



# KABABAIHAN KAPAYAPAAAN<sup>at</sup>

Issue No. 1

March 2014

## The WOMEN at the Peace Table

**Beyond Age and Gender:  
Young Moro Women Lead the  
GPH Legal Team**

**DSWD: Peace Builders  
on the Ground**

**The Governor as Babaylan**

MIRIAM CORONEL-FERRER  
Chair of the GPH Panel for talks with the MILF



## Table of Contents

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1</b> From the Publisher</p> <p><b>3</b> <b>WOMAN at the Talks</b><br/>By MIRIAM CORONEL-FERRER</p> <p><b>8</b> <b>Yasmin Busran-Lao: Peace-BUILDER from the Grassroots to the Peace Table and Back</b></p> <p><b>10</b> <b>Iona Jalijali: It's Not About Gender</b></p> <p><b>12</b> <b>Beyond Age and Gender: Young Moro Women Lawyers Lead the GPH Legal Team</b><br/>By MA. LOURDES VENERACION-RALLONZA</p> <p><b>16</b> <b>Q&amp;A</b><br/><b>Senen Bacani: "The women were more diligent and meticulous."</b><br/>By MA. LOURDES VENERACION-RALLONZA</p> <p><b>18</b> <b>PHOTO ESSAY</b><br/><b>Scenes from a Peace Process</b><br/>Text by POLLY MICHELLE CUNANAN<br/>Photos by JOSER DUMBRIQUE</p> <p><b>21</b> <b>REFLECTION</b><br/><b>THE EMOTIONAL CALCULUS OF CONFLICT</b><br/>By JURGETTE HONCULADA</p> <p><b>22</b> <b>On The GPH-CPP/NPA Front: The Women Hold the Fort</b><br/>By MA. LOURDES VENERACION-RALLONZA</p> | <p><b>22</b> <b>Jurgette Honculada: Raising Gender Concerns in the Peace Negotiation</b></p> <p><b>24</b> <b>Ma. Lourdes Tison: The Gift of Grounded Pessimism</b></p> <p><b>26</b> <b>Ma. Carla Munsayac-Villarta: Hope Springs Eternal</b></p> <p><b>28</b> <b>Sol Matugas and Cora Malanyaon: The Governor as Babaylan</b><br/>By JURGETTE HONCULADA</p> <p><b>32</b> <b>DSWD</b><br/><b>Peace Builders on the Ground</b><br/>By DIANE KATHRINA LEOMO</p> <p><b>36</b> <b>Charlotte Matias and Jessica Banganan: Softening the Ground in the Cordillera</b><br/>By MARJ IBAÑEZ</p> <p><b>39</b> <b>NEWS</b><br/><i>Gender Responsive Justice System Key to Sustainable Peace</i><br/><i>Mindanao Women Share Insights on Normalization, Submit Recommendations to BTC</i></p> <p><b>41</b> <b>CALENDAR</b><br/><b>Gender and Peace Events, 2014</b></p> |
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## FROM THE PUBLISHER



**IN THE PAST DECADES**, more and more Filipino women have played decisive roles in society – as heads of families, business executives, political leaders, community workers, government officials, and civil society organizers.

In the peace process in particular, women have been breaking ground, taking on active roles and succeeding as negotiators, mediators, peacekeepers, peace builders, relief workers, trauma healers – the list goes on.

The Philippine government has made significant strides in protecting and fulfilling women's rights in situations of conflict. In 2010, the Philippine government adopted its National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security that is anchored on the Magna Carta for Women, making the Philippines the first country in Asia that has adopted a policy to operationalize its commitment to the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) 1325, 1820 and 1888. These resolutions acknowledge women's capacity

to make decisions on women, peace and security issues; recognize sexual violence as a tactic of war and a possible war crime, and establish leadership, deploy expertise, and improve coordination among stakeholders involved in addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

The Philippine government has blazed a trail, ahead of many other countries, for women's participation in its peace processes. The government peace panel that successfully negotiated a peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front is chaired by a woman, UP Professor Miriam Coronel Ferrer and includes another woman member, Presidential Assistant on Muslim Affairs Yasmin Busran-Lao. The Technical Working Groups on Normalization and Wealth-sharing, the Secretariat, and the Legal Team are likewise headed by women.

Two women – Jurgette Honculada and Lulu Tison – also take part in the government peace panel for talks with the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army/National Democratic Front, and its Secretariat is headed by a woman.

In spite of the significant progress achieved in the role of women in the peace process, however, much still needs to be done to increase women's representation in political leadership and governance. In its 2011 report, Isis International observed that in the southern most regions in the country, women "continue to face traditional notions of gender that question women's participation in higher levels of governance." In fact, "Women's capacity and strength in leading amidst a conflict situation is continuously questioned because of traditional notions of gender that see them as weak and unable to protect themselves."<sup>1</sup>

In this context, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, which chairs the National Steering Committee on Women, Peace and Security mandated to implement the NAP, has initiated the publication of *Kababaihan at Kapayapaan*, a magazine that showcases the contribution of women to peace building. By telling the stories of women in various jobs in government – from leading government agencies to sitting across the negotiating table to bringing social services to the grassroots, we hope to contribute to raising awareness, acceptance and support for the valuable role of women in building and attaining lasting peace.

Published twice a year, *Kababaihan at Kapayapaan* also focuses on the contributions and concerns of stakeholders from civil society, business, the academe, the donor community, and the general public who are government's partners in strengthening women's roles in peace promotion.

Our maiden issue which focuses on "Women in Leadership", is aptly being launched in March 2014, Women's Month.

  
**TERESITA QUINTOS DELES**

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<sup>1</sup> *Recognising Women's Participation in Sustainable and Lasting Peace Research Report, Women and Peacebuilding, Philippines, December 2011, Isis International*





Powerhouse trio: Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (right) arrives at the talks with Panel member Yasmin Busran-Lao and Secretariat head Iona Jalijali.



# WOMAN at the talks

*MIRIAM CORONEL-FERRER writes about her experience chairing the GPH panel in the traditionally man's world of peace negotiations with the MILF.*

**FOR CERTAIN, WOMAN** was a presence in the peace talks between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Though she was often kept bottled up, she kept popping out. Because of her weightiness, she would be treated lightly. She stayed amiably visible, but was also threateningly obstinate.

That there were women in the room unavoidably made WOMAN visible. In the beginning there were only five of us women. There were Iona Jalijali, our secretariat head; Johaira Wahab, then the head of our legal team; Armi Bayot, a lawyer at the Office of the Solicitor General detailed to us; and Emma Leslie, representing the Conciliation Resources in the International Contact Group that accompanied the process. Around March 2013, Anna Tarhata Basman replaced Johaira who was appointed to the Bangsamoro Transition Commission.

The presence of WOMAN was further enhanced when GPH added in its

panel Undersecretary Yasmin Busran-Lao. The number gradually increased to include by the 23rd Exploratory Talks in December 2011, lawyer Raisa Jajurie on the other side of the table.

More women in the room was made possible when the two parties agreed to open slots to consultants in February 2012 and, much later, created the first Technical Working Groups (TWGs) in August 2012. The chair of our TWG on Wealthsharing was Maria Lourdes “Babes” Lim, regional director of the National Economic and Development Agency. The second of three members was another woman, Trinidad “Ning” Rodriguez, executive director of the National Tax Research Center.

With the posts of consultants and TWGs opened up, the MILF did not have to reconstitute its all-male panel and was still able to bring in women in their official delegation.

In December 2012, President Benigno Aquino III raised the bar for WOMAN

when I got appointed as chair, replacing Marvic Leonen who was appointed to the Supreme Court. This appointment was made on the strong recommendation of Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (PAPP) Teresita “Ging” Quintos Deles and effectively also of the MILF.

But that’s moving ahead of the story.

### Gender banter

Before WOMAN became an agenda on the formal table, she emerged first as fodder for conversation during meals. This was in the first months of 2011, when we all ate and sat at the same time in several dining tables in the hotel, observing proper protocol in sitting arrangements. Later we became more informal and sat anywhere we liked.

During these breaks in the early phase, everyone tried their best to diffuse the tension through banter and story-telling. And what small talk beats that about men and women?

After a while, the bantering on WOMAN became incessant. “Does joking about gender, trivializing it as feminists would say, reflect how much gender is now on the agenda?” I posed this question to myself in the random notes that I had typed on my laptop in the course of the negotiations.

The entry was written in April 2011, shortly after the new Malaysian facilitator, Tengku Ghafar came in, replacing Datu Othman Razak. I answered my own question with this reflection:

*“Maybe so, unless it stays at that level. So for most parts and for now, Emma and I (and apparently also Johaira and Iona at the other dining tables) just go along with the banter, pitting feminist wit with the male taunting. We cannot be grim-and-determined in our approach. Umbra Kato in his interview with Mindanews said something along the line that women should wear hijab, as part of the Islamic way that they envision to put in place. Even if the MILF panel members are more liberal in their views on this matter, they have to contend with the more conservative forces in their ranks. They, like us, have to play their cards well on the gender issue. But to be sure, it’s out there, sticking out, and they cannot ignore it anymore. We just need them to slowly get used to it.”*

Despite the fun approach we dealt with the WOMAN question in the earlier phase of our negotiations, we all knew that there was intense pressure from the international community and also our domestic public for gender inclusivity. Inevitably, the matter jumped from the dining room to the negotiating table.

### **Sexuality and privacy**

In our 25th Exploratory Talk in February 2012, we began work on

the set of consensus points that the two parties eventually signed under the title “Decision Points on Principles as of April 2012. We had to come to terms with the items and formulations on the list of rights that we deemed important to reiterate in the Decision Points.

On the item on non-discrimination based on sex, creed, race, ethnicity and so on, then MILF panel member Datu Michael Mastura moved to use “gender” instead of sex which he deemed a controversial subject. Qualifying that he is not saying that there is no sexuality in Islam, he nonetheless cautioned that the ulamas are wary of the s word. We heartily agreed to replace it with the even better alternative word that he had proposed.

The right to privacy, which the GPH panel wanted included, was queried in relation to *aliwat* (a man and woman caught in a compromising situation) and the Koranic practice of saying *salam* before entering a house. Dr. Hamid Barra, then GPH panel member, elucidated on the intricacies relating to *aliwat* as a criminal act. Not without unresolved concerns on this matter, the two panels agreed to accord the right to privacy its rightful place in the list.

But of all the discussions in this round, the word “meaningful” took the cake for the all-around discomfort it caused in order for it to be carried in the text.

### **The meaning of meaningful**

Put on the chopping block on 14 February 2012, the second day of the 25th Exploratory Talks, was GPH’s entry on “the right of women to *meaningful* political participation, and protection from all forms of violence.”

Our MILF counterparts wanted to know what we meant by meaningful. Did we mean substantial? Did we mean maximum? At what level should that participation be? They recommended deleting the word and keeping the rest of the sentence.

Sensing a prolonged discussion on the matter, Tengku Gaafar moved to leave the matter to the team tasked to reconcile the two lists. However, the word meaningful persisted as the locus of discussion onto the third day of the talks, with the members of the ICG asked to give their definitions.

“Meaningful means genuine,” said Christ Wright of UK. David Gorman of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue mused if “equal participation” might be better, Emma replied that would be privileging quantity over quality.

Johaira countered with court cases to illustrate that it is not just about equality, and that what is meaningful is defined on a case-to-case basis.

Yasmin affirmed that we intended the right to be substantial, not a mere token. For her, meaningful means having equal opportunity to influence decision-making at all levels.

I put in my two-cent’s worth: meaningful is best understood by its opposite, which is meaningless. One can have participation that is meaningless.

MILF Panel Chair Mohager Iqbal tsaid his piece. Speaking from his heart, he believed that women and men cannot have absolute equality because they are different physically, biologically and even emotionally.

This prodded me to go into the difference between being equal and being the same, a matter long articulated in the discourse on



GPH panel chair Miriam Coronel-Ferrer with panel member Yasmin Busran-Lao.

women. Yes we are different, biologically, socially. Men traditionally carried arms, women gave birth. But equality is not about sameness. It is about relationships founded on mutual respect and the dignity of both persons. It is no different from what the MILF wanted for the Bangsamoro -- parity of esteem. The same 'parity of esteem' or mutual respect that is desired between the majority and the minority population is desirable as well between men and women.

GPH Chair Marvic rounded up that discussion with his idea of a compromise: Let's use meaningful

as appreciated by the women in our panel, and also based on your own understanding. He then moved to retain the word. The MILF chair agreed.

And so it came to be. The "meaningful political participation of women" was "entrenched" as among the protected rights, first in the Decision Points and later, in the October 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

### Ups and downs

There were several other light moments in our cautious attempt to genderize the process. On 14

February 2012, the second day of the 25th Exploratory Talks, we bought heart-shaped boxes of chocolate to give out to the men in the room. On one other occasion, the GPH panel unceremoniously handed over copies of UN Resolution 1325 to the Facilitator and the MILF.

But there were unsavory occasions too, such as when a woman in our panel (I) was derided as a "second-class woman" – apparently, one who aspires to be like a man. This was after an intensive discussion of the lists of powers prepared by the MILF where a lot of questioning ensued. On another instance, a younger, female member of the GPH team had to suffer some of the antagonism.

Overall, I can say that there has been a cumulative advance in the MILF's openness to talk and appreciate gender concerns. Although a quota system remains difficult to introduce, we happily witnessed over the months the presence of several more women in the talks.

Raisa was at one time joined by educator Cabaybay Abubakar. Juckra Abdulmalik and lawyer Roslayni Maniri became permanent fixtures in the MILF delegation. The clauses that we introduced on women in the different annexes were approved without much ado.

On our end, we were kept on our toes by groups like the Women Engaged in Action on 1325 and the Women's Peace Table who lobbied for provisions that would make for a gendered peace agreement.

### Appointment as chair

In January 2012, when Marvic was first considered for another government position, the issue of succession came up. PAPP Ging



recommended me. PNOY reportedly replied first by qualifying that he is not anti-women, but that those on the other side of the table may not be ready for one. So he kept Marvic in his post. The same concern arose when in November 2012, Marvic was shortlisted for the Supreme Court.

For someone who spent her youth and adulthood generally unhampered by societal barriers, it was with consternation that I found myself in my golden years hitting the glass ceiling for being WOMAN.

Reading literature on feminism and women's rights during and after college caused little internal upheaval as I had already, organically imbibed the essential tenets. As an activist in the underground movement against the Marcos dictatorship, WOMAN posed no practical obstacle, only theoretical debates on feminism and Marxism. Can being a woman now in my mature years be such a handicap?

PAPP Ging's guarantee to PNOY that I am the right person for the job

convinced the President to let go of Marvic and appoint him to the Supreme Court. I am glad another woman kept the faith in me and that the President too kept his faith on two women to see through a concern that is very important to him.

