

Nonviolent Peaceforce

in the Philippines



Jasmin Teodoro, Regional Programme Officer, with Child Protection Project Coordinator Francisca da Silva doing their rounds in one barangay to verify children in need of protection during the Zamboanga crisis (main). Smoke coming from Zamboanga city as a result of the MNLF attack (inset, as seen from Zamboanga Boulevard).



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Editorial

Welcome to the fifth issue of the Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) Philippines Quarterly Newsletter.

First of all, we would like to express our sincere sympathy to the victims of typhoon Yolanda. As NP is not present in the Visayas, we encourage our friends to support the relief efforts of the Red Cross.

Meanwhile, October 2, the birthday of the late Mahatma Gandhi, has been declared by the United Nations as the International Day of Nonviolence. In its commemoration, Gandhi reminds us that "non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man."

At the very core of our unarmed civilian peacekeeping work is the principle of nonviolence that translates to but is not limited to tolerance, respect, and dialogue. These tenets are the cornerstones of our work on the ground—on how we interact with the communities we engage with.

As a new chapter for the Organization begins with the appointment of our new CEO, Doris Mariani, we hope to reach more and more communities and foster the building of peace in the areas where we work in Mindanao. In this issue, we talk with Ms. Mariani about her first impressions of NP in the Philippines, and what her immediate plans for the organization are.

Truly, the mettle of our mission was tested during the crisis in Zamboanga in September. Our Regional Programme Officer, assisted by a response team from our main office, recalls the ordeal that plunged her very own city into a crisis.

We also feature our peacekeepers in Basilan and Sulu. They share their stories of working in the field.

The team concentrated on helping children in conflict with the law (CICL) and liaised with different agencies for this purpose. They also conducted an internally displaced persons (IDP) assessment to identify people who had been forced out of their dwellings by the conflict.

In addition, two of our peacekeepers from our Maguindanao field site (MFT) share how the paper they presented at the World Conference on Humanitarian Studies in Istanbul last October relates to their work on the ground. They presented a paper on 'Supporting Local Capacities of Conflict-Affected Communities,' based on their experiences in the field. Our Lanao field team (LFT), meanwhile, has opened a protection site, which is meant as a safe space for the communities surrounding it.

While we also welcome three new colleagues, this publication's editorial team would like to bid farewell as both of us are leaving NP at the end of the year.

We trust that the colleagues who will take over will continue to bring you captivating quarterly updates on NP's work in the Philippines.

Happy New Year!

Paul Mettler
Country Director

NP CEO talks about our work in PH and her immediate priorities for the organization

Some weeks ago, fresh from her visit to Mindanao, recently appointed NP CEO Doris Mariani said that for her—“work on the ground cements the peace process.”

She added that NP’s work in the Philippines has allowed to bring a “unique protection aspect” to the table, especially since field staff live in communities in various parts of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Ms. Mariani also said that she was “impressed with the staff in the field” who live in “real hardship situations.” But despite this, she observed, it was because of the staff’s “dedication, commitment and their hard work that NP has gained such acceptance” in the communities we work with.

Working with the grassroots, systematic partnering

Working with grassroots organizations and local people is at the very heart of NP’s work on the ground in Mindanao. Doris articulated that because the field staff are “in these communities day in and day out, NP has gained acceptance, we are trusted, we are there with the people, and it definitely sets us apart.”

She added that because of this relationship, “our offices and our staff are frequently called upon to help others facilitate relations at the community level, so we very much play that role of linking other organizations and the community.”

The ability to act as a channel between other humanitarian organizations and the communities we work is, according to her, “very much NP’s strength and uniqueness.”

But she admits that though this is one of NP’s strengths, there is a need to “partner with some of these organizations in a better, a more systematic way.”

With this, she said that the question that arises for the future is “while still maintaining our

niche of providing civilian protection and preventing conflict, how can we form partnerships with other organizations that could address some of those other needs, how can we provide a more holistic way of helping

people?”

Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping: Maximizing its use on the ground

Another strength is the organization’s use of unarmed civilian peacekeeping (UCP) in conflict zones around the world. Although UCP is not exclusive to NP, Doris said she believes that the time for UCP has come especially since in conflicts nowadays, “the casualties are mostly the civilians, the women and the children.”

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Doris talks to Col. Donald Gumiran, 7th Infantry Battalion chief and other local partners in North Cotabato as Country Director Paul Mettler looks on.

