Case Study

Peace Zones of Mindanao, Philippines: Civil Society Efforts to End Violence

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This document was developed as part of a collaborative learning project directed by CDA. It is part of a collection of documents that should be considered initial and partial findings of the project. These documents are written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across a range of situations. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people at the time when it was written.

**These documents do not represent a final product of the project.** While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project’s findings cannot be made from a single case.

CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time, experience and insights for these reports, and for their willingness to share their experiences.

Not all the documents written for any project have been made public. When people in the area where a report has been done have asked us to protect their anonymity and security, in deference to them and communities involved, we keep those documents private.
I  Acronyms

AFP:   Armed Forces of the Philippines
COP:   Culture of Peace
CRS:   Catholic Relief Services
IMAN:  Integrated Mindanaons Association for Natives
IMC:   Immaculate Conception Parish
KFI:   Kadtuntaya Foundation Inc.
MNLF:  Moro National Liberation Front
MILF :  Moro Islamic Liberation Front
NPA:   New Peoples’ Army
SOP:   Space for Peace
UPPIF: Ustaads Pastors Priests Imams Forum
ZoPs:  Zones of Peace
II Acknowledgements

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I am especially grateful to the central command of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) for taking the time to meet with me and share their vision and goals for Mindanao. I also

¹ A collection of villages
thank the many combatants and ex-combatants of the MNLF and the MILF who talked about their experiences and their hopes but who have to remain anonymous for obvious reasons.

III Introduction

The Conflict in Mindanao

Mindanao is the second largest group of islands in the Philippines\(^2\). Its land area is approximately 10.2 million hectares and its population today is roughly 20.3 million. The population of Mindanao is its tri-people:

a) The indigenous people known as the Lumads who constitute 14% of Mindanao’s population. They are of 18 different ethnic groups.

b) The Moros who follow Islam, constitute 18% of the population. They are further divided into 13 ethnic groups.

c) The settlers (migrants) who came from Luzon and Visayas are the majority (68% of the population) and come in nine different ethnic groups.

Mindanao is a resource rich region that produces 100% of the pineapple, rubber and banana exports for the Philippines. The country’s economy depends heavily on Mindanao for rice, cattle, fish, chicken, corn, plywood, lumber, nickel and gold. In spite of this, 14 of the poorest provinces of the country are in Mindanao. Poverty coincides with religious and ethnic backgrounds.

This has made the Catholic Relief Services\(^3\) urge people to look at the conflict in Mindanao as one where material causes result in relational tensions which are furthered by

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\(^2\) See Appendix I for a map of the region
\(^3\) The staff of the Peace and Reconciliation Programme of the Catholic Relief Services, Philippines have produced the Mindanao Conflict Map which is an exhaustive account of the history of the conflict in Mindanao and the present conditions seen as an interaction of forces at the material, external, relational and system level.
There are many who present the conflict in Mindanao as a conflict between the minority Muslims and the majority Christians. They see this conflict as a Muslim or Moro problem within the context of a larger Mindanao problem. This view is explained in socio-economic terms of the deprivation of one community (the Moros): lack of education, unemployment, poverty, resistance to the colonial influences to bring change and continuing to live in isolation and effectively a community that has stagnated in comparison to the Christians who adapted to the changes introduced by the Spanish. (Diaz, 2003). The larger Mindanao problem is explained by Diaz (2003) as the combination of the socio-economic problem between the Muslims and Christians, the political interests and manipulations of vested interests and the leaders, the feeling of alienation and disenchantment with the national policies seen as unjust to the Muslims and the rivalry within the Muslim leaders. These are rooted in the history of Mindanao and the evolution of the two communities.

To explain the Mindanao conflict as a conflict between Muslims and Christians is provides a very simplistic explanation but is wrong in the fact that the theological differences do not justify the conflict (CRS Manual). Besides, in both these equations detailed above, the Lumads are left out as a party in the conflict.

(Gaspar, Lapad, & Maravillas, 2002) highlight the policies of the colonialisation and how this led to what transpired in the post-colonial period. Under this theory, the authors detail the coming of Islam to Mindanao via the trade route and the subsequent Spanish conquest and colonisation of its people. Following the usual policies of divide and rule, the seeds for a

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4 A term conferred by the Spanish on the Muslims
5 A Visayan word for indigenous people
Muslim – Christian divide were sown. The Muslims in the South, were the ones who resisted the invaders the longest but then were subjugated; however, Spain was never able to establish complete political control. While resistance in the South persisted, revolts in the North erupted. The fifty of years of American colonialisation completed the domination of the Christians over the Muslims. The US policies of forced migration from the North to the South and the subsequent transfer of political power in the hands of the Christian Filipinos was the minoritization process that led to the marginalization of the Muslim and indigenous people of Mindanao.

When Philippines gained independence in 1946, the situation of the Moros worsened. The Moro armed struggle had weakened after years of war against the colonizers. This led to some of the Muslim leaders shaking hands with the Filipino (Christian) rulers in the North. These leaders also big land owners resisted land reforms with the result there was widespread landlessness. This led to the rise of the armed struggle in Mindanao.

Civil Society Institutions

In Mindanao there is a substantive presence of civil society institutions working to bring peace to the war-torn area. These institutions vary from being local grassroots initiatives to the presence of large international NGOs; some of them come from religious traditions, others are very secular in nature and then there are the academic institutions that play an important role in bringing peace and in the fight for social justice.

It was also interesting to note that the bigger national NGOs such as Tabang Mindanaw or international ones such as CRS or OXFAM were all involved closely with grassroots initiatives for peace. This involvement is more than the usual form of supporting local
organizations with funds, here the bigger NGOs are involved in providing training, preparing training materials, conducting workshops and so on.

The NGOs described below are the ones that are more prominently involved in the Zones of Peace initiatives that are included in this research. They are by no means an exhaustive list of NGOs in the area. The roles played by each of these NGOs in the peace zones is detailed in subsequent sections.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

The CRS has been working in the Philippines since 1945. Its main office is located in Manila with three sub-offices in Cebu, Davao and Cotabato. The three primary programmes of CRS are: a) Humanitarian Relief b) Integrated development and c) Peacebuilding. As part of the Peace building programme, CRS began its peace and reconciliation programme in 1996. The primary aim of this programme is to support grassroots initiatives that want to give peace a chance. Their programme activities include support to inter-religious dialogue between Christian and Muslim religious leaders and peace education workshops that aim at bringing people together and finding peaceful solutions to common problems.

Since the summer of 2000, an annual feature of the Peace and Reconciliation programme in Davao has been the Mindanao Peace Building Institute (MPI). MPI seeks to deepen commitment to justice and peace; increase tolerance for differences; expand respect for human rights; and create new relationships among participating individuals, communities and institutions throughout Asia and the Pacific. Courses at MPI have been in the areas of Peace, Conflict Transformation, Religion and conflict, War and violence. So far, over 600 academics and practitioners, from all over the world, have participated in MPI. MPI participants have also come locally from the grassroots partner organizations of CRS such as Integrated Mindanaons
Association for Natives (IMAN), Peace and Justice programme of Kidapawan Diocese, Kadtuntaya Foundation Inc (KFI).

Kadtuntaya Foundation Inc. (KFI)

KFI is a non-governmental organization established in 1989 and based in Cotabato city. KFI engages in integrated development programmes among the communities of central Mindanao. KFI’s early thrust was to bridge the gap between the Christians and Muslims. KFI facilitates dialogues of Muslim and Christians with the goal of reducing prejudices, improving relationship, and forging mutual cooperation. The programmes, today, include the Moro Integrated Area Development (MIAD) which covers community organizing, organizational building and strengthening, community social services, resource tenure improvement and farming and economic development. Other programme areas of KFI are: peace building, integrated women and children development (for Moro women), disaster management programme, research documentation and advocacy. KFI’s coverage areas expand from Maguindanao to North Cotabato and Sultan Kudrat.