It certainly helped that the MILF wrote a letter to the President signifying that they can work with any chairperson regardless of gender and ethnicity – again another sign of their growing openness to en-gender.

Still, the MILF expressed some misgivings. "In Maguindanao culture, we don't quarrel with a woman," Iqbal was quoted as saying, implying that the new situation might unduly constrain them. Culture or not, I wasn't spared the difficulties involved when we began wrangling over texts in December 2012, my baptism of fire as chair.

Since I have worked with men all my professional life, I suppose the challenge of adjustment was more theirs than mine. Moreover, the men

who have been part of our panel (former Agriculture Secretary Senen Bacani, Dr. Hamid Barra who was later replaced by the chair of the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos Secretary Mehol Sadain) are believers in women's rights.

### Kitchen Economics

Being WOMAN brings its own amusing moments. Several times, the Malaysian facilitator slipped, calling me sir or chairman. He reasoned good-humoredly, that "Sir" in Malaysia is used for both sexes.

After signing an Annex for the first time as panel chair in the 35th Exploratory Talks held in January 2013, Tengku Gaafar and I shook hands. He joked, "First time I shook the hand of a woman." I smiled and said, "First time I shook hands with a prince." Tengku" is a Malay royal title equivalent to a prince. We had a good laugh.

Months afterwards, when the government wanted clear



A light moment. (L-R) GPH Panel Secretariat Head Dir. Iona Jalijali, former legal team head Atty. Johaira Wahab, GPH Panel Chair Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, legal team member Atty. Armi Bayot and GPH Panel Member Usec. Yasmin Busran-Lao.



benchmarks for the decommissioning of weapons and combatants, the MILF team had to grapple with another persistent woman, Undersecretary Zenonida “Zen” Brosas of the National Security Council. Zen headed our TWG on Normalization.

Together, Zen and I upped the ante for details we wanted ironed out in the remaining annexes, haggling and bargaining on numbers, costs and percentages.

Our facilitator chided us for bringing in “kitchen economics” into the talks. “Beware of the housewives,” he joked, “They are after the kitchen money.”

Some feminists would have been irritated or angry by such housewife-jokes. But Zen and I didn’t mind since it was producing results. Later, when everything was agreed on and the texts were laid out, that kind of attention to detail would be noticed and appreciated by the men in both panels.

### The personal and professional

As we were about to complete the last of the four Annexes on 25 January 2014, several journalists began writing on the fact of being WOMAN in the government panel that successfully sparred with all-male counterparts. More features followed in the aftermath of the signing, and especially in this month of March, which is Women’s Month.

These write-ups and television and radio interviews inevitably included snippets on one’s personal life. They wanted to know how one was able to take on such a job, despite being a woman. They explored what kind of upbringing one had that enabled one to transcend societal biases. If one is married with children, what is the husband like, because a wife and

mother wouldn’t have done it were she is burdened with household chores.

The underlying assumptions in these questions are of course very real to most women around the globe. They speak of handicaps that most women would most likely face by fact of WOMAN alone.

When *Time* magazine in its 20 January 2014 issue featured Janet Yellen, the US Federal Reserve’s new chair of the board, the same aspects of her life got covered.

The article prompted a certain Sylvaine Poncet from France to write *Time* a letter to the editor with this blunt observation:

*“And, because and only because this personality is a woman, we know all about how she fell in love and how lucky she was to have a husband who takes care of their baby – and even more so because it is unbelievable that he washed the dishes. If the personality had been a man, you would have written long-windedly about his years spent in college, how he was perceived by his fellow students and his career prospered.”*

I quote this now not to say that we should completely disconnect the personal from the professional life. What I would want to see, in fact, is that men’s personal lives be captured as well in the features that are written about them. I’d like to know the WOMAN or women behind the success story, and the sacrifices they made to make the man. I’d like to know how far the man has gone in his gender consciousness.

In fact, we should probably organize an event with the wives and husbands or partners of

our peace process to get to fully understand each other as persons and colleagues in this unusual endeavor.

### WOMAN factor

The flipside to the question as to how a woman can do what she did is, can only a woman have done it?

Questions like these are challenging because either way, we are tempted to fall into one-sided stereotypes. In the academe, we call this trap essentialism: to reduce everything to a set of defined and unchanging values, when in fact everything we think we know results from how we have been “trained” to process and view things, which can certainly change over time. This includes our biases about men and women.

There are many reasons to explain how we got this far in the negotiations, in this manner and with this content. WOMAN was a part of the equation, certainly, but obviously not the only factor.

But did WOMAN make a difference? Yes. She did change the dynamics as in any group setting, especially in a sensitive and difficult undertaking such as peace negotiations. She did guarantee the inclusion of important gender provisions in the agreement.

But is it a difference for the better? Again, there would be many other factors that would determine the fate of this process. Again, WOMAN just has to prove twice as hard that three, thirty years from now, the answer would also be a Yes.

So do we mind having to work twice as hard? No. This is, after all, the kind of opportunity that we, womankind, have been trying for centuries to get our hands on. ♀



## Yasmin Busran-Lao: Peacebuilding from the grassroots to the peace table and back

**YASMIN BUSRAN-LAO** began her journey as a peace-builder in a non-governmental organization where, as head of the *Al Mujadilah* Development Foundation in Marawi City and *Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro* in Zamboanga, she integrated Islam and women's human rights in her pursuit of peace. Through her involvement with other organizations and networks, such as the PILIPINA, Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute, and the Women Engaged in Action on UNSCR 1325, she got involved in crafting the Gender and Development Code of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the advocacy campaigns for the drafting of the Philippine National Action Plan (NAP) on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security, and the passage of the Magna Carta for Women.

In all these mechanisms and fora, Yasmin made sure she included the concerns of Moro women who, she believes, must surface from the margins. Internationally, she was part of the team that drafted the Philippines NGO Shadow Report in 2006 for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that included a section on the rights of Moro women and indigenous women.

In 2010, she entered a completely new and rather alien terrain when she ran for the senate in the national elections under the Liberal Party ticket. Although she knew that she would not win, she used the campaign as an opportunity to talk about what is happening in Mindanao. As she explained:

"I knew *hindi ako mananalo* (I wasn't going to win). But the thought of being able to go all over the country (that I wasn't able to do in my NGO work) was very encouraging. In the campaign sorties, even the only one or two given to you to speak was enough to explain that in a peaceful Mindanao, everyone benefits.

When the appointment ban for non-winners in the elections was lifted after one year, she was invited to be an observer of the Government of the Philippines (GPH) panel in the talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). When a negotiator position for the GPH panel opened March 2012, she was invited to fill the post.

### The appointment

According to Yasmin, Secretary Teresita 'Ging' Deles, was very clear about wanting to put more women in the panel. At this time, Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer was the only woman in the GPH panel. So, for the vacancy, the logical and appropriate choice was another woman negotiator.

Deles' decision to endorse to the President Yasmin's appointment to the GPH panel was grounded on her previous position as observer which gave her an insider's view of the processes and dynamics of the negotiation. At the same time, her identity, roots and experience in peacebuilding and women's rights prepared her to negotiate as a Moro, a Mindanaoan, and as a woman.

As Yasmin passionately expressed, "all these things mattered because we are very clear that in any agreement, there has to be a gender lens...that gender should be an important factor." She links her journey as a peace builder with the importance of gender mainstreaming in peace agreements and the involvement of women in peace processes.

"You talk about gender at the grassroots, then policy at the national level, and even at the international level, like involvement in CEDAW, to include the status and rights of Moro and indigenous women in Mindanao. Then (you relate the practices) at the international level back to the national level and then (you conduct) peacebuilding at the grassroots."



## The gender agenda

Such principled belief is reflective of the spirit of the women, peace and security norm embodied in UNSCR 1325 and the NAP which call for the participation of women in various spaces for peace building, including peace negotiations. Having women at peace tables enables them to share their perspectives and experiences, and in the process, contribute to more expansive thinking.

Although the Philippine government has signed peace agreements with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF, 1996) *Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Pilipinas*/Revolutionary Proletarian Army/Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPM-P/RPA/ABB) Tabara-Paduan Group and Nilo dela Cruz Groups (2000); the Cordillera Bodong Administration-Cordillera Peoples Liberation Army (CBA-CPLA, 2011), and the MILF (Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro [FAB] in 2012), only the FAB has gender sensitive provisions. Found in the section on Basic Rights are:

“(g) Right of women to meaningful political participation, and protection from all forms of violence;”

“(i) Right to equal opportunity and non-discrimination in social and economic activity and the public service, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender and ethnicity”

The debate on the inclusion of gender provisions in the FAB text was heated but it went more smoothly than Yasmin thought it would. It was, however, her being a Moro woman in the Government panel that was somehow harder for the MILF to acknowledge. There was the question of loyalty and sincerity which the MILF made a remark about on her first day as government negotiator. Yasmin did not let it pass unanswered:

“I just want to clarify that I am here for the peace and the Bangsamoro, for this country. I mean for the country, it is really a peace for all Filipinos. Whether I am part of government or not, this is my position. But being part of government does not undermine my identity as a Moro. I am as much a Muslim and a Moro than I was before I became part of the government panel, and I don’t think I am as much or less a Muslim as you are as you sit in this table.”

### Holding her ground

Eventually, the peace process had to be brought back to its constituents and stakeholders. The people had to own the process and be part of it through various mechanisms made available to them. Accordingly, the 15-member Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) was established



With former GPH panel chair and current Supreme Court Associate Justice Dean Marvic Leonen.

on 25 February 2012 to lay the groundwork for the creation of the Bangsamoro entity.

Initial appointees to the BTC on the GPH side were three women out of the seven members (Atty. Johaira Wahab, Froilyn Mendoza, and Fatmawati Salapuddin); on the MILF side, out of eight members, only one was a woman (Atty. Raisa Jajurie).

On the ground, it was also important to bring in women and to concretize what ‘meaningful’ political participation is all about. This was completely new and uncharted territory; previous agreements did not have this component. Being part of the external review of the 1996 Peace Agreement between the GPH and the MNLF, she observed that the people who made decisions were all men.

She concluded with characteristic passion:

“The goal of women’s participation is to attain durable peace. One aspect of the peace agreement that women should focus into is the Normalization where arms are going to be put beyond use. We cannot afford to have another displaced woman or a child who cannot finish schooling, whose future will be destroyed because she/he cannot live peacefully. The things that we see in the evacuation centers, their impact on women – lack of access to reproductive health, getting pregnant or giving birth in very deplorable situations, having abortions in that situation, an adolescent girl in an evacuation center or in a conflict situation vulnerable to all other forms of violence including sexual violence – never again! And that this will only happen if we work together in whatever level of the process – be it at the grassroots level or at the negotiating table. Our thoughts and actions on this must be in synch. Otherwise we may lose everything.”

- Ma. Lourdes Veneracion-Rallanza ♀



## Iona Jalijali: It's about getting the job done

**BEFORE IONA JALIJALI** became part of the GPH-MILF peace process, she was a law student in the University of the Philippines who was also working full as a member of the legislative staff of Akbayan Congresswoman Risa Hontiveros where she handled bills on social issues such as the cheaper medicines bill and the extension of the agrarian reform law. Part of her work was to consult with legal experts like Marvic Leonen, who was Vice President for Legal Affairs of the UP and then Dean of its College of Law.

Having had limited engagements with Dean Leonen, she was surprised when he invited her to join the Panel Secretariat in June 2010 after he was appointed by the President as chief negotiator in the peace talks with the MILF. “I really had no idea at the time what I was in for,” she recalls. “He didn’t even tell me that I would be the Secretariat Head with the position of Director. All he said was that he needed someone he could trust. I accepted because anyone in the College of Law would know that you don’t really say ‘no’ to Dean Leonen.”

“I am a feminist at heart and I can get into any argument on the table with regard to women’s rights, equality and all that – but I was never really a member of a group. When I was in Akbayan, I was never active in the women’s group there. The legislative agenda I carried was not *ka-women-nan* (women-centered) – it was on environment and other stuff.”

### The job of the Secretariat

Little did Iona know how challenging the work would be. As head of the Secretariat, Iona describes her task as “anything and everything – our role really is to make it possible for the panel to do its work.”

The job of the Secretariat encompasses a broad range of things: from doing technical research and preparing reports, to organizing and preparing materials for all sorts of meetings and consultations, documentation and records-keeping, and of course, making all arrangements

for the negotiations in Kuala Lumpur. “We must give all kinds of support to the panel – technical, administrative. The peace process also has a complex architecture – there are the security mechanisms such as the ceasefire committees and the International Monitoring Team. We process all their administrative and financial requirements because under the Terms of Reference, *gobyerno ang may karga noon* (those are responsibilities of the government). Then there’s the political aspect of the work, managing relations with international partners as well as local personalities and groups. We try to assist the panel in that work as well. And with the implementation phase of the agreements about to begin, we’re anticipating that our responsibilities will become even greater.”

### Feminine touch

Paying close attention to the nitty-gritty is part of her repertoire. “We try to make sure that what we do, we do well, so that the panel can just focus on the details of the negotiations. I try to tell my staff that even if were just stapling documents together, we can’t take that task for granted. Imagine if you give an incomplete document and the Panel will rely on it during negotiations! I know it sounds like a little thing, but when you’re in that room and things are getting heated, it’s an inconvenience you don’t want to have to deal with,” she explains.

Beyond supervising the logistical, administrative and technical aspects of the Secretariat’s work, Iona plays ‘mother hen’ to her staff and the delegation to KL. It’s something she enjoys, she says, as she has a natural desire to take care of people and make them happy. She also acts as a conduit between key actors, and in dealing with security sector officers, including the high-ranking generals they work with, she chooses to be informal. “Maybe they let me get away with it because I am a woman, but for me it’s just about getting the job done. Besides, since I don’t have a military or diplomatic background, I wouldn’t even know what the protocols are for dealing with these high-ranking officers,” she muses.



Iona said that as far as her work relations and operations are concerned, gender never emerged as an issue. Facing a woman or a man does not change how she does her work. Personally, she has not experienced any gender discrimination, but that does not necessarily mean that she did not observe it in others.

### Learnings and realizations

Aside from mastering the ins and outs and peculiarities of the negotiations, Iona considers the personal relationships she has built as another significant element in her work. The women in the GPH Panel have become her role models. She is equally glad to have made friends from the MILF side and in the process, understood their religion, culture, history and struggles.

“I came into this cold. Practically all my understanding of Islam I gained by observing the way it is being lived by the Muslims in our group and in the MILF delegation. Before this, I really did not have any Muslim friends, but now I do. *Ang laki ng value noon sa pagkatao ko* (That has contributed much to me as a person), my understanding of the history of Mindanao, the culture of Islam in the Philippines, and the struggles of Muslim women... These have all been very enriching, and it has made me a better person.”

