Civil society institutional response: peaceful intervention to resolve armed conflicts

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The term "civil society" has been in the public consciousness for quite some time now. Yet, many are still not aware of the nature, purpose, history, and activities of the various groups that comprise civil society.

This *Notes* thus explains what civil society organizations (CSOs) are in general. It specifically dwells on *peace CSOs* as they relate to addressing the armed conflict situation in the country. The *Notes* traces their beginnings and expounds on their various responses to peace and human security concerns in the country as well as enumerates the other formations under which CSOs have branched out. Finally, it provides an initial assessment of civil society's institutional response—the enabling and hindering factors that support or stymie the growth and sustainability of the efforts of peace CSOs.

What are CSOs?

The term civil society organizations (CSOs) includes organizations, institutions, and other collectivities working and organized autonomously from the state to respond to societal and political issues. *Peace CSOs* refer specifically to a segment of this broad range of Philippine CSOs that have a focused peace agenda, i.e., framing their campaigns, services, and other activities within a peace perspective or advocacy for peace, or undertaking peace-related activities and considering themselves as peace organizations. Like most CSOs, they generally undertake any or all of three roles in society: (a) guardians of or watchdogs over the state, (b) service-provider, and (c) advocates of alternative policies. They engage not only the state but also armed nonstate actors and act as mediators, interlocutors or cooperators for both.

A brief history

Most CSOs addressing the impact of armed conflicts and promoting peaceful alternatives evolved during the post-Marcos democratic transition period. Among the early members (late 1980s to early 1990s) are the individuals, sectors, and groups who were part of the left antidictatorship struggle. At the grassroots, they include people who initiated new forms of "peace organizations"—notably the peace zones—to respond to the violence in their midst; and those who sought to revive or strengthen indigenous mechanisms for peaceful settlements in highland communities.

In Mindanao, former Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) combatants or support bases became "peace and development" cooperatives in order to undertake developmental projects. The rise in peace CSOs within and cutting across Muslim, Christian, and *lumad* (indigenous) sectors is particularly phenomenal in this region where significant peace agreements have been reached between the government and the MNLF and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) but where, sadly, an unstable peace still prevails.

Peace CSOs and their principles

In the Philippines where the armed conflicts are deeply rooted in social and political inequities, the peace process is not limited to the "peace talks" between the government and the different armed groups but also includes the institution of the needed political, social, and economic reforms in order to eradicate the causes and manifestations of armed conflict and political violence. The peace process aims to find long-lasting solutions to the country's domestic wars. It gives importance to nurturing a culture of peace, healing the wounds, and dissolving prejudices in communities and families torn apart by conflicts. Its end goal is to transform social, political, and economic relationships into relations based on justice and human dignity. In brief, the Philippine peace process seeks to address both the *negative* (absence of direct and physical conflict) and *positive* (presence of justice and wellbeing) dimensions of peace in the country.

The broad concepts of peace, peace process, and peace building hew closely to the equally broad concepts of human security and human development. Their goals are congruent with one another. *Peace building* usually refers to activities in the post-conflict phase needed to prevent the resumption of conflict. It is seen as a necessary undertaking after a successful peace process. But in the Philippines where there are protracted conflicts and political violence even after the forging of peace agreements, it has not been easy to determine conflict and post-conflict phases. Thus, peace building in the present context is construed as the different programs and activities undertaken by individuals and groups (government and NGOs) to support and sustain the peace process.

The civil society response

Approaches and strategies

In general, peace CSOs perform the same functions as most other Philippine CSOs: to provide social and other services; to monitor state (and the armed groups') actions and guard against abuse; and to advocate alternative policies, programs, and paradigms. Table 1 enumerates the responses of peace CSOs in accordance with their roles.

