

The Philippines: Civil Society-Military-Police Capacity Building

Written with Ariel Hernandez, Myla Leguro, Deng Giguiento, Chito Generoso and Jon Rudy. Found in Schirch, Lisa, with Deborah Mancini-Griffoli (editors). *Local Ownership in Security: Case Studies of Peacebuilding Approaches*. The Hague: Alliance for Peacebuilding, GPPAC, Kroc Institute, 2015. Found at www.humansecuritycoordination.org

Following a long period of brutal colonial rule by first Spain and then the United States, Philippine government policies of martial law and authoritarianism correlated with increasing accusations of human rights abuses by military forces and a decline in civilian control of the military. Under these repressive and corrupt influences, internal insurgency movements grew, the main ones being The Communist Party of the Philippines –New People’s Army (CPP-NPA) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

An increasingly emboldened civil society opposition to authoritarianism led to a broad-based democratic movement of “people power” that ultimately toppled President Marcos in 1986. Ultimately, civil society-military cooperation contributed toward making the transition to a democratic political system. While foreign security assistance programmes for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) concentrated on train and equip programmes aimed to enable counterinsurgency, Filipino civil society organisations identified the military and police as critical stakeholders in the peace process and reached out to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to begin dialogue.

With a robust and highly skilled civil society, the Philippines became one of the first countries where civil society peacebuilding organisations began to reach out to the military and police to offer training and advice on building peace. A number of Filipino civil society groups have taken part in large-scale capacity building in peacebuilding values, skills, and processes for thousands of military officials, staff, and civilian reserve forces in the Philippines in conflict assessment, facilitation, mediation, negotiation, building a culture of peace and other conflict transformation strategies.²⁷

Like most other Filipino civil society groups, Balay Mindanaw had no intention to work with the military when they began their peacebuilding work in 1996. The director of Balay Mindanaw, Ariel (Ayi) Hernandez, first learned to know military officers in a leadership development program. “While all I heard about the military before was their abuses, here I was talking face to face with soldiers who are willing to change, willing to help improve our people’s lot,” Hernandez recalls. In particular, Hernandez built a relationship with then Colonel Raymundo B. Ferrer. Balay Mindanao reached out to the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute to begin discussion on training the military in peacebuilding.

The challenge:

Security forces and civil society viewed each other with suspicion, making the peace process difficult.

Theory of change:

Joint training in mediation for all stakeholders will improve local capacity to support the peace process by managing conflict and solving problems without the use of force.

Initial Civil Society Training for Military Officers

The Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI) was set up as a training ground for civil society in 2000. When military personnel applied to take courses, there was at first resistance. MPI faculty worried that admitting military personnel into their courses might affect the safety of other participants, or would change the dynamic of the learning environment, intimidating other students. There was also concern that the military wanted to spy on NGOs attending the training, to gather intelligence.

²⁷ Pressia Ariffin-Cabo. *Peacebuilding with the Military: The Case of the Armed Forces of the Philippines: Lessons Learned*. Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst PHL, June 2008.

Trainers at the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute had previous negative experiences with military forces. Lead trainer Deng Giguiento from Catholic Relief Services, had been on a fact-finding mission in North Catobato, Philippines when soldiers stopped her. The soldiers were drunk and had removed their nametags, so they could not be identified. Six pointed their guns at Giguiento, pushing the rifle barrels into her dress. Giguiento was subsequently hesitant about letting military personnel take her course on conflict transformation. However, other MPI faculty had more positive experiences with soldiers. Another MPI trainer Rudy Rodil (aka Ompong) had been part of a government panel that negotiated a truce with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and had seen, through that process, that soldiers could become respectful and skilled peacebuilders. One particular Filipino military leader was the first to seek training in peacebuilding. Balay Mindanao and another Filipino NGO Pakigdait, whose story is told later in this report, vouched for the good relationship they had developed with then Col Ferrer. As a result of civil society advocating on behalf of their military colleagues, Giguiento agreed to let Colonel Ferrer into her course on conflict transformation.

MPI staff set strict ground rules for military personnel attending MPI: “no guns, no uniforms, no bodyguards, no ranks, just the participants’ first and last names would be used, and no intelligence gathering.”²⁸ Military personnel learned side by side with civilians working for civil society organisations. The mixed workshops were opportunities for the military to engage with groups that they don’t usually engage with such as Muslim peace advocates, grassroots peace leaders, and young peace activists. This allowed for breaking down stereotypes, and developing relationships between civil society and military personnel. Ferrer helped to ease civil society’s anxiety by listening closely to other participants, not interrupting others, and demonstrating respect through all his interactions.