Furthermore, it is in the Philippines where the organization has been the longest and where it has used UCP as a tool for “conflict prevention and civilian protection in the context of an armed conflict.” She added that because “people know what we do, we have been able to maximize the use of UCP on the ground.”

Continued cooperation and applying lessons regionally

With NP being in Mindanao since 2007, Doris shared that when she met local partners, “they expressed their desire for continued cooperation for capacity building.” She added that “as we move forward in the Philippines, it is important for us to focus on how we can strengthen our partner organizations because when the expatriates leave one day, local people will be left behind and they are the ones who have to develop their own solutions to the local problems. It is therefore very important that we give them all the tools we possibly can, and provide them with training to strengthen their local civil society organizations (CSOs).”

Doris hopes lessons learned from NP’s experience of working in the Philippines will be “applied regionally.” She also pointed out that it is precisely because of NP’s work in the Philippines that the organization was invited to “Myanmar where we are just beginning the new programme.”

Moving forward, immediate priorities

Aside from a regional approach, Doris said that first on her list of priorities was to “to develop an NP global strategy,” since “the organization now has field operations in the Philippines and South

Sudan, is starting in Myanmar, and has a small program in the Caucasus which it is trying to expand.”

To be able to come up with an NP global strategy, she hopes to “get input from all of our staff – and look at the world and analyze conflicts and see where NP should be.”

She said the

question that needed to be addressed is “within the constraints of our resources, what should be our global strategy?”

Her second priority is to give attention to “NP’s financial health.” Spoken like an economist who has spent half of her professional career in international economic development, she said “we need to prioritize our fundraising and business development efforts to make sure that we get the best possible return on our investment.”

Next on her list is to “look at the organization and how we organize ourselves internally to best implement the strategy and do the fundraising.”

Lastly, with the success of the Early Warning-Early Response (EWER) mechanism, Doris would like to explore “how we can harness technology to make our work better” in such initiatives.



Responding to a crisis in her own city

Surreal. This was how NP Regional Programme Officer Jasmin Teodoro described what happened to her city, Zamboanga, in September.

Jasmin said that she felt that although she had been able to respond in other areas of armed conflict in her area of responsibility, including Basilan and Sulu (through various initiatives, particularly focused on monitoring Grave Child Rights Violations-GCRVs), she said “I didn’t know how to respond in Zamboanga—I couldn’t imagine it happening in my very own city.” What was going through her head that time was that “Zamboanga is not in armed conflict.”

Remembering the first day

After gathering her thoughts but still recognizing that what happened to Zamboanga really came as a surprise, Jasmin called up some contacts and they agreed to meet at the *Sanggunian* which was close to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) office where some of the staff of the mayor also went. This was during the first day of the crisis, September 9.

Once gathered there, they were all hoping what happened would be over the day after. Jasmin then proceeded to alert NP’s Main Office in Cotabato City by sending an email summarizing the information she had gathered so far.

Since the grandstand was nearby, Jasmin proceeded to go there with a friend from DSWD. Once at the grandstand, she realized how serious the situation was looking at the number of the people there. Then she knew that “something was terribly wrong.”

She saw some children being carried down from a dump truck. Later on during the night, she vividly recalled how an old woman passed by in front of her



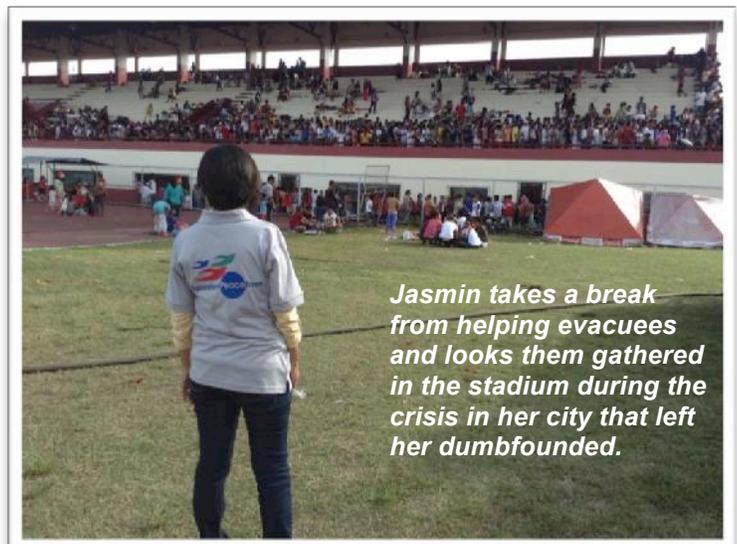
bringing her goat and it really struck her because people were going to the grandstand with all they had—for their survival.