Types of CSO peace interventions

The different dimensions of conflict and peace building have required different interventions which may be categorized as follows:

Peace constituency-building work is the gradual process of reconstructing society, mending the social fabric torn by protracted conflict, and bringing about sustainable devel-

Table 1. Roles of peace CSOs

Civil Society's Roles	Peace CSOs' Interventions	Activities	Illustrative Examples
Service-provider	Relief and reconstruction	Alleviation/mitigation of violence and impact of violence thru psychological trauma healing, relief operations, etc.	● Delivery of integrated programs for societal reconstruction. ● Support for peace-building programs like spaces for peace/peace zones, housing and livelihood programs. ● Training programs on mediation, organizing, leadership, community development, and psycho-social trauma rehabilitation skills.
	Training programs Program development	Capacity building Fact finding, documentation, legal services	
	Other forms of assistance	Development projects	
Watchdog of the state and the nonstate armed groups	Engagement campaigns mediation	Campaign for forging ceasefires or respect of ceasefire agreements Campaigns and support activities for continuity of peace negotiations, and observance of agreements Informal dialogues and creation of various consultative mechanisms Responses to specific concerns in the context of continuing conflict Promotion of observance of human rights and international humanitarian law	● The MILF's unilateral suspension of military offensives after the series of violence in February 2003 was partly a response to the civil society calls, including that of the CBCP and the Bishop-Ulama League of the Philippines. ● President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's resumption of talks in 2001 was partly in response to public outcry over the humanitarian consequences of the 2000 offensives launched by former President Joseph Estrada and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). ● The participation and presence of women, children, Moro, lumad, and civil society groups in general in the peace agenda, processes, and structures have become institutionalized—e.g., women and lumad representatives were included in the GRP (Government of the Republic of the Philippines) panel and technical working commit-tees; civil society representatives sit in panels and other committees in the formal bodies. ● Peace CSOs exerted pressure to operationalize the GRP-MILF Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee and Local Monitoring Teams. ● Peace CSOs have instituted parallel third party monitoring/promotion mechanisms such as the Bantay Ceasefire (to monitor the GRP-MILF Ceasefire Agreement) and the Sulong CARHRIHL (to promote observance of the GRP-National Democratic Front [NDF] Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law). ● Peace CSO and religious leaders, in particular, facilitate the release of detained suspects, bodies, and personal belongings of rebels killed in operations; of AFP soldiers taken by the NPA; and the withdrawal of troops in certain areas. There are now campaigns directed at the two parties to respect the rights of people doing justice and peace work.
Advocates of alternative policies, programs or paradigms	Policy advocacies Peace education Interfaith dialogues	Policy charge/reprioritization Institutional reforms	● Successful lobby for the creation of the National Unification Commission (NUC), the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). The NCIP formation was

Table 1 (cont'd.)

Civil Society's Roles	Peace CSOs' Interventions	Activities	Illustrative Examples
		Growth of peace consciousness, and of peace organizations/ programs	preceded by exposes which pushed government to act on cases and outbreak of violence, e.g., it put up Task Force 63 to deal with conflicts arising from development projects in IP communities. The Task Force's responsibilities were later transferred to the NCIP. • Successful lobby for the adoption by the national government of the Six Paths to Peace and the Social Reform Agenda. • Lobby for the passage of related laws (e.g., Anti-Rape law, creation of NAPC and NCIP laws). • Influencing how media writes about peace and conflict and helping generate greater peace awareness among media people and institutions. • Institutionalizing peace studies, and peace and conflict research in the academe. Holding interfaith dialogues at the national and local levels to promote interreligious harmony, tolerance and ecumenism.

opment and governance reforms. It also involves peace education wherein some schools have initiated awareness programs on the values of peace and social responsibility. At least eight schools have declared themselves "peace zones" that bar entry to armed groups and demand respect for the schools' or community's right to peace.

Conflict-reduction efforts are being done by peace CSOs to address the impact of violence on communities. They have campaigned hard for the observance of human rights and international humanitarian law principles on the conduct of war; and the cessation of hostilities through unilateral declarations or bilateral agreements. Communities on their own have taken steps to keep the peace in their localities by declaring their communities as peace zones. Bantay Ceasefire and Sulong CARHRIHL are another type of citizen initiatives aimed at stopping direct violence.