KFI has a board of directors with nine members (1 Christian, 1 Indigenous People and 7 Moros – 3 of them are women). It has 45 staff in management, administration, programme and the general services.

Integrated Mindanaons Association for Natives (IMAN)

IMAN was started in 1985 with seven members. It was founded by Mike Haroon, a Moro from the Pikit area. However, it was registered as a non-governmental organization only in 1995. IMAN is involved in providing peace education to the people of Pikit and in empowering them
to be responsible for their own development. Mike Haroon works tirelessly with his team of committed individuals to bring peace and build understanding between the different communities in Mindanao.

Haroon says his use of the term Mindanaons in his organization’s name is him making a significant point. He is opposed to the term tri-people for it is very divisive signifying that there are three groups of people who are different. Haroon believes that they are all one people and so he prefers to give them the name Mindanaons.

Haroon and IMAN start with the simple belief that violence is easy but non-violence is not.

The staff members of IMAN who are Moros, receive strong support from the communities in which they work. Their religious background does not come in the way of their genuine message to foster understanding and peace among the different groups. Their teachings and their programmes however do have a base in Islamic traditions (one derives this from the titles of some of the

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**BOX I**

*Conversation with Mike Haroon, Project Coordinator at IMAN*

I believe very strongly that peace starts with oneself, then within one’s family and then finally with people. In 1974, as a young boy, I witnessed my mother being shot and killed by the military. It took me a long time to get over my own feelings of trauma, anger, revenge, sorrow and mistrust of another community (having identified the military with the Christians).

Once I was able to overcome these feelings, I started talking to my own family. Once I got their support, I began my work in my community. We started IMAN in 1985 with seven members. The organization was registered in 1995.

Mike Haroon is my adopted name. Another Moro, my namesake, was wanted by the military and they frequently came after me because they were confused. Besides, in general, many Moros were being harassed by the military for being MNLF/MILF supporters. It made so much more sense to change my name and be able to continue to do my work without any disruptions.

Fr. Bert from IMC and I went through a process of trust-building and reconciliation. When I first met Fr. Bert he had some very strong feelings against the Moro community having been close to the Bishop of Halo who was shot dead by the MILF. Having gone through these emotions myself after my mother’s death and also because I felt that Fr. Bert had some work to do together, I approached IMC, Pikit.

Thus began our relationships. It was not always smooth. We both had to build trust for one another. We had to deal with our own biases and stereotypes. I believe that both me and Fr. Bert put to test our own personal misgivings and anger against the “other” and once our relationship graduated to one of trust and love, we were more than ready to reach out to others with a similar message. The pressure of having to set an example of friendship, acceptance and respect actually strengthened ours.

Today, we work very closely with IMC Pikit and have complete acceptance of Fr. Bert. In fact, we have a room in the Parish with a mat for our prayers.
programmes – an example, “Islamic Education for women and children”’) which leads one to believe that the main beneficiaries of their programmes come from the Moro-Muslim community. However, Mike Haroon when asked said that anyone could be a beneficiary of IMAN’s programme. He was however, not clear on how many Christians or Lumads took advantage of his organization’s programme.

One needs to note here (especially in the context of this case study) that Haroon and IMAN’s association and work with IMC, Pikit makes a significant impact in fostering Muslim-Christian-Lumad unity. There was ample evidence of this in the statements from people in the different barangays of Pikit and this will be made evident in the case-study descriptions.

**Ustaads, Pastors, Priests, Imams Forum (UPPIF)**

Based the Kidapawan parish, the UPPIF, was started on May 9, 2000. It was inspired by the regional level Bishop-Ulama conference which had a role in national level negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the MILF. Today the UPPIF, has 18 members. Its members are the religious leaders from the Muslim and Christian communities – they are Ustaads, Pastors, Priests, Imams – and they appeal to their communities to respond to the situations created by war by drawing from the peace teachings in their faith.

Fr. Eddie Pedregosa who is the Inter-religious/ Interfaith Program Coordinator of the Kidapawan Diocese and one of the key leaders of UPPIF, explains that the basic premise of the organization is that inter-religious and interfaith dialogue is one way of reaching truth and bringing peace to Mindanao. When religious leaders from these communities come together and jointly address the communities at war to reflect on the teachings of their faith and practice forgiveness and reconciliation, the impact on the local people according to him is big.
Ustaad Abdul Aaziz Hassan and Abdul Wahhab Tarasun also members of the UPPIF explain the difficult journey they have had to make in being accepted by their own communities for working so closely with the “other”. They were taunted by persons from their community who sometimes called them “the Bishops” for working closely with the Christians, for visiting the priests in their homes and sharing their food. Both explain how they themselves in the beginning were very suspicious of Fr. Eddie and were not sure how to respond to his call for working together. Today, it is a common sight to see one of the Ustaads or Imams in the dining area of the Bishop’s House in Kidapawan (the Arch-Bishop of the Kidapawan Diocese, it was mentioned by many, has had a major visionary role to play in these efforts of the Diocese), talking to the priests, opening the refrigerator to take food and even using one of the rooms to say their prayers.

While the UPPIF stresses on inter-religious dialogue, it seemed from their stories that while a lot of work is done to bring communities together, a lot more intra-community work remains to be done.

IV Methodology

The material for this study was gathered primarily from a field visit to Mindanao from May 19 to May 29, 2004. A variety of people were interviewed who were either key players or stakeholders in the setting up and maintenance of the peace zones. They were NGO workers, community leaders, community members, grassroots organization members, church officials, religious leaders, members and leaders of the MILF, former MNLF members, academics, social activists and local Barangay officials. No meetings could be arranged with the military or the local municipal officials due to lack of lead time.
Interviews – personal and group - were unstructured and a qualitative analysis is presented here in this report. Information was also gathered through observation and through the collection of locally published literature. The Catholic Relief Services in Mindanao supported and facilitated the execution of this visit to Mindanao. The peace zones visited and therefore the people interviewed were those with whom the Catholic Relief Services had some form of involvement.

Information gathered from secondary sources provided a background for this visit and subsequent analysis.

V Zones of Peace and Spaces of Peace in Mindanao – A Historical Overview

Mindanao has a history of conflict and violence. From Mindanao, also come stories of initiatives made by the communities to bring peace. One story of grassroots peace building effort which stands out is that of zones of peace. The Zones of Peace experience is one more example of community efforts to mitigate violence and survive in a war-torn region than an attempt to resolve the Mindanao conflict. With some of the earliest peace zones being set up towards the end of the 1980s, the recent versions are more creative approaches to working around the various threats to local peace zones and thus making them more resilient. The people of Mindanao have set up an example of the power that communities hold in ending violence and bring peace.

As the cases below will demonstrate, the primary goal of the zones of peace is to bring an end to the violence in the hope of less disruptions to normal life. There are other goals attached to this primary goal which will described in the last section.
A Zone of Peace can mean different things, but in Mindanao they are territorially defined areas where through an agreement, some acts are prohibited and/or others encouraged, even made necessary (Iyer & Hancock, 2004).

The history of peace zones in Mindanao goes back to 1989 when the first four ones were established in municipality of Tulunan. Since then over a period of time, there have been many such peace zones (well known are the ones in Maladeg, Barangay Bituan, and North Cotabato) initiated by the people and/or with the support of local NGOs and the church. The church in Mindanao has played a significant role supporting the creation and maintenance of the peace zones.