For Iona, the learning has been very personal and has deepened her appreciation of the peace process and its importance to many people whose life narratives are that of armed conflict. When asked to identify the singular event in the peace negotiations that has made an impact on her, she named the day when both sides agreed to the text of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB).

“*Kasi ang process namin* (in our process), the draft is projected on screen in regular print and once the Parties agree to the language, the words would be highlighted in bold font. So as the panels agree, you’ll see more and more parts of the draft in bold font.

“The interactions at this time were already very informal. At some point, we suspended the plenary discussions and I, together with Johaira Wahab, the head of the GPH Legal Team then, was shuttling notes between the Panels. Then finally, a plenary was called. I was the one who was editing the draft agreement that was projected on the screen. It came down to one word that was not yet in bold. Then I was asked to type in the agreed word, and I paused for a moment and said to myself, ‘Oh my – this is really happening!’ I still get goose bumps when I recall that day.”

A very sentimental person, Iona tears up easily. And that time, she shed tears of joy. “*Iyak ako noon habang nagtatype*. (I cried while I was typing.) Even if I was a mere encoder, the feeling of being part of that moment was just overwhelming.”

### Women make a difference

As part of the entire process from the start of the work



Iona Jalijali: A feminist at heart

of the current GPH panel to the signing of the FAB, Iona observed that the inclusion of women in the peace negotiations really made a difference. Within the context of a negotiating forum numerically dominated by men, she reiterated that her being a woman made it easier to deal with men in a way that even sensitive matters do not come out as a threat to their masculinity. At the same time, she affirmed that being a woman, her foresight and attention to minute details were an asset.

On the women negotiators, Iona said that having women in the GPH panel carrying the gender agenda and knowing what they were talking about, somehow opened the space on the MILF side to include women. She observed that the MILF team now includes up to three women. “I think having so many women across the table helped our counterparts to be more open to including women in their team. Just the fact that we were there, doing this job, I think made a statement.”

### Balancing work and motherhood

Iona performs her own balancing act between work and school, as she struggles to finally finish her degree in law. But her biggest struggle, she says, is having to be away from her partner and her two children, Aya, age five and Jelo, age two. “From 2012-2013, I think we were in KL almost one week for every single month. My daughter once told me: ‘*Nanay*, it’s more fun in the Philippines...but not in Malaysia. I cry when you go to Malaysia.’ It was cute but it broke my heart at the same time,” she admits.

However, Iona said, “That’s why it’s so important to me that I’m doing something that’s much bigger than myself, something that’s more than just a job. If by being here I am somehow contributing to the hope for peace in Mindanao, then maybe the sacrifice that I have made with my family is worth it.” - **Ma. Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza** ♀

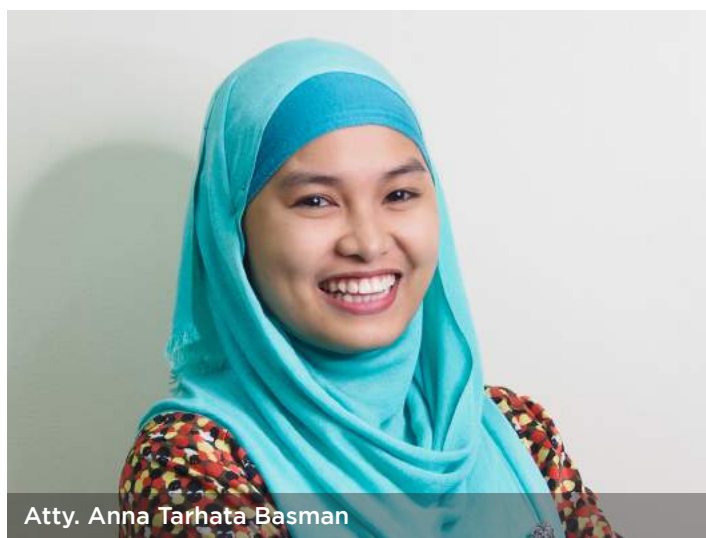
# Beyond Age and Gender: Young Moro Women Lawyers Lead the GPH Legal Team

*How two young Moro women under 30 guided the GPH panel  
on the legal issues that clinched the peace agreement.*

By MA. LOURDES VENERACION-RALLONZA



Atty. Johaira Wahab



Atty. Anna Tarhata Basman

**THERE ARE TWO** interesting but not surprising facts about women lawyers and their participation in peace negotiations. One is that the feminization of the legal profession by increasing the number of women lawyers and closing the gender gap in the field has yet to be attained. A 2010 study conducted by Ethan Michelson, found that no country has reached the threshold of increasing the number of women lawyers to 30 percent.

Second is that the involvement of women in peace negotiations is notably low. A 2008 study cited by UN Women observed that out of 33 peace negotiations documented, only four percent (or 11 out of 280) were led by women. The study also noted that, on the average, women's participation in government negotiating panels was only at seven percent, but higher than the number of women in delegations of non-state armed groups.

Both these realities are being challenged in the Philippines.

First, there has been sustained growth in the number of women entering the legal profession. Although gender parity is yet to be attained, the current available data is most positive: there are more women entering law school, about 40 percent of those who pass the bar exams are women, and there are more women lawyers than men working in the academe and civil society organizations.

Second, regarding peace negotiations, a very significant element of the Government of the Philippines' (GPH) team



in the peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is the involvement of highly competent women as negotiators and as technical support to the panel. Specifically, the GPH's legal team has been led by two young Moro women lawyers, Atty. Johaira Wahab and Atty. Anna Tarhata Sumande Basman, both of who are under 30 years old.

Both women graduated from the University of the Philippines College of Law, both were recruited by the former Chief Negotiator of the GPH Panel and now Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, former law school Dean Marvic Leonen, and both worked as research assistants/associates at the UP Institute of Human Rights. These women take pride in their Moro identity, and tirelessly work to contribute to peace in Mindanao.

#### **Atty. Johaira Wahab**

Johaira initially enrolled in the INTARMED Program of the UP College of Medicine before she decided to move to UP Diliman to pursue an undergraduate degree in Philosophy as a pre-law course. She entered the UP College of Law in 2005 where, along with her studies, she worked as a research assistant at the UP Institute of Human Rights.

At around this time, she had the opportunity to learn about gender and Islam through a program conducted by the Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro. In 2008, she helped organize a forum on the MOA-AD at the UP College of Law and was invited by Dean Leonen to help prepare a case on behalf of stakeholders to be filed at the Supreme Court. Thereafter, she was invited by Dean Leonen to be a researcher for a consortium of members of the academe from different universities and colleges who wanted to advance

the peace process after the failed MOA-AD.

It was in this consortium where she worked with Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, who is now Chair of the GPH Panel. Early in 2010, several months after taking her oath as a lawyer and while working for a private law firm, she received a Facebook message from Dean Leonen informing her that he had been invited to be the Chief Negotiator of the GPH Panel in the negotiations with the MILF and asking her if she would be willing to leave the law firm and head the GPH legal team, in the event that he accepted the post. As Johaira recalls:

“It was an easy decision for me, considering the subject matter and objectives of the peace process, and the people I would be working with. I knew that I wanted to do it. The difficult part was to convince people that it would be worth the risk, the effort, time and energy. At that time, people had very little hope, if at all, in the peace process.”

Taking the helm of the GPH legal team was a serious challenge. As Johaira explains, “head of the legal team” was not exactly an official position in the organizational structure of the GPH panel. It was only a functional element that Chair Leonen wanted to be an integral part of the panel that he would lead. Johaira recalls that she needed to “locate and define the role and place of the legal team in the work of the panel” and “carve this out based on the objectives of the negotiations, the objectives of the GPH in the negotiations, and the resources that were available.”

As head of legal, she was invited to sit at and observe meetings of the panel with its principals and constituencies, and had access to most of the documents that the panel members

worked with. The exposure provided Johaira with the socio-political context that the panel worked in and an understanding of their concerns and challenges. This gave her the “basis for foresight and therefore, sufficient information to define how the team should be organized and what our primary tasks and priorities should be so that we can be most useful to the panel.”

As the responsibilities of the legal team crystallized, Johaira was able to define more clearly the kind of work she needed to do for the panel. Attending panel meetings, she constantly reviewed and evaluated the legal feasibility of the ideas being advanced. “Part of my job was to make sure solutions we stand by are the best we can come up with at any given time, and are at the same time, politically and legally feasible.”

She prepared draft texts for the panel, which she usually had to do from scratch, with no set format. She had to decide on the best format for the first draft and hoped that this would be appropriate to facilitate productive discussions. She provided panel members with memos to guide them on legal concerns, and gave them outlines of arguments she thought were important to consider.

In other words, says Johaira, “It was my job to make sure that the panel had all the information necessary and available to guide them in the discussions and decision points that needed to be made.”

As such, part of her evolving tasks – although not so much as head of legal, but more for her being a Moro – was to provide the panel with her insights on cultural and religious sensitivities to help clarify some behavior and ease tensions at the table.



Johaira Wahab confers with Lanao del Sur Rep. Pangalian Balindong (left) and North Cotabato Rep. Jesus Sacdalan (right) on the Bangsamoro Transition Commission.

In detailing her work as head of the legal team, Johaira explains that her tasks were “not really determined by any fixed list of things to do”, but the need to be “resourceful, creative and proactive in assisting the panel in what may be necessary for continuous progress in the substantive aspect of the negotiations.”

Recalling her most memorable positive experience as part of GPH legal team, Johaira speaks about the evening the text of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) was completed:

“It felt surreal to me. For several months, that document was just a draft document on my screen which we had turned around and over and analyzed in all imaginable ways. While we were aware of its significance, when it was completed, it was overwhelming to realize this document is intended to deliver change (for the better) to the lives of so many thousands. That evening, I felt the weight of the enormous promise that those dozen pages contained.”

She also recalls that one of her most stressful experiences during the negotiations was when gender came into the picture because the

discussion became a “sensitive, heated almost personal, exchange between the parties”. Despite this, gender became part of the Framework Agreement text and is now a benchmark in the history of peace agreements in the country.

Johaira’s experience in providing technical support to the GPH Panel and as head of its legal team helps her greatly in her new role as a member of the Transition Commission (TC). Initially, she felt that, once again, she would need to locate and define the role of the TC in the peace process and her own role in it. At first, she found it strange that she no longer had to receive instructions from others or assist them. She is now in a position to make her own decisions on substantive issues, argue her own points and make her own stand. Most notably, she sees the great value of consultation, inclusiveness and the need for transparency in the work of the TC. And, as a commissioner, she puts premium on upholding the integrity of the peace process.

To young women who wish to contribute to peace in Mindanao, Johaira says:

“Peace is not a document or an event that takes place over night or even over decades. It is a social process

of growth and discernment. Peace requires humility and the ability to lay down our values for continual re-evaluation and assessment. The trouble with the pursuit of peace is that it can only be as simple or as complex as the people involved. Therefore, anyone who wants to be a ‘peace advocate’ should be comfortable with difficulty and willing to work with questions that might have no ready answers. This is a thankless job: the only reward for the pursuit of peace is the promise of peace. Who knows whether we might ever get there? But most times a promise is more than enough as something to live for. Finally, and most importantly, when you are a peace advocate, remember that it’s not about you. There is no one person who is indispensable, though we need everyone to make it work. So you can forget everything else that people say about this kind of a job, but just don’t forget that last one: it’s not about you.”

#### **Atty. Anna Tarhata Sumande Basman**

Anna Basman graduated from the University of the Philippines in 2007 with a degree in Public Administration. Thereafter, she entered the UP College of Law where, like Johaira, she worked as a research associate at the UP Institute of Human Rights. In August 2010, as Dean Marvic Leonen was forming the legal team that would assist the GPH Panel in the peace talks with the MILF, Anna was recruited as a legal researcher. She worked with the team until February 2012.

The following year, after taking the Bar exams, she was asked by Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (who was already the Chair of the GPH Panel) to re-join the legal team. By this time, the FAB had been signed and Anna understood the criticality



of the subsequent months of the negotiations. At the same time, she also knew that Atty. Johaira Wahab would be appointed as a member of the Transition Commission and the GPH Panel urgently needed someone who was familiar with the process. The decision to join the legal team at this stage of the negotiation was not a difficult one. For a Moro like herself, Anna says, “It is more of an honor and privilege than a job to be part of this process.”

In explaining the role of the legal team, Anna focused primarily on providing technical assistance to the GPH panel and coming up with the government’s positions in the negotiations. To a large extent, before a scheduled round of talks with the MILF, the legal team discussed and negotiated with lawyers and technical personnel in all relevant government agencies to firm up the GPH Panel’s position.

During negotiations, they formed special teams to discuss difficult and more technical concerns with their counterparts in the MILF. More recently, the legal team also assisted the panel in explaining to various stakeholders, the content of the negotiated documents. Currently, they are communicating with the legal and technical staff of Congress to assist them and their principals in understanding the FAB and its Annexes.

Anna’s transition to the head of the GPH legal team was quick and left her little time to prepare.

“It was in the middle of the negotiations for the remaining three Annexes and the transition was only for a short period (about 1-2 weeks). There was not much time for a regular learning curve as everything was happening all at the same time. The Panel was already scheduled



Anna Tarhata Basman to young women: Find your niche in the peace process.

to have regular discussions with the Cabinet to vet the Annexes on Wealth and Power Sharing, there was an upcoming round of talks in KL, the Transition Commission was just formed, etc. This meant a lot had to be done on the technical aspect of the process – a lot of briefing papers, presentations and meetings. Hence, my first few nights back with the Panel were spent familiarizing myself with the many documents, getting updates on the negotiations, and getting acquainted with the people and the processes involved.”

She learned quickly, on the job, that she finds particularly challenging. Foremost, she has to have some degree of expertise on the different areas and topics of all the signed agreements. Secondly, she needs to communicate the content of these agreements to various stakeholders and audiences. For Anna, striking the proper balance in conveying the message is a constant challenge and a continuing opportunity to develop the best way to do this.

When asked about her most memorable experience as head of the legal team, Anna explains that the negotiations have been a collection of memorable moments. She narrates:

“When you have bosses (in the GPH Panel) and their counterparts (in

the MILF Panel) who are mutually workaholics and emotionally invested in the work that we do, you can’t help but share most of your time together. Thus, our combined relationships are defined by light (when we share personal stories, snacks, and jokes), difficult (when sensitive matters are under discussion and everybody is just tired from the ongoing talks), and high moments (when the Panels agree on difficult issues and we egg the ICG members to treat us all to ice cream).”

Undeniably, Anna gets genuine satisfaction when her legal team is able to assist the panel with the necessary preparations for the negotiations.

To young women who want to contribute to peace in Mindanao, Anna says:

“This is the perfect moment to find your place in the wide-open spaces of the peace process. Everyone is welcome, encouraged even, to look for ways and means to support this noble endeavor. Roles have long been demolished and lines have long been blurred. It has become imperative for everyone – man, woman, and child – to find their niche in the peace process and contribute to attaining lasting peace in Mindanao. The generations to come deserve no less.”