Conflict settlement is something that peace groups have tried very hard to help with. In this regard, CSOs act as third party in conflicts and follow-through negotiations, and provide critiques and alternatives.

The attainment of peace also requires continuing research and training (*peace research and training*) of practical and analytical value. Database gathering, descriptive and comparative analyses of local and foreign experiences, and theorizing on the ways to peace serve to guide everyday action and contribute to the world body of knowledge essential to local, national, and world peace. On the other hand, trainings equip leaders, activists, and community residents with skills needed in conflict prevention, management, resolution, and transformation.

Lastly, *social development work* involves activities beyond the provision of relief or temporary shelter to displaced communities. They help generate greater self-reliance, address the economic roots of armed conflict, and secure social wellbeing.

Range of CSO formations addressing the armed conflicts/promoting peace

Peace zones and other people's organizations for peace

"People's organizations" (POs) may be defined as organizations of individuals drawn from among grassroots communities, sectors or other groupings, committed to advance their shared rights and welfare. POs are usually considered "mass-based" organizations because they are tightly organized groupings of ordinary citizens banded together as a territorial group (barangay, sitio, city, province) or a sectoral (women, workers) unit for a common cause (group or community welfare, environment, human rights, peace). They are composed of individual members with a set of officers who are accountable to the mass membership. In contrast, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as "service-providers," are distinguished from POs in that they are made up of hired or voluntary staff who are accountable to their board and funders.

The most solid manifestation of a focused peace PO are the "peace zones," the generic term for community-based initiatives to stop and prevent violence and to gradually restore and enhance community peace and wellbeing. The peace zones were usually formed after an upsurge of traumatic violence. For example, in Sagada, Mt. Province, the community declared the town a peace zone after the 1988 killing of two children by drunken soldiers followed by the death of a pupil in an attack waged by the New People's Army (NPA) on the military in the town's public high school. Armed groups, arms, and hostilities were banned in the town premises.

Peace zones rely largely on moral suasion to impose their declaration and on the strength of their community organization to negotiate with the parties in conflict. From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, more than 10 communities have declared themselves peace zones. The city-wide Naga Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) declared in 1988 is the country's first peace zone. Most of the first wave of peace zones were in areas affected by the conflict between the government and the CPP-NPA, namely, in Mt. Province, Kalinga, Abra, Bicol, Negros Occidental, and North Cotabato.

A new wave of peace-zone building mostly in areas affected by GRP-MILF hostilities has resulted in the formation of "Sanctuaries of Peace" and "Spaces for Peace." They were formed with the aid of government and other CSOs. Spaces for Peace were declared by 13 sitios and 5 barangays in Pikit, North Cotabato after the 2000 wave of violence.

Independent "peace zones" have also been put up in other places like those in Bgy. Bual in Isulan, Maguindanao in response to a 1988 Christian-Muslim feud, and in other barangays in Zamboanga del Sur and Lanao del Sur. While more attuned to address intertribal, family, and communal disputes, these peace zones are also responsive to insurgency-related violence that erupts in their community.

Although sparse, new peace zones in GRP-CPP/NPA affected areas have also sprouted in Quezon and Mt. Province in 2004. Local government and AFP support for community-initiated peace zone is important as well as the cooperation of insurgents. On this matter, the MILF tended to be more supportive of the peace zones than the CPP-NPA who have maintained an ambivalent if not negative position against this type of initiatives.

Unlike the consolidated and grassroots-based peace zones in villages and barangays, peace zones declared in schools and bigger territories like cities and provinces tend to be only

symbolic. Government-initiated peace zones also cause wariness. Examples include former President Estrada's 20 towns and one city in Central Mindanao declared as peace zones in 2000 after the AFP overran MILF camps, and President Arroyo's declaration of portions of Pikit after government offensives in 2003.

Peace coalitions

Coalitions and networks correspond to the "network of effective actors" or a "collection of representative actors from the political, social, and structural fields concerned with peace-building in a specific conflict, whose purposes are to enhance effectiveness through fostering a holistic approach to peace-building and to foster the development of new 'theories of action' that necessitate collaboration" (Ricigliano 2002). The primary function of such networks is "to supplement the limited theory of action of any one organization." They have been referred to as "unofficial supplements to negotiation."