Under the 1996 peace agreement between the MNLF and the Philippines government, the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) was set up to lead the development in 14 provinces of the region. The area covered by the SPCPD was the Special Zone for Peace and Development (SZOPAD). From the minute the presidential directive was passed, it was doomed for failure. This primarily because the peace agreement did not draw support from the civil society. The SZOPAD was to be managed by SPCPD which had no resources, no police powers and no voice at the national level. Public opposition to SZOPADs increased when the transitional structures proved ineffective.

As a result the first peace zones (known as the First Wave ZoPs) started in the late 1980s became more distanced from the peace process at the national level between the government and the NPA (Arguillas, 1999).

Many respondents mentioned that under SCZOPAD, the government declared and funded zones of peace in where communities that were evacuated during the violence were forcibly re-located. The government is said to have even armed the local population to fight the
MILF. In some places in Pikit town, the military were stationed in the zones defeating the very purpose for which they were set up (Ferrer, 2003). It is also said that in some places MILF camps over-run by the government were converted into zones of peace.

Completely fed-up with President Estrada’s all out policy and after his overthrow, the people in parts of Mindanao, made it a point to establish peace zones that distinguished them completely from the government set up peace zones. Some of these zones were termed spaces of peace or sanctuaries of peace and others have referred to it as the second generation of zones of peace in Mindanao.

Today, there are peace zones that are have existed for as long as 14 years and others that were started after the 2003 war. Many of these peace zones have therefore withstood periods of war. At times, there have been some violence in the areas declared as peace zones, some that are struggling to retain their status and yet others have totally collapsed. Yet, efforts to create and expand zones and spaces of peace continue in Mindanao.

VI Peace Zones in Mindanao: Three Cases

*Nalapaan, Pikit, Cotabato*

Barangay Nalapaan is one of the 42 Barangay’s of Pikit town in Cotabato province. Nalapaan lies along the national highway; 165 km. west of Davao city. Nalapaan has around 330 households in five sitios: Baruyan, San Roque, Proper I, Proper II and Maguid. Sixty-five percent of Nalapaan’s population is Muslim, 30% Christians and 5% Indigenous People.

Sitio Baruyan is the only tri-people sitio. In the words of one Christian women of Baruyan “In this sitio there are approximately 86 households; of which 40 are Christians, 18 are Indigenous Peoples and the remaining 20 plus are Moros.”

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6 A Village
The Kagawat (Barangay Councillor) comes from Sitio Baruyan and is a Moro. His assistant and the sitio leader is a Lumad. It seemed as if the people of Sitio Baruyan are used to meeting visitors and talking about their experiences of declaring their sitio and their barangay a zone of peace. Bebot, a staff member from the IMC parish and the coordinator of the work in Nalapaan said that over the last couple of years that have had many visitors come to Nalapaan to understand and observe a zone of peace. The people recount the history and the past events with such an ease that it almost uncanny when they remember dates of every event in their sitio going back into the 1960s and 1970s.

The people of Baruyan recollected that they had a harmonious relationship amongst them which was rudely and abruptly disturbed in 1997. They said that in June 1997, when the AFP had attacked camp Rajamudda, a fierce war broke out between the AFP and the MILF. The MILF hounded out their camp, came to Nalapaan and to Sitio Baruyan seeking support of the community. They were hotly pursued by the AFP with the result that Sitio Baruyan and other sitios of Nalapaan became a virtual battleground.

They said “we were so afraid then of being caught in the crossfire or being targeted by the AFP for sheltering the MILF (who forcibly took refuge in their homes) that we had no choice but to leave our homes.” The people of Baruyan recount being evacuated to the local High School leaving behind their all their possessions, their farms and their homes. When they returned home days later, the atmosphere was tense, a lot of their property was damaged or destroyed. It was the outsiders who had come in and destroyed their peace but relationships among them was strained. They explained this by saying the Moro community felt their

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7 In all the interviews the people kept saying that they had lived peacefully before 1997, there was never any problem among the members of the different communities and the three times (1997, 2000, 2003) they had problems it came from outsiders. It was difficult to draw out from them their past misgivings and distrust for one another. In all the interviews and group discussions they speak as one group, with a common history and the same experiences of war.
Christian neighbours supported the AFP, while the Christian community felt the Moros were supporting and sheltering the MILF.

Then on 2 May 2000, calamity struck again. In the period of President Estrada’s all out war policy, Nalapaan was once again caught in the crossfire between the MILF and the AFP. With the help of the IMC, Pikit and the personal intervention of Fr. Bert Layson, the people of Nalapaan were moved to evacuation centres. The Christians stayed in the Parish compound while the Muslims were moved to other locations. The Moros of Baruyan said that in 2000, they had mistrusted the Christians and the priests and were unwilling to go live in the church complex.

Once again, the people had lost it all (although this time there was more looting than actual destruction of houses). They would have to start life again. In late June of 2000, officials from Tabang Mindanao visited Nalapaan and took stock of the damage to the houses and the land. On 29th of July, the people of Nalapaan were persuaded by Tabang Mindanao and Archbishop of Cotabato to return to their homes accompanied by these officials. On their return and in the days following, Fr. Layson and the IMC, Pikit stayed close to them and the idea of declaring Nalapaan as a Space for Peace was conceptualized.

Tabang Mindanao committed themselves to helping the people of Nalapaan to rebuild their lives and to be partners to IMC, Pikit who would be the main coordinators of Space for Peace Programme. The staff of IMC Pikit said that while the funds came from Tabang Mindanao and later from the Catholic Relief Services and other international NGOs like OXFAM, CORUM, PBSP, Canada Fund, ZCDFC and MIT MOPAD it was IMC, Pikit who under the leadership of Fr. Bert Layson undertook the journey with the community of rebuilding lives in Nalapaan.

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8While from different paper records that Tabang Mindanao and the Archbishop had a role to play, people report that it was Fr. Bert Layson who was responsible for their return to the Barangay.
The people reported that in the period from their return to the Barangay in July 2000 and up to November, 2000 negotiations were held with the AFP (local units), the MILF and the local municipal authorities to keep Nalapaan safe. Everyone said that it was Fr. Bert Layson’s efforts, persistence, connections and charisma that made it possible to bring all parties together. The staff of IMC, Pikit explained the personal relations Fr. Bert had with a local MILF commander and the local AFP commander. They said it was his connections with different individuals in the area from the MILF and the AFP that made it possible to secure their commitment to a space for peace. The Baruyan community unanimously expressed the opinion that Fr. Bert was the one who gave them hope when they felt all hope was gone. They trusted him completely and in getting to know him, their fears of the other community slowly disappeared. There is in fact a very interesting and amusing story of a young Moro girl (from Rajamudda) who is member of the COP team in IMC Parish. Along with other members of the COP team, she took a break in the hot afternoons to rest. The only cool place for them to rest was in the church. One day a family member came in search of her and when he asked for her, someone replied “Oh, she is in the church, sleeping!” This story and the other sentiments expressed show very clearly that the Muslim community had no misgivings about the church and its involvement in their barangay. As one Moro put it “when in need, you take help and Fr. Bert offered help.”