# Sec. Senen Bacani: “The women were more diligent and meticulous.”

By MA. LOURDES VENERACION-RALLONZA

**SENEN C. BACANI** was appointed to the GPH peace panel negotiating with the MILF in July 2010. An agribusiness executive with extensive knowledge of Mindanao, he has occupied management positions in the Philippines, Thailand, Ecuador and Costa Rica. From 1989 to 2002, he served as Secretary of Agriculture under President Corazon C. Aquino. According to Sec. Bacani, his extensive corporate record notwithstanding, his participation in the GPH panel was his first experience in direct negotiations. In his previous experience in the private sector, his role has been mostly directing and guiding negotiations, particularly, in the context of collective bargaining agreements. So, for him, being part of the peace panel was very enriching because he learned a lot from the process and the people he worked with, both his co-members in the GPH panel and their MILF counterparts.

Working with women is nothing new to Bacani. However, having been with the women in the GPH panel and secretariat at the negotiating table, he saw how their work ethic, competence and their so-called ‘women’s touch’ contributed very significantly to the success of the peace process.



Working with women is nothing new to Bacani who has worked with them many times in the past. However, as far as the GPH-MILF peace panel is concerned, he strongly believes in the importance of women’s presence at the negotiating table and support secretariat. More than the so-called ‘women’s touch,’ he sees the value of their work and competence contributing to a very significant and historic peace process.

**One of the key observations in the GPH-MILF Peace Negotiations is the involvement of women in the process -- some would even say that this is a benchmark of**

**the Aquino Administration. What do you think is the significance of such a benchmark?**

I think from the MILF table, yes, but for government there is no need for a benchmark because we are dominated by women (not only as negotiators but also as members of the technical staff). They (the MILF) didn’t have a woman in their panel but they had a woman (Atty. Raisa Jajurie) who led their legal team, and at some point, she was sitting with the men in front.

**What are your personal observations regarding the**



**presence of women at the negotiating table? Was there a difference in terms of negotiating style? What did you observe about your women colleagues in the panel during moments of critical discussions?**

Aside from knowing their stuff, they're really very competent. In terms of style, yes -- they're really more diligent and meticulous than the men. That's what I noticed and that's why, I think, even in terms of style, in terms of the way the texts were worded, they're definitely better. All our women are very competent -- they know their stuff. I sometimes don't get very conscious of gender -- *parang* we're all the same *na*.

We were fortunate because there was a lot of complementation. As a team, in a way, after a while, we more or less knew where we could help best. As far as I'm concerned, having women there made a difference -- they were taking notes... there was (even) no need for me to take notes. I said I will concentrate on listening, analyzing.

I think we affected each other -- we were calm all throughout. I guess, especially, we're from Government, we didn't lose our temper at any point... in terms of emotions, which, in a way, can be an advantage. I think it's hard to categorize on the basis of men or women alone because it depends who the men and the women are. But no one of us lost our temper.

**Another benchmark in so far as the history of peace negotiations is concerned, is the inclusion of gender -- women's concerns -- in the text of the agreement. How do you think this came about?**

We were reminded by the women. In fact they were the ones who put it there. I don't know if you know that story behind the "right of women to meaningful political participation" -- that word "meaningful" took a lot of time to discuss.

Iye (Miriam Coronel Ferrer, chair of the GPH panel) put that word "meaningful" in. On that word, we had a lot of discussion. I think it took more than an hour to convince our counterpart to have that adjective. *Sabi nila*, what's "meaningful?" So it is the opposite of meaningless, or something like that.

I was convinced that it was much better to include it because it really gives more meaning to the noun "participation." Eventually, they (the MILF) relented, they accepted. Meaningful means not just a token -- it's something substantial, something significant.

If Iye and the other women were not there, *sa palagay ko hindi maisasama iyon* (I think that would not have been included). *Kasi parang ok na kasi ang* (Because it seemed okay to say) "right of women to participate" but I guess it really gives more meaning when you include the word "meaningful". When you start thinking about it, it really gives more meaning to "participation."

On women's meaningful political participation, I really have no question there. Although *mahirap din yung quota-quota*. I think if you are competent, regardless of sex or gender, what is important is you are competent.

**Now that the talks have ended, what would you like to say to the women who are involved in the GPH team?**

The panel as well as the secretariat -- it has been a joy working with them, sharing experiences, sharing knowledge. It was so easy, there was no adjustment on my part. That's what I told them on one occasion, that it has been fun, it has been a very productive experience. I told the group that I really enjoyed this because you know that you are doing something that is hopefully

productive but at the same time, you are enjoying it because you're working well with people.

Thanks to all of them because I think -- and I can probably say -- that we wouldn't have reached this far without them. Our chair is Iye -- she leads us. *At saka maganda ang samahan dito* (There is great camaraderie). Now, the harder part starts -- the implementation. Because we are responsible for the whole implementation, we have to oversee the whole process... *sabi nga namin, walang iwanan dito* (we said, we're all in this together).

It is the decommissioning, the disbandment of the private armed groups, the economic programs -- *ang dami e*. It is beyond the text. All of these are just paper if we do not affect the lives of the ordinary man and woman on the street -- he or she must feel something different. Hopefully, it is for the better. We have to give meaning to those pieces of paper. We have to guide it along the way, shepherd it, and work with the congressmen and the senators. In fact, it is important to maintain the networks because, in our society, connections mean a lot -- getting the help of the private sector, the NGOs, POs because government cannot do it alone.

*Kasi ang importante sa lahat yung tao* (What is important is the person). In the end, it's the person that we're trying to help. *Pag walang nangyari doon, parang bale wala* (If nothing happens there, this will all be for naught).

Anyway, you just have to multiply that to thousands and millions of people. Hopefully we can finish it (by the end of this administration) and if it is not finished, hopefully, whoever will succeed the President, most of the work has been done and the process becomes irreversible. Worst case is there is some delay but hopefully, it becomes irreversible. ♀

# Scenes from a Peace Process

*It was serious business all right, but there were light moments too at the peace negotiations in Kuala Lumpur.*

*Text by POLLY MICHELLE CUNANAN*

*Photos by JOSE DUMBRIQUE*

## **“HARD ON ISSUES, SOFT ON PEOPLE.”**

This was how Moro Islamic Liberation Front chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal described the peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the MILF since the talks resumed in February 2011 under the Aquino administration.

Indeed, this was how the two peace panels interacted throughout the negotiations until the very last round, which ended with happy tears and tight hugs on the evening of January 25, 2014, with the signing of the last of four annexes and an addendum to the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB).

Across the table, there were heated arguments, rising tensions, escalated rhetoric, an impasse, and even a walkout. But after the drama, both sides invariably returned to the table to settle the hard issues that would bring peace on the ground.

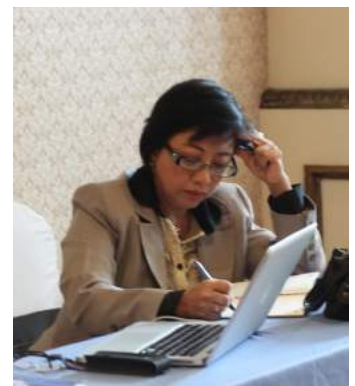
Their sincerity and commitment to the goal of peace shone through in the willingness of both sides to compromise, seek common ground, and find viable and sustainable solutions to the armed conflict that has affected thousands of Filipino lives.

While both sides zealously argued their positions in formal and informal meetings, on the sidelines, relationships were cordial, the conversations candid, the banter friendly, with smiles and laughter freely shared by the members of both delegations. Clearly, they were working for the same goal – to make a difference by bringing peace through concrete and lasting changes in people’s lives.

As GPH chair Miriam Coronel-Ferrer put it, “In all, the public expectation is that these, our efforts, would truly

make a difference. A difference for the better. A difference that is sustainable. A difference that will unite rather than divide. A difference that will bring about a sense of well-being and not stoke the fears and insecurities of the populace.”

With their openness, goodwill, determination, and lots of smiles and laughter, the GPH and MILF panels have already begun to make that difference.













# The Emotional Calculus of Conflict

By JURGETTE HONCULADA

*Member, GPH Panel Negotiating with the CPP/NPA/NDF*

**HOW DO I HURT THEE?** Let me count the ways.

Statistics from the AFP-PNP over a 33-year period (1978-2010) report an aggregate of 29,553 fatalities in the ongoing conflict between GPH and the CPP/NPA categorized thus: 13,412 Communists (45%), 8,264 military and police (28%) and 7,877 civilians (21%). This further translates into 2.5 deaths daily for the period and nearly 900 yearly.

When the GPH and CPP/NPA/NDF peace panels met in June 2012 in Oslo to de-clog a peace process mired in a contrapuntal word and ground war, both sides raised their bills of particulars. The CPP/NPA/NDF listed over half a dozen issues pertaining to safety and immunity guarantees for their consultants (JASIG), bilateral agreements, the release of political prisoners, terrorist listing of the CPP/NPA and Jose Ma. Sison and indemnification of human rights victims.

The GPH panel focused on a demand to “lower the level of violence on the ground”, with particular reference to the use of land mines and child soldiers by the NPA.

“There is no meeting of the minds there,” Satur Ocampo wrote in his *Philippine Star* column on Sept. 1, 2012. NDF chair Luis Jalandoni echoed this sentiment when he said, in a forum on the same day, that peace talks must not be reduced to mere ceasefire negotiations.

For GPH, the issues of child soldiers and land mines are not marginal or

peripheral to peace negotiations. Children, in the barest sense, are our future; when we imperil them, we risk our future. International humanitarian law and Philippine law prohibit the use of child soldiers, a practice staunchly denied by the CPP/NPA but belied by regular news reports, among them, that on a 17-year old (recruited when he was 13) among NPA casualties in an Aug. 31, 2012 Davao encounter.

The CPP/NPA/NDF takes pains to point out that the NPA uses “command-detonated” land mines (as against “pressure-activated” ones which kill anyone) whose use is allowed by international conventions. But land mines do not always obey instructions, time and again killing and maiming hapless civilians. Just last month, in Davao, an NPA command-detonated landmine hit an ambulance, injuring four health workers on their way to pick up military casualties of still another landmine blast.

Unlearning war must begin here and now, not with the inking of the final pact. Violence has taken too high a toll on our families and villages and communities, rending them asunder. In the poem “Brave Woman” by Grace Monte de Ramos, a village woman (perhaps a widow?) soliloquizes about her two sons, unschooled and unskilled, joining the army “when they were young”, and her third and youngest son, abducted at 17-- by soldiers or rebels? She cannot say. As she seeks his bones, she laments that perhaps her older sons have “given other mothers sorrow ... Perhaps my (youngest) son had to pay for what they borrowed.”

Violence has taken too high a toll on our psyches, most especially those who have come within arm’s length of it. The former pastor of a campus Protestant church was one of three children in the 70s serving the NPA as errand boys. His peasant father jailed by the military, his mother in the US to earn money somehow, he had to survive by his wits, thus ending up with the NPA in Isabela, his home province. Decades later, by dint of hard work, struggle and sacrifice, and luck, he became a pastor, as did one of his fellow errand boys. The third took his own life.

The inner wounds inflicted by violence take a lifetime (and amazing grace) to heal. The inner demons one cannot always slay. King Badouin I of Belgium has said, “Youth is the first victim of war; the first fruit of peace. It takes 20 years or more of peace to make a man; it takes only 20 seconds of war to destroy him.”

This is where GPH is coming from. This is the emotional calculus that compels the GPH panel to raise the issues of land mines and child soldiers and press for reduced levels of violence during negotiations. These do not negate the GPH’s commitment to socio-economic-political reforms. For GPH, seeking peace in the here-and-now is a foretaste or token of the just and enduring peace that we all want. Muting the gunfire during peace talks, keeping children and civilians out of harm’s way, will mean one life, or two or three or more saved, and that will have been worth it.

American peace mentor John Paul Lederach once said, when we choose gunfire as the modality by which we communicate, it becomes difficult to go back to words.

Herein lies the challenge: of finding a common ground, of finding the right words to cut through the crap and the gunfire, of matching word with deed, resolve with will, of restoring integrity to words so that we do not engage in wordplay and verbal sleight-of-hand, but mean what we say and say what we mean, of unlearning war in order to wage peace. ♀

# On the GPH-CPP/NPA Front: The Women Hold the Fort

*The peace process with the CPP/NPA has been slow, but GPH panelists Jurgette Honculada and Lulu Tison and Secretariat head Carla Villarta are ready when the CPP/NPA are.*

## Jurgette Honculada: Raising Gender Concerns in the Peace Negotiations

**“WE STARTED OFF** with such high hopes... We started with grounded optimism. As the years wore on, it became grounded pessimism... Now it’s just grounded.”

That is how GPH panel member Jurgette Honculada describes the peace negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army-National Democratic Front (CPP/NPA/NDF). Although she says it in jest, peace talks between the Government Panel and the CPP/NPA/NDF have actually been stalled since February 2013.

“But there are efforts to ‘un-stall’ it,” she adds.

A staunch advocate of labor and women’s rights, Honculada became a member of the Government Peace Panel negotiating with the NDF in late 2010. “I suppose I was asked to join because of my involvement with the women’s movement and links with the Presidential Adviser on the



Jurgette Honculada: Grounded pessimism

Peace Process,” she explains. Jurgette and Secretary Teresita Quintos Deles have worked together in NGOs since the 1980s.

Jurgette has always championed the cause of gender equality. Standing at the forefront of feminist organizations, she was the former Chairperson of the Women’s Action Network for Development (WAND) and former Vice Chairperson of PILIPINA. She also served two terms as Commissioner at the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (renamed Philippine

Commission on Women). During the Arroyo Administration, she represented the women sector in the National Anti-Poverty Commission. She has also worked with the labor movement, undertaking trade union seminars with local unions of the National Federation of Labor in Mindanao and the Visayas.

To date, she has participated three times in negotiations: During the preliminary talks in January 2011, the formal talks in February 2011, and informal talks in June 2012, all held in Oslo, Norway.

Compared to the members of the NDF Panel – “old hands” who have negotiated with five government-constituted panels for 28 years, Jurgette says that all five members of the current Government Panel are “newbies.” However, she notes that they were carefully chosen so that “there is both gender and geographical balance” among them.

In the beginning, “there was quite a bit of naïveté,” Honculada says of the government panel. “We were thinking that maybe, with a lot of goodwill, just maybe, we could go far” in negotiating an agreement that could bring closure to the 46-year old communist insurgency that has claimed the lives of close to 30,000 people.

During the half year before the first formal talks in February 2011, the panel had monthly briefings on various matters to gain a deeper understanding of the background of the peace negotiations.

