to finger-point, the community sent a contingent to the barangay captain to demand action. This stage eschews the blame game in favor of solutions that are more creative, collaborative and communal.

*Drawn from “Trauma and Recovery” by Judith Herman
Peace women in uniform

Women may carry half the sky but in the police and the military they remain a minority. But what a difference they make in peacebuilding and service to community.

Lina Sarmiento: ‘You are an instrument of peace’
By JENNIFER SANTOS

IT HAS BEEN an eventful climb up the leadership ladder of the Philippine National Police (PNP) for Lina Sarmiento. She entered the service in her early twenties as a chemist in the crime lab in 1980, and retired in February 2014 as a two-star general, the highest rank ever reached by a woman in the police force.

Not bad for one who didn’t plan on becoming a policewoman. A chemistry major from Adamson University when she joined the PNP, she later graduated with a Bachelor of Law degree from Jose Rizal University, and a masters’ degree in management from Philippine Christian University.

Lina originally wanted to be a doctor. But when an opportunity for a chemist position opened up at the PNP Crime Laboratory, she did not let it pass. “I just wanted work that was different so I wouldn’t get bored. And then I got interested.”

Her career can be described as stellar — she shone wherever she was assigned — as chief of police, as PDEA drug law enforcer, as the PNP’s human rights officer, as the PNP’s representative to workshops and forums with civil society, and finally, as the government’s point person in the International Committee on Policing for the GPH-MILF peace negotiations. Lina’s trajectory is not that of a standard police officer because she is not your standard, everyday cop.

When she retired in February 2014, she was immediately called back to government service as Chair of the newly-created Human Rights...
The Victims Claims Board (HRVCB), an office attached to the Commission on Human Rights to implement the long awaited Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act of 2013 (RA 10368) that mandates the payment of compensation to around 40,000 victims of martial law from a ten billion peso fund recovered from President Marcos’ stolen wealth. A quasi-judicial body, the HRVCB receives, evaluates and processes all claims for awards and reparations. It is also tasked to recognize the victims by enshrining their names in a Roll of Human Rights Violations Victims.

Her appointment was met by some quarters (including human rights advocates) with skepticism, if not criticism. They would have preferred someone from civil society to head the Board, and not a newly retired policewoman. But the negative comments have died down as Lina Sarmiento has showed that she can deal with human rights victims with intelligence, sensitivity and compassion.

As chair of the Victims Claims’ Board, she deals directly with people who have lost family members, homes, land and their very dignity to the abuses of the martial law regime. The job has brought her and the board all over the country, meeting with the victims, hearing their stories, and receiving the documentation of their claims for compensation.

“I speak to them when I have the opportunity and inform them that this is a government initiative, the first of its kind; that government acknowledges its legal and moral obligation to those victims of human rights violations during the martial law period.”

She says her new role is somewhat similar to her former job as head of the PNP’s Human Rights Office where she dealt with complaints of victims of human rights violations by the police. However, the scope and scale of her present responsibilities are much bigger.

“In the past, I only dealt with peace and order but this one has a deeper context — those who were abused during Martial Law. When it was risky to defy the dictatorship, they disregarded their safety and security to speak out against the dictatorship. This is precedent setting, because it involves compensation, both monetary and non-monetary.”

A record of excellence

Sarmiento did the PNP proud with her record as an uncommon police officer. She was in the PNP for more than 30 years, her first decade in crime lab work followed by staff work at national headquarters. This exposed her to field activities of police officers, prompting her to apply for operations and field work.

She was called back to National Headquarters after two years in the field and took on a desk job reviewing the careers of senior officers for promotion. It was, to her, a boring job compared to being chief of police where she dealt with actual crime solving – but it was coveted by the other officers. Lina didn’t mind the change. As she put it, “We’re flexible, easy to adjust.”

Drug law enforcement

Her patience and dedication landed her at the National Drug Law Enforcement Coordination Center (NDLECC) under the Office of the President in 1999. The Center was mandated to coordinate all drug law enforcement operations, both at the regional and national level. The task of the center was strategic; all initial directives on drug enforcement were issued by the office, including procedures for operations, organizational staffing in the drug enforcement centers, and

“I encourage everyone to take part in peacebuilding, because this is the only legacy that we can leave to the next generation.”

She was chief of police, learned a lot about dealing with communities and local officials. “I learned how to balance dealing with local officials and performing my duties as supervisor. I learned that you must not leave your job and you have to learn to explain. And you should not compromise your position. Matututo kang makinig. (You must learn to listen).”

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relationships with other agencies. Sarmiento served at the NDLECC for three years, and after it was converted into the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), she was appointed director for plans and operations, a post she held for the next four years.

While being chief of police involved maintaining peace and order in one municipality and several barangays, working at the Center involved law enforcement in the entire country. If before, she handled and made decisions on petty crimes such as jaywalking, carabao theft and family problems, at the Center, she was involved in busting local and international drug rings, a matter of national security.

Bridging gaps in the community

In 2006, Sarmiento was assigned to the PNP’s Directorate for Police Community Relations. The job focused on community mobilization, networking and an information campaign to bridge the gap between the police force and the community. This transfer prepared her for her next assignment as Chief of the PNP Human Rights Office in 2007. She formulated the PNP’s comprehensive human rights program, and reinvented human rights education for the police force.

“Yung human rights education namin ay kasama sa lahat ng career courses, pero pag tinatanong ko lahat ng nag-attend, ‘Ano ang natatandaan nyo?’ Sinasabi nila, ‘Wala.’ Kaya dun muna ako nagfocus, sa human rights education (Human rights education is a requirement in all career courses. However, every time I asked the participants what they have learned, they would say, nothing. That is why I focused on human rights education).”

She also addressed human rights violations lodged against members of the police force. In this regard, Lina felt the need to go to the communities and conduct grassroots consultations to better address the violations the police were being accused of.

“Mariring mo every now and then and in the newspapers yung sinasabi ng mga organizations about violations of human rights. (Every now and then, you would hear and read in the newspapers, cases of human rights violations reported by different organizations). But I felt these were very general and we might be able to address the specific issues at the grassroots level...Because if we are able to solve issues at the grassroots level, baka mabawasan yung taong nagaalit sa gobyerno (maybe there will be less people who would be angry at government).”

Lina conducted community dialogues with assistance from the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the Alternative Law Group and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). She said these engagements with community organizations helped change the perceptions of civil society regarding the police and the military.

She says the community dialogues led to a change in the relations between civil society and the police and military. Initially, the environment during community dialogues’ was hostile. The civil society groups and the security sector did not trust each other. During the first caucus, Lina asked a CSO representative for the attendance sheet. She said, “They wouldn’t give me a copy, even though I was one of the organizers. But we just wanted to know who the people we would be dealing with were.” But after two days of dialogue, she observed that the CSOs and the security sector were talking comfortably with each other and even exchanging mobile phone numbers.
Lina says, “The challenge was how to get the support of the citizenry so that they would actively support us in maintaining peace and order.” Once the perceptions towards the police changed, the community became more pro-active in maintaining peace and order.