The IMC, Pikit has a Culture of Peace (COP) team. This team comprises of lay Christians and Moros. To give a short background to the COP teams and workshops: In 1996, the office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process invited a group of NGOs engaged in peace education to come together for a peace education workshop. Out of this workshop was born an organization Kalinaw Mindanaw – Peace for Mindanao.
Members of Kalinaw Mindanaw are academic institutions, church institutions, indigenous groups and NGOs. Using the “Panagtagbo sa Kalinaw”, a basic orientation manual designed specifically for the promotion of a tri-people culture of peace in Mindanao communities, a Culture of Peace module was developed. This culture of peace module has been used in many workshops among the community. This module encourages the people to face the conflict in the region with a clear understanding of its historical roots, to see conflict as an opportunity for growth and transformation and to actively participate as agents of peace in their communities.

In Nalapaan it was proposed at a community meeting with IMC (to which everyone in the community agreed) that members of the community would all undergo a COP workshop. A series of such workshops were held which lead to the declaration of a the barangay as a Space for Peace. The COP team members said that their own personal experiences in the war, gives them the insight into dealing with sensitive feelings and emotions of the people. In a discussion with some of the COP team members, each one of them shared tragic stories of how they and their families were affected by the war and violence. The team recounted the fear and suspicion between the Moro and Christian communities in Nalapaan. According to them the community was divided, everyone suffered from insecurity and fear. There were myths and stereotypes about the “other” that had to be broken down in the COP workshops. In the COP workshops, one of the tasks was to draw up a common history of Nalapaan and this task, the COP team believes, brought the community closer than they were before. Through the sharing of stories, there began a growing respect for the diversity in their community, the differences in culture, traditions and customs. The strategies used by the COP team for doing this was through the creation of a space for dialogue.
In response to a request for personal examples of changes brought up by the COP workshops, a young Christian women who is very active in the Nalapaan women’s programme gave her own personal example of transformation. She said she was always kept away from the Muslim community because she had a strong negative bias towards them. When asked, what were these specific biases she said that in her experience with the members of the community, the myths and stereotypes were reinforced. Others in the meeting explained that an example of stereotypes of the “other” was: Muslims and Manoba are dirty and lazy people; Christians are “pig-eaters”. Before, the COP workshops, when walking down the village lane, this woman said she kept her head down if she saw a Muslim walking down the path because she did not want to talk or get into a conversation with “them”. Through the COP workshops she felt a big change come over her in terms of her perceptions of the Muslims. Interacting closely with them in these workshops she began to feel differently. Today, she works very closely with the Muslim and Lumad women in the women’s communal farm. When asked if these stereotypes had disappeared now, the people laughed and commented that they did exist but people did not really believe in them.

On the 1st of February, 2001, Nalapaan was declared a space for peace. The term space for peace as opposed to a zone of peace was chosen because according to the people, a zone denoted some very strict boundaries and adherence to rules while a space is more loosely denoted. They said, “for example, in a zone there could be no display of arms and this is a hard one to negotiate with the armed groups and the military so an easier way was to have a space for peace where everyone was welcome even with arms – the condition being no one could use the arms or have any kind of fight in the space for peace.”
The Space for Peace declaration in Nalapaan is a document that emphasis the peoples demand for keeping violence out of their barangay and for living peacefully. One assumes that it might have included a series of dos and don’t dos. When asked about what is allowed and disallowed in the SOP, the response was: be no violence, no carrying of fire-arms, no fighting with neighbours and if there was fighting and attempt should be made to resolve it within the community. They further described the characteristics of a SOP as a place where the children would continue with their education, the community with their production activities and where they would work closely with the NGOs that can assist them in rebuilding their lives and provide them with means for livelihood.

**BOX 2**

Declaration of Peace of the People of Barangay Nalapaan, Pikit, Cotabato

Peace be with you. The glory of Allah be unto you!

May genuine Peace be with all of us!

We, the Moro, the IPs and the Christians or the Tri-people living in barangay Nalapaan, Pikit, Cotabato, for several years experienced severe hardship due to the unending violence in Mindanao, of which the latest was on May 2, 2000. Many of us left our homes including our lands and means of livelihood. We lived at the evacuation centres for more than three months.

Amidst all these, we still believe in PEACE and we are hopeful that we could still restore and rebuild our barangay through our unity and fellowship.

We are very happy with the guidance and assistance of Tabang Mindanao, NGOs, LGU, Pos and the local church of Pikit parish through the different livelihood programs which were instrumental to the attainment of the dreams of the poor for PEACE, DEVELOPMENT AND bright future.

As participants to the attainment of genuine PEACE, we, the three tribes living here, declare our stance, on this day, that barangay Nalapaan is a SPACE FOR PEACE where we live freely and peacefully, far from any violence.

We pray to Allah, to our Lord God, to “Magbabaya”, that everyone will respect our DECLARATION and that our SUCCESS will be the SUCCESS of everyone.

Signed on the 1st day of February, 2001 at barangay Nalapaan, Pikit, Cotabato.
The community felt that the success of Nalapaan as a space for peace was mixed. They were unhappy that the AFP and the MILF did not respect the SOP in 2003 when there was violence in Mindanao. At this time, the atmosphere in Nalapaan was very tense and the primary reason for this was its geographic location – its proximity to the national highway. In 2003 too, the community had to be evacuated but this time there were “internal evacuations”, that is, within the barangay. There was an evacuation centre in the sitio where everyone stayed together at night and went during the day to work in their fields. Even though they felt their space for peace had been violated, they felt that it also mirrored their success. The success lay in the trust the people had in one another, the lack of fear in staying together and more importantly, the urge to help and support the members of the “other community”. As one person put it “we did not fear our neighbours anymore and took comfort in their presence at night.” The people told a story of how sanctions had worked when there was a violation (See Box 3 for the story) which made them feel that their SOP was a success.

**BOX 3**

An incident involving a resident of sitio Baruyan happened in April, 2001. A Moro who was selling ice-cream was slapped by a military personnel stationed outside the sitio because he went very close to the military detachment. The Moro was in a drunken state when he wandered into the secured area. The community of Baruyan along with members from other sitios of Nalapaan had assisted the military in building the barricade. The military officials explained their colleagues reaction by saying, the Moro was suspected of being a spy for the MILF and hence slapped. The Moro, when sobered, explained that he had not consciously wandered into the military area. Besides, since he had helped build the barricade, he could not have been a spy; in fact, as far as he was concerned, the military were their friends. When the matter came up before the Barangay officials, it was felt that the incident (the violence associated with slapping) was a violation of the SOP. The Barangay officials paid a compensation to the Moro and the military transferred the entire detachment.
MANIFESTATION OF SUPPORT (JUNE 4, 2002)

In line with the teaching of Islam, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is consistent with its policy for a peaceful solution to the age-old Bangsamoro problem. This is a commitment to God, Almighty and our people as an alternative to war and bloodshed.

As you will note, the MILF has always responded positively to any peace effort for the peaceful resolution of the Bangsamoro problem from the Aquino, Ramos and Estrada Administrations to the present Arroyo Administration. The successful holding and progress in the peace process between the government and the MILF under the Arroyo government speaks well of our commitment for a peaceful, just, and comprehensive political settlement of the problem in Mindanao.

I do understand that the Arroyo government from the inception is very much concerned with the return and rehabilitation of the displace peoples and their development from the ravages of the all-out war. This leadership of the MILF has responded and committed to the support during the negotiation of the FRAMEWORK FOR THE RESUMPTION OF THE PEACE TALKS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES (GRP) AND THE MORO ISLAMIC LIBERATION FRONT (MILF) signed on March 24, 2001 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and the GRP-MILF TRIPOLI PEACE AGREEMENT signed on June 22, 2001 in Tripoli, Libya.