Various peace coalitions, some short-lived, some sustained, have been set up to revive and sustain political negotiations with the CPP-NPA-NDF. The earliest was the Coalition for Peace (CfP) set up by leaders of 22 Metro Manila-based organizations from several ideological formations in December 1986 shortly before talks between the NDF and the Aquino administration collapsed. The CfP participated in the National Peace Conference (NPC) in October 1990, which issued a 7-point National Peace Agenda that was presented to the GRP and NDF.

In 1992, a gathering of 120 organizations constituting themselves as the People's Congress drafted a "People's Agenda for the First 100 Days of the New Government" addressed to newly elected President Fidel V. Ramos which called for the continuation and pursuit of the abandoned peace process with the CPP-NPA-NDF. Among these early post-1986 coalitions, only the NPC is still operational and is focused on institutionalizing reforms through its participation in the National Anti-Poverty Commission.

In Mindanao, various coalitions have sprung up in the last decade. The Kusog Mindanao umbrella covers the Mindanao Caucus of Development NGOs Network (MINCODE), the Mindanao Business Council and associations of local government officials and professionals. The Mindanao Peoples' Caucus and the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement have a mixed membership of Moros, christianized settlers and *lumad* (indigenous peoples). Together with other networks and NGOs, they launched the Mindanao Peaceweavers. A Moro coalition was also organized in Lanao del Sur in 1999 called the Muslim Multisectoral Movement for Peace and Development. It is composed of nine sectors including the ulama, traditional leaders, youth, women, professionals, and madrasah.

Of late, several peace coalitions have been formed to address heightened violence and developments in the peace process. In 2002, for instance, the Program on Peace, Conflict Resolution and Democratization of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP-CIDS) initiated a series of meetings that sought to resuscitate coalition initiatives on the peace front. They adopted the name All-Out Peace Groups (AOPG) to publicly advocate for support to the peace process and privately engage the different state and nonstate parties concerned. This initiative was followed in late 2004 with the formation of Sulong CARHRIHL after the GRP and the NDF agreed to implement and observe the human rights/international humanitarian law agreement.

A number of NGOs and campaign groups are linking gender, human rights, children's rights, disarmament, environment, foreign policy, education, and social reform issues to the peace process. Some of these are the Peace Education Network (PEN), the Coalition Against the Use of Child Soldiers, the Philippine Campaign to Ban Landmines, and the Philippine Action Network on Small Arms.

NGOs, centers and other programs

The churches have been staunch and influential peace advocates. Through regular organizations like the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and the protestant National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), they have participated in major peace undertakings such as the monitoring of the 1986 ceasefire agreement and the 1992-1993 National Unification Council (NUC) consultations. Various programs and offices were put up to attend to the peace campaign, including a CBCP-NCCP Joint Peace Committee to coordinate local, national, and international efforts. The CBCP's National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace (NASSA) campaigns and coordinates the CBCP's social action concerns ranging from anti-corruption, environment, and peace. In Mindanao, interfaith dialogues continue to be undertaken through the Bishops-Ulama Forum and many other local counterparts.

NGOs also play facilitative and coordinative roles in peace undertakings. Other collaborative efforts have prospered led by various agents like the UNDP-Philippine Office, International Alert, UNICEF Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Inter-Agency Committee, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), World Council of Churches, Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network, Asia Foundation, UP-CIDS, Philippine Council of Islam and Democracy, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Mennonites Central Committee, and the Catholic Relief Services, among others.

To date, the active and organized third-party peace constituency concerned with the peace process with the NDF remains small compared to groups interfaced with the Moro peace process.

Assessment of civil society institutional response

The stumbling blocks to the peace process have to do with the ambivalent policy of both the state and insurgent groups, the conditions on the ground that sustain the conflict, and the lack of national consensus on the way to move forward to achieve the needed social and political change as well as the peaceful settlement of armed conflicts.

