



Joint Peace and Security Team at a training. Philippines, 2022 ©NP

Building Solidarity in the Pursuit of Peace



FROM CARMEN LAUZON-GATMAYTAN, FORMER WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY ADVISOR OF NONVIOLENT PEACEFORCE IN THE PHILIPPINES – WHERE ARMED FORCES FROM THE SEPARATISTS AND GOVERNMENT, ALTHOUGH ONCE IN CONFLICT, ARE NOW WORKING TOGETHER IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

In the context of the peace process and post-conflict transition period in the Bangsamoro, what is the relevance of raising gender awareness?

In the Bangsamoro region of the Philippines, separatists and government soldiers were once enemies. As part of the peace process these men are now working together and creating “Joint Peace and Security Teams” (JPST). While fighting between the government and separatists is over and the peace process holds, political violence and clan feuds still bring daily violence to this region. The JPST, each made up of half government soldiers and half separatists, will be a new force bringing community safety to local towns and villages.

And it was my job to teach these newly formed groups about why they must care about gender along with peace and conflict in their work. In

fact, as part of the requirements for forming these new JPSTs, all members – whether government or separatist – must undergo training on gender-sensitive peacebuilding.

I traveled every morning from the NP office in Cotabato City to Talitay, the poverty-stricken town where the JPST site was located. **It surprised me that a place only one hour away from the bustling Cotabato City could be one of the most neglected and poorest conflict-affected communities in the region.**

We met in the camp of the government forces for the gender-sensitive peacebuilding training. **We were confined in a training hall of unfinished construction, with wooden slabs for flooring and galvanized iron sheets for roofing.** The pay members of the JPST receive for their work had been delayed for weeks by the government.



For the separatists, this was their only source of income and, right before I arrived, they had staged a protest of the delay in their pay.

The unfinished hall, the delay in pay – these are the everyday markers of how a large, complex process like peace, after centuries of conflict, can be full of challenges and delays. Despite this, **here were men from both sides of the armed conflict, laughing, sharing and cooperating with one another, ready to learn how to bring a gender lens to their work.**

For gender and peace advocates like me, this is a huge thing: bringing together both forces from the two sides of the conflict and seeing how they interacted with one another. They were eager and interested to know more about gender and how such training applies to them. Through the training, they developed a shared understanding of the significance of women’s contribution to peace and the development of families, of communities, and even of the entire nation.

When I asked what struck them most in the training, the response was unanimous. They all pointed to the exercise on the “Daily Schedule.” For this exercise, I asked the JPST members to present the usual daily routine of their families. They wrote down when they wake up, make

meals, give kids baths, go to school, go to work, etc. They also wrote down who in their family takes on which activity.

After making their schedule, the JPST members – all men – realized how gendered their daily routine was and how their wives carry most of the burden of household chores and taking care of their children. They acknowledged that this realization could help them become better partners and fathers.

One soldier admitted:

“ I never realized how much my wife did [for our family] until I participated in this exercise. ”

I felt in my heart that our training sessions allowed these men to reflect on their roles and responsibilities as gendered beings and understand the significance of gender in their work. The training also gave them a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the other side of the armed conflict, fostering empathy and solidarity among the soldiers and separatists who must now be one team.

When community safety teams like the JPST have these skills and perspectives, when we have policies that change how women are treated, and when we challenge cultural norms that subordinate women, I have hope that gender-based violence and gender stereotyping will diminish, and over time, we can attain true gender equality and peace.





NP Sudan Team leading a First Aid Psychological Support session. Darfur, May 2023 ©NP



CONFLICT IN SUDAN

On April 16th, armed conflict broke out in the capital city of Khartoum between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Within hours, fighting spread across Sudan, including the two states where NP works: North Darfur and West Darfur.

While many civilians have been able to leave amid ongoing fighting, the vast majority – 45 million people – remain and are facing the ongoing threat of active violence.

All NP staff are accounted for, with 30 staff currently in country and others supporting remotely from South Sudan.

You Support Protection in Darfur

NP staff in Sudan and beyond have been creative and proactive in responding to the escalating needs of civilians in Darfur, working alongside communities with whom we have long-standing relationships.

Already, nearly 200 community members have attended training sessions on Psychological First Aid – a tool the Sudan team learned online from NP staff in Ukraine.

With your support, NP is monitoring ongoing civilian protection concerns, advocating for those most vulnerable, and providing direct protection when possible – including through protective presence at pediatric medical centers. In one instance, NP safely relocated 400 children from a health facility caught in the midst of violence, to a safer area. There, NP staff and other volunteers provide ongoing assistance.

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT



MATTHEW RIGGEN

As we often say, conflict is inevitable but violence is not. This philosophy, and that of nonviolence at large, is what initially drew Matthew Rikken to support NP's work of peace and protection.

"Violence begets violence. Anger as well. Even when I get into an argument, I notice the more heated I get, the more heated they get, and it's hard to get out of that spiral," said Matthew. "I've been impressed on the pragmatic way NP works to get people out of that cycle."

From his neighborhood to the globe, Matthew sees the growing need to help people develop skills to resolve conflict peacefully. "In a lot of ways we already know how to do it. We know how to be neighborly, we know how to talk with people. **We just need the inspiration, the confidence, and tools to fall back on.**"

"If you're reading this, there's some part of you that's inspired by the idea of nonviolence - it's worth following up on that inspiration."

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