Significantly, the two parties have agreed for a system of cooperation and coordination for the immediate normalization of the situation, the return of the displace peoples or evacuees, Relief and rehabilitation, and a joint development program in the conflict-affected areas pursuant to the provision of the IMPLEMENTING GUIDELINES OF HUMANITARIAN, REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT ASPECT OF THE TRIPOLI PEACE AGREEMENT OF 2001 signed on May 7, 2002 at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

In behalf of the leadership of the MILF and the MILF Peace Panel, I manifest, as I do hereby declare our manifestation of support to the peace project being initiated by the local peace advocates and concerned peoples. I am optimistic that peace and justice will/shall once again reign through the cooperation and support of everybody and concerned peoples in your communities.

Thank you and Wassalam.

Mr. Jun Mantawil
Head Secretariat
MILF PEACE PANEL, GRP-MILF PEACE TALKS

In general, the community felt that the number of conflicts had gone down since the Barangay was declared a space for peace. There were conflicts – petty quarrels, some crime and robbery – that were treated as violations to the SOP and sanctions imposed on the guilty. The people explained the mechanisms they had in place to find a resolution to conflict and to impose relevant sanctions. In the system they had set up, if there were intra-Muslim or intra-Lumad conflict, their council of elders would help the parties come to an agreement. The Christians would take their conflicts to the Barangay officials who also dealt with all inter-community conflicts. In Baruyan, the people felt that in a way they were like a model to the other barangays.
of Nalapaan and that this made them more responsible and committed to preserve the sanctity of the SOP.

Along with IMC Pikit’s assistance in the declaration of Nalapaan as a SOP came their support and advice in creating and maintaining the mechanisms to sustain the SOP. The IMC came into Nalapaan with the resources (financial and personnel) to carry out an integrated development project for the community of Nalapaan. The integrated development programme provided funds for livestock, money for seeds and fertilizers, and farm equipments. As said by one member of the community, they were people in need and they wanted help. The community felt that the help they received for basic survival and for the education of their children was very important to them but was separate from their desire to have peace with members of the other community. The programmes of IMC helped them in realizing both their needs. The staff of IMC felt that the integrated programme was necessary and in the words of Bebot “if the people’s basic needs were not satisfied they could not think about peace”. The help the community receives today is substantial but the joint cooperatives and the communal farm run by the women are all examples of good working relations between the communities.
Declaration of Peace by the residents of the Sitios belonging to Panicupan SPACE FOR PEACE Integrated Rehabilitation Project

Peace be with you! The glory of the Lord be unto you!

We, Magindanaon, Bisaya, Ilangano and Tiruray, residents of the different “sitios” villages of Panicupan Space for Peace Integrated Rehabilitation project including Barangays Ginatilan, Takepan, Lagunde and Dalengaoes here in the municipality of Pikit, Province of Cotabato (decided to) express our desire to live in peace.

We have been living in poverty and fear caused by the previous incidents. The most serious happened on May 2, 2000 when we all suffered and have had to live in evacuation centres for four months, more or less, in fact some had stayed there for more than a year. Amidst all these, we still believe in peace and we can only attain this through our efforts to stop violence and that there will be unity, understanding, respect, fellowship and above all our constant dialogue for the good of everyone.

We are very happy with the assistance of OXFAM-GB, different non-governmental organizations (NGOs), People’s organizations (Pos), together with the Moro partners, local government units (LGUs) and the facilitation of the Integrated Rehabilitation Project Team of the parish of the Immaculate Conception, Pikit, Cotabato through the different programmes which could become instruments in the attainment of our desired peace, development and good future.

Being part of the attainment of genuine peace we, the three tribes living here, express our stance that from this day, barangays Panicupan, Ginatilan, Takepan, Dalingaoen and Lagunde are a SPACE FOR PEACE where we are free and living peacefully (and) away from any danger.

We pray and ask Allah, the almighty God, from “Magbabaya”, that our declaration be respected by all and that our success be the success of everyone.

Signed on the 4th of June, 2002 at Barangay Panicupan, Pikit, Cotabato.

Panicupan, Pikit

neighbouring

Panicupan

neighbouring

of Nalapaan. The

community of

requested the staff

IMC, Pikit to

declare their barangay as a space for peace. The captain (barangay official) of Panicupan, a Moro, explains how he actually hounded Bebot, the IMC staff member at the evacuation centres in 2000. He saw Bebot interacting with the evacuees from Nalapaan providing them with food and other relief measures. He wanted the same for his (Panicupan) community. When he asked around, he was told that IMC provided assistance to the community of Nalapaan and also worked with them to improve inter-community relations. From that moment on, he pursued Bebot.

Later, when Nalapaan was declared a Space for Peace, he noticed that they continued to receive development assistance.
The secretary of Panicupan spoke honestly when he said that they as a community were people in need and they would do anything – including declaring themselves as a space for peace – to satisfy their basic needs.

Fr. Bert and his team once again responded. They negotiated with the municipal authorities to recognize Panicupan as a space for peace.

On June 4, 2002 amidst great fanfare, the people of Panicupan declared their barangay as a space for peace. Once again the armed forces (MILF and MNLF) and the military were present. People mentioned that the military did not give a written commitment but only an oral one.
Agreement between the Moro and the Bisaya (settlers) in Sitio Saguing, Barangay Ginatilan, Pikit, Cotabato.

1. Work for the return of the Moro and Bisaya (settlers) with mutual trust and confidence (in sitio) to restore good relationship.
2. The Bisaya (settlers) here in sitio Saguing are requesting our brothers Moro for their sincerity to the agreement, likewise the Moro to the Bisaya (settlers), to attain genuine peace.
3. For those who want to live in the sitio, whether a Moro or a Bisaya (settler), let me abide by the old argument that they be registered in the barangay to ensure his identity.
4. If ever we have visitors or relatives in our homes, whether a Moro or a settler, we should inform our people. For the Moro, please inform councilor Ben Buhian or Benjamin Gerodias. If Bisaya, please inform Sedik Akmad Maninding, this to avoid doubts from both sides.
5. All Moro and Bisaya living in this sitio, request all barangay officials to monitor the situation every now and then so that (if) problems would immediately be given attention before it would grow big.
6. We are hoping that the barangay officials and those in authority would implement “curfew hour”.
7. All residents, Moro and Bisaya, establish signs for the presence of questionable persons especially during the night to alert everyone.
8. For incidents like cattle rustling here in the sitio Saguing, we request the authority and the military to make immediate response to control such crimes.
9. We, the Moro and the Bisaya, are requesting the authorities to give justice if there are violations or untoward incidents.
10. We the Moro and the Bisaya, are ready to accept every goodwill to show peace to everyone.
11. We are highly hopeful that we, Moro and Bisaya, be provided with “sustainable livelihood projects” for our daily living and for our daily needs.
12. We, the Moro and Bisaya are hoping for the support of the local government headed by Mayor Farida U Malingco, the military and police, Fr. Roberto C Layson, OMI, Program Coordinator for the Space for Peace, together with his staff.

May our almighty God, O Allah Bless us always!

Roberto I Gomez          Sedik Ahmed  
Spokesperson          Spokesperson 
Settlers          Moro

Witnesses:
1. Honorable Mayor Farida U Malingco, Municipality of Pikit, Pikit, Cotabato
2. Ludamindo Q Gomez, Chairwoman, Barangay Ginatilan
3. Manny Suliek, Chairman, Barangay Lagundi
4. Tanny Mandas, Chairman, Barangay Panicupan
5. Fr. Bert Layson, OMI, Project Coordinator, Space for Peace
6. Alexander Tagun, Chief of Police, PNP, Pikit, Cotabato
7. Col. Onesimo, Banaga, Battalion Commander, 40th Infantry (Magiting Battalion 6 INF (K) Div. PA, Ladtingan, Pikit, Cotabato

Since Panicupan was declared a space for peace there have been no reported clashes between the military and the MILF in the area. In fact neither of them has even passed through their Barangay.
In Panicupan, too, as in Nalapaan the integrated development programme is an integral part of the concept of space for peace. In fact, it is in Panicupan that the link between the two becomes the most clear because of the reasons behind the request made by the community.