**Participating in the peace process**

From community relations and human rights, the opportunity came for now Gen. Sarmiento to participate in the government’s peace process with the MILF in 2013 when she was appointed official GPH representative to the Independent Commission in Policing for the establishment of the Bangsamoro entity. The high-level commission chaired by Mr. Randall Beck of Canada, included international experts from Japan and Australia, local experts and one representative each from the MILF and the GPH.

They were tasked by the negotiating panels to produce, in six months’ time, a set of recommendations for a police force for the Bangsamoro that is civilian in character, professional and free from partisan political control. It had to be effective and efficient in law enforcement, fair and impartial, and accountable for its actions. And it would be responsible to the national government, the Bangsamoro government, and the community where it would operate.

It was a tall order that Lina saw as a major challenge and a privilege. Her appointment to the commission was a high point in her career. The commission had to imagine every sort of post-conflict scenario, taking into account the ethnic and cultural diversity in the Bangsamoro. It also had to address security issues facing women, men, children and minority groups.

Sarmiento resolved to help advance the process by not allowing herself to be the reason for any delay in the commission’s work. “I had to live up to expectations. As a representative of the GPH, I should not be the cause for the talks to bog down. Even if we already had the Framework Agreement, there were still annexes that had to be completed. So I was very careful.”

On her new responsibility, Lina says with awe, “Parang instrument ka ng peace (You are like an instrument of peace).”

Sarmiento narrates how in the independent commission, she had to balance the orders from the PNP’s chain of command with the need to think outside the box by making recommendations that were not along traditional lines. “This was direct participation in the development of a new idea. It was not traditional, so we had to be creative.”

It was a memorable six months. “The representatives from the MILF and the international experts were very professional.” Again, she was the only female in the group. But, she says, “I didn’t feel any discrimination. Our members were all gender-sensitive; we even put gender balance in our recommendations.”

Her six month duty at the ICP helped prepare Sarmiento the transition from her high position as a police general to civilian life. “It was as if I was being prepared, because during our discussions on policing matters, the environment was different from that of a traditional police environment. So it prepared me for the transition from a police officer to civilian life.”

Having been a vital participant in the peace process, Sarmiento shares her realization that peace building needs the active participation of everyone, the security sector and civilians alike. “We have been through a lot of conflict even within our communities. I hope there can be more active public support, that the people are not just by-standers but prime movers and active participants in attaining lasting peace, for the sake of our children and our children’s children.”

**Sense of guilt**

Working for peace and order, the peace process and human rights has been tedious and stressful, limiting Lina’s time with her family and herself. A mother of four, she confesses, “I feel somewhat guilty for being frequently absent from home. My time at home is limited compared to others with regular employment, since I have a lot of responsibilities and I often go home late. So I always think in terms of quality over quantity.”

The quality time she has managed to give her family has paid off. Her children are done with school except the youngest who is taking up law. One works in a bank, the other one is a chef and another is in the medical field. No one joined the police force.

An awesome, accomplished police officer, Lina Sarmiento broke the glass ceiling in what is decidedly a man’s world without losing her woman’s grace, poise and polish. This two-star general, anti-drug crusader, human rights worker and peace builder, is determined, dedicated, compassionate — a true peace woman, in and out of uniform.
We first heard about her from the news. A woman soldier in uniform was photographed and interviewed breastfeeding an infant. It wasn’t her baby, but she was there, sharing her milk with one who survived the strongest storm to ever hit land. It was the aftermath of super storm Yolanda and the storm surge that destroyed much of Eastern Visayas.

Corporal Anjanette Obligado, a lactating mother of a three-month old baby girl, had flown to Tacloban to look into the status of her in-laws who lived there. It was the first time she was separated from her little girl.

She remembers how surreal that day was. One moment she was watching the news about the storm and worrying about her in-laws, and in the next hour she was strapping herself to her seat in a C-130 that would take her to Tacloban to check on the family. Although she was going to Tacloban as a dutiful daughter and not a soldier, she had to wear her uniform to be able to fly in a military plane.

What she found was a city in shambles, its population traumatized. It was hell on earth for those who had to wait it out while death knocked on their roofs, walls and doors as the strong winds buffeted the city and giant waves demolished everything on their path. It was an even worse hell for those who survived and experienced its immediate aftermath.

While she went to Tacloban on a personal mission, it was difficult to separate herself from her persona as a soldier. A third generation soldier — her father and grandfather were in the army too — it had been ingrained in her that it was her duty to serve.

She found her in-laws safe, and on her way back to the airport, she passed by a makeshift hospital where she saw mothers of newborns who were scarred, traumatized and desperate. Their breasts had gone dry and their babies were crying in hunger.

“Meron po akong gatas (I have milk),” Cpl. Obligado told the mother of a new-born, and offered to feed the infant. Although breast milk comes free to every lactating mother, in Tacloban after the storm, it was a scarce commodity.

Offering her breast milk to complete strangers — to babies of mothers whose names she didn’t know, babies who were brought to the hospital by their clueless fathers and grandfathers, orphaned babies — came easy to the young corporal. It was all part of her duty as a soldier, she said.

In all, she fed five babies before she boarded the C-130 back to her own baby at home.

Corporal Anjanette Obligado, dutiful soldier, servant of the people, earth mother.
The Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict

GPH delegation focuses on women’s role in peace process

By KAREN R. DOMINGO

Two Philippine delegations showed the world that the women in our peace process simply don’t give up.

THERE WAS NOT ONE, BUT TWO delegations from the Philippines that participated in the “Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict” organized by the British Government in London on 10-13 June 2014. This indicates how important it was to share the Philippine experience with the world.

Both delegations were chaired by the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Teresita Quintos Deles and included Philippine Panel Chair for the GPH-MILF talks Miriam Coronel-Ferrer.

The official Philippine Delegation organized by the Department of Foreign Affairs, was composed of Chair Ferrer of the GPH-MILF Panel; Ambassador Rosario Manalo, who represents the Philippines in the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR); Undersecretary Leah Armamento of the Department of Justice (DOJ); Undersecretary Maria Cleofe Gettie Sandoval, Assistant Secretary Rosalie Romero and Karen Domingo of OPAPP; Consul Kristine Leilanie Salle, First Secretary at the Philippine Embassy in London; and Director Gonoranao Musor of the DFA.

The Peace Process delegation, composed of women involved in the Mindanao peace process from Government, MILF and civil society, was organized by the UK and Australian Embassies in Manila to showcase the successful Philippine experience in the GPH-MILF peace negotiations. It included Chair Ferrer, Atty. Raissa Jajurie, member of the MILF panel, and a member of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), along with Ms. Froilyn Mendoza and Atty. Johaira Wahab; Ms. Carmen Lauzon-Gatmaytan representing WE Act 1325; Ms. Irene Santiago of the Mindanao Commission on Women (MCW); Ms. Fatima Allian of Nisa Ul Haqq fi Bangsamoro; Ms. Noraida Abo of UNIPHIL WOMEN, and Ms. Maria Ressa, editor-in-chief of Rappler.
Two youth representatives, Jill Bacasmas and Reinna Bermudez, also attended the Summit as winners of an essay writing competition organized by the British and Australian Embassies.

