

Nonviolent Peaceforce

in the Philippines



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Editorial

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

July 18 has been declared by the United Nations as the Nelson Mandela International Day to “acknowledge his contribution to the struggle for democracy and the promotion of a culture of peace throughout the world.”

August 12 marked the 64th anniversary of the ratification of the Geneva Conventions, the cornerstone of International Humanitarian Law. The Conventions, comprising four treaties, focus on the humanitarian treatment of wounded and sick soldiers, shipwrecked military personnel, prisoners of war and civilians in time of war.

In light of these milestones, we share stories from the field to illustrate our commitment to peace and the promotion of human rights.

Our first story features the visit of New Zealand officials which included partners and affected communities in Maguindanao.

Next we report on how one of our teams disseminated International Humanitarian Law to a base command of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Another story is about the Olympeace basketball tournament in which our team participated, and won. The tournament aimed at bringing together peace stakeholders, espousing sportsmanship between teams and fostering camaraderie.

Also in this issue, Rocelyn Labalan, one of our National Civilian Peacekeepers, shares her thoughts on why the vocation she has chosen can be considered a “road less travelled.”

Completing the round-up of stories are a thanksgiving to one of our partners whose program has just ended, a look at how some of our staff members work behind the scenes, as well as NP's recent signing with the Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.

A lot has happened since we last went to press, and NP will continue to do its best to contribute to the protection of civilians affected by armed clashes of which, unfortunately, there has been an increasing number as of late.

Paul Mettler
Country Director

New Zealand Officials Visit NP Offices and Displaced Communities

In April, two New Zealand diplomats accredited to their Manila embassy visited NP's Cotabato and Datu Piang offices, and displaced communities in Maguindanao.

During the first day of their visit, they were given a briefing about NP's programs and activities, particularly its Early Warning-Early Response (EWER) initiative of which New Zealand has been the primary donor since January 2011.



The next day, the delegation proceeded to NP's Datu Piang (Maguindanao) field site. There, initiatives such as the Mamasapano linking (which refers to the introduction of the Mamasapano monitoring structure to the local government unit in the area), the Zone of Peace and the Saidona EWER monitoring structure were presented to them.

Later, the visitors, accompanied by members of NP's Maguindanao Field Team, went to Barangay Damabalas, Datu Piang, to visit a partner organization, Tiyakap Kalilintad. Tiyakap Kalilintad is the grassroots peacekeeping arm of the Kadtuntaya Foundation (KFI). The team met community monitors and coordinators of KFI, and discussed issues related to the Zone of Peace in the area. Following that, the delegation visited the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Post in Barangay Kitango, Datu Saudi Ampatuan.

The delegation also met NP's partner organization United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD) in Cotabato City during the last day of their visit.

Led by Manila embassy Deputy Head of Mission Justin Allen, the three-day visit also included courtesy calls to the Government of the Philippines-Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (GPH-CCCH) in Cotabato City as well as the 6th Infantry Division in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao.

Nonviolent Peaceforce Team Disseminates International Humanitarian Law

In June, the NP Civilian Protection Component (CPC) South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos City (SOCKSARGEN) mobile team gave an orientation to a base command of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front-Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (MILF-BIAF) on International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The mobile team joined the representatives of the Security and Civilian Protection Components of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) and Local Monitoring Team (LMT) partners for the full-day orientation.

The morning session was joined by the MILF-Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (MILF CCCH) and the Mindanao Peoples Caucus (MPC), and focused on their respective mandates as well as situational updates. During the afternoon session, the SOCKSARGEN team discussed the main principles of IHL applicable to non-international armed



conflicts. After discussing the main concepts of IHL, the team elaborated on mandatory warfare rules protecting civilians and persons *hors de combat*.

This orientation was part of the activities that the SOCKSARGEN team has been conducting under the CPC of the IMT. The team also monitors and documents movements of internally displaced persons, conducts outreach activities, provides support to relief operations, and strengthens coordination and information-sharing among key actors in the peace process.

Scoring for Peace

As the buzzer beater shot was made, the crowd shrieked with excitement. This basketball game, however, was different—the teams played for peace.

