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Women and Armed Conflict*

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Strategic Objectives:

- E1. Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflict or under foreign occupation.*
- E2. Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments.*
- E3. Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations.*
- E4. Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace.*
- E5. Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women.*
- E6. Provide assistance to the women of the colonies and non-self governing territories*

History provides no written chronicle of women's experiences of organized political violence, ignoring as inconsequential the differentiated ways women had been affected by armed conflict and violence, their stories of survival, resistance, and peace building. Only in the late 20th century and early 21st century did literature on women's experiences of war, militarism and armed conflicts emerge, revealing as Rita Manchanda puts it, "the multiplicity and complexity of women's narratives of the war story" (Manchanda, 2001).

It took half a century before the first Filipino woman, Lola Rosa, had the courage to talk about her unspeakable past as a 'comfort woman' during the Japanese occupation. In the last two decades, voices of women who had experienced sexual violence in the wars and conflicts in Rwanda, Afghani-

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stan, East Timor, Myanmar and many others began to be heard. Through the active support of women's movements across the world, women stepped forward not only to reveal the atrocities they experienced in times of armed conflict/war but also to offer alternative paths to attaining inclusive and sustainable peace. Many more women, in many parts of the world including the Philippines, have demanded the right to participate in formal peace negotiations. This report provides a backdrop of two of the most persistent conflicts in the Philippines: their impacts on the lives of women and their families and the significant peace initiatives led by the government and civil society groups including women's peace advocates in promoting women's leadership and participation in the ongoing processes in the Philippines.

Twenty years after the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) were laid out, significant milestones have been achieved by the Philippines in pushing forward the rights of women and girls during war and strengthening their participation in peace building (Philippine Commission on Women [PCW], 2014). Among the groundbreaking accomplishments of the country in women, peace, and security are the passing of the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710) and the development of the Philippines' National Action Plan based on the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325, 1820, and 1888, which recognize women's important role in conflict management and their need to be protected from sexual violence during armed conflict situations. The government's commitment to the BPfA's strategic objectives on women and armed conflict is highlighted by the appointment of three women leaders who are spearheading efforts to restore and sustain peace in the country, namely: Secretary Teresita "Ging" Deles, chairperson of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, chairperson of the government panel in the peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Yasmin Busran Lao, a member of the Philippine government Peace Panel with the MILF. They have all been instrumental in the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) on March 27, 2014 and the drafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which is presently being deliberated by the legislative branch.

The appointment of two women leaders to the government's peace panel negotiating with the Communist Party-National Democratic Front (CPP-NDF) and the New People's Army (NPA) is likewise noteworthy. However the cessation of negotiations shortly after the resumption of peace talks in 2013 dampened what would have been a productive engagement by women in the peace talks.

The Mindanao Conflict

Military superiority may destroy the capacity of the Bangsamoro to win the war but it will not destroy their will to resist as it was during the entire era of colonial

rule and conquest which lasted for more than four hundred years. (Dr. Samuel Tan, 2000)

The persistent conflict in Mindanao has deep roots in the historical exclusion of the Moro people from the mainstream of the Philippines' political and economic and cultural life. This situation has been aggravated by decades of deprivation, land grabbing, government neglect and injustice. From the perspective of the Moro people, the core issue is the recognition and restoration of their independence and autonomy.

The conflicts in Mindanao must also be seen within their broader social and economic contexts. In Mindanao, poverty and a lack of social opportunity are both drivers and outcomes of conflict. Although the region is rich in natural resources, continuing conflicts have left the