**A special delegation**

At the send-off reception for the delegation, Australian Ambassador Bill Twedell stressed that the creation of the special delegation is recognition of the “efforts of so many Filipino women in the peace process — as negotiators, mediators, peacekeepers...” Their achievement, he added, “has set a high bar around the world.”

UK Ambassador Asif Ahmad added, “The Philippines has provided a shining example not just to your people but all around the world. Ging Deles and the delegation will talk about what they have achieved, and the inclusiveness of women in the peace process is a really great example.”

DOJ Usec. Leah Armamento from the official Philippine delegation welcomed the special delegation, saying it serves as a model of how successful a country’s peace process can be with women taking the lead. This meant, she said, “We are a cut above the rest.”

DFA Director Gonoranao Musor said that having a separate Peace Process delegation “shows the high level of empowerment that women enjoy in Philippine society.”

The signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in March 2014 is considered a historic feat for two major reasons - the Philippine Government successfully negotiated and signed a peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) after 17 long years of conflict, and Filipino women peace activists took the lead to ensure the success and fruition of the peace process.

**Governments, NGOs and victims in attendance**

The Global Summit, co-chaired by then UK Foreign Secretary William Hague and the Special Envoy for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, actress Angelina Jolie, brought together representatives from governments and civil society who shared their experiences and, in the process, identified the commitments and practical actions necessary to push forward the goal of ending sexual violence in conflict-affected areas throughout the world.

It was one of the biggest gatherings convened to address the issue of sexual violence with 1,700 delegates from 129 countries in attendance. Aside from government and NGO...
Launched at the Summit was the International Protocol on the Investigation and Documentation of Sexual Violence in Conflict, which includes best practices and sets international standards for the process of documenting and collecting information and evidence on cases of sexual violence.

The global initiative to end sexual violence in conflict began in 2012 with the launching of the Prevention of Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) that included the UN Declaration of Commitment to Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict. More than 150 countries have since signed on to this high profile declaration. The London Summit last June was a strong re-iteration of that commitment.

**Sharing the Philippine experience**

In summit sessions and fringe events, Secretary Deles and GPH panel Chair Ferrer led the Philippine delegations in sharing experiences as women leaders who strive to make a difference in ensuring peace, securing meaningful women’s participation in peace processes, and making substantive changes and policy reforms that will benefit Filipino women through generations.

In her Ministerial Intervention during the Ministerial Session on “Delivering Progress through Women’s Participation”, Secretary Deles asserted that Filipino women have been making great strides and breaking ground in peace negotiations — from upholding the “right of women to meaningful political participation and protection from all forms of violence” as provided in the Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (CAB), to the signing of the historic peace agreement by three women.

She also talked about the increasing leadership roles played by women in government, how “a well-organized and dynamic women’s sector has kept government on its toes”, and how “women like us in government rely on them for continuing moral and even technical support.”

In the Experts Session on “Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) in Context: The Women, Peace and Security Agenda and Women’s Participation”, Chair Ferrer described the gradual shift in GRP-MILF peace process where, over time, the previously male-dominated peace negotiations has attained a more inclusive and gender-sensitive composition, on the part of both the GRP and MILF panels and staff.

She narrated how “more spaces” were created for women by “putting more seats around the table and inside the room, and, by stressing the glaring absence of women, these seats would be given to them.” She said that continuous “nudging — cautiously and graciously, ever so sensitive to the cultural milieu of the ethnic groups involved,” got the men used to the presence of “so many women inside the room.”

Chair Ferrer and BTC Commissioner Raissa Jajurie also served as resource speakers in a roundtable discussion organized by Conciliation Resources on “Women in the Peace
Negotiations” where they reflected on the challenges they had to overcome as women negotiators in the peace process.

Mat-weaving

Secretary Deles was a guest speaker at the launch of the UK’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), along with other notable women leaders, Ms. Sabah Hallak of the Syrian Women League and Ms. Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng of Isis-Women’s International Cross-Cultural Exchange. She described the process of drafting the Philippines’ own National Action Plan, as akin to “mat-weaving”, because it is “intricate” with “an overlay of a legal framework, implementing structures, institutional mandates and, of course, personal passions and inclusive and inter-generational intentions”.

She said, the Philippine NAP “benefits from decades of consciously raising and organizing women peace and human rights advocates, where multiple strands of the government bureaucracy are woven in with the establishment of the National Steering Committee on Women, Peace and Security.”

A side event, a “Google Hangout,” was organized by Maria Ressa of Rappler where members of the Peace Process delegation in London chatted online with Ambassadors Ahmad and Tweddell who were in Manila, to update them and online viewers on the goings-on in the Summit and share their experiences, in real time. The interactive discussion facilitated by Ressa likewise highlighted the importance of social media raising further awareness and building broad consensus on vital issues affecting women, such as sexual violence in conflict situation.

Learnings from the Summit

In its many sessions and fringe events, the Global Summit succeeded in putting across the message that sexual violence in conflict is unnatural and unacceptable, and should not be used as an instrument of war. It also succeeded in securing commitments from countries in its call for a united effort to address the issue. Of equal importance, the Summit highlighted the important role women play in peace and security matters. As various speakers emphasized, among other measures, there is a need for a more inclusive approach to peace and mediation efforts by increasing the number of women in peace mediation and peace-keeping, and in the police, military and other peace-related institutions.

The Philippine delegations did a good job projecting the country as a model of success in transforming conflict-affected areas and societies into zones of peace and development, and in producing and implementing its own National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. They showed the Summit participants that given the opportunity, women can and will take the lead and make significant changes in the government’s approach to peace and security.

As Secretary Deles aptly put it, it is important that there are women in the peace process because “we [the women] just don’t give up.”
My trip was to London was kind of rushed. I was a last minute replacement for Dr. Jasmin Nario-Galace, who heads Women Engaged in Action on 1325 (WE Act 1325). And that is how I came to be a member of the Philippine delegation to the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, sponsored by the Australian and British Embassies in Manila.

Among the many international conferences I have attended, this was the most organized, professionally-handled and systematically managed.

It was a real privilege to participate in this event. It was humbling to speak in a Fringe Event organized by Conciliation Resources, an international NGO working on conflict prevention and peace building in various parts of the world and a member of the International Conduct Group (ICG) that is part of the Philippine government (GPH) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace process. The panel discussion on “Women’s Innovations in Peacebuilding” featured the role local women play in peace processes, specifically in Mindanao and Colombia. I talked about the WE Act network’s contribution to the drafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law, specifically on “normalization” and how it was able to generate the perspectives of women on normalization, changes in their behavior and attitudes on specific aspects, and the role they can play in putting an end to violence, armed conflict, poverty, deprivation, etc.