Networking and consolidated response

After seeing the number of people grow to about four to five thousand in the grandstand at about 5 pm the same day, Jasmin decided to call an NP partner on child protection initiatives, the Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention Network (CAPIN). Upon meeting, they prepared hot meals for the evacuees and Jasmin, assisted by her husband, also provided old tarpaulin for the children to lie on.

During the succeeding days, Jasmin was in close contact with the DSWD and monitored reports of GCRVs while the armed conflict was ongoing. She visited evacuation centers to personally assess child protection needs and verify cases of children that needed attention. Jasmin also regularly attended meetings with local civil society organizations (CSOs), government structures, DSWD, PNP and AFP to be in the loop on what was happening.

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Jasmin takes a break from helping evacuees and looks them gathered in the stadium during the crisis in her city that left her dumbfounded.



Jasmin (top, right), Jeya and Francisca in a meeting with DSWD Secretary Dinky Soliman and her colleagues.

Seeing that the crisis was far from over, Jasmin told NP Main office that they should send her reinforcements to be able to assist her in the verification and monitoring of child protection issues that had arisen from the situation.

The NP team together with Jasmin then met DSWD Secretary Dinky Soliman to inform her of NP's mandate for MRM-GCRVs. During the next few days, while monitoring reports on GCRVs and child protection issues, the team conducted a rapid needs assessment in three evacuation centers, namely: Boalan Elementary school, Ebenezer Gymnasium and Cawa-cawa seaside. The result of the assessment was then forwarded to the concerned agencies.

Assisting children in conflict with the law

Since the Zamboanga peninsula, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi tawi (ZamBaSulTa) team's main focus is on child protection, the team intervened with a number of cases of children in conflict with the law to ensure that they were given due process and were not incarcerated in any detention facility with adults.

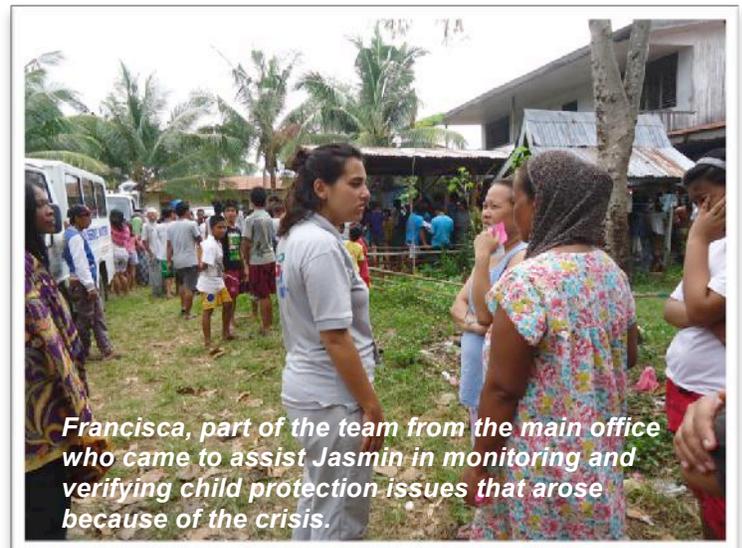
The team was able to successfully assist some children in conflict with the law (CICL) who were then transferred to the CICL facility in the province. They also continuously checked on the condition of children while at the CICL facility. While talking to one child in Tausug before he was transferred to the CICL facility, Jasmin was struck because he sobbed while he shared his story.

Advocate for women and children

Jasmin, who is founding Executive Director of an NGO for women, called Pinay Kilos (Pink), said that working for NP was a big opportunity because it allows her to work in the area of her personal advocacy for women and children. It is perhaps in cases like assisting CICLs that she has found fulfillment in responding to the crisis that happened in her own city.

She considers the Zamboanga crisis her most challenging experience with NP and she takes to heart "every child protection issue and concern" that she deals with on behalf of the organization.

Jasmin, who is also a mother of three young children, said that for her the most important thing while doing her work was that she had a "family who supports and understands."