Since Panicupan there have been other barangays in Pikit that have declared themselves as spaces of peace: Takepan and Ginatilan. All this has been through the support of the IMC, Pikit. Bebot explains that the plan is to create a network of spaces of peace. The network will be called GINAPALADTAKA (GINAPALADTA means “we are lucky”). The network name is the first two letters of each barangay that will be a space of peace.

GI – Ginatilan
NA – Nalapaan
PA – Panicupan
LA – Lagundi
D – Daleingaon
TA – Takepan

Kalakacom

<table>
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<tr>
<th>BOX 7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>We, Muslim and Christian residents of sitio Saranay-Gantung, Barangay Takepan, Pikit, Cotabato, agreed to abide by the provisions herein listed to resolve the misunderstanding caused by the deliberate cattle rustling (9 carabaos) owned by the Christian residents on April 9, 2003.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. The leaders of the Moro populace will help in bringing to the attention of the MILF and convince them to return or pay the nine lost carabaos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Process the restoration and strengthening of the good relationship of the Moro and Christian residents in sitios Saranay and Gantung.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The Moro leaders would help in talking with Mamakung so he will be understood and finally erase suspicions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Stop pointing a finger or suspicions on both sides. Investigate facts of incidents to avoid intrigues and that truth will come out.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Revive beautiful traditions, fellowship, celebrations and understanding of the Moro and Christian residents in sitios Saranay and Gantung.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Enhance respect for both sides or for each tribe.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. If there are misunderstandings, let dialogues be first priority. Dialogue must be primary instrument in resolving conflicts or misunderstandings. Avoid the use of any form of violence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Bring to the attention of concerned parties and to trusted leaders of the community any form of intrigues or complaints. Call for a conference of the parties involved for possible resolutions.</td>
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<td>9. Bring to the attention of a trusted leader of the community and call for the parents involved of children getting fruit trees or anything from somebody else.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. The Moro residents would face the armed group (MILF) and secure the Christian residents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. The Christians would also face the Armed Forces of the Philippines and defend the interest, the rights and secure the Moro residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Inform all residents of any problem caused by any group. This to be deliberated by the people and that possible solutions be reached and nobody should be left if there is a need to vacate the place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. If the area is already peaceful and both communities are secured all together, the residents of Saranay and Gantung, should leave the evacuation centres and return to their places of origin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The residents of Saranay and Gantung should be informed of the provisions of the agreement. Inform them of the importance of its contents to ensure and strengthen its orderly implementation and maintain peace and good relationship of the residents of both sitios.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. For violations of any provisions of this agreement, the Council of Elders would convene and deliberate on such violations. Appropriate recommendations (resolutions) will be formulated and be brought to the grand assembly for approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. This agreement shall take effect on both sides now in conference on this day 29 May, 2003.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. This agreement shall take effect for the general populace of sitios Saranay and Gantung. After the contents are comprehensively and thoroughly explained to the people and after the Council of Elders have signed covering the two communities this 28th day of June, 2003 at Saranay Parok Centre, Barangay Takepan, Municipality of Pikit, Province of Cotabato.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Signed:
Moro Council of Elders (Two Signatures)
**Bual, Isulan, Sultan Kudrat**

Barangay Bual is situated at the foot of the Daguma Mountains in Isulan town of the Sultan Kudrat Province. As one approaches the Barangay, the picturesque beauty and the rugged silence is very striking. The houses are very neatly laid out and have small gardens in the front or the back and there are community halls and facilities. There is also a huge mosque at the entrance.

This, however, is not how Bual looked or felt some years ago. On 14 December, 1996, Bual burned when a land dispute between a Maguindanaon (Muslims) and an Ilongo (Christian) escalated out of control. Over two hundred houses (largely belonging to the Muslims) were burnt, four people died and large number of people (Muslims and Christians) were displaced (evacuated) over a period of three days of violence.

While the cause of the violence in 1996, was a dispute between a Muslim and Christian community, the effect was felt on the entire community. When asked why a family dispute should have strained relations between the entire community, the people at the community meeting explained the 1996 event as a festering wound that exploded. However, they added, when the “pus” came out of the wound, this facilitated the healing. According to them, the settlers (Christians) came to Bual a long time ago and lived peacefully with the Muslims and the Manobas (Lumads). However, with the enforcement of the martial law in the 1970s, the environment changed; where previously there were concerns about rising crimes, now, there
were tensions between the Muslims and Christians. The tensions kept growing and in 1996 they finally, erupted.

Villagers said that in the period between December 14, 1996 and April 14, 1997, the people of Bual were in evacuation centres, living in fear and licking their wounds. There was no communication between the Muslim and Christian residents of Bual in the evacuation centres and it was not just because of the physical separation of the two communities. There was a complete break – down in the trust of the “other”.

In April 1997, Kadtuntaya Foundation through the Catholic Relief Services provided emergency relief to the people of Bual. The people recollected that in the days following their return to the Barangay, there was fear and suspicion in the air. Men and women went to work in the fields carrying their weapons.

According to the people it took almost four years to build back the neighbourly spirit in the Bual community. Four years of integrated development programmes by the Kadtuntaya Foundation and the Catholic Relief Services that included a component of peace building. There were many inter-faith dialogues and culture of peace workshops conducted for members of both communities. This led to the formation of a grassroots organization called SAMAKAMA (Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Mamamayan ng Bual Tungo sa Kapayapaan – Association of United People of Bual Towards Peace) in December 1998. SAMAKHANA is registered as a cooperative that generates financial support for its members livelihood. Its other important function is its peace-building component that has encouraged the community to adhere to what they had learnt from their peace education.

The Kadtuntaya Foundation received financial support from the Catholic Relief Services and launched a project called the Bual Integrated Development for Peace Program (BID-Peace)
in 1998. A very important component of this programme is its integrated development programme. This includes the following pieces: formation and strengthening of people’s organization, agriculture, pre-school education, health, micro-enterprise and peace building. Today, one sees in Bual ample evidence of these programmes: a beautiful and well-equipped community centre, a community health centre with good facilities and a well-trained team of health workers, a day-care centre for children (which is now at the end of the KFI project is now funded by the Barangay government).

Applications were forwarded by the Kadtuntaya Foundation and the community to the Barangay government who then forwarded it to the municipal government to recognize Bual as a Zone of Peace. The Kaduntaya Foundation is run by a very charismatic and dynamic person, Gumail, who through his personal connections was able to secure the support of the MILF and the military to the zone of peace. On April 14, 2001, barangay Bual was declared by the community as a Zone of Peace. Every year, the 14th of April, is celebrated as the Peace and Reconciliation Day, in Bual, it also being the day the community returned from the evacuation centres in 1997.

Gumail recounts the bitterness and distrust among members of the community and the struggle that he and the members of his team had to go through to break down barriers and rebuild relationships.

Gumail explained that one of their strategies was to start with relief and rehabilitation and then move on to peace-building. He remarked that economic problems add to the problem of peace. Besides, according to him, in providing relief and rehabilitation one came to know the needs of the people and in fact the real core of a person. This knowledge helped him in choosing an approach that would appeal to that person in peace building. Gumail puts it simply by saying
that change takes place in three stages: personal, then relational and cultural. The Culture of Peace module has contributed to this approach of Kaduntaya Foundation for it dealt with each of these three stages. His felt that a lot of work still needed to be done in Bual but that most of it was structural. In some ways, he was implying that it was out of the hands of the people. The people of Bual themselves had come a long way.