On April 25, the joint Local Monitoring Team (LMT)/International Monitoring Team (IMT) players of SOCSKSARGEN became the champions of the 4th Sarangani OlymPeace Games basketball tournament, an event held for all peace stakeholders.

The road to victory was not easy. The joint LMT/IMT team faced stiff competition from other teams composed of local actors and stakeholders. After four consecutive victories against the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Philippine National Police (PNP), and media representative teams, LMT/IMT advanced to the finals. In the final game, they faced the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) team in a nerve-wracking match.

Finally, after three gruelling days of intense competition, the team prevailed over its competitors and received a trophy from Sarangani Governor Miguel Rene Dominguez.

IMT Team Site 4 Leader Lt. Col. Syed Islam Bin Shahajam said that this activity was also an occasion for all the stakeholders to come together to exchange ideas and discuss matters of common interest.

Furthermore, he said that it was a good time for the stakeholders to interact with the people from the various communities. By “showing the community your presence and level of participation, the people listen to you.” This activity, he believed, had enabled them to bring a message of peace to the people who actively participated or were enthusiastic spectators during the games.

The Sarangani OlymPeace is an annual event sponsored by the Sarangani Governor and organized by Kalinaw Sarangani, a human rights advocacy body attached to the governor’s office. This year, it attracted more than 4,000 participants from all Sarangani municipalities. For three days the participants competed in numerous sports and academic competitions.



Peacekeeper's Diary: Rocelyn Labalan

July 24, 2009 was the day I began working for NP Philippines. The date was unforgettable because of the events that occurred before and after that fateful day. The day before, July 23, the Suspension of Military Operations (SOMO) was declared by the AFP and on July 25, the MILF declared the Suspension of Military Actions (SOMA).



By now, I have been working for NP Philippines for more than four years, first as a Senior Field Translator and now as a National Civilian Peacekeeper.

Being the only non-Muslim field staff working in Lanao where Muslim communities are prevalent, I have met a lot of challenges and learned many lessons, as well as opportunities for growth.

First, I thought I was already acquainted with Maranao culture after studying at the Mindanao State University, but I realized that there was a need for me understand and internalize their culture and values. I also realized that integration into the community did not only mean giving lectures and eating with the community or learning their language but it was actually more about listening to and understanding their views, experiences, feelings, fears, and aspirations.

Second, I faced various challenges while working in the field. Reaching our beneficiaries was one of them, particularly because of very bad road conditions, landslides, and floods. Sometimes, mainly because of lack of communication, we were not certain of our security while in remote areas. The security situation can be highly volatile because of the presence of armed groups, ridos and the possibility of being caught in crossfire.

Another challenge that our work poses is that while we would like to assist communities, NP has limitations in its

mandate. It is particularly challenging to effectively link communities to those agencies able to respond to their material needs.

Maintaining neutrality and trying not to become overly emotionally involved in the difficulties faced by the communities has been another one of the things I have had to face as a civilian peacekeeper.

Developing good relations with our partner organizations is very important. That is not always easy because many partners still do not fully understand the mandate of NP and their expectations are often beyond the capacities and limitations of the organization.

Acceptance is another issue of prime importance. I have come to realize that respect is key to acceptance, protection and trust by the community, armed actors and other stakeholders. Showing respect to everyone I meet and work with is very important, because they, too, have bright ideas that can help our efforts to protect conflict-affected civilians.

Despite of all the challenges, I have also had opportunities for growth. Visiting local communities, even in the remotest places, have brought my heart closer to people. Another one has been the chance to interact with high-ranking officials both in the PNP and AFP. Also, the chance to meet the MILF and to be invited to visit their camps has been a rare opportunity for me as a non-Muslim.

Though I travel the road less travelled as a peacekeeper, this vocation has shown me what it is to be accepted by people from different walks of life in the communities and places I have been to.