The spirit that pervaded the whole summit was a sense of urgency, the need to act now, not tomorrow, not next week, not next month, not next year — to end sexual violence in armed conflict.

The issues of masculinity and patriarchy were tackled in the same breath as the end to impunity and the demand for accountability on the part of governments, state security forces and non-state armed groups.

There were repeated calls for practical, tangible and concrete actions to address sexual violence in armed conflict. One doable action is to remove the stigma attached to survivors of sexual violence. There was a resounding consensus that in the prosecution of cases of sexual and gender-based violence, there is a need to shift the shame and the blame from survivor to perpetrator, and to accelerate rehabilitation support to survivors.

In a session on the protection of women and girls in emergencies, the discussion identified the gaps in the responses by various actors, such as the need to mobilize or involve the community, not only individual survivors, in finding solutions and initiating response measures; and to improve psychosocial services and strengthen the application of the principle of “do no harm”. It was recognized that a paradigm shift is needed to operationalize on the ground, survivor-centered prevention and response to sexual violence during conflicts.

From the discussions and points raised in the sessions I sat through, my personal summation is, in order to end sexual violence in conflict, the following are indispensable: political will at the local, national and regional levels and the leadership of state institutions and international and inter-governmental organizations in terms of accountability and judicial reforms to end impunity; the mainstreaming of prevention and response mechanisms through partnerships between community and civil society and the local/national government; and the need for greater enforceability of all instruments, conventions and treaties on civilian protection and gender and on women, peace and security.
When UNSCR 1325 was put on trial at a Fringe event, it was seen how limited the implementation is of such an important instrument on women, peace and security, especially in countries where this UN resolution is most relevant. A powerful testimony attributed to a woman survivor conveyed this mind-boggling message: “The definition of peace and conflict do not matter to me... I have been raped before the conflict and was still raped during the conflict.”

My take home from this global summit is the insight that sexual and gender based violence cannot be addressed on its humanitarian aspect alone. It calls for action on the empowerment of women and tackling the root causes of gender inequality and other related strategic issues. Complementarily, the attainment of solidarity between and among women, and ensuring safe spaces for survivors, are crucial to their healing and recovery. Most important of all is to bring to the fore the voices of women in all platforms of decision-making, where women, in both quality and quantity, are made more visible and are able to participate meaningfully.

In the words of former UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, Mary Robinson, women should be placed front and center and at all levels. My favorite part of her speech at the summit was when she talked about the situation in the Congo: “The people of Congo are used to hollow peace agreements — ‘bad men forgiving bad men in front of cameras,’ as the saying goes, only for the pomp and promise to fade away at the next round of gunfire. We need a different approach, one that includes the society as a whole, with a due role given to women. As Genevieve Inagosi, the Congo government’s Minister of Gender puts it: ‘Women do not only have the solutions. They are the solutions.’”

Conflict situations and emergencies continue to this day, and as the global summit was happening, the violence in Iraq and Ukraine were in the news. The kidnapping of more than 200 girls by Boko Haram in Nigeria is unresolved, and the senseless violence directed at ethnic women in Burma continues. All the more reason for the summit to succeed not in rhetoric but in making a difference in the lives of millions of women affected by crises and emergencies.

At the summit, I was delighted to meet women peace and human rights activists from other countries, former comrades and partners, friends and allies, who have either moved to government or remained in civil society. There were also fun moments with the members of our delegation. While we all know each other and have worked together on occasion, rarely have we had the opportunity to have fun together, immersed as we are in the work that we do. Those were precious rare moments when women from different sides and across the divide of the peace process in Mindanao were able to come together and share one table, one ride, one panel, one room, one flight, with smiles on our faces accompanied by girlish laughter, giggles, cheering and teasing. At one point over breakfast, amid the jokes and story-telling, I injected a work-related topic and Maria Ressa of Rappler who was seated at our table, took a picture of us saying, “I like what you women are doing...”
Peace work is never done
Social workers Carmen Mejia and Decimia Cabang help former rebels build normal, productive lives

Carmen Mejia: A future for rebel returnees
By JENNIFER SANTOS

CARMEN MEJIA, 63, is the head of the Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office (PSWDO) in Northern Samar. Among her many activities in the insurgency-affected province is the Local Social Integration Program (LSIP) that the Provincial Government of Northern Samar is implementing together with the DILG and OPAPP to help rebels who decide to lay down their arms and rejoin their families.

Through LSIP, government provides psychosocial and economic assistance to former members of the New People’s Army, thereby assisting their reintegration into their communities.

“The good thing about the program is we give them the opportunity to live a normal life,” Ma’am Carmen or Ma’am Mejia, as she is known by her clients, says of her job.

Working with former rebels
At first she was “a little frightened” when she learned that she would be working with former rebels (FR). Although the work involves providing psychosocial interventions and not authentication if an individual is a rebel or not, she harbored that small fear that her security would be threatened.

“At first I felt frightened because they are a different kind of client that we don’t usually encounter day-to-day. They have been in the mountains for quite some time. We don’t know if they really want to surrender and avail of the program because we don’t know how to read their minds, whether or not they are sold on the program.”

The fear lies in the possibility that during profiling interviews, the social workers might step on certain aspects of a former rebel’s life that he or she might not want to share. Carmen says that she and her co-workers consider this. “If they don’t want to answer our questions, we don’t force them.”

Sometimes the social workers are speechless after hearing the stories of the rebels. Which is why Carmen emphasizes the need for social workers to undergo debriefing after a profiling session so as not to be overly affected by what they hear from the FRs.

“It is scary, especially if they did something terrible ... you ask them why and how they did it. And there are times when you must stop and think, is that right? So you are affected when you realize that they do such things.”

But after talking to many FRs, Carmen realized that the FRs were indoctrinated. “The reason they did those things is because of their beliefs. They were indoctrinated.”
Every FR’s story is different. Despite being in the same armed movement, they give different reasons why they joined the NPA. She remembers one beneficiary whose story drove her and the other social workers to tears.

It was the man’s third attempt to surrender. He had entered the movement at a young age. “He said he did not know that there was a government. All he knew was everything and everyone was bad. Then he cried; he didn’t even expect to be so accepted and that there was a program for people like him.”

It takes creativity and persistence for social workers to handle rare instances when they have to validate the identity of a rebel returnee. Carmen once had to go to Camp Crame in Quezon City to check if the FR who surrendered there was the same FR who had already availed of the program earlier in Northern Samar.

When she saw the FR in Camp Crame, she greeted him saying, “Uy andito ka pala.” When the man did not mind her, she persisted and he replied, “Hindi ko kayo kilala,” adding, that he had a twin who surrendered in Northern Samar.