Areas for assessment

A UNDP assessment of Philippine civil society peace building proposed to evaluate civil society peace-building efforts on the following aspects:

- Impact on the policy issue
- Impact on the ground-level situation
- Impact on the perception, attitudes, behavior, and perspective of other stakeholders (community, other civil society groups, elements of the state, and NSAs)

The above three areas for assessment were deemed specific enough to be relevant in informing present initiative as well as the immediate future.

Table 2 provides a listing of impacts that can serve as indicators of civil society successes. They were culled from the various case studies under the UNDP project as well as from other writings.

Table 2. Impact of CSO peace interventions

Areas of Impact	Illustrative Outcome
On the policy issue/environment	
Agenda or policy	• Adoption by the National Government of the Six Paths to Peace, Social Reform Agenda
	• Passage of related laws (e.g., Anti-rape law, creation of NAPC and NIPC laws)
	• Influence in the resumption of peace talks and end to military operations
	• Heightened visibility of women, children, Moro, lumad, and civil society in general in the peace agenda, processes and structures
	• Influence on how media write about peace and conflict and generation of greater awareness among the media.
	• Declaration of Eid il-Fitr as a national holiday
Creation of formal mechanisms	• Creation of the National Unification Commission, NAPC, and NIPC
	• Operationalization of the GRP-MILF Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee and Local Monitoring Teams, and institution of parallel third party monitoring (Bantay Ceasefire)
	• Various consultative mechanisms
Specific peace/conflict mechanisms	• Release of detained suspects, bodies, and personal belongings of rebels killed in operations; release of AFP soldiers taken by the NPA; withdrawal of troops in certain areas
Impact on the ground level situation	
	• Mitigation of human rights violations through fact-finding missions and relief missions
	• Less cases of illegal detention
	• Reduction in indirect violence through extended local ceasefires even if short-term only
	• Continuing dialogues
	• Delivery of integrated programs to alleviate the impact of violence and assist in societal reconstruction
	• Empowerment of people in regaining control over their lives through peace-building programs like spaces for peace/peace zones, housing and livelihood programs.
	• Help in resumption of economic activities, schooling, and building of unity and mutual trust
	• Help to people by having options/alternatives to joining armed groups
Impact on the attitudes, behavior, perceptions of primary stakeholders	
On the state/rebel group	• Convincing of both parties to engage in dialogues and help in developing receptiveness to campaigns for ceasefires and settlement
	• Influence in having the military become more careful/conscious of its behavior in communities and with political detainees
	• More respect for and less suspicion over church people doing justice and peace work
On the community and citizens	• Broadening of people's consciousness toward peace constituency
	• More peace organizations and peace advocates on the ground and establishment of a wide and deep network of peace advocates that can mobilize and influence ground-level situation and top-level policy
	• More human rights advocates
	• More awareness of people of their human rights and justice and peace issues
	• Growing interest in peace studies in the academe
	• More attendance in peace activities
	• Less young people joining rebels
	• More learned mediation skills
	• Better understanding by the public of other people's or groups' perspectives
	• Growing preference for nonviolent conflict settlement practices in communities (based on reflections on peace zones in Bual)

Peace building is long-term, norm-transforming and norm-building. Indicators of positive changes in norms on the part of government and armed groups include a greater consciousness to respect and observe human rights and international humanitarian law. However, although there have indeed been changes in some areas and instances, on the whole, human rights violations still continue.

It is therefore still an uphill climb. Admittedly, too, attempts at identifying and measuring impact have been very preliminary. Most CSOs do not have built-in monitoring and evaluation components. More thorough studies, including the use of quantitative methods, would therefore need to be undertaken to measure successes and impact.

Enabling and hindering factors
To be able to increase the chances of success for many of the CSOs' interventions, an identification of the enabling and hindering factors will be a good start.

Below are some of the identified factors.