Partner Profile: A Kanduli to the Kalinaw Team

A Kanduli (thanksgiving) was recently held for the Kalinaw Sarangani Unit (KSU) on June 27. The KSU is a Peace and Development Program initiated by the Sarangani provincial government in 2006. In a formal gathering of peace partners, led by the NP-CPC SOCSKSARGEN Mobile Team together with the IMT-TS 4, a token of appreciation was handed to the staff of the KSU for a job well done, and now completed.

Inspiration of partnership

Jocelyn Lambac-Kanda, Program Manager of the KSU, said it was the “inspiration of partnership” that made the efforts of their team possible and successful. She pledged to continue their peace efforts in their capacity “as individuals or involvement in non-government organizations” in spite of the conclusion of the program.

Likewise, Reynaldo Patricio Sol, acting field team leader of NP’s SOCSKSARGEN team expressed his gratitude to the KSU for its efforts to educate communities in Sarangani about the role and responsibilities of peace monitors, and their invaluable support and cooperation with NP over the last couple of years.

Lt Col. Syed Islam Bin Shahazam, head of IMT-TS 4, thanked the KSU for its efforts in promoting peace education and the orientations on the Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro (FAB) for grassroots communities in Sarangani.

LMT member Ustadz Ibrahim Macatimbol seconded this and said that the stakeholders in the peace process will always be grateful to KSU for its remarkable efforts.



Other partners present included the MPC, the IMT’s Humanitarian Reconstruction and Development Component (HRDC), LMT, members of the MILF Saguda Bhuiyan provincial committee, board members of Sarangani provincial government and barangay officials of Taluya, Glan.

Continuing peace efforts

To continue their mission of promoting a culture of peace, tolerance and maintaining a harmonious relationship between Moros, Lumads and Christians through various innovative activities in communities, members of the Kalinaw Team have created an organisation named Circle of Peacebuilders (COPs). Peace partners at the gathering expressed their support for COPs in their future peace advocacy initiatives.



Since its establishment, the KSU implemented multiple component projects such as Culture of Peace trainings in communities, supporting the Madaris program (sessions on Arabic literacy and the Holy Qur’an being taught in schools), Moro cultural activities, and the strengthening of grassroots communities in partnership with development institutions. It also spearheaded orientations on the FAB in 32 barangays in Sarangani. The innovative initiatives of the KSU have contributed significantly to maintaining peace and order in the province of Sarangani.

Behind the Scenes: The Story of Mar, Borge and Asraf

In NP, while it is mostly the field staff who are exposed to unexpected situations, some NP staff behind the scenes have also had their fair share of such situations.

One situation was when Muamar “Mar” Alim, Emmanuelle “Borge” Monton and Asraf Usman were caught in crossfire in August 2008. This was the time when fighting broke out and the Supreme Court declared the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) unconstitutional.

They had been tasked to help in the evacuation of an NP field team whose office at that time was located in Dapiawan, Maguindanao.

They share their stories of how it is to work behind the scenes.

Saving a life, unexpectedly

Program Support Officer Mar recalled that during the incident, he “acted as translator for the international staff.” Being caught in crossfire made him realize how difficult the situation was. He said he was “nervous and had an adrenaline rush because of the desire to help all those displaced people in need.” He also recalled clearly how he was able to see the “actual displacement of the people who were walking on the street” going to a safer place.

Administrative Assistant Borge said that even if they were originally there to help an NP field team evacuate, he could not forget a child asking them for help to evacuate his grandparent who had been left behind during the hurried evacuation of the people in their community. Evacuating the elderly person caught in the crossfire was not an easy feat and they had to request the military to let them through.

For his part, Transportation Officer Asraf even recalled that he carried the elderly person to safety and brought the person to his family to be reunited with them. The elderly person he saved had been already mistaken for dead. Asraf found the experience unforgettable because he said that being able to help other people really made an impact on

him and this he believed is at the very heart of NP’s work.

Role of NP in community

Mar believes that NP has a proactive presence on the ground because “we are the only organization with an office in one of the most conflict-affected areas in Maguindanao.”

For Asraf, said that NP’s work (particularly the seminars and trainings given to the communities) helps civilians know their rights and not be illegally arrested. He said the presence of NP in a place like Maguindanao also assures people that they would be safe.