Balay Mindanao, the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute faculty, Catholic Relief Services and other Filipino civil society groups planned follow up after these initial trainings. Civil society invited trained military officials to become members of province-based networks of peacebuilders. Various groups established follow-up structures as support mechanisms for the trained military men and women. The support mostly comes informally through follow-up conversations, phone calls, and texts. Formal strategies included the conduct of regular meetings, inviting trained military personnel into



Photo 1: Deng Giguiento with Armed Forces of the Philippines; Photo Credit: Bobby Timonera, Balay Mindanao

local peace networks, and civil society visits to military camps. Local level initiatives between military commanders, local leaders, and communities included joint community-based peacebuilding efforts such as local zones of peace, local dialogue between warring parties at the village levels, and community development projects. Key leaders in civil society began reframing their perspective of the military from an enemy to a partner in supporting the peace process.

²⁸ Ibid p. 6.

Expanding the “Soldiers for Peace” Approach

Colonel Ferrer continued to reach out to Filipino civil society groups working in peace, development and human rights after he received training at the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute. His promotion to Brigadier General came along with the title of “Peace General” because of his peace leadership and negotiation skills. Recognizing the history of bad relations and military abuses, Ferrer sought to involve soldiers in acts of atonement and reparation.

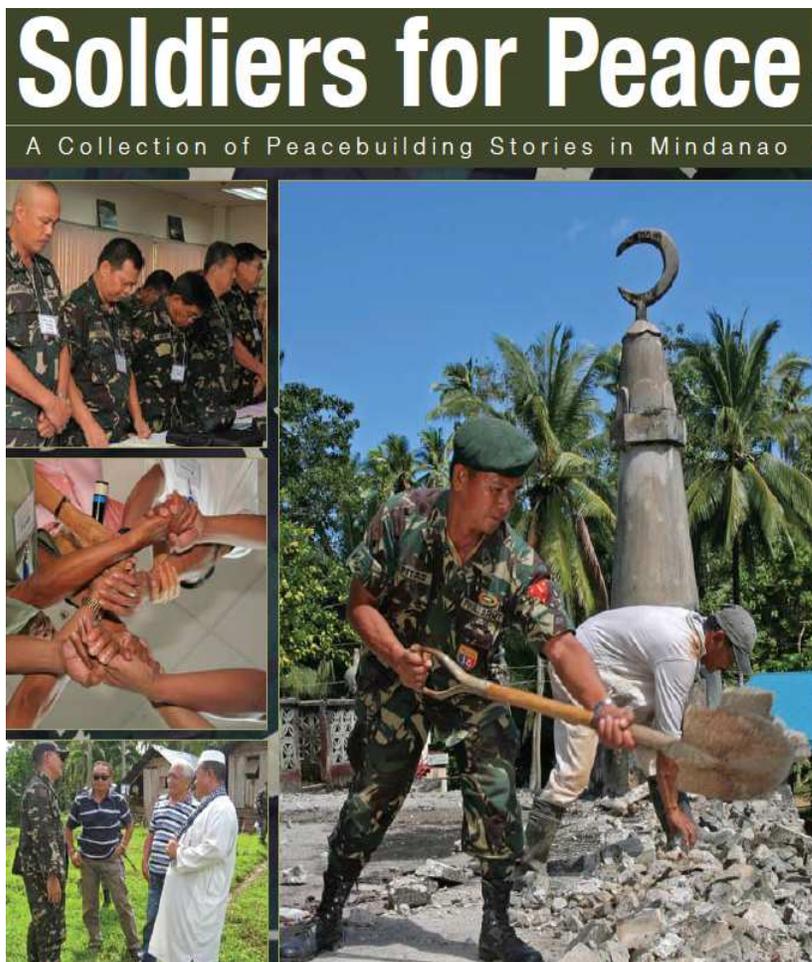


Photo 2: Balay Mindanao's report document its work with the Filipino military

workshops for the officers and soldiers of the 1st Infantry “Tabak” Division with the goal of deescalating the violence in Mindanao.²⁹ Ferrer committed his entire division to Balay Mindanao’s Operation Peace Course (also known as “OP KORs”). Balay Mindanao’s President Kaloy Manlupig supported the project, recognizing that peacebuilding requires involving the security sector, which was at the centre of peace and security issues in the Philippines. Manlupig quoted Albert Einstein, “No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.” Trained for war fighting, working for peace would at first glance appear to be contradictory. For transformation to happen in the security sector, security forces needed a new approach. Soldiers needed to learn communication skills so they could deescalate and defuse conflicts through active listening, dialogue, negotiation and mediation processes.