But Carmen had done her homework. Before going to Camp Crame, she talked to the man’s parents and so she knew that he didn’t have a twin. She stayed in Crame until the person said he just wanted to go home.

Motivations and challenges

In spite of the difficulty working with FRs, Carmen never felt like giving up. Debriefing sessions where social workers share their experiences help them manage the emotions and trauma they go through when dealing with former rebels.

And it can be very satisfying when the FRs they process and assist, use what they receive to start their lives anew and do not go back to the mountains. Carmen tells of one rebel who financed the education of his wife, and others who bought farmlands or got back the lands that they had pawned.

“I do not stop going forward. I am rushing to do everything I can for the project before I retire.”

Carmen continues to meet with the FRs who update her on what they are doing. “Some of the returnees look different from when they surrendered. One who joined the army is now more sociable and carries himself differently.”

But there are those beneficiaries who go back to the movement, and she can’t hold them back or force them to stay. “We feel that some of them went back to the movement because they didn’t get their financial assistance.”

Her challenge now is to bring the provincial LSIP initiative to the municipal level and ensure the support of the LGUs of Northern Samar. The advocacy program, Carmen says, should start from the municipality with the orientation of the municipal social work and development officers and partner agencies so they will understand and appreciate the program; and the local government units, so they will support the program.

Carmen began working with government in 1972, starting as a volunteer, then as a contract of service employee, to her present post as head of the PSWDO in Northern Samar. She first managed an evacuation center in Zamboanga, accounting for evacuees from conflict areas in Sulu and Basilan. In 1974, she transferred to Northern Samar because her husband wanted to move out of a conflict area to ensure the safety of their growing family. Ironically, Northern Samar is now a major area of armed conflict.

Forty-two years later, Carmen is looking forward to retirement. It has been a difficult journey but she has learned a lot in her work that, she realizes, has always been related to conflict.

Achieving life-work balance

A mother of four, Carmen has had to balance the concerns of her family and her work. Her secret is communication.

Early on, she talked to her family, explaining to them the nature of her work, that she didn’t own her time, especially during disasters. “But even if my time with them was limited, we made sure that we continue talking,” she says.

Carmen didn’t want any of her children to follow in her footsteps as a social worker, a job that cannot be set aside for personal concerns. However, fate had a different plan. One of her kids is a social worker.

Just a year away from her planned retirement, Carmen has not slowed down. “I do not stop going forward. I am rushing to do everything I can for the project before I retire.”

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Decimia Cabang: The social/peace worker is in
By SHEI DATINGUINOO

DECIMIA DUQUE CABANG talks and the room listens. She speaks with calm confidence, and she has the ears of 140 former Cordillera People’s Liberation Army (CPLA) combatants and their kin.

“It’s about letting them know that there are tools to help them help themselves. We need to show them that we (government) are ready with the resources to establish their enterprises,” she says about the livelihood training and general assembly she recently facilitated for the Highlanders for Peace and Development, Inc., a people’s organization of the former CPLA in Abra.

Decimia, also known as Deci, has been at the helm of Abra’s Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office (PSWDO) since 1992. She rose through the ranks, starting as a volunteer in 1977, and then as an entry-level social worker in 1998. She has since become a senior social worker, community welfare supervisor, and supervising social welfare officer.

In her 36 years of service, she has seen and helped implement the country’s rebel integration through various administrations. “It was perhaps 1986 when a Bayanihan Center in Camp Juan Villamor in Bangued was established. It was a halfway house at a time when programs for former rebels were under the local government. At that time, DSWD was not yet devolved.”

The program has undergone subtle changes through the years. There is the shift in terminologies to reflect the changing paradigms — “rebel returnees” are now called “former rebels/combatants”, “tactical interrogation” is now “custodial debriefing”, the focus has shifted from individuals to groups and back to individuals, and there is new technology being used in the integration program.

“In the past, we also tracked the progress of the rehabilitation plan for each former rebel but now we have the profiling and biometrics system.”

Challenges and benefits

Deci talks about the challenges faced by the integration program. “There was a time when loans were granted to cooperatives the former rebels formed. But the cooperatives died a natural death. It was a challenge, perhaps they were not prepared. Think about it — they fought for years and then suddenly they were tasked to manage a cooperative.”

“Only the well-off got to manage. Others were sidelined.”

Deci also cited an instance in Malibcong, when the program granted a passenger jeep to the former rebels. But when the jeep broke down, no one had the capacity or the money for repair. A small grocery store in Tubo eventually closed shop.

In terms of community benefits, Deci cited a project in Malibcong in the 1990s that had a positive impact on the community: a micro-hydro that was very much welcomed and helped in the demilitarization of the area.

Motivations and frustrations

“It is frustrating to see how the good intentions of government programs get wasted on people who do not take care of it since it is just given by government,” says Deci. “If I have it my way, I will start with capacitating them with skills and a mindset to change themselves. Even with the best programs, if change does not come from within, they will just go to waste.”

Deci wants to provide vocational or other short courses that may be chosen by the integrees. She wants to enhance their farming skills with new technology since most of the integrees are engaged in agriculture.

“Didn’t President Noynoy say during the State of the Nation Address — we help by teaching people how to fish, not by giving them the fish?”

There are integrees who pursue the political path. Deci is thankful that they choose to pursue their political agenda through peaceful, parliamentary means. But she rues
the fact that some of them end up doing the same things they rebelled against in the first place.

“It is unfortunate since you thought they would be different and they would change what is unacceptable. But they end up doing the same things that they used to despise.”

Deci’s motivation stems from the satisfaction she gets knowing that she is helping her fellow Abrenians, and that the life of a social worker is connected to that of a peace worker.

“In times of disaster or war, when people see a social worker around, they immediately know that government services can reach them. In this way we help in the cause of peace.”

She is aware of the dangers of her job, but she does not fear for her life and usually goes around without a security or military escort, even on official business. But she recounts a time when she almost felt fear in the course of implementing the integration program.

It happened three years ago on the road to a hard-to-reach area of Abra when an unknown individual sent her a text message as her vehicle passed by a known rebel stronghold.

“I did not recognize the number but the sender introduced himself using his alias. The text read — ‘Namonitor ko na dumaan ang sasakyan ninyo’ (‘I monitored your vehicle passing by our area’).”

The text message seemed threatening but instead of being paralyzed with fear, Deci responded with a text message: “Opo, apo. Sunod po kayo, may medical mission po kami. Magpa-medical exam po kayo para sa kung anuman ninyong karamdaman. (Yes, apo [Cordilleran term to address the elderly or wise with respect]. Please follow, we have a medical mission. You can have a medical exam for any ailment.)”

The texter did not respond. Neither did he go to the venue of the medical mission, and Deci forgot about the incident.

A few months later, while in the provincial capitol for an activity that processed emergency assistance for former rebels, a man introduced himself as the person who sent her the text message.