Jurgette recalls that “the lines were already drawn” when she participated in the first informal session in January 2011. For instance, the placement of a semi-colon on the phrasing of a sentence in a joint statement could take a half-hour of arguments. Several times, there were deadlocks in the course of the debates.

One major unresolved issue that has repeatedly bogged down negotiations is the demand of the National Democratic Front (NDF) for the release of their consultants, political prisoners facing criminal charges in various courts in the Philippines.

At this stage in the protracted peace process, gender is not even part of the formal agenda. But as a women’s advocate, Jurgette has tried to raise gender concerns during the informal

and formal talks, albeit “in small ways.” Whenever she pushed for inclusive language in the framing of statements, she says, they would sort of humor her. While she did not feel outright discrimination as a woman, she saw some subtle manifestations of a patriarchal mindset in the NDF Panel. “You just have to assert yourself,” she said. And by constantly pointing out that language can exclude women, Jurgette is “hoping that they get the point finally.”

With formal peace negotiations stalled, there has been no opportunity to incorporate gender concerns in the agenda. “We are not yet in the meat of discussions ... we haven’t tackled the main issues yet,” Honculada says. “It is anybody’s guess when the peace talks will resume... But if and when it happens, we will bring in the gender dimension as best as we can.”

Looking at the recently forged peace agreement between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the experiences of other countries, such as South Africa and Northern Ireland, Jurgette believes that it is possible to achieve peace, even if it is imperfect, but “there has to be political will on both sides.” For her, making peace means unlearning the ways of war and disavowing the primacy of the armed struggle. She finds it heartening to meet young and bright military officers who understand and uphold the supremacy of civilian rule and affirm human rights, an indication that the “security sector is weaning itself of its militaristic orientation”. This is a far cry from the brutal military she knew as a young activist in the 1970s.

In the course of traveling across the country speaking with various groups, Jurgette has witnessed the deep yearning for peace in rural communities that are caught in the crossfire between the Philippine

military and the New People’s Army. She tells the story of the residents of a small barangay (i.e. village) in Lianga, Surigao del Sur. In February 2011, when the villagers learned that the government panel was flying to Oslo for the peace negotiations with the NDF, they contributed money to buy Manila paper and markers, wrote slogans like “We are for peace!”, and posted them in public spaces.

“Who would’ve thought that a small remote barangay would be aware of Oslo and what it might bring?” she asks.

In an article posted in the OPAPP website, Jurgette writes that “unlearning war must begin here and now, not who knows when, or with the inking of the final pact. Violence has taken too high a toll on our families and villages and communities, rending them asunder.” For her, this is the “emotional calculus of conflict” that must compel both parties to wage peace and prioritize the rebuilding of communities.

“One day of armed conflict is one day too many as it translates into resources diverted away from schoolrooms and health clinics, roads and bridges, deepening the culture of violence that wreaks lasting damage on our psyches and our body politic,” she writes.

“How do you prioritize the rebuilding of communities?” Jurgette asks. “From the gender perspective: if it is not friendly to women, it is not friendly at all.”

In the meantime, as the formal peace negotiations have yet to resume, Jurgette and her colleagues in the government panel, are keeping faith in the peace process. - **Ana Maria Clamor** ☪



## Maria Lourdes Tison: The Gift of Grounded Pessimism

**MARIA LOURDES ‘LULU’ TISON’S** journey as a peace advocate started the summer after she graduated from college at the Ateneo de Manila when she worked for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) at the Bataan Refugee Processing Center. She taught English as a Second Language to refugees from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam prior to their resettlement in the United States after having fled their war-ravaged countries in the late 1970s. At the end of that summer, she cut her stint in Bataan to return to her home province of Negros Occidental and fulfill a commitment to the Benedictine Missionary Sisters to teach for a year at St. Scholastica’s Academy in Bacolod.

Honoring this commitment was Lulu’s way of paying back her alma mater. But the academia was not her cup of tea. Thus, after a year, she was back at the Bataan Refugee Camp. And this was where she first saw the down-side of utopian revolutions:

“On hindsight, that set me on a trajectory. Because in the refugee camp, you saw everyone from all classes, from all sectors of society – a university professor, an army colonel, a prince, a farmer –all of them, victims of the war. All of them, refugees. All of them, boat people. . . I remember one time I was at the camp Catholic chapel hearing mass and I happened to look at a Vietnamese who was also there to hear mass and whom I knew to be a university professor. And then I remember thinking, ‘My God – this is what war has made of him.



A refugee! A boat person. Ito pala yung puede mangyari sa giyera (So this is what can happen in a war).” After seven years of working with refugees and learning their stories, Lulu enrolled at the University of the Philippines masteral program in Urban and Regional Planning. In 1988, she spent a semester away from school and went back to Negros. It was during this time that the military’s counter-insurgency campaign, Operation Thunderbolt, was at its height and thousands of internal refugees were fleeing the countryside. Lulu again saw firsthand the human cost of armed conflict: the exodus of internally displaced peoples to the city. For Lulu, it was another moment of realization:

“Again the human cost (of war) – the destruction and death, the chaos and filth in the evacuation centers, the human misery because of the war that was raging in the hinterlands – *bakit kailangan maging ganito tayo* (why do we have to be this way)? Why do people have to be subjected to this kind of life?”

With others, she assisted the internal refugees through relief and rehabilitation programs, conducting feeding programs in temporary shelters. And they organized “stop the war” campaigns through advocacy work and prayer brigades. Three years into their work, they responded to the call of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) “to seek peace and pursue it” by establishing *Paghiliusa sa Paghidaet-Negros*.

Since 1988, *Paghiliusa* has built a community of peace-builders in Negros Occidental who help create the conditions of genuine and lasting peace both in their province and the entire country through advocacy for justice, freedom, integrity of creation, and authentic peoples’ development; seek, advocate, and engage in the peaceful resolution of internal armed conflicts; and support community-based initiatives towards these ends.

### Direct involvement

In 2001, Lulu was the civil society (CSO) representative that reviewed

the peace agreement between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the *Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Pilipinas/Revolutionary Proletarian Army/Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPM-P/RPA/ABB)*.

In 2010, she was invited by OPAPP Secretary Teresita Quintos Deles to be a member of the government negotiating peace panel with the CPP/NPA/NDF. She responded with reluctance, questioning her own technical competence to do the job. Secretary Deles nonetheless requested her to fly to Manila to attend a meeting. There she met her fellow panel members.

Lulu continued to question her technical competence: “I am not competent, that is not my world... *yung world ko ay ‘yun sa baba* (my world is at the ground). Throw me in my world and I will survive because I have the skills and the wisdom to navigate that kind of terrain, but the table is not my area of competence.”

And the question nagged at her: “What right do I have to decide or represent the people in this issue?” But when Secretary Deles asked if she was open to it, Lulu remembered something from her years at the Ateneo: the exhortation, “fight your inclinations”. Her inclination was to say no to a world that she was not comfortable in. However, she chose to go against her comfort zone and saw her Jesuit education materializing.

### **Grounded pessimism**

In her two and half years as a member of the GPH panel, Lulu has always been clear about what she stands for and what she needs to contribute to the peace process. First, she believes that the government should have a

peace process with its own people and not just with armed rebel groups. As a peace worker for the last 25 years, she believes that government, through policies, programs, and project implementation that threaten or actually undercut the human security of people and communities, could actually push people to the embrace of the insurgent movement. Second, she firmly stands by the primacy of persons rather than ideologies and frameworks. She is angered by those who project themselves as “the saviors, the messiah of the oppressed, the victims of social injustices”.

“For me, if you are what you claim to be – that you are their messiah – then the first thing that you need to respect is their autonomy, the right to judge for themselves...You have to respect their innate ability to think for themselves and, having thought for themselves, their right to decide what is best for them.”

In defining her work, Lulu recalls John Paul Lederach’s ideas in his book *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Peace processes usually focus on reaching an agreement to end the conflict without repairing relationships: government with its citizens, armed groups with the people, and government with armed groups. She cites Lederach’s concept of the ‘gift of pessimism’, that people who have experienced armed conflict are critical of peace accords and approach the supposed transition to peace with great caution.

Such is particularly true when the construction of peace does not involve them, and the peace process uses simply a top-down approach. With their absence from the process, it is highly probable that the people will feel alienated with solutions dictated upon them. In other words,

any social transformation must include them since they are the ones who understand the context and historicity of their own experience.

“I see the wisdom that we need to draw from the ground – it is some kind of grounded realism. We are going to have a peace table, we are going to have a peace agreement – sure! But we need to be informed by the ‘gift of pessimism’ of the people who precisely know how things are on the ground with regard to this conflict.”

She reflects that her contribution to the panel is not technical competence but the ‘gift of pessimism’ to the work. “It is like the people are speaking to government through me.”

Reflecting on her journey as a peace builder, Lulu recalls her own narrative. Because of several turning points in her life, nurtured by her education, allowed by her family “to be”, ignited by her experience of living among people at the margins who have largely been invisible to government, she took the risk to be part of a very difficult peace project. She believes that peace will not happen just because of a signed agreement. The process must engage the people.

“My life experiences have brought me to see and realize the genius and the nobility of our people who, for all intents and purposes, do not have the political, social and economic resources to be reckoned with by power holders. It is like river water shaping the rocks. The river waters are my experiences, things that I have witnessed that flow through me, shaping me in the process. Ultimately, I am from the ground and of the ground.” - **Ma. Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza** ♀



## Maria Carla Munsayac-Villarta: Hope Springs Eternal

**MARIA CARLA MUNSAAYAC-VILLARTA** has dedicated almost two decades of her life pursuing an elusive peace as head of the Secretariat for the GPH panel negotiating with the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army and the National Democratic Front (CPP/NPA/NDF).

Carla graduated with a BS Economics degree from the University of Sto. Tomas in 1982 and landed her first job at the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA). In 1995, Alma Evangelista, then Executive Director of the OPAPP, invited her to head the Secretariat of the Government of the Philippines (GPH) Panel.

Carla admits that at that time, she was totally unaware of what was going on in the peace negotiations. At NEDA, her work revolved around the drafting of the chapter on housing of the Philippine Development Report, the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan, the Public Investment Plan, and other economic related documents.

On one hand, she thought that she was not fit for the job since her background was mainly in economics and the post needed someone with a political background. But on the other, she felt excited about the challenge of working in an entirely new arena. She was particularly excited about the chance to meet the communist leader, Jose Maria Sison, whom she had only read about in books.

In June 1995, Carla went to work as Secretariat Head of the GPH panel, a post she has held for the last 18 years. The peace talks have since spanned four administrations – from President Ramos to Estrada to Arroyo to Aquino.

Carla had to learn things quickly. “When I attended my first GPH panel meeting, they were using a lot of acronyms and so I had to really learn the ‘nego lingo’. It was quite an adjustment from an economic frame to a political one”.

After only a few weeks, Carla joined the GPH panel in Brussels for the first round of formal peace negotiations in June 1995. “That was my ‘baptism of fire’. After the opening ceremony in the morning, both sides agreed to reconvene the next day for the discussion of the substantive agenda. However, the meeting did not proceed. The issue then was the demand of the NDF for government to release one of their alleged consultants who had been hurt in a cross-fire and was hospitalized by the GPH. They insisted that he be physically present at the talks. Of course, the GPH could not do that. He was facing

many criminal charges and we had to follow the judicial process. Thereafter, the talks were suspended by the NDF. I told my predecessor, ‘Ma’am Binky (Ma. Lorenza Palm-Dalupan), we have not even stayed here long enough, the talks are already suspended.’ ”

As one of a few persons with the institutional memory of the process since 1995, hers is a heavy responsibility. As far as the narrative of the peace process is concerned, she and a few others carry the collective knowledge and experience of the negotiations.

She describes her main contribution as head of the Secretariat: “Because I’ve been there so long, there are many lessons learned. These are helpful to the panel and I share the lessons with them. I am able to provide them background information and caution them, especially about critical issues, like prisoner release. And, if there is a proposal from the NDF, I need to create a balance between cautioning them and encouraging them to pursue creative approaches in talking to the other side.. But of course, the decision is still up to them.”

Carla’s primary role is to meet the requirements of the GPH panel so that they can function as efficient negotiators at the table. Logistics such as setting up meetings and taking care of travel arrangements are the easiest part of the job. The more difficult is providing substantive technical support where the Secretariat prepares issue papers, strategic frameworks, road maps and other technical requirements.

Beyond the logistical and technical requirements, Carla is also a kind of motivator during moments when panel members feel discouraged about the outcome of meetings, sharing with them the experience of past GPH panels and what they did to overcome difficulties.

“There should always be hope. The job of the panel is really very difficult and with the current state of the talks, there has to be continuous support and push to go on with the peace process. Of course, we must not let our guard down or get derailed from the principled position of government. We must not be dampened by unfavorable circumstances. We must continue moving – not just for the sake of moving but towards advancing the process to its fruitful completion.”

Since 1995, the peace negotiations have been disrupted 15 times. Dealing with the same thing repeatedly for so long has become an emotional burden to the point where she has begun to doubt if she has anything more to contribute to this peace table. But what keeps her going is her faith and hope in God who, she believes, is in control of everything. A prayerful woman, she constantly prays



Carla Villarta: Institutional memory

that the process continues towards its logical conclusion, for both sides to be guided by divine intervention “para matapos na ang gulo at giyera (so that the chaos and war will be over)”. She also prays for the panel members of both sides to find solutions to contentious issues.

Of all the chief negotiators she has worked with, it was Prof. Nieves Confesor, the only woman chair, who impressed her the most with her strong personality and keen mind that linked the academic to the practical:

“Every time there was a GPH panel meeting, it was like we were in class defending our thesis so it was important to come to the meeting fully prepared. She would ask her panel members and secretariat to report, each would have her/his own assignment. It was a period of long impasse – there were no formal negotiations, but we had several informal meetings with the other side. Despite this, she always told me to be prepared for any eventuality that the talks may re-open.”

She also has a high regard for GPH Chief Negotiator Alex Padilla who Carla describes as “a vibrant leader who leads by example”, “a man of integrity”, and “the epitome of humility”.

Carla views the progress in other peace tables, specifically, in the GPH-MILF peace process, as a motivation for her and her own panel to work harder for peace. However, she is being realistic. Each table has its own uniqueness, dynamic and context. No single formula will work for all tables.

After 18 years, Carla feels that the time is near when she must go back to personal concerns that she has placed on the backburner to help advance the peace process. But if and when she leaves this job, she will make sure that it is passed on to someone who can and will perform as well as, or better than she has.