Balay Mindanao began offering three levels of training in response to Brigadier General Ferrer’s interest in expand the training of soldiers for peace:

²⁹ “The Military in Democratic Development: A Philippine Case Study.” Raymundo B. Ferrer and Carolina Hernandez. *Military Engagement: Influencing Armed Forces Worldwide to Support Democratic Transitions. Volume II: Regional and Country Studies*. Edited by Dennis Blair. Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 2013. P. 144

- A two-day course for senior officers, since they can only be absent from their command for a maximum of 3 days;
- A five-day course for junior officers, some of whom were trained as trainers so they could take the lessons to their respective battalions, companies and units;
- A five-day course for non-commissioned officers at the community level. This included training members of the volunteer Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGUs).

Balay Mindanaw also carried out policy advocacy. First, Balay Mindanaw attempted to institutionalise the peacebuilding and conflict management skills courses in all of the formal academic institutions in the Department of National Defence and the Armed Forces. Second, Balay Mindanaw aimed to change the doctrine of the basis of promotion for the soldiers, so that they would be rewarded for the peace leadership and not just for how many enemies were killed or captured, or how many weapons surrendered or captured.

Through the training and Ferrer’s leadership, soldiers in violence-prone Basilan province improved their relationships with local civilians and worked side by side with them to build houses and water supply systems. Ferrer questioned why his troops had been taught to scowl at people and “to put on a fierce face.” He encouraged soldiers to smile at people and to greet them with respect.³⁰ Ferrer wanted paramilitary troops to be “peace multipliers” not “force multipliers.” And slowly his efforts yielded results. People began going to the security forces with their concerns rather than running away from them when they drove to their community. BMI’s colourful report called “Soldiers for Peace” includes photographs and stories of the impact of training for the military in peacebuilding. For example:



Photo 3: Training for CAFGU. Photo credit: Chito Generoso

The Army’s 403rd Infantry “Peacemakers” Brigade arranged a ceremony for a return to the community for 22 members of the New People’s Army. Living a life of abject poverty in a remote village far from government services, the young men had been easy recruits to the NPA, who promised them a right to self-determination if they took up arms to topple the government. Recognizing the power of offering respect to each human being, regardless of their identity, the Army did not use the more common term of a “surrender” ceremony. They issued an apology to the 22 former NPA members, noting that the Army had committed human rights abuses against their people. Then Army officers helped the NPA to reintegrate, often by pushing civilian government officers to do their job in providing medical care.

Foot soldiers are now perceived as being more respectful in their dealings with people. Police and military officers have started to help mediate large and small conflicts in the communities; including defusing local disputes over land. When the public calls on security forces to respond, police or military soldiers trained in mediation use these skills rather than use force.

³⁰ Maryann Cusimano Love. “Partnering for Peace in the Philippines: Military and Religious Engagement.” Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, GUIDS Pew Case Study Center. Washington DC, p. 3.

When a German national and his three Filipino companions were kidnapped in North Cotabato, Philippines, military officers who were in the midst of attending a peacebuilding course at the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute pursued dialogue with the kidnappers by contacting the police, local government officials, peace negotiators and the MILF instead of sending troops after the kidnappers. The victims were freed within 6 hours.³¹

Training for Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units

While much of the civil society training for the military focused on the southern, Mindanao region of the Philippines and emphasised top-level military leaders, another group was focusing on training in the northern region. Like other Filipino leaders, the Interfaith Center for Conciliation and Nonviolence (ICCN) viewed a strong partnership between the military and key government service delivery units as main factor to reduce the level of dissatisfaction of the people. ICCN encouraged strong collaboration – especially in the operational level - between the civilian government and the military. This would help ‘capacitate’ civilian units to allow them to handle local peace and order problems without dependence on the military.

From 2010 to 2013, ICCN under the direction of Chito Generoso, partnered with the Office of the Presidential Adviser to the Peace Process (OPAPP), and the Philippine Army’s Civil-Military Operations Office (G3) on a project to train select local CAFGUs (Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units) and their commanders to support peace and human security in armed conflict affected areas. ICCN’s trainings for these paramilitary groups included conflict transformation, alternative dispute resolution, and mediation in ten CAFGU Battalion camps in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, with a focus on trainees from detachments from remote villages not easily accessible for government services.



Photo 4: ICCN for CAFGU. Photo Credit: Chito Generoso

In the Cordillera region in particular, local government units led an initiative to use mediation to address local conflicts that drive violence between state and non-state armed groups. In 2011 at Lagawe, Ifugao, the Provincial Governor, with UNDP support, formally organised and launched one hundred and six (106) mediators, consisting of local government officials, line-agency employees, civil society organisation members, policemen, and security personnel as the “Ifugao Mediators Club.”

³¹ Chito Generoso, “Partnering for Peace, Conflict Transformation & Alternative Dispute Resolution, Peace-Building & Security Sector Reform(SSR) in the context of IPSP “BAYANIHAN” & OPLAN SAMAHAN Initiatives.” The Philippines: Interfaith Center for Conciliation & Nonviolence (ICCN), December 14, 2011. P. 6.