The people said that without the intervention of Kaduntaya Foundation and the Catholic Relief Services, they could not have come together and created a zone of peace. For them the two NGOs were the catalysts for change and definitely were the force that brought them together. When asked to comment on their personal transformation, their reply almost unanimously was that there was never really any conflict between the Muslims and Christians. The events of 1996 was only because of the fall-out between two families. Since the Muslims and the Christians had always co-existed in peace, and once they had overcome the fear and distrust this even had caused, coming back together was only natural. The feelings of fear and distrust came and lasted for a while because they felt the outsiders could come again and cause trouble. The fear was not about their next door neighbours. There were, however, a few in the community who felt that the 1996 event reinforced some of the misgivings the two communities had against each other and while earlier the conflict between them had never reached such proportions of violence, now they were aware of the dangerous levels it could reach. Added to this is the volatile situation in Mindanao and the outbreak of war again in 2000, 2001 and 2003.

A CRS staff member said that for one barangay with a mixed population (tri-people) to sustain the spirit of goodwill and faith in one another when relationships across Mindanao are fragile and polarized is challenging and daunting. But, Bual did manage to do it with the help of the two NGOs. The zone of peace declaration in April 2001 has seen significant changes in the
atmosphere and life in the community. The declaration itself is centred around prohibiting all
groups (including the MNLF, MILF and the AFP) from engaging in war in the geographic area
of Bual and from any display of arms. The latter they felt was important because if one had arms
around handy and got into any form of confrontation there was a temptation to use them.
However, during the discussions, people admitted to still possessing arms but said one hardly
saw them around anymore.

The zone of peace included more than just these two physical evidence of reduction of
violence. It included having respect for the other’s traditions and customs, peaceful settlement of
conflicts (intra community conflicts were to be referred to the elders but inter-community
conflicts should be taken to the Barangay officials), promoting peace and peace education in the
community and supporting development activities for the community through the local
organization.

The zone of peace declaration in Bual has recognition and support from the local
municipal government, and as mentioned earlier, the armed groups and the military. When the
MILF leaders were asked about their support for peace zones they said they did support local
people’s efforts to bring peace and that they were initiatives that were to be encouraged.
However, the added that real peace would not come until there was a clear solution to the
Mindanao question and this had to be negotiated with those sitting in “Metro Manila”. They felt
one should not over-emphasis on the peace zones because these initiatives were not going to
bring and end to the war and violence in Mindanao. When asked if the peace zones actually
hindered their ability to “fight” since it placed restrictions on areas they could enter with arms or
use them, their simple answer was “no, it did not have any impact.” Did this mean that if Bual
Gumail had an interesting perspective on the support the zone of peace received from the armed group. He felt that the armed groups and the military do not want to come across as the “bad guys” or the violent ones, they wanted to win over the people by showing that they were for peace. Besides, peace zones gave them a temporary respite from war and this was another reason why they supported community initiatives. Either way, he capitalized on their intentions and used his good connections to get their support for Bual and other peace zones in the region.

III Analysis

Zones of Peace are territorially based in Mindanao. The territory, a geographic location with clear boundaries is either a sitio, a barangay or a town. The more common ones are the sitio (village) or a barangay (cluster of villages). In Pikit, barangay Nalapaan is a space for peace and all the five sitios under the barangay became a space for peace. Similarly in barangay Bual all the seven Poroks (understood as the equivalent of a sitio) were part of the Bual Zone of Peace. In the case of the other barangays in the Pikit area that were soon to join the network: GINAPALADTAKA, it seems to be more of a step by step, that is, sitio by sitio process.

Zones of Peace and Spaces of Peace

In Mindanao, there is some distinction between zones of peace and spaces of peace. There are newer ones that are declared sanctuaries of peace. The way people understand a zone or a space is different. As mentioned above in one of the earlier sections, some see a zone as a rigid concept where the dos and don’t dos are strict, while a space is more loose and more welcoming of everyone including those with arms. Others explained that a zone was big while a
space was small – territorially. Yet others opine that when the government began to hijack the term in 2000 and started declaring their own zones of peace, it became imperative to distinguish the newer ones from the government declared ones – thus was born the term spaces of peace. Sanctuaries of peace on the other hand were explained as ones that had the backing of a very “churchy” group. However, they all seemed to float around the same ideas of reducing violence.

Who declares a Zone of Peace?

According to Garcia⁹, in the Filipino experience of zones of peace, the people of that zone make a unilateral declaration (independent of the support received from others such as government, armed groups and forces) to keep their community off war and violence. He further adds that bringing recognition for the zone is an objective but not a pre-condition to setting up the zone of peace. In Nalapaan, the idea to declare their community as a space for peace did come from the community in their discussions with IMC. In Panicupan, the community asked IMC’s help to declare themselves as a space for peace. In Bual, the zone emerged from the community dialogues and discussions with KFI. In all three cases, the presence and close association with an NGO or the church was important for the idea to take shape. Besides, in all three cases the NGO/ Church played a crucial role in getting the military, armed groups and local government to express support and recognition at the time of the official declaration as a peace zone. This does not necessarily differ from Garcia’s point about recognition for the zone being an objective but not a pre-condition. There are many other examples in Mindanao of peace zones that were declared irrespective of support and recognition from the armed groups or military at the time of declaration.

⁹
In all three cases, the NGO or the Church played a very important role in initiating the idea to declare the community as a peace zone. They also provide assistance (both personnel and resources) to the communities to get the ZoP started and to some extent in maintaining it, at least in the initial stages. There is a very close networking of NGOs in Mindanao and the obvious advantage this has been their capacity to reach out to many communities.

**Timing of the creation of a Peace Zone**

Iyer and Hancock\(^\text{10}\) in developing a framework to analyse zones of peace examine the usefulness of locating them on a temporal scale: before, during and after a formal peace agreement (Iyer & Hancock, 2004). The Mindanao peace zones fall in all three categories of the temporal scale because of ongoing peace negotiations and the intermittent break out of violence. However, because of the nature of violence: low-intensity and intermittent and the nature of peace agreements: incremental but largely related to cessation of hostilities, it would be safe to suggest that the Mindanao peace zones are in the first plane on a temporal scale: that of being established and maintained during conflict or put differently, before a peace agreement. Iyer and Hancock conclude in their study that in the first plane of the temporal scale, it is more important to have people’s involvement than the government’s in the creation and maintenance of the peace zone. Also, any form of imposition on the community would have a negative impact on the survival of the peace zone. These conclusions are reinforced by this study; in Mindanao the people in consultation with the NGO declared themselves a peace zone and it was the people’s organizations that were responsible for the maintenance of the zone.
Conflict, Community and Peace Zones

In Mindanao, a zone of peace (sitio or barangay) with a mixed population of Christians, Muslims and Lumads, seemed more vibrant as compared to a zone of peace that comprised of just one religious community. The more homogeneous a community, the more difficult it was to get them to interact and accept other communities. For example the other sitios of Nalapaan – which had a 95% population of one community, either Muslim or Christian – were not as actively a part of the space for peace as was Sitio Baruyan a tri-people sitio. Communities that had to interact with members of the “other” group on a daily basis were the ones that had a vested interest in creating a space of peace where setting up rules for interaction made their daily existence smooth and easy.