“As a woman, I have missed some opportunities, particularly in the context of my family life, especially when I have to travel. Since 1995, you can count the number of meetings abroad where I was not included in the GPH delegation. My husband would say, ‘Aalis ka na naman? Kailan ba matatapos ang peace talks na iyan? (You are leaving again? When will those peace talks ever end?)’ As a wife, I am deeply concerned when I have to leave my husband – especially during those times when he was sick, to respond to the call of duty. The missed opportunities to be with my family when I am most needed, that’s the hard part. Honestly, right now, I am looking forward to my retirement to take care of my parents, husband and three-year old apo. I look forward to waking up every morning with my apo and all we will do is play.”

Carla continues to hope and pray for the best scenario to unfold. However, should this not happen at the negotiating table, she hopes that it can happen on the ground, with Government resolving the armed conflict with the CPP/NPA holistically and peacefully, and delivering the peace that our people have been aspiring for, before a new administration steps in. - **Ma. Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza** ♀



# Sol Matugas and Cora Malanyaon: The Governor as Babaylan

*Two women governors in Mindanao face the challenge of peace and development in conflict zones with vision, determination, courage and compassion.*

By JURGETTE HONCULADA



Gov. Sol Matugas



Gov. Cora Malanyaon

**SURIGAO DEL NORTE** is the second northernmost province in Mindanao consisting of the mainland and two islands including Siargao. The capital Surigao City and 11 of the province's 21 municipalities are located on the mainland, nearly all of the latter conflict-affected. Six major mining companies operate in the province, including Taganito Mining Corporation producing nickel ore, which was torched by the New People's Army over two years ago.

Davao Oriental is bounded on the west by Compostela Valley (ComVal) and on the north by Surigao del Sur and Agusan del Sur. Sharing borders with Caraga and ComVal which harbor strongholds of the New People's

Army, Davao Oriental once had high rates of insurgency. The province is now relatively conflict-free with concerted LGU and military peace and development efforts in conflict areas.

The image of the *babaylan* comes to mind upon meeting the women at the helm of these provinces—Sol Forcadilla Matugas of Surigao del Norte and Corazon Nunez Malanyaon of Davao Oriental. The *babaylan* played a distinct role in pre-colonial Philippines. They were healers, advisers to barangay leaders, predominantly female and in their late 30s or 40s, done with child bearing and early child rearing. Unfortunately, Spanish church authorities could not countenance

competition from this unlikely source and the *babaylan* were eventually stigmatized into extinction.

## Politics beckons

Politics beckoned Sol Matugas and Cora Malanyaon late in life, the former after 43 years in public education; the latter, a lawyer-accountant and university lecturer, engaged in business and civil society concerns. Sol is mother of three and grandmother of eight, Cora has one daughter and is grandmother of two.

Both are seniors (Sol turns 70 this year, Cora 64), they were valedictorians in primary and secondary school, Sol in her home

island of Siargao, Cora in Cateel, Davao Oriental where she grew up. Both graduated cum laude, Cora with accounting and law degrees from Ateneo de Davao, and Sol with a bachelor of science in elementary education from San Carlos University. Sol later completed a master of arts and a doctorate in education.

Marrying into a political family (husband Francisco Matugas, a former governor, is first district representative of Surigao del Norte), Sol carved out a separate career in the Department of Education as teacher, school superintendent and later DepEd regional director. At DepEd, she pioneered programs that enhanced schoolchildren's reading skills (CRÈME), strengthened communication and teaching skills of secondary school teachers (SHAPE), sharpened managerial and leadership skills of school heads (CREST), and retrofitted academic and technical training for the needs of agriculture, business and industry (APEX). This litany of innovations shows her desire to cover all bases in the public primary and secondary school system, as well as her penchant for catchy acronyms.

In 2009, all thoughts of a graceful retirement vanished with the challenge to run as governor under the local political party *Padajon Surigao* (Onward, Surigao), which was bereft of a qualified candidate. Winning by a mere 2,000 votes in the 2010 elections, Sol parlayed her experience in education into the field of politics, changing the rules of the game where she could, and scored a landslide victory in her second gubernatorial bid in 2013.

### **From corporate law to local governance**

With a lucrative practice in corporate law and taxation, Cora had little regard for politics. But she was invariably drawn into it as part of

the PDP-Laban party, joining Davao City's Yellow Friday movement that supported Cory Aquino in 1986. Later appointed OIC city councilor, she topped the city council race the following year. Cora recalls that running was not an easy decision, but the "chance to be part of the mainstream of development" was too compelling to ignore.

After five-years as city councilor, politics had become all-consuming and she decided to take a leave to address family concerns. She travelled with her husband, and the "beautiful insights" from other places helped firm up her resolve "to be a local executive". After nine years, her husband Luis, a businessman, told her, "I think you have what it takes". That was the green light for her political comeback.

The love and loyalty Filipino women have for their husbands, neither grudging nor gratuitous, is often a source of amazement. Lalo, Sol's husband, claims that he "forced" her to run for governor, but that may be only partly true because Sol is very much her own person. In any case, it is nearly imperative for a Filipina in politics to have a husband's full support and understanding.

### **Results-based local governance**

Yet another parallel is how their exposure to other realities deepened both women's concern for the poor and underprivileged. Sol's eye-opener was her immersion among informal settlers in Surigao City for her doctoral dissertation on "The School and the Slum Family" where she learned that programs for people "must be based on their needs and culture", and that government must "translate the mission of caring into tangible terms, into equitable sharing of resources".

This has informed her results-based approach to governance.

Eschewing pre-packaged programs from Manila, Sol's first term opened with consultations with barangay captains in Surigao del Norte's 21 municipalities, starting with hard-to-reach barangays, a process repeated later in the year for follow up, which was no mean feat, given the 335 barangays involved.

During Cora Malanyaon's five years as Davao City councilor she helped her province mates in tight financial straits, a generosity not lost on her kababayans who, in 2001, clamored that she run for Congress, the better to serve her home province. Four out of six mayors supported her bid, and on her second term she ran unopposed. But of her six years as legislator, she realized, "You can't realize your vision for the province (without) ... local governance". In 2007 she ran for governor, winning by a two-thirds majority.

### **Comprehensive development agenda**

After winning the governorship, Cora drafted a six-year development agenda that stressed *pagkain at kita* (food and income security) which she submitted to all stakeholders (including the provincial board, municipal mayors, congresspersons and NGOs) because it had to be owned by the entire province. This was a direct response to the negative development indicators that dogged the province, including high malnutrition rates and poor health services.

Sol's comprehensive development plan--HEALS Plus Convergence--covers health, education and environment, agriculture and aquaculture, livelihood and tourism, and social services.

Early on, Cora struck a conciliatory tone with the opposition, giving credit where it was due because "a leader at the helm of the province must be an



instrument of unity; more resistance means more delays (in approval and implementation of programs).” Sol, on the other hand, enrolled at the UP School of Governance because “formal learning is different, (it means) ... understanding the intricacies of taxation ... going back to online learning”.

Government can, and must, make life better for its people. It is this unswerving belief that guides both women in the long term and from day to day. Sol cites “poor service delivery, abusive leadership, mediocre performance, roads in disrepair, unfinished structures” as reasons for high insurgency rates in the province.

### Health as priority concern

Both women have targeted health as a priority concern. Barangay health stations are planned for each barangay in Davao Oriental with labor provided by the army and other agencies. As legislator, Cora was horrified by conditions at the provincial hospital and vowed to bring it up to par with the best private hospitals. She started with an outpatient department (OPD) primed by P2 million in provincial funds with the remaining P6 million sourced from Congress and other entities. Properly impressed, the Department of Health has refunded the governor for the project’s P8 million bill.

Cora has targeted P120 million as starting fund for a bigger hospital, debunking the notion that running a government hospital is a losing proposition and proving that it can be ran efficiently with self-liquidating operations. Davao Oriental constituents benefit from PhilHealth and the province’s earlier Madayaw PhilHealth, covering 35,000 indigent families with fees underwritten by the province, the congressional representative and the LGU.

With this determined focus on public health, Davao Oriental’s malnutrition rate of 17.7% in 2007 dipped to 4% in 2011, garnering for the province the *Pag-asa* Award for three consecutive years, and the *Golden Agila* Award in 2011 for nutrition. The provincial government has also focused on education (day care centers, alternative learning systems and technical-vocational education), socialized housing and disaster preparedness—for which it has received various other awards and citations, including the 2012 *Gawad Pamana ng Lahi* for distinction in the areas of health, revenue collection, peace and order, and agriculture.

### Livelihood, peace and security

Davao Oriental produces coconuts in abundance, but Cora rues the fact that coconuts as sole source of income encourages indolence. The coconut farmer harvests quarterly, and between harvests, takes out goods on loan at the dry goods store. Although income is inadequate, the farmer is not encouraged to change the state of things, happy with extended rest periods. Cora saw that a transformation in values was needed and pushed for a 15,000-hectare coconut demonstration farm intercropped with cacao.

With food and income security and the requisite social services, Cora hopes to sustain the “insurgency-free” status of the province. This is a continuing challenge since that New People’s Army presence is strong in the three provinces bordering Davao Oriental. The army’s Internal Peace and Security Plan (*Bayanihan*) program was piloted in the province to great success, with government and the military cooperating in bringing development projects to far-flung areas. Cora attributes this, as well as other development gains, to effective convergence and collaboration in all 183 barangays.

The entry point and bottom line is that development can and must be non-violent and non-confrontational. For this, Cora has received the *Gawad sa Kaunlaran* award from the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the highest distinction given by the AFP to government officials pursuing peace and development.

Such efforts have moved some left-leaning groups to declare Cora “*Utak ng Militarisasyon*” (Brains of Militarization). Unfazed, Cora says she is “not militarizing the province, but civilianizing the military”. A halfway house called Happy Home helps rebels in transition to civilian life, staffed by a composite group providing psychosocial, spiritual and other services. Linked to this are seminars in rural entrepreneurship development with the Department of Agriculture, and workshops in welding skills with the Technical Education Skills Development Authority, providing alternatives to the poor and marginalized, rebel and non-rebel alike.

### Compassion, understanding, patience

Sol Matugas’ new provincial hospital will be inaugurated in Surigao City later this year. How she raised the funds for the building, is a credit to her resourcefulness. Like Cora, money for Sol is not a problem, but a means to realize one’s vision. As she wryly puts it, “Money will not look for you; you will look for (the) money”.

Sol puts a premium on social services, linking the establishment of high schools, barangay health stations and livelihood programs to the fight against the insurgency. Show the other side of governance (to the rebels), she says, “Compassion, understanding, patience ... (rather than) running after them in offensives ...” She speaks of “soft approaches” which are non-violent such as education, albeit time-consuming, but which “strikes both heart and head”.

Nearly all the 11 mainland barangays of Surigao del Norte are impacted by the conflict, Sol notes. One plan is to put a nurse in 70 GIDA (geographically isolated and depressed areas) barangays. Sol also enjoins the Department of Interior and Local Governments to provide safe water. Diarrhea is a common problem and health programs are useless without potable water.

She also stresses the importance of PAMANA and military support for infrastructure such as roads and bridges that are essential for livelihood. The army's peace and development efforts have been met with threats. Sol has been told by the NPA, "There is too much militarization in the mountains. If you do not stop them we will submit you to a people's court and you will be convicted." But she is undeterred, and continues to welcome development projects from both PAMANA and the military.

Sol launched *Bayay Paglaum* (House of Hope) last year to provide former rebels the wherewithal to join the mainstream with livelihood and employment, scholarships for their children, health services, and others. Implementation however is on hold because while the army wants the returnees to settle in one place for easier monitoring, the ex-rebels prefer to be dispersed so they do not become easy targets of reprisal from their former comrades. Sol calls the armed conflict a "never ending story... but there should be an ending...with friendship...and a healthy trust in government."

### Participative governance

Participative governance is a hallmark of Sol's approach, a lesson she learned from a high school in economically-depressed northern Samar which topped the National College Achievement Test. More

important than money, she realized, are community support, parental commitment and the diligence of teachers.

Growing up on an island, Sol speaks of the traditional concept of government as "unreachable" and of gubernatorial visits from the mainland marked by "pompous ceremony". She has sought to change that concept starting with barangay dialogues. She is also building a provincial capitol in Siargao Island for greater accessibility of constituents and local leaders to the local government. Accessibility – "bringing government to the barangays" – is one prong of her governance style, another being convergence, or pooling the capabilities of various government units for social protection.

The building of day care and women's centers is another priority. Women are a forgotten group, she says, and have not been well served. Municipalities are given P1.5 million each for a women's center and they have been creative: one structure doubles as an evacuation center, another has sleeping and training facilities, another is engaged in baby food production, and a fourth is equipped with a decorticating machine for twine production.

What worries Sol these days is the discovery of Siargao as a surfing paradise and its growth as a tourist hub. While tourism has provided jobs to many and prosperity to some, Sol senses its underside. She notes the rise in dynamite fishing and its consequent environmental destruction, as tourism-related, and asks why resorts seem to thrive even off-season, when surfing and tourism are seasonal, wondering if this relates to the "underground economy" of sex tourism.

On mining – seven large-scale mining companies operate in the province –

Sol notes that the mining companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs help provide government with needed resources. But she is also aware of the deleterious effects of small-scale open pit mining such as siltation and dust, and has tried but failed to close them down. She welcomes the concept of "*minahan ng bayan*" as promulgated under R.A. 7076 or People's Small-Scale Mining Act of 1991.

The *babaylan* of pre-colonial times were empowered females with healing skills and political savvy. It is no accident that Sol Matugas and Cora Malanyaon have centered their governance on health and healing. And they have done the *babaylan* one better: not simply providing counsel to local leaders but wresting leadership and tackling the macho terrain of politics on their own terms.

These governors speak in different accents, set different priorities, say what they mean and mean what they say. Cora has banned the shameless practice of political self-promotion in public infrastructure projects; and demands that statistics and percentages be understandable to constituents. Sol awards public infrastructure projects directly to the community or LGU, cutting out corruption and hefty contractors' fees in the process. She has zero tolerance for tardiness.

Redefining governance and changing the rules of the game. This is politics for Sol Matugas and Corazon Malanyaon who are playing for high stakes and having fun, as well. But they also know there is life after politics. This, perhaps, is what constitutes the gender divide, taking power and leaving power willingly, knowing they have built on firm foundations. Cory Aquino did it first. And long before her, the *babaylan* knew that power wielded for good will endure. The *babaylan* spirit lives on. ☸



# Social Work and Peacebuilding

*The social workers of DSWD, the first responders in crisis and disasters, are also government's first peace envoys in the grass roots.*

By DIANE KATHRINA LEOMO

**IN JANUARY 2013**, on a highway in Compostela Valley, a woman repeatedly shouted at the top of her lungs in Bisaya:

*“Diri na kami sa habig. Diri na. Kung gusto niyo makipagistorya, istoryahan ta, Diri sa habig, indi naton iperwesyo kag ibang tawo. Tuyar ninro na pobre ang hinaharangan ninyo.”* (We are here. You wanted to talk to us. Let us talk. Let us talk by the side [of the highway]. Let us not make it inconvenient for the others [who also want to pass on the road] Your fellow poor are the ones you are blocking here.)”