For his part, Borge said that in his observation, people in the community really trust NP and that the presence of the international staff is vital to show non-partisanship in the conflict.

While NP work may be challenging at times, Mar, Asraf and Borge also make sure that they spend time for themselves doing what they love to do to relax. For Mar, a trip to Davao to watch movies does the trick, for Borge it is spending time with his family and for Asraf, he likes to join off-road driving competitions during his spare time.

Impact on other people’s lives

In December 2012, outside the Cotabato General hospital, Asraf recalled that a stranger approached him to ask if he was NP staff. The man, whose wife had just given birth in the hospital, told him that NP had helped him a lot and he even showed Asraf his ID and certificate from one of the NP trainings he attended.

Asraf said he would never forget how the man from Malabang, Lanao told him that NP had really helped him a lot and has had a significant impact in his life. This incident made Asraf feel good because working for NP had enabled him to help others even in his own small way.

These are just a few of the stories of NP staff behind the scenes—helping others in a small way, a little at a time, and hoping this would have a positive impact on the lives of people in Mindanao.



What Others Say...

Nonviolent Peaceforce Visits Kabacan Town; Holds Orientation

by Ibno Uzair (reprinted with permission from www.luwaran.com)

The Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) paid a significant visit at Kayaga, Kabacan, North Cotabato and conducted an orientation program to community residents held at Provincial Markaz Campus, Sitio Tan, Kayaga, Kabacan town on August 14, 2013. The activity was graced by two foreign guests, Brother Salman Khan, from Pakistan and Brother Mong Marma from Bangladesh, International Civilian Protection Monitors together with Sister Bai Elaysa Inalang and Lemuel Artiaga with the able assistance of the officials of North Cotabato Provincial Information Committee.

The group related about their organization and its programs with mandates to monitor, receive, and verify data or information reported by the concerned individuals in conflict-affected areas. They also discussed to the community residents matters that pertain to their rights and privileges when natural and man-made calamities occur in their respective areas particularly issues that affect the GPH and the MILF Peace process. They



said that the Nonviolent Peaceforce act as mediator and makes recommendations to concerned authorities matters or issues that are reported to them which need urgent remedy or solution. Some of these are problems that affect internally-displaced persons (IDPs) like human rights violations, lack of much-needed medicines, food, shelter and others. They stressed that conditions like these need immediate attention so that the people shall not suffer for long.

The community gathering was organized by local residents who were so elated with the presence of Nonviolent Peaceforce, an international non-government organization/service agency and non-partisan organization. Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) is a member of the Civilian Protection Component of the International Monitoring Team (CPC-IMT) holding satellite office in Pikit, North Cotabato.

At least forty (40) community residents from the municipalities of Matalam, Kabacan and Kidapawan City attended the activity. They expressed their thanks and gratitude to the guests for letting them know their rights and privileges embodied under international law.

The program ended at noon time.

NP signs Code of Conduct

In June, Nonviolent Peaceforce was recognized as one of the signatories of the Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief. NP has been listed as the 337th organization out of 515 that have so far signed this code.

The Code of Conduct is voluntary and self-policing. It has 10 principles, gives emphasis and puts importance on humanitarian aid without discrimination. The 10 principles are as follows: the recognition that it is the organization's responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance when it is necessary; the victims' race, creed or nationality, should not be a basis for discrimination; political or religious affiliation of the victim is not dependent in the delivery of aid; acting independently from government foreign policy; respecting culture and custom; focusing on local capacities when responding to disaster; considering the importance of working with the community of the affected locality; taking into consideration future disasters while providing relief; accountability to donors and beneficiaries; and lastly, the Code reminds humanitarian workers to view beneficiaries not as "hopeless objects" but instead as "dignified human beings."

With this new development, NP hopes to further strengthen its efforts to protect conflict-affected civilians.



NP's Global Security Adviser, Bernard O'Sullivan, during his annual audit. Seen here with members of the North Cotabato Field Team (NCFT).

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