

A civilian brings inspiration to other civilians

In the middle of a long-standing conflict in Datu Saudi-Ampatuan, Maguindanao, Abe Salipada was able to step up and help his community.

By Denise Rafaeli Cadorniga



Abe Salipada, a 49 year old farmer, was born during martial law time. In retrospect, he shares, “Hanggang ngayon may gera pa rin. Mula noon, hanggang ngayon. Pero ngayon may *normalization* na.” [“Even to this day there is still conflict. Since then, and to this day. But now there is normalization.”]



Abe Salipada telling the story of his first encounter with Nonviolent Peaceforce.

He recounts how the times have changed, “Wala kang masandigan, malapitan, magtulong sayo. Pero ngayon sa panahon na *manageable* na ang mga situation ngayon, may malapitan ka.” [“There was no one you could approach, to turn

to for help. Now in this time where situations can be more manageable, you can get the support you need.”]

For Abe, this support came from NGOs advocating for peace through deployment of international and local monitoring teams. In his locality, it was the Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) that had its presence there.

He recalls the time when NP first arrived in his locality. It was during a time of conflict, and though initially civilians and combatants alike were unsure of NP’s purpose and intent, it was quickly established among all parties that NP aims to assist in the monitoring of [GPH and MILF] peace process and the current Bangsamoro normalization.

“Sila ang naging gabay namin—ang Nonviolent Peaceforce,” Abe shares.

[“They became our guide—the Nonviolent Peaceforce.”]

In navigating through the long-standing conflict in their area, Abe recounts how the NP is able to help civilians by being a reliable partner and ally.

“Kahit anong problema ay nandyan ang NP na naging partner namin. Sila ang *nag-momonitor* sa amin, kami ang nagsasabi sa ground na ito yung pangyayari sa civilian, ‘pag may naipit, o *shortage* ng pagkain. So nalaman ng mga tao na ang NP ay talagang *nagmomonitor* ng civilian at saka kakampi ng civilian

‘yun.’ [“In any kind of problems, NP is there who have become our partner. They monitor the situation, and we report from the ground—if there are people caught in conflict, or there is food shortage... This is how the people have come to understand that NP is an ally to the civilians.”]

Through NP, Abe adds that he was able to attend seminars such as Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) and Early Warning, Early Response (EWER), and these helped him be more able to serve and assist his community in protecting civilians during conflict situations.

One such event necessitated Abe to employ what he learned in these trainings. On November 2019, a conflict that erupted between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in Sitio Bayog, Dapiawan, Datu Saudi-Ampatuan, Maguindanao forced civilians out of their homes. When food supplies at the evacuation center started running low, displaced families were left with no choice but to return to their homes to gather crops. Unaware that combatants were still present in the area, they were caught in the crossfire.



Abe confidently showing us how he usually pose for a photo.

As the situation called for action, Abe was one of the civilians who stepped up to help. Through NP’s trainings, they were able to help internally displaced people (IDP) and themselves out of the conflicted area safely.

As an IDP leader, he imparts, “Parang isang pamilya lang kami sa evacuation center.”

[“We are like just one family in the evacuation center.”]

Thinking what else needs to be done for the community, Abe muses, “Paano ma rehabilitate yung utak ng mga tao... Ipakita sa mga tao na ang pinakamagandang

solusyon sa lahat ng problema ay *peace through negotiation*. Hindi yan gamitan ng dahas... *Peace* na pag-iisip, *peace* na pamumuhay, sabayin natin ang training at kabuhayan. Kung wala talagang matinong pagiisip yung mga tao hindi *successful* ang project.” [“How to rehabilitate the minds of the people... We need to show them that the best solution to all problems is peace through negotiation, not force... A peaceful manner of thinking, a peaceful manner of living, coupled with training and a source of livelihood that reinforce these. If the people do not share the same mindset, the project will not be a success.”]

As Abe puts it, normalization has been a long-standing dialogue, and there is still much to talk about. However the challenges, he maintains his pieties to the vision of peace. In peace building, he encourages and affirms, “Everyone is invited.”

Abe is one of the beneficiaries and training participants of the ATTAIN Project funded by EU in partnership with Nonviolent Peaceforce. ATTAIN or Accompanying the Transition, Transformation of Conflict, and Advocacy on Social Cohesion in the normalization of Bangsamoro is being implemented in BARMM, Regions 9, 10 and 12 to complement the civilian protection component of confidence-building and security measures under the normalization and opportunity to broaden the practice of unarmed strategies in conflict transformation and social cohesion to a wider geographical scope in Mindanao.

Tag: European Union in the Philippines