It was a firm and urgent but gentle demand for dialogue with Barug Katawhan, a local militant NGO that had barred the highway. At barely five feet tall, Secretary Corazon Juliano-Soliman of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) stood tall before members of the organization who have alleged ties to the left.

Sec. Soliman recalls that since it was almost lunchtime, she pointed out that because the group was in the middle of the only road that leads to the market, the women would be too scared to go to market to buy food to feed their families for lunch. Because the group refused passage on the highway, some families would go hungry.

It takes a woman to see things from this perspective. For the by-standers and passers-by, it was a simple inconvenience. But a woman would understand it from the point of view of other women and the roles they have to fulfill.

Much has been said about the empowering role of women in the Philippine Peace Process, citing how women have broken the glass ceiling in the peace negotiations. The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process is headed by a woman. The Government's negotiating panels and the secretariats for the MILF and the CPP/NPA talks are also led by women.



Secretary Dinky Soliman: Peace must be just.

However, it is an accepted fact that, although agreements are reached at the table, much of the peace is actually won on the ground. And in this, the DSWD is at the forefront. Peace is won by social workers who trek up and down mountains, cross raging rivers, and walk for hours to ensure that social services are delivered to the farthest barangays. These unsung heroes and heroines are at the vanguard ensuring that government presence is felt in the most remote areas.

Secretary Soliman, or Dinky as she is known to the entire nation, understands that DSWD's mandate goes beyond providing relief goods, looking for lost children, and poverty reduction.

*“Isa kami sa mga ahensya na nakararating sa mga pinakaliblib na lugar, sa mga isla na hindi naabot ng maraming ahensya, hindi lang pagka may disaster. In fact, sa aming Pantawid Pamilya, lahat ng munisipyo ay covered. Karamihan sa mga mahihirap na aming tinutulungan ay nakatira sa mga geographically-isolated and disadvantaged areas o GIDA. Ang mga na-e-encounter namin dun, maliban sa kahirapan, ay ang mga non-state actors na nagnanais ding magbigay*

*ng alternatibo, sasabihing sila ang makakapagdala sa mga mahihirap ng pagbabago.* (We are one of the agencies that reach the most remote of areas, islands where many agencies have yet to go, and not only during disasters. In fact, our Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program covers all municipalities. Many of the poor we reach out to live in geographically-isolated and disadvantaged areas or GIDA. There we encounter non-state actors who also want to provide the poor with alternatives, claiming that they are ones who can bring about change.)”

### First responders

DSWD is usually the first responder after every calamity to ensure that the welfare of those affected by the most recent storm, earthquake or siege is looked after. Come hell or high water, in their bright red vests, lugging bags of relief goods, their job is to ensure that no one is left behind.

But DSWD’s work in calamities starts long before the eye of the storm hits. At the first announcement of an impending typhoon, DSWD personnel gather in their offices monitoring storm updates, packing cans of corned beef, packs of noodles and several kilos of rice in individual plastic bags to serve as initial relief packages for those who will need immediate support.

After the storm has passed, they are the first on the scene, dispensing relief goods to local government units and ensuring that the people affected by a typhoon do not feel neglected.

As Sec. Soliman points out, “We help everyone. It is our duty. We do not look at the political color, creed or background of people who are in need. Our mandate is to provide assistance to all vulnerable groups. Their political color, their creed, their faith is not a basis for our support. Everyone who needs help, legitimately, we will provide.”

### The Post-Pablo Looting Incident

Prescilla Razon, Regional Director of DSWD Field Office XI, reads from her diary recalling Typhoon Pablo that hit Northeastern Mindanao in 2012: “There were mixed feelings about Pablo. It was beyond imagination.”

*“Ilang oras makatapos kumalma si Pablo, andun na kami sa Davao Oriental—sa Boston, Cateel, Bagangga. The first three days namin, we were going from one funeral to the next dala-dala iyong mga relief para sa mga nasalanta.* (Hours after Pablo, we were already in different barangays of Davao Oriental—Boston, Cateel, Bagangga. During the first three days we were going from one funeral to the next carrying relief goods for those who were affected by the typhoon).”

Typhoon Pablo was one of the strongest typhoons to batter Mindanao, leaving countless dead and entire communities devastated in its wake. Torrential rains flattened entire villages, reducing stone posts to rubble.

A month after it hit, on that highway in Compostela Valley, Sec. Soliman listened to the demands of the members of Barug Katawhan. They were demanding that they be given 10,000 sacks of rice for distribution to those who, they claimed, have not yet received any. It was agreed that there would be a dialogue between DSWD Region XI and Barug Katawhan on rice distribution and on January 18, 2013, both groups signed an agreement on how the 10,000 sacks of rice were to be distributed.

On February 25, 2013, less than a month after that dialogue, as the sun was setting over Davao City over two months after typhoon Pablo, hordes of men, women and children arrived in buses and jeeps and stormed the DSWD Field Office XI, declaring that they had not received any support

from DSWD. In the guise of a program commemorating the EDSA revolution, Barug Katawhan and other militant groups staged a rally in front of the office demanding that they be given the sacks of rice that were being repacked in the office. They also accused DSWD of hoarding the rice and selling it.

Director Razon recalls, “What we were packing, those were for typhoon Crising. We knew that we had covered all the municipalities (affected by Pablo) yet they continued to claim that many were left unserved. If they claimed that they did not receive, then let’s get the list from them. *Gumawa na kami sa mga kartolina, ang laki-laki na nga ng mga iyon. Ang gagawin na lang ng mga lider ay ibigay sa amin ang mga pangalan.* (We prepared sheets of cartolina, big ones. All their leaders needed to do was to give us the names) and list down whatever issues and concerns they had against DSWD.”

Caught between a rock and a hard place, Dir. Razon stood firm.

“We were willing to give the 10,000 sacks of rice. But I stood firm in not releasing the 10,000 sacks without the list. I made it clear to the protesters that what they were claiming, these 10,000 sacks of rice, is equivalent to 12 million pesos. That is a lot of money and I am accountable for every centavo. Whatever resources the government gives out, it has to be duly accounted for. Imagine that’s 12.5 million pesos, that’s the money of the people. We have to be very careful. We have to have supporting documents to show that these were really given to the underserved, to those who we were unable to serve.”

There were accusations hurled at DSWD, claiming that they refused to help the group because of their political leanings. To this, Raquel Nuñez, Division Chief of DSWD FO 11’s Policy and Plans Unit, and Protection



Cluster Head of DSWD 11's Task Force Pablo responds, "*Pilipino pa rin tayo. Hindi mo pipiliin ang bibigyan kasi alam mo gutom na rin sila. At alam namin na kapag ang mga tao walang kinakain, papatayin ka talaga.* (We are all still Filipinos. You do not choose who you give service to because you know they are hungry too. And we know that when people are hungry, they could run amok)."

## Typhoon Yolanda

The latter part of 2013 was a difficult time for the Philippines. The country took one hit after the other. There were the siege of Zamboanga by the MNLF in September, the Bohol earthquake in October and Typhoon Yolanda that hit Eastern Visayas in November.

Nothing could have prepared the nation for Typhoon Yolanda. Months after it hit, its grim aftermath continues to loom over the Tacloban sky. Headless coconut trees stand as painful reminders of the strongest storm to have made landfall in recorded history.

For those who survived, it was the longest day of their lives. At DSWD, most of the staff are women, social workers who are also mothers of families that were in harm's way. But they had to be on disaster duty on the eve of the storm, clutching their rosary beads praying that while they worked, their families would be safe.

Some DSWD Field Office VIII staff refused to talk about their experience during the typhoon, unable to come to grips with the pain and suffering Yolanda has wreaked on their lives.

Maria Theresa B. Costelo, a member of FO-8's Disaster Monitoring Team, recalls. "*I was helpless watching the storm. Binabasa ko nuon iyon sa internet, sa Twitter, sa TV habang minomonitor ko ang bagyo. Pero hindi*

*siya lumihis ng direksyon, tatama pa rin sa Leyte. Nung bagyo, ramdam ko nun, humahampas na ang mga puno sa mga bubong namin dito sa FO. Kumakatok na sa mga bubong.*" (I was reading about it on the internet, on Twitter, on the TV, while I was monitoring the storm. But it didn't change direction. It would still hit Leyte. During the storm, I felt the trees already knocking on the roof of the office)."

Ms. Costelo manages to laugh, "*Para akong security guard na naka-life vest sa loob ng office. Pinapanuod ko ang mga staff na matulog habang ako hindi magkanda-ugaga dahil umiikot na ang hangin sa labas. Naisip ko nga, ay naku, mababasa na mga bigas sa relief.* (I was like a security guard, wearing a life vest in the office. I was watching the staff sleep while I was restless because the winds were howling. And I thought, the rice for relief would get wet.)"

She never imagined that they would end up eating relief goods after the storm. "*Hindi ko maisip na kakain kami ng relief goods makatapos ang bagyo. Iyong pagkain namin nun parang meatballs, corned beef na binibilog-bilog, kasama iyong relief na rice. Iyon na ang pananghalian naming nun at hapunan*

(Our food was meatballs made of corned beef, with rice for relief)." That was our lunch and our dinner)."

It is difficult to imagine how the DSWD staff were still the first to respond. They were also survivors, after all. They told stories about tying themselves to lamp posts so they would not be swept away, and wading in waist-deep sea water in their underwear to get to the DSWD office.

"*Minsan masakit lang. Kahit binibigyan mo ang mga tao, sila pa rin ang aangal. Gagawin mo na ang lahat, lahat ng mga suicide mission at mag-swimming-swimming, para lang hindi nila masabi na wala lang sila. Pero andiyan pa rin talaga ang ibang mga tao, lalo na iyong mga nasa kabila, na maging detractors ba. Sasabihin sa mga tao, walang pake ang gobyerno sa kanila, mga ganyan. Pero hindi ka pa rin titigil. Hindi ba dito naman nagsisimula ang peace ba? Yung masabi ng mga tao na andiyan tayo para sa kanila* (It hurts, sometimes. In spite of what you give them, they still complain. You do everything you can, including suicide missions -- swimming just so they would not say that you have forgotten them. But there are still those, especially from the other side, who continue to



Relief goods for Typhoon Crising victims as they were being seized by members of Barug Katawhan.



be detractors. They tell the people that the government does not care for them. But still you do not stop. Isn't it here where peace starts, when people can say that we, the government, is there for them?)."

It can be a thankless job. People forget that government workers are survivors too. They get tired providing services, going from place to place, lugging relief goods from one site to the next, constantly being intimidated by the rebels. But Ms. Costelo is undeterred. "*Siyempre tinatakot kami ganyan. Pero wala kaming pinapanigan. Hindi namin pinapairal ang politika. Lahat naman tayo ay biktima din.* (Of course, they would scare us. We would not take sides, though. We do not let politics rule us. We are all victims here)."

### Social work and peacebuilding

DSWD personnel know that their work means more than just poverty alleviation and relief provision. OIC Regional Director Nestor Ramos of DSWD FO-8 says about social work: "The root cause of conflict is poverty. With our efforts, we try to alleviate poverty. We do not care about poor road networks or how hard is it to go there. Our staff goes beyond what is needed of them. Our women workers, they take extra efforts. We climb fallen logs, push these to the side, just to make sure that no one is left behind."

He adds, "*Mas mahal ng mga tao ang mga programa ng gobyerno kapag sa kanila nanggaling. Marami sa mga proyekto ng DSWD gaya ng KC-PAMANA (Kalahi-CIDSS-Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan) at SLP (Sustainable Livelihood Program) ay demand-driven by them (People identify more with the programs by the government if they come from the people themselves. Many of DSWD's projects, like KC-PAMANA and SLP are demand-driven by them).*"

Kristi Lou Sarabosquez, a DSWD Community Facilitator in Maragusan, Compostela Valley describes DSWD's contribution to peacebuilding. "*Uya kami na dara na baril o bala. Pumapasok kami sa mga areas naming ID lang ng DSWD ang suot namin para ipakita sa kanila na hindi sila nakalimutan ng gobyerno.* (We have no bullets or guns. We go to our areas wearing only our DSWD IDs to show them that we -- the government -- have not forgotten them.)"

### Using stereotypes to their own advantage

Culture and stereotypes have framed social work as women's work. With more women working in the profession, it is easy to generalize that social workers are women. And because women are compassionate and patient, social work comes naturally to them. DSWD has used this stereotype to its advantage.

Natividad Sequito, KALAHÍ-CIDSS-PAMANA Regional Coordinator for DSWD FO 8I, elaborates: "*Matatawa ka na lang e. Iyong mga municipal mayors sa mga KC-PAMANA areas, diyan sa mga Matuginao, San Jose De Buan, etc., sasabihin 'Please, give me women' dahil alam nila na hindi pinagduduhan, na talagang tiga DSWD, na ang gusto ay talagang mag serbisyo. Pag lalake, mas marami sa mga nasa kabila pinagkakamalang military iyong mga iyon. Tsaka mas pasensyosa ang mga babae. Nandun na rin na nasa culture natin na ang mga babae ay pinalalaking mahinahon at pasensyosa.* (You just have to laugh. Some municipal mayors from the KC-PAMANA areas, like Matuginao and San Jose De Buan would demand that their community facilitators are women because it is beyond doubt that these women from DSWD are there to provide service. When they have men, there are those on the other side of the fold who mistake them for military. And

women are known for their patience. Perhaps, it is because of our culture. Women are raised to be calm and patient)."

Not only in the selection of personnel is the gender stereotype used by DSWD to its advantage. Rebecca Santamaria, Division Chief of DSWD FO-11's Protective Service Unit, recalls the Pablo looting incident: "*Tanda ko nun, marami sa aming mga staff, mga babaeng staff ang pupunta sa mga nag-rally diyan sa baba tapos kunyari makiki-chismis lang. Siyempre iisipin ng mga iba sa mga nag-rally mga chismosa lang. Pero iyon na, paraan na namin iyon alamin kung ano ba talaga ang gusto nila. Ayaw nila kami kausapin as DSWD staff e* (I remember many of our female staff would go down to the rally and chat with the rallyists as if they were just gossiping. The rallyists would think these women were just gossips. But that was our way of getting information about what they wanted because they wouldn't talk to us as DSWD staff)."