Another issue needs mentioning. There are many debates that are just about semantics. For example: while many of the NGOs and community refer to the presence of the three groups of people in Mindanao as the tri-people there are others who find the term divisive. Similarly, there is a lot of discussion about who is a Moro and who is a Muslim. While some use the term synonymously others insist that not every Muslim is a Moro. Moro is an ethnic identity and clearly used in the superior sense of being the first ones to be there. When there is some kind of aggravated behaviour by an individual who follows the Islamic faith, the common refrain from the members of that community would be that the person is a just a “Muslim” not a Moro.

Formal declaration of a Peace Zone

Another important point to be mentioned that it was not possible during this field research to access a single signed declaration of zone of peace. In all three cases, the people in the community had a very clear idea of what was allowed or disallowed in a peace zone and this
included their expectations from the AFP and the armed groups. This NGOs involved too were sure of what acts the peace zone encouraged and those it did not allow. This makes one conclude that there elements and functions of a peace zone that do not formally have to be stated but is a shared and accepted knowledge. It is clearly something that was well discussed since the wordings for the formal declaration came from the COP workshops. However, the question remains if this clear understanding that is shared by the community and the NGOs of the expectations from AFP and other armed groups is communicated to them in some manner. In fact, the incident described in Box 3 shows the AFP being held responsible for a violation and their subsequent actions shows acceptance to the principles of the ZoPs. Similarly, Box 7 tells a story of how the MILF was being held responsible for a petty crime – a violation of the SoP. In the discussions with the MILF, it seemed as if they were aware or at least had no dispute about the communities desire not to turn their area into a virtual battleground. When the MILF leaders were asked if they had no objection to peace zones because if more and more of them mushroomed it basically gave them fewer areas in which they could actually fight the military their response was understanding the communities desire for peace. To which they add, that real peace can come to Mindanao only when there is a resolution with those sitting in “metro Manila”.

In spite of the fact that no copy of the declaration was available (the samples posted here are the unsigned copies found in IMC office) in Pikit or in Bual, everyone seemed very clear on what the peace zone meant. These leads one to believe that the cultural aspects associated with the declaration – the public fanfare, the presence of local government officials, NGOs, AFP and the armed groups at the declaration, the agreement and the understanding reached through the
COP workshops and demonstrated through dances, poetry and skits at the declaration ceremony – are far more important than a signed sheet of paper.

*Elements of a Peace Zone*

As is clear from some of the sample copies of a declaration of a peace zone, the document is seems more of an expression by the communities of wanting to live in a peaceful atmosphere that is devoid of violence. For this, they make a commitment on how they will behave with one another and what are some of the rules they will abide within the community. The communities seem to give the local government at the barangay level a lot of power (refer to the agreement in Ginatilan, Box 7 or Box 5 for the agreement in Takepan) to settle the disputes that arise between them, that is the Moro and Christian communities. In Takepan they actually give the barangay officials and the military the responsibility to ensure that the two communities do not stray from the objectives of the peace zones. None of these formal declarations consist of a clause that explicitly forbids the military or the armed groups to indulge in fighting in their area. This is surprising given the fact that the violence the barangays in Pikit experienced was due to the fact that their areas were caught in the crossfire between the MILF and the AFP. [In Bual, the violence was due to a family feud between the two communities however, it was not possible to get a copy of the declaration of Bual as a zone of peace so it is hard to comment on what it stated]. The staff of IMC and CRS mentioned that it was not the people who actually had a problem with one another, in fact, peaceful co-existence between the Moros and Christians had happened in the past and continues to do so, it is those from the outside, fighting the bigger war in Mindanao who cause the problem. It is therefore puzzling why the declaration of the peace
zones do not explicitly state what the community demanded from the armed forces and the armed groups.

The economic aspect was a crucial part of the ZoPs. The assistance the zone required from the NGOs and an acknowledgement for the assistance given so far is mentioned in the formal statement of declaration. One actually wonders if a zone or space for peace would survive without this economic component. The answer is probably no as explained by most of the NGO workers. According to them, basic needs are those that need to be met first and only when they are satisfied can people talk about peace. As one person remarked, people do not talk about peace on an empty stomach. When one’s stomach is empty they can pick up a fight with anyone. In their own words “the idea of peace and basic needs is closely tied and should be respected.”

**Maintaining a Peace Zone**

In the barangays in Pikit and in Bual, the communities maintained their zone of peace. In all the barangays there are established people’s organizations (cooperatives) that take responsibility for the various joint ventures of the entire community. In Bual, KFI is planning to soon withdraw completely and let SAMAKHANA run the various programmes and maintain the peace zone. Though the people of Bual expressed concern about funding, they felt confident about running it by themselves. Bual receives funds for some of its programmes from the Barangay office. However, it has had to shut down its day care programme for children because the funds from the Barangay were not released. Due to non-payment of loans taken by the members of the cooperative their own funds too were dwindling. This does raise some concern if the peoples’ organization, SAMAKHANA will be able to manage on their own if KFI moves
out. Gumail and the staff of CRS had thought about these issues and it appeared their withdrawal would be done in a phased manner.

In the Nalapaan and Panicupan, the community again had their own cooperatives that took care of the economic aspect of maintaining the SOP. The community was also actively involved placing sanctions for violations. For this, the local barangay officials (members of the SOP community) played a leading role.

In Pikit, Fr. Bert and the staff of IMC had a great influence. There was great respect for their work and gratefulness for their assistance. One obvious question is: Will the people be able to maintain the SoP in the absence of IMC? The staff of IMC answer this by saying that they never take decisions for the community, they only facilitate and empower them to come together and control for their lives. They believe their presence is a form of on-going training to prepare the people to manage on their own in the future.

Evaluating the success of Peace Zones in Mindanao

Are the zones and spaces of peace in Mindanao a success? The people themselves are restrained in their answer and quote their success and their failures. All communities mentioned that in general, violence has gone down since their community was declared a ZoP or SoP. The communities get assistance, either from an NGO and/or the barangay, which has improved their quality of life in the economic sense. Both the people and the NGOs are in agreement about the increased levels of trust between the communities in the areas declared as ZoPs or SoPs. There is a greater appreciation of the “others” religion, beliefs, customs and traditions.

An point to note here is that whenever there have been violations, sanctions have been applied and respected. This adds to the successes of a ZoP or a SoP.
The people themselves are quick to highlight, however, the bigger violations that have taken place in the context of the war in Mindanao. In Pikit, the SoP was not respected at the time of fresh outbreak of war in 2003 although the damage was not to the same extent as in 2001. No one could answer with confidence if the AFP and armed groups would respect the peace zones if once again full scale war broke out. As, everyone one in Mindanao points out, this situation is out of the control of the community that has declared themselves a peace zone. Here is where one feels the peace declarations, as they are currently worded, works during the time of a ceasefire in Mindanao but may not work during war.

The people in Pikit and Bual kept insisting that they have always had good relations in the community. It was the forces from outside who have frequently come in and disrupted their peace.

Garcia (1997) opines that the ZoPs should be link between local and national efforts to bring peace to Mindanao. The experiences of the Pikit and Bual do not show any work done in this direction. However, on a local level and within a specified territory they do seem to contributed to the reduction of violence and over-all development. Today, in Mindanao, individuals and institutions from the civil society have a voice in the on-going peace negotiations been the MILF and the GRP. Many of these people do take the ZoPs experience to the table at the national level, yet it is hard to see the connection today between the peace declaration at the local level and the peace process at the national level.

But, success should not be measured by the evidence or lack of such dramatic impacts, it could well be seen as an incremental process in which there have been some positive changes at the first level – the local areas. In a way, ZoPs make a contribution by creating conditions for just and durable peace.
**Bibliography**