Deci remembered how she felt when she received the message. What was initially a moment of fear and paralysis turned out to be an opportunity to reach out and turn things around for a rebel. The former rebel was given emergency assistance and is now a scholar under the Office of the Governor.

The changing tide

Based on the many interviews she has had with the rebels, Deci says they fight mainly because of the unjust and corrupt practices of politicians. But she says the times have changed, as transparency and accountability have become the buzzwords of governance reform, and local chief executives have become more responsive to the needs of the people.

She cites the governors she has worked with. “I am fortunate that all governors I have worked with have the heart and focus for the disadvantaged. Whoever our office endorses is given assistance. It is a big help when the local executive is open to feelers from the rebels. They are more inclined to approach government if they feel that the Governor is approachable.” It is the same with the army. Deci says the rebels are no longer afraid to approach the army, which is non-judgmental and very open to feelers.

Deci’s work comes with sacrifice. When her two children, a son, 23, and a daughter, 21, were growing up, she was not always around, especially in times of disaster. She recalls that during one bad storm, her daughter called, “Mama, nalulunod na yung mga alagang baboy sa baha! (Mama, our pigs are drowning in the flood!)”

Says Deci, “I have a responsibility to my family but then I have a greater responsibility as a government servant. I just instructed my daughter to calm down and ask for the neighbor’s help.”

Her house serves as a help-desk where visitors come often to inquire about government services. Once, when Deci was sick and people were still coming to her house, her daughter asked in frustration — “Mama, pwede bang maglagay kayong karatula sa gate na, “The Social Worker is OUT?” (Mama, can we please put the sign on the gate, “The Social Worker is OUT?”)

Deci and most social workers in and out of government know the answer, and it has always been clear. Social work does not stop. Peace and development come first.

The social/peace worker needs to be in.

September 2014

KABABAIHAN at KAPAYAPAAN
Real women, real stories, real hope

_Genuine efforts in peacebuilding are happening everyday, and not only at the peace tables. Here we explore how three local women fully dedicated to peace are making an impact in their communities._

SK Pendatun, Maguindanao
There is life in lilies

*By MELISSA S. CALINGO*

CONFLICT TOOK AWAY their loved ones. They will not allow it do the same to their lives.

In Maguindanao, widows of departed Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighters have channeled a shared experience of loss, grief and suffering into positive energy, fuelling a productive and resourceful means of livelihood, as well as a common aspiration for lasting peace in Mindanao.

“We need peace because the next generation will suffer if we don’t work for it,” said Sarika Pendatun, who heads the Women’s Improvement Club, a rural cooperative established in the municipality.

“I have witnessed a lot of fighting throughout the years and it truly breaks my heart to keep seeing Filipinos killing fellow Filipinos in this part of our country.”

The wife of the late MILF commander and former SK Pendatun mayor Datu Saiduna Pendatun, Sarika used to treat wounded Moro combatants in the hills of Maguindanao in the 1970s as a young registered nurse.

Now approaching her 60s yet still unwavering in working for the peace that she and her neighbors in their conflict-torn community so ardently long for, Sarika has taken the lead in establishing a blossoming handicraft industry that utilizes the abundance of water hyacinths in the Liguasan marsh.

She initiated the livelihood project in 2009 among her fellow Pendatun womenfolk, drawing inspiration from a local TV feature on water lily handicrafts and soliciting support from the government.

“I said, ‘Why don’t we just do it? The raw materials can be found all over our area,”’ she recalled, pointing out the teeming wetland flora blanketing their homeland marsh.

Her appeals for government support were heeded initially by their provincial government under Governor Toto Mangudadatu and the Department of Agriculture, sparking the project to life with a PHP200,000 grant.

A year later, the cooperative sought an audience with Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Quintos Deles. A fruitful dialogue led to a second, even larger grant amounting to
PHP500,000 coursed through the Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan (PAMANA), the government program and framework that extends socioeconomic development assistance to isolated and conflict-vulnerable locations across the Philippines.

The significant financial backing that Sarika and her peers received from the government allowed them to purchase equipment such as a water hyacinth flattener, sewing machines, and sole cutters for use in slipper-making. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Design Center of the Philippines (DCP) further complemented this through substantial training designed to enrich and sustain the endeavor.

Today, the Women’s Improvement Club is able to turn stalks of water hyacinths into bags, wallets, fans, baskets, slippers, ropes, and other craft. Among the most saleable products are large-sized bags that fetch as much as PHP880 per piece.

The up-and-coming cottage industry has begun to draw attention from well beyond the boundaries of Maguindanao. The empowered women weavers have been active participants in commercial trade fairs and exhibits in recent years, allowing them to reach and gain appreciation from a wider, more diverse audience and market.

In fact, fashion designer and peace advocate, Arnold Galang, has taken notice of SK Pendatun’s hyacinth crafts. Moved by the weavers’ story, he extended a personal commitment to help them by contributing his designs and helping promote the products, while also paying homage to Maguindanaoan tradition.

“Even though it is a big responsibility to make such a commitment,” Galang explained, “when you see the women and the weaving centers they work in, it is impossible not to voluntarily share what you have.”

Galon recounted that when he ordered hyacinth craft bags to serve as giveaways during the 2012 Philippine Fashion Week, he was oblivious to the source of the products. A surprisingly positive response and demand for the bags, however, convinced him to look for the source.

The impact of the initiative, however, have proven to go well beyond economic gains.

While hyacinth-weaving has boosted the livelihood of the SK Pendatun women, it has also opened doors for out-of-school youth to chip in, aiding a 25-member complement of regular in-house weavers.

The harvest of water hyacinths has even contributed to disaster risk management efforts in the Liguasan marsh, curbing annual threats of flooding and disease there.

Water hyacinths are known to be invasive species, which are able to cover lakes and ponds completely, leading to flooding in low-lying parts of the marsh. The hyacinths are also conducive habitats for mosquitoes and other wetland pests and parasites.

In a country so prone to naturally-occurring, weather-caused calamities and even more so in a region already hampered by decades-long strife, something as seemingly simple as the prevention of floods can pay huge dividends for a struggling community’s welfare.

Through a simple idea realized, the women of SK Pendatun have grown a meaningful livelihood that now allows them to ably support their families after a shared history of tragedy and loss.

Bataraza, Palawan
Back to school, onward to opportunity

DONYA ELIG stopped going to school when she got married at age 19, and was not able to complete her secondary education.

Now a 28-year-old mother of five, she finally has a chance to graduate, thanks to the establishment of the Sapa National High School in her community, constructed through the government’s Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan (PAMANA) program.
The PAMANA program, through direct community consultation and feedback, identified the lack of educational facilities as one of Barangay Sapa’s most urgent needs to attain peace and development.

“Gusto ko pong makatulong sa mga magulang ko at maging mabuting magulang sa mga anak ko kaya bumalik ako sa pag-aaral (I want to help my parents and become a better mother to my children),” Donya says.