Francisca, part of the team from the main office who came to assist Jasmin in monitoring and verifying child protection issues that arose because of the crisis.

Peacekeeper's Profile- In the line of duty: Muhti Hashim Abdulla

If there was one incident Muhti Hashim Abdulla will not forget, it was when in September this year while there was an armed conflict in Lamitan, Basilan, a teacher with a one-year old baby approached him to ask for help to be brought to a safer place. He took them to an evacuation camp and once there, the teacher offered to pay him but he declined and said that what he did was part of his work with NP—helping to protect children. The teacher thanked him profusely. He said this experience had made him realize how NP has been able to help in their area.

Muhti has been a local leader in Basilan for quite some time before joining NP as a National Civilian Peacekeeper (NCP) in 2011. He was formerly the provincial coordinator of the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS), which was one of NP's partners on the ground. When asked why he joined NP, he said that he wanted to support the organization's work because he believed that NP's role in Basilan was to help local NGOs, to network with them, and to assist in working on the ground.

Working on the ground—trust is crucial

While being a local can prove advantageous in working in a community, Muhti said that for him “trust is crucial” and one must “never promise” something which cannot be delivered. He said that in his work, being truthful with the communities enabled him to

gain their “trust and confidence.”

Being alone to cover 11 municipalities and two cities in Basilan is an uphill battle and Muhti said the best part of working with NP was “field monitoring.” This is because he believes that the organization's “proactive presence on the ground helps facilitate the delivery of relief to local communities; thus building trust with the communities that we work with.”

He recalled that there was one instance following that fire in Lamitan in September when 100 families in a *sitio* had not received any relief goods. Muhti followed up with the concerned agency for three days and on the third day, he was relieved to hear that aid had arrived in that *sitio*. He said that this incident proved to him that through the efforts of “NP staff, help will reach those who need it.”

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Muhti Abdulla during his field monitoring—earning the peoples trust and keeping it.

He also added that because of this perseverance, “patrolling everyday, visiting and revisiting, internally displaced persons (IDP) camps” NP was known in the province.

Striving to protect children in the community

In his work as NCP, Muhti along with his colleagues in the Zamboanga peninsula, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-tawi (ZamBaSulTa) region are especially focusing on child protection with the support of UNICEF. Muhti said that among the changes in the community because of the work of NP and its partners on the ground, there were fewer grave child rights violations (GCRVs).

This may be a result of conducting Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and Grave Child Rights Violation (GCRVs) orientations in conflict-affected areas and consistently monitoring the situation of the children in communities with partners.

Mostly, the ZamBaSulTa team gives workshops on MRM and GCRVs to public school teachers, which include role playing and examples of situations which may arise and must be reported to authorities and concerned organizations.

He also said that while visiting IDP evacuation camps, he asked them how their condition was and he also verified if there are children who needed medical attention.

When asked how NP helped in ensuring the protection of children, he explained that “NP helps by giving response to victims of GCRVs through reporting of the national staff to the main office. The main office will then pass the information to the authorities concerned as well as to the UNICEF.”

Moreover, about the ‘big picture’ of NP’s work on child protection in his province, he said that “since NP is actively working towards the protection of children with this kind of initiative, the children of Basilan would be better educated because of such protection mechanisms and they would not turn to vice in the future.”

It was precisely because of this hope for a bright future ahead for the children of Basilan that the sacrifices for his job were worth it, Muhti said. As a development worker, specifically in his province, Muhti feels that working in the area of child protection is his contribution to his community.



Muhti talking with people from the community, making sure children are safe from GCRVs.

Sharing the Maguindanao experience at the World Conference on Humanitarian Studies

In October, two of NP's International Civilian Peacekeepers (ICPs) shared their experiences of working in Maguindanao at the World Conference on Humanitarian Studies held in Turkey.

Georgi Engelbrecht and Vidushi Kaushik, both from the Maguindanao field team (MFT), presented a paper at the conference titled 'Supporting local capacities of conflict-affected communities: Role of community-based protection mechanisms and Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping.'

Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping: grassroots driven, grounded in the community

Vidushi, who has been an ICP since 2011, believes that the importance of UCP "lies in the fact that it is grassroots driven." She added that UCP is "in a way, basically working with communities on softer approaches to view conflict and to understand their own dynamics."

More importantly, she stressed that "UCP gives you a 'community grounding,' other stakeholders working in the same conflict may not have that kind of grounding."