### We're all in this together

Sec. Soliman connects the DSWD's task of social protection with peacebuilding: "Peace-building is rooted in the people's rights and welfare. If their rights are protected and their needs are responded to, both by the local and the national government, they will keep the peace and the desire to work for it will be stronger. If, on the other hand, their needs and their voices are not respected, are not heard, they have every reason to be angry and be easily agitated. For us in DSWD, to achieve lasting peace, it has to be just. Just and lasting peace is achieved by addressing the problems that beset the poorest communities, and addressing these problems means involving the people in the change and the solution to improve the quality of their lives." ♀

# Charlotte Matias and Jessica Banganan: Softening the Ground in the Cordillera

*After a difficult start, two young women Project Development Officers managed to earn the trust and respect of former CPLA rebels in the Benguet Saguday Livelihood Association, Inc. (BSLAI).*

By MARJ IBÁÑEZ



Jessica Banganan



Charlotte Matias

**TRANSFORMATION:** *to change something completely and usually in a good way (Merriam Webster Dictionary)*

On July 4, 2011, President Benigno Aquino Jr. witnessed the signing of the peace agreement between the Philippine Government and the Cordillera Bodong Administration – Cordillera People’s Liberation Army (CBA-CPLA) in Malacañang. The agreement gave flesh and brought to full circle the Mt. Data (Sipat or ceasefire) Peace Accord signed in 1987 by the CBA-CPLA under the leadership of Fr. Conrado Balweg and the newly-installed democratic government under the President’s mother, President Corazon C. Aquino.

The 2011 Agreement, entitled “Towards the Closure of CPLA as an Armed Group and its Transformation into a Potent, Socio-Economic, Unarmed Force”, has five components: the final disposition of arms and forces; the transformation of the CBA-CPLA into a potent, socio-economic unarmed force; socio-economic reintegration of CPLA members through employment or livelihood/enterprise development; inter-municipal and inter-barangay development; and the documentation of the CBA-CPLA struggle.

According to Sec. Teresita Quintos Deles, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, the 2011 Agreement

“entailed an essential shift in the way the CPLA views itself – no longer as an armed group with a command structure that has commanders as leaders and combatants as members, but as a potent socio-economic, unarmed force that can directly make a difference in the lives of their families and communities.”

Thus far, some 328 former CPLA members have been employed as forest guards and another 168 of them or their next-of-kin have been integrated into the AFP. A total of 337 firearms have been turned in. Development projects such as communal irrigation systems, farm-to-market roads, water works and school buildings are currently being implemented in more than 81 communities in the Cordillera under this agreement.

For those who opted to pursue livelihood projects, the government has committed to provide technical assistance and entrepreneurial development through DSWD’s Community Driven Enterprise Development (CDED) program. CDED is a series of seminars aimed at building the capabilities of people’s organizations to pursue social enterprises that will help them break the cycle of poverty.

One group of former CPLA combatants in Benguet who availed of the livelihood component has transformed its command structure into a people’s organization, the Benguet Saguday Livelihood Association, Inc. (BSLAI) that has chosen to invest the P2.7 million fund allocated for them in the 2011 Agreement in organic chicken raising, organic feeds processing and farm inputs trading.

As the administrator of the project fund, Governor Nestor

Fongwan is closely monitoring its implementation. He has been meeting with BSLAI regularly and has attended some of their seminars.

To facilitate its Community Driven Enterprise Development (CDED) program in the area, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in the CAR, in coordination with OPAPP, assigned two young women, Charlotte Matias and Jessica Banganan as program development officers (PDOs) in Benguet.

“In the beginning, people in the neighborhood wondered why we were helping them. *Bakit daw kami sumasama sa CPLA?* (Why were we with CPLA?),” Charlotte says. She observed that the former CPLA rebels suffered from a kind of stigma among their neighbors. But for the former CPLA combatants in Benguet, the 2011 Agreement was their only opportunity to shed off their former image as warriors and make good economically through legitimate means.

Jessica Banganan recalls, “*Ang tagal-tagal daw nila itong hinintay.* To them, the negotiations for the 2011 Agreement, its signing, and its final implementation has been a long, long wait for the fulfillment of a long-overdue promise of government. Now that it is here, they said they don’t want to waste this once-in-a-lifetime chance.”

Last year, as part of their work in Benguet, Charlotte and Jessica facilitated a series of three-day CDED seminars for BSLAI consisting of sessions on values clarification, time and financial management, value chain analysis, basic microenterprise management skills, among others. After the training seminars, they continued to accompany the group with mentoring and coaching.

Charlotte relates, “In the beginning, it was really difficult. The former CPLA members were different from the other groups we have worked with. They were more suspicious, more sensitive and strict about their ‘command’ structure. You had to go through their zone commander and be sensitive to instruction from the leadership higher than them. They also had an unpredictable behavior—they could get upset and irritated by sudden changes, or by some reason we couldn’t understand.”

She adds, “Their behavior sometimes caused us to feel hurt. But, more than that was the stronger sense of curiosity and the need to understand why they were behaving the way they did. What deprivations must they have experienced in the past?”

Jessica relates, “We worked with them for only one year but it felt like five years. The days were long and exhausting, especially at times when some of the challenges appeared too difficult to overcome.”

The PDOs were not simply implementing a program. They were implementing a difficult program within a complex setting aimed at building peace and transforming former combatants. This reality dawned on them during their interaction with the women in the community.

“While the men seemed always angry and irritable in the beginning, when we looked at their relationships with their wives, we saw a different reality,” says Jessica. Charlotte observed that towards their wives, the men were soft-spoken, gentle, and understanding. And the wives, to their pleasant surprise, were supportive of their “difficult” husbands.



"I would look at the women and the children and my heart would break. They have been through extreme situations of neglect . . . so much more has to be done knowing the extent of their unmet needs. I could understand the reasons for the anger and discontent sometimes," says Jessica.

To move the processes forward, they learned to meet BSLAI leaders halfway.

"It is not only important to achieve goals; it is also important to agree on the processes for achieving them. They have their own ideas and ways of doing things. We have to listen and find a compromise, otherwise, we will get stuck," Jessica explains.

After the series of training seminars, the PDOs would visit the communities to meet with BSLAI members and leaders and guide them through the initial stages of doing business. These included ensuring transparency in the purchase of chicken housing materials, the setting up of financial systems and records, and linking with markets and potential partners and support agencies.

"What helped us see hope in this endeavor was the readiness of the group, especially the leaders, to focus and give time to the business," Charlotte explains. "They have really been giving their best to make this succeed, sacrificing their own family time and employment opportunities."

"It also helped that they were able to express their anger freely with us because we were women. It would have been different had we been men," observes Charlotte. She saw that the leaders tended to keep their emotions in check when they were

with their male counterparts, to avoid open conflict.

BSLAI has only four women members but they have a significant voice in the organization, according to the DSWD officers. One of them is actively involved in decision-making, especially in research and networking with other agencies and partners.

Charlotte and Jessica have completed their assignment with BSLAI and are gradually phasing out their services, but the BSLAI leaders have written OPAPP and DSWD requesting for their continued stay in the area.

This request for their extension surprised the two women. After all, in the beginning, they were regarded by the former CPLA members as "*taong gobyerno*" and therefore "corrupt".

"*Siguro nakita na nila na hindi porke gobyerno, walang magagawang tama* (They must have realized that just because we're from government doesn't mean we won't be able to do anything right)," they say, smiling.

Relationships have also changed for the better in the community. Thomas Tanacio, former CPLA zone commander in Bakun recently got elected as barangay chairman. Charlotte said this could be indicative of the way people's views have changed towards the former CPLA combatants.

BSLAI officers, Carlito Payangdo (President), Ramon Lid-ayan (administrative officer) and members Nestor Guindayan and Daisy Lee say that their organization now has a shared vision on how to proceed with their business, how to divide the profits, and how to re-invest them. They have been

meeting regularly to make collective decisions. The BSLAI officers note down all their activities and every small expense in a logbook that is open for all of their members to see. The BSLAI disburses and liquidates the funds according to government accounting rules and regulations. As in any organization, they have had difficult internal dynamics, but these have been settled collectively.

They observed that some former CPLA members who used to have doubts about the peace process are also starting to change their attitude, strengthening the hopes of the BSLAI officers. And their neighbors have begun to appreciate the developments brought about by the 2011 Agreement.

All over the Cordillera, similar undertakings are being implemented in CPLA areas covered by the 2011 Agreement. Currently, there are ten other people's organizations in the five other provinces that represent the transformed organization of the former CPLA. But it is the BSLAI that has reached the most advanced stage in social enterprise.

Much more remains to be done before their undertaking can be regarded a success, but for DSWD PDOs Charlotte Matias and Jessica Banganan, the trust, respect and understanding they have earned from the former rebels after a very difficult start are enough reward for now. While the former CPLA members have gone through some changes for the better, the DSWD officers admit that they, too, have matured because of this experience.

They know only too well that transformation is not a one-way street and that change works best when it is a mutual and negotiated process. ♀

# Gender-responsive justice system key to sustainable peace



Former UN Under-Secretary-General Amb. Anwarul K. Chowdhury and Philippine Representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights Amb. Rosario G. Manalo both addressed gender advocates from various sectors during the “Workshop on Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN” held at the Mandarin Hotel in Makati in December last year.

**MANILA** – Sensitivity to the needs of women in the justice system is vital to ensuring sustainable peace, according to a former United Nations (UN) official.

“We need to bear in mind that a gender-responsive justice system is an integral element of effective peace processes and a necessary component of nation-building activities in post-conflict situations,” said former UN Undersecretary-General Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury at the “Workshop on Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN” held at the Mandarin Hotel in Makati in December last year.

Chowdhury added that women’s participation in the peace process is also important as the development of a gender-responsive justice system “is one of the priority concerns they raise.”

“Such a justice system helps to break the continuing cycle of violence

against women, and ensures their meaningful participation not only in peace negotiations, but in rebuilding their communities and in transforming their societies,” he stated.

In his keynote speech, Chowdhury remarked that women have always been seen as “helpless victims of wars and conflicts” and their role on cultivating peace in their communities “has often been overlooked.” He added that in reality, women have proven their capacities as peacemakers.

“They assumed activist roles during conflicts while holding together their families and communities. At the grassroots and community levels, women have organized to resist militarization, to create space for dialogue and moderation and to weave together the shattered fabric of society.”

“This should make us determined to ensure that women have more

avenues to promote peace, not only at the local level but also at the national, regional and global level,” said Chowdhury who, during his time as president of the UN Security Council, worked towards the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which recognizes the role of women in peace and security.

On the same note, Ambassador Rosario G. Manalo, Philippine Representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), also stressed that women should not be seen only as victims of war but critical participants in peace building.

“Women’s participation is vital for conflict prevention work, and women have a right to fully participate in decision-making regarding the future of their communities and to have barriers to that decision-making based on gender discrimination fully dismantled,” she stated.

Manalo related that there have been efforts in the international community to define issues of women in different stages of conflict situations. “It is however critical for ASEAN to look into the impact of conflict on women and their human rights from a regional perspective, and to identify relevant key issues that will comprise its own regional

agenda on Women, Peace and Security,” she added.

The two-day workshop was aimed at raising awareness of the human rights issues faced by women in conflict and post-conflict scenarios, and explore opportunities to move the women, peace and security agenda forward in the ASEAN.

It was attended by representatives from the AICHR, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, Ministries of Defense, national human rights institutions, the ASEAN Secretariat, and civil society organizations from the region. ♀

## Women share insights on normalization, submit recommendations to BTC



Jasmin Nario-Galace (in pink), co-convenor of the Women Engaged in Action (WE Act) on 1325, and Mohagher Iqbal, chair of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front peace panel, hold out a copy of the results of the recent consultation series conducted by WE Act 1325 among 200 Mindanao women who shared their insights and recommendations on matters related to the normalization process pursued by the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. (Photo by We ACT 1325)

**MANILA** – Some 200 women from the proposed core territory of the envisioned Bangsamoro region voiced out their insights on the normalization process pursued by the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

In four separate consultations led by the Women Engaged in Action (WE Act) on 1325, Moro, Lumad, and Christian women from Lanao, Maguindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga shared their thoughts on normalization, particularly on issues, such as decommissioning, addressing arms proliferation and misuse, and transitional justice.

“These consultations were done to bring to the fore women’s

perspectives which are traditionally on the margins and not mainstreamed in peace documents,” said Jasmin Nario-Galace, co-convenor of WE Act 1325, a network of women’s groups who actively collaborated with the government in the formulation of the National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 that recognizes women’s capacity to make decisions on peace and security issues.

Galace said the consultations were conducted from September 2013 to February 2014.

She added that the results of the consultations were submitted last March 6, 2014 to the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, the body mandated to draft the Bangsamoro

Basic Law which will formalize the establishment of the Bangsamoro political entity.

Recommendations included those on protection of human rights, arms control and decommissioning, policing structure, conflict resolution in communities, transitional justice, and participation and representation of indigenous peoples and Moro women, among others.

The series of consultations were part of the Women Working for Normalization project supported by the Australian Government. Also involved in the initiative were the Nisa ul Haqq fi Bangsamoro, Al Mujadillah Development Foundation, Inc., Teduray Lambangian Women’s Organization, Kutawato Council for Justice and Peace, and Pinay Kilos. ♀



## Gender and Peace Events 2014

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<b>MARCH</b>	<b>1-31</b>	National Women's Month
	<b>8</b>	UN International Women's Day Theme: "Equality for women is progress for all."
		National Women's Day
	<b>1st Week</b>	National Women's Week
	<b>12-18</b>	Bangsamoro Week of Peace
	<b>16</b>	Anniversary of the Signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL)
	<b>4th Week</b>	Protection and Gender-Fair Treatment of the Girl Child Week
	<b>27</b>	Signing of the GPH-MILF Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro
<b>JUNE</b>	<b>23</b>	UN International Widows' Day
<b>JULY</b>	<b>4</b>	Anniversary of the Signing of the GPH-CBA-CPLA Memorandum of Agreement
<b>AUGUST</b>	<b>12</b>	International Humanitarian Law Day
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	<b>1-30</b>	National Peace Consciousness Month
	<b>2</b>	Anniversary of the Signing of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement
	<b>12</b>	National Day of Prayer for Peace and Reconciliation
	<b>13</b>	Anniversary of the Signing of the GRP-CPLA Mt. Data Peace Accord (Joint Memorandum of Agreement to a Cessation of Hostilities)
	<b>21</b>	UN International Day of Peace
<b>OCTOBER</b>	<b>2</b>	UN International Day of Non-Violence
	<b>11</b>	UN International Day of the Girl Child
	<b>15</b>	Anniversary of the Signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro
		UN International Day of Rural Women
<b>NOVEMBER</b>	<b>19</b>	World Day Prevention of Abuse and Violence Against Children and Youth
		UN Universal Children's Day
	<b>25</b>	UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
	<b>Last Week</b>	Mindanao Week of Peace
<b>DECEMBER</b>	<b>1st Week</b>	
	<b>6</b>	Anniversary of the Signing of the GRP-RPM-P/RPA/ABB Peace Agreement
	<b>10</b>	Human Rights Day



## OPAPP

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