Despite being “overage” compared to her classmates, she is undeterred from her desire to finish high school. She wants to be an inspiration to the younger girls in her community and the other mothers who have yet to finish their schooling, to do the same.

“Hindi ko po ikinahihiya na nag-aaral ako kahit na matanda na ako (I do not feel ashamed returning to school at my age),” she asserts.

“Nais ko pong maging halimbawa sa mga kabataang babae na mag-aral sila habang bata pa, lalo na ngayon na may malapit ang eskwelahan dito sa amin. (I want to be an example to young women, to study while they’re still young, especially now that we have a school nearby).”

The Sapa National High School responds directly to the needs of marginalized Muslim and IP communities in Barangay Sapa and adjacent barangays of Bataraza in Palawan. The town of Bataraza is associated with the presence of several factions of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). This threat to peace and security has made it difficult for students, especially the girls, to travel to the schools situated beyond the boundaries of the local community.

The school building project in Sapa has benefited most the female students in the locality. Prior to the construction of the school, the young women had no choice but to stay at home and help with the household and livelihood chores. Now with a full-fledged school close by, the girls are provided the same opportunity as the boys to pursue formal education beyond the primary level. When the high school opened, more than half – 46 – of the 90 enrollees were female.

“Aang objective po natin ay makapag-produce ng maraming educated Muslims, especially Muslim women na katulad ko, dito sa ating barangay (Our objective is to produce more educated Muslims, especially Muslim women like myself, here in our barangay),” says Marie H. Butu, Teacher-in-Charge of Sapa National High School.

“Sa susunod na henerasyon, sila naman ang mga magiging professionals na magpatuloy ng mga magandang nasimulan natin. (In the next generation, they will be the professionals who will continue what we’ve started).”

Besides the high school, PAMANA has built for Bataraza a two-kilometer farm-to-market road in Sitio Bukid-Bukid, Barangay Rio. Elsewhere, in Aborlan, PAMANA helped build a multi-purpose hall for the community in Barangay Magsaysay.
Zamboanga City
Our lesson for today...
(Adapted with permission from the Department of Education)

IT WAS A SUNNY DAY in Zamboanga City, but teacher Tess Sale had only three students in her class.

It was a Thursday, the second day of classes in Putik Elementary School (PES). It also happened to be the 18th day of intense armed conflict between government forces and rebel factions of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

From the classroom, one could hear the sound of helicopters hovering in the sky; one could see the dark smoke emanating from the houses being burned in a nearby barangay; one could smell the tension of yet another budding skirmish in Sta. Catalina.

But Teacher Tess was with her students, standing bravely in front and constantly reminding them that everything would soon be okay, that everything would be back to normal.

“This (war) is not about religion. We are all Filipinos regardless of our faith,” Teacher Tess told her students — a class comprised of young Muslims and Christians alike — on the first day of classes.

“Kahit ano pa ang relihiyon mo, basta may naintindihan at inirerespeto nyo ang bawat isa, magkakaroon ng kapayapaan sa inyo (Whatever your religion, as long as you understand and respect each other, you will have peace among you).”

Teacher Tess emphasized that it was imperative that they understand that religion should never cause conflict. She constantly instilled the value of peace and comradeship among her students.

“Peace education is crucial in developing students. Opening their minds is important because these children will be future leaders,” she said.

She encouraged her class to set up a special board in their room, where the students could post their prayers and wishes for fellow Zamboangueños who are directly affected by the armed conflict.

One of the students wrote: “I pray for peace in our country. I hope the war would stop. Those people need help, Lord. May you guide them to this happy place once again.”

Teacher Tess is convinced that by instilling peace within the hearts and spirits of her students early on, a culture of peace will grow among them.

“Noong first day ng klase, pinag-usapan namin ang kanilang karanasan at saloobin para na din maibsan ang nararamdaman nila (During our first day of class, we talked about their experiences and sentiments in order to defuse their tense emotions),” she recounted.

“Ngayon, part ng activity namin ang thanksgiving at ang patuloy na pagdarasal para sa mga talagang apektado ng gulo (Now we have adapted thanksgiving into our regular activities and we continue to pray for those who are adversely affected by the war).”

Teacher Tess impressed an invaluable lesson on her students at the height of the Zamboanga siege.
From the Peace Tables

As a continuing commitment to a just and lasting peace, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) actively pushes for the success of all existing peace tables with different groups in the country.

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

AFTER THE HISTORIC signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) last March, the government and MILF embarked on the implementation stage of the peace pact.

The signing of the CAB ended the 17-year peace negotiations with the MILF and the decades-old conflict in southern Philippines and gives way to the creation of a Bangsamoro region by 2016, which responds to the Bangsamoro aspiration for self-governance through genuine autonomy.

Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL)

The Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) — consisting of both government and MILF representatives — was tasked to draft the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which the President would certify as an urgent bill.

In a meeting between President Benigno Aquino III and the BTC in July, the President said that he will aggressively push for the enactment of the draft BBL in Congress “with conviction”, saying it is his obligation to the people who are yearning for peace in Mindanao. He also conveyed this in his fifth State of the Nation Address.

On his part, Mohagher Iqbal, MILF peace panel and BTC Chair, said that the “only option [for the MILF] is peace” and they are “pouring everything” to make peace possible.

Government peace panel chair Professor Miriam Coronel-Ferrer underscored that processing of a draft BBL is a crucial stage in the implementation of the CAB. Upon its passage, a plebiscite will be conducted in the proposed areas of Bangsamoro that will replace the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The GPH and MILF peace panels held a series of meetings in July and August until they reached a mutually-acceptable draft.

Normalization process

Alongside the creation of the Bangsamoro, a normalization process will be jointly undertaken by the government and MILF.
Normalization consists of the gradual decommissioning of MILF forces and weapons, socio-economic development, and transitional justice and reconciliation.

Meanwhile, the Sajahatra Bangsamoro, a socio-economic program jointly implemented by both parties to jumpstart the initial dividends of peace after the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro, has been continuously rolled out in Bangsamoro communities since February of last year.

“So many people have suffered for so long; so many of our stakeholders have worked so hard to arrive at this point. I will not let peace be snatched from my people again,” the President said during the signing of the CAB.

**Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)**

**IN KEEPING WITH** the goal of inclusivity, the government continues to engage relevant parties in the MNLF to reach a just and comprehensive political solution to prevailing peace issues in southern Philippines.

Sustained dialogues are carried out through the OPAPP with MNLF groups and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation - Peace Committee for the Southern Philippines (OIC-PCSP) towards the completion of the GPH-MNLF-OIC Tripartite Review Process on the implementation of 1996 Final Peace Agreement.

But the process had had its fair share of challenges: In 2013, the fifth session of the Tripartite Review Process that was supposed to take place on September 16 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia was postponed on the request of Nur Misuari in light of the MNLF siege in Zamboanga City on September 9. The attack was led by individuals and groups associated with the MNLF-Misuari faction.