While UCP is not exclusive to NP, Vidushi said that what sets NP apart is that it is an "international nongovernment organization (INGO) that works with a local flavor."

Not only is UCP grassroots-driven but also, the idea of UCP and having international peacekeepers on the ground also provides a "neutral space for the civilian population so they do not necessarily become the direct targets in cases of ambush or in cases of attacks by state and non-state actors," she pointed out.

Early Warning-Early Response mechanism: keeping communities safe

One of the tools being used by NP on the ground is called the Early Warning-Early Response (EWER) mechanism.

EWER is defined in the paper as "structures (which) enable communities to gauge and identify the early signs of when a potential violent incident could surface and find corrective responses at a grassroots level."

The foundation of working in communities is the level of trust NP has been able to develop on the ground. Georgi said that in the course of their work, "most of the people, know who we are. When we go see the communities, NP is not a name which is like a question mark, they have met us in one way or the other, which is why a lot of credit goes to our national staff, they are very capable of talking to communities, sharing with us their concerns and vice versa."

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Georgi (rightmost, standing) and Vidushi (rightmost, seating) with other members of the MFT and some members of a partner organization.

It is because of this relationship of trust, Georgi said, that what is remarkable about the EWER system which NP has developed on the ground is that it has allowed to tell more often than not whether a potential violent incident will set off. He added that “we know the possibilities, then the questions come in, what are the places where the civilians need to go (should a potential violent incident occur), that is the place we want to know.”

While EWER is common to humanitarian work, the MFT has been able to develop a system that is suitable for their area. Georgi said that “what we actually did with our EWER, is that we did not only use it for armed conflict, we used it in context of *ridos* (clan feuds), as well as in the context of political violence, and we also managed to link one of our EWER structures to the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) mechanism within the local government unit (LGU).”

Creating safe spaces and Building resilience

Another aspect the paper focuses on is creating safe spaces and building resilience in communities.

When asked about how the MFT has been able to do this, Vidushi said that “inclusive means equal and more representation of women and the youth from these spaces.” She added that in the EWER mechanism, some partners and women asked ‘how can they play a role in EWER’ which led them to include a module on the role of women.

But in dealing with a multisectoral environment and a wide variety of people, Georgi said giving a safe space was also a “matter of giving everyone a voice and listening to all of their concerns.”

To build resilience in the community, the MFT has started a zone of peace. Now the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS) is starting a similar initiative and two of the main monitors in their program used to work with NP. Vidushi said this is good because those who used to be with NP are “diversifying their work.” Georgi added that “the drive and the impetus has to come essentially from them which is what local ownership is all about.”

Moreover, Georgi pointed out that an organization “cannot contribute to the resolution of the conflict if they don’t have “deep engagement with the affected community.” Without a doubt, working with the people on the ground is an important aspect, if not the most important factor towards building peace.

Truly, being with the community and working with them to achieve peace is what creating safe spaces and building resilience is all about.



Peacekeeper's Profile

Voices of women and children heard: Wanfatma Marrack

Wanfatma “Fatma” Marrack is a mother of six. She has been a National Civilian Peacekeeper (NCP) under the Child Protection Program of NP since 2011. Her area of assignment is Sulu. What struck her most about her work was that as a mother she knew that “you need to protect children” and that there was a “need for every community to be aware so that violations against children will be lessened.”

She added that working on a child protection project and being a mother herself has made her understand her work better.

Challenges of working alone

Covering six municipalities in her native province of Sulu by herself is no mean feat. She shared that with kidnapping cases on the rise, she really needed to take care of her personal safety, and proceed with caution in her work. But this did not deter her from working, “even if it’s risky, I really try” to reach the communities. She added that she “tries her best to do verifications to the best of her ability—and does as much as she can and goes as far as she can go.”

But she stressed the importance of working with local partners and barangay officials. She said that in proceeding with her work, she listened to local partners’ warnings, took precautionary measures, and usually asked assistance from local officials like the barangay captain to be able to do her work.

She shared that in the course of her work, being a woman helped as people in the community she talked to “listen more.”

Even when sometimes she encounters an initial negative response from the community, she tries to be as steadfast as she can while having “a certain gentle way of dealing with people”

that can be likened to “being a mother, talking to her children in a calm manner.”