Moro and Mindanao peace initiatives
Enabling factors:
- The availability of funds (from government, foreign governments, and international NGOs), resources, and capability-building projects as an offshoot of the 1996 peace agreement.
- The Catholic church's revitalized interest in interfaith dialogues and peace building in Mindanao which "set off a chain of events that all became forces promoting dialogue" (Larouse 2001).
- The MILF's welcome and respect of "third party" civil society intervention and its real interest in attaining peaceful settlement.
- The many-sided interventions—from grassroots to elite—which have provided an array of tools to address the many aspects of the conflict.

- The gross impact of several high-level hostilities from 1997 to 2003—despite the 1996 GRP-MNLF peace agreement—which thereupon mobilized people to act for peace and achieve a deeper understanding of the conflict and search for alternative approaches.
- The presence of government support in key cases, e.g., the barangay council or mayor in promoting/upholding peace zones, interfaith dialogues of the Bishop-Ulama Forum, and undertakings especially in relief and rehabilitation.
- Increasing "ownership" by the people of the process through active intervention/participation in various mechanisms.

Hindering factors:
- Lack of skills and capacities to sustain mechanisms and information
- Lack of financial resources to sustain peace efforts
- Diversity of groups hinders united movement to pursue effective solutions

Peace interventions nationwide
Enabling factors:
- Presence of initiating, sustaining and capable core
- Nature of the institution with the church having the moral authority and can serve as effective mediator; the academe having the expertise and can do peace research and education module development; and CSOs having the legitimacy to participate and intervene.
- Presence of networks and social capital which may be tapped for help.
- Availability of resources that may be secured from the mother organization of the one serving as the core or secretariat, from funding from local and international NGOs or governments, or through sharing or contributions from coalition members.
- Use of appropriate and multipronged strategies and approaches.
- Presence of supportive environment

● Institutional track record of organizational coalition success that enhances the capacity to network, mobilize, and influence policy and other stakeholders.

Hindering factors:
● Lack of and weaknesses in human and material resources where there are limited or no full-time staff/peace educators; people are overworked or are reassigned in different posts; and some lack knowledge and understanding of the diversity in cultural and religious practices.
● Lack of support and cooperation from other sectors of society.
● Continuing governance problems like the disappointment over failure of government assistance to rebel returnees and continuing threats they receive from both sides.
● Threats posed to peace work and affected communities such as indiscriminate acts of violence on civilians by armed groups; continued suspicion by the military of religious and CSO workers; and presence of armed groups and powerful people with vested interests intimidate people in the communities.
● Difficulties in engagement of armed groups where the NDF does not support localization of peace negotiations, thus hampering local initiatives and where CSOs lack the knowledge of current policies, dynamics, leadership, and changes in ideology in the communist insurgency.
● Other environmental factors such as the cyclical and/or seasonal nature of conflict which disrupt post-war physical and psychosocial reconstruction; unstable "peace and order" situation; natural calamities and other disasters; and the distance between the affected areas and difficulties in delivering services/undertaking initiatives.

Conclusion: implications for policy

In the final analysis, the peaceful settlement of the armed conflicts cannot be detached from or is integral to the national democratization process that includes social restructuring, cleaning up of the military and police, combating corruption, poverty alleviation, healing and reconstruction of war-weary communities, and the transformation of the Philippine state to make it more autonomous from private interests. Failure of the democratization process to move forward substantially can only mean a prolonged life span to the violent armed conflicts.

CSOs will continue to play important roles in the democratization project, notwithstanding the diversity, conflicts, and different capacities among CSOs themselves. It would thus be important to continue to support civil society capability-building and CSOs' various programs and activities. Their capacities and effectiveness of intervention, however, are limited by the policies, attitudes, and behavior of the state and the armed NSAs. As it is, the peace process suffers from the structural infirmity of being dependent on the political leadership, namely the Philippine president, who in turn has a short timeframe and narrow political agenda. The different government administrations have exhibited varying interest and understanding of the armed conflicts. Thus, the adoption of a "peace and development" state policy and deeper rootedness of the human security framework in government, civilian and military institutions is an important intervention that should be pushed by civil society. 📖