To spread the gains of peace, the government urged the MNLF to take part in the creation of the Bangsamoro region, to include their concerns in the draft BBL and take part in the elections.

Socio-economic assistance has been extended to MNLF Peace and Development Communities through the Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan (PAMANA) program since 2011. Provincial and municipal government units in 14 provinces and four chartered cities implement PAMANA projects in the form of community infrastructure, post-harvest facilities, local roads, and water systems, to name a few.

**Communist Party of the Philippines/New People’s Army/National Democratic Front (CPP/NPA/NDF)**

**AFTER A SEVEN-YEAR IMPASSE**, the peace negotiations between the GPH and the CPP/NPA/NDF resumed in February 2011. However, differences in interpretation of past agreements led to another impasse in June 2011.

In late 2012, the talks resumed under a Special Track proposed by Mr. Jose Ma. Sison that was designed to be more focused on essential doable reforms, including a ceasefire. But this too failed when in 2013, the CPP/NPA/NDF retracted its commitments.

The government peace panel then consulted civil society organizations, the academe, the business sector, and the peace advocacy community, for ideas on how to proceed which led to the crafting of a “new approach” to the negotiations: time-bound, agenda-bound, focused on doables, and directed towards the reduction of violence on the ground.

The GPH has called on the CPP/NPA/NDF to match its openness and goodwill and come to the table not for the sake of talking, but to deliver the peace that the people desire and deserve.

**Cordillera Bodong Administration-Cordillera People’s Liberation Army (CBA-CPLA)**

**THREE YEARS** after being signed, the implementation of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the CBA-CPLA is on its way to its final phase.
The government’s healthy partnership with the group has allowed for their transformation into a legitimate, unarmed, socioeconomic organization. Now called as the Cordillera Forum for Peace and Development (CFPD), members of the former CPLA—forming 11 people’s organizations under it—have been organized and registered under the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as part of their transformation process.

CFPD members now reap the gains of peace through community development projects and livelihood programs. Others are given the opportunity to be integrated into the Armed Forces of the Philippines or be employed as forest guards/protection officers under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

In February, the CBA, after 15 years, convened a special congress that resulted in the amendment of the Constitution and by-laws of the Manabo Pagta—removing the provision “calling for army building” to be consistent with the MOA of 2011 on the CPLA’s final dispositions of arms and forces, and its transformation into a socioeconomic and unarmed group.

Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa–Pilipinas/Revolutionary Proletarian Army/Alex Boncayao Brigade Tabara-Paduano Group (RPM-P/RPA/ABB TPG)

SIMILAR TO THE TRANSFORMATION of the CFPD, the RPM-P/RPA/ABB TPG has also chosen to take the road to peace by becoming instruments of political and social change without the use of arms.

During an assembly in April of last year, the TPG formed Kapatiran para sa Progresong Panlipunan (Brotherhood for Social Progress) as a legitimate sociopolitical organization registered under the SEC.

The group now envisions improving the economic conditions and well-being of its former combatant members; strengthening its capabilities to continue to work for the interest of the working masses; and pursuing substantial reforms for the betterment of the working people.

Socio-economic development projects across Negros and Panay, such as shelter assistance, livelihood projects and development of settlement, and in-situ sites for TPG members, as well as social preparations and mobilization activities, are also being extended to the group to help them reintegrate into mainstream society.

By the end of 2013, a total of 95 TPG members had been hired as forest guards/forest protection officers for deployment in Negros Occidental (43); Antique (22); Aklan (14); Iloilo (6); and Negros Oriental (10).

The women of the RPM-P/RPA/ABB TPG have also participated in a seminar-workshop which sought to localize the National Action Plan on women, peace and security and foster opportunities for opening the role of women in conflict-prevention and peacebuilding, and protection of and prevention from sexual and gender-based violence during the implementation of the Closure Agreement with the group.
NEWS BRIEFS

Bangs in support of Bangsamoro

QUEZON CITY, 28 JULY 2014 — As a symbolic gesture of support, students from Miriam College had their bangs trimmed to highlight calls for the meaningful participation of women in the Bangsamoro.

Dubbed as ‘Bangs for the Bangsamoro,’ the campaign is part of Women Engaged in Action on 1325 (WE Act 1325)’s initiatives to push for the women’s agenda in the future Bangsamoro region following the signing of the peace pact between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) early this year.

It was held in time for the President’s State of the Nation Address and the opening of Congress, as an expression of the participants’ support for the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

In solidarity, government peace panel chair Professor Miriam Coronel-Ferrer also had her bangs trimmed and assured the group that the BBL is not only for men, but also for the women; not only for Muslims, but for everyone regardless of religion; not just for the MILF, but also for all Filipinos who seek change through peaceful means.

Deles conducts dialogues in Cordillera

BENGUET, 1 JUNE 2014 — Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Quintos Deles conducted a series of dialogues in Benguet and Abra to reiterate the government’s commitment to deliver on the promises of its peace accord with the Cordillera Bodong Administration and Cordillera People’s Liberation Army (CPA-CPLA).

In 2011, the government signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the CPA-CPLA to secure the peace in the region.

Deles visited community development sites in Manabo, Abra and Mankayan, Benguet under the Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan (PAMANA) program, taking note of the success of the projects there, and the support of local government executives in sustaining the gains of the MOA.

The peace adviser was accompanied by OPAPP Undersecretary Maria Cleofe Gettie Sandoval, Assistant Secretaries Rose Romero and Danilo Encinas, and Director Martin Perfecto during the site visits.
# Gender and Peace Events
**September 2014 - March 2015**

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Brave Woman
by Grace R. Monte de Ramos

I am a mother of sons.
Two joined the army when they were young;
There was not enough money for school,
They had no skills for jobs in foundries
And factories, and it was easy to sign up
And learn how to handle a gun.

I am a mother of sons, two sons
And one, the youngest, now gone.
In his youth he was taken
By men whose names I never will learn.
I only know they were soldiers, like my sons,
Cradling fearsome guns.
He was a fine young man. I took care of him
For seventeen years and they took him away
And now I am searching for his bones.

I will never learn their names.
Alone I try to imagine the scene: were their faces
Bearded or clean-shaven?
Perhaps their bodies were robust.
Did they wear uniforms the color of shrivelled
Sampaguita or fresh horseshit?
How pointed the bullets from their guns?

My soldier sons come home
When life at the barracks is still.
I hide their brother’s picture;
It makes them cry and remember.
Perhaps they, too (God forbid it),
Have given other mothers sorrow.
Perhaps my son had to pay for what they borrowed.

I cannot cry, though I am told
It is better to cry and let go.
Where is my son’s body for me to bury?
I only wear my grief in the lines
Of my face, my sunken cheeks.
Silent, I mourn a woman’s
Bitter lot: to give birth to men
Who kill and are killed.
NAGKAKAISANG BAYAN PARA SA KAPATAPAN

PEACE MONTH
SEPTEMBER 2014

www.opapp.gov.ph