In all of these experiences, aside from her love for her work and her commitment, her empowerment comes from being able to empathize with the people she talks to.

Peacebuilder for women and children

Fatma was originally working for NP’s partner organization *Tulong Lupah Sug Inc.* (Help the



Fatma talking to some women leaders in the area.

People of Sulu) before she joined NP. She thinks that her past experiences, being an NGO worker since 2005 and working in the same area of responsibility, have prepared her for her job as NCP with NP. Her previous job enabled her to work on “rido mediations and peace advocacy work,” and this lay the cornerstone for her as she continues her work as a peacebuilder in the area.

In the course of her work, she gives community orientations on the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) of six Grave Child Rights Violations (GCRVs) and during these orientations, what really strikes her is being able to listen to voices of women and children sharing their stories.

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Fatma (rightmost) with her colleagues from the ZamBaSulTa team, (from left) Muhti Abdulla, Jasmin Teodoro and Francisca da Silva.

...one of the most important aspects of her job, is being able to hear out women and children talking about their concerns and issues.

She said that while conducting focus group discussions “with religious leaders, teachers, and traditional leaders of the community, people who don’t usually speak up” are given the chance to open up and share their experiences. This to her is one of the most important aspects of her job, being able to hear out women and children talking about their concerns and issues. This active involvement with the community, she said, gave her the “extra push to work harder.”

NP’s role, facing adversities and finding balance

With regard to the role of NP in the area, she said that the organization had been able to “contribute in awareness raising, which is a big factor, so that children in the area will be protected” against GCRVs. And because of NP’s mandate of protecting civilians, these orientations had contributed to that.

She also observed that NP’s work in the province was critical because of its focus on child protection.

Furthermore, working in Sulu can be an uphill battle because there are communities that have initial doubts about NGOs and also, working in remote areas can be trying but despite this, she said, she prayed and kept the faith so that she would be able to overcome these challenges.

And when asked about how she maintained balance—she goes back to being a mother, spending time with her children during weekends.

Being a mother is at the very core of Fatma’s work as a peacekeeper. She said that “as a mother, it is your instinct to protect your children, and that kind of care you apply to other children as well because they are the most vulnerable.” She may be a peacekeeper, but to her this role is second only to being a mother protecting her own children’s future as well as the future of the children in her community.

NP opens protection site in Lanao

In October, NP, in cooperation with the Muslim Organization of Government Employees and Professionals (MOGEP), opened a protection site in Barangay Balintad, Munai, Lanao del Norte. The site is slated to serve 25 barangays within its vicinity. It became operational in December.



NP staff with barangay captain Mubarak Abdulrahim and community leaders Acmad and Nashrudin Dimacaling at the protection site.

The main purpose of the site is to provide a neutral and open space for parties and stakeholders. Xarifa Sanguila, National Civilian Protection Monitor from the Lanao Field Team (LFT), said that the site would be a place of “dialogue, *opisina ng bayan* (office of the community), and a meeting place of the Community-Based Human Rights (CBHR)

monitors.” She added that the site was multipurpose and could be an emergency/command center as well as also a neutral space for conflicting parties.

Furthermore, the site also aims to “ensure the safety and security of the communities.” It also works towards “strengthening the connections and information-sharing among key actors in the peace process” and will be “a centre for receiving complaints of human rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) violations.”

Mubarak Adbulrahim, the barangay captain of the area, said that the site was good for the community especially for its civilian population, so that they could feel safer. One of the community leaders, Acmad Dimacaling, added with NP taking the lead in the initiative, their barangay was willing to help and cooperate with NP in this ongoing venture.



International Civilian Protection Monitor Kingsley Ayettey makes friends with the youngest visitors in the protection site.



Welcome new staff !

NP Philippines welcomes new staff members, Ajanth Fernando, Kate Smart and Maria Cecilia Denila-Tangaro.

Prior to joining NP Philippines, Ajanth was team leader at the Abyei field site of NP's programme in South Sudan. He is currently NP Philippines' Safety and Security Coordinator.

Kate was formerly NP's Programme Development Consultant in Tblisi, Georgia. She is currently NP Philippines' Programme Officer.

Maria Cecilia Denila-Tangaro was formerly Program Officer for the OMI-Interreligious Dialogue Ministry, prior to joining NP Philippines as finance assistant for our Pikit, North Cotabato field site.

Warm welcome to NP Philippines to our new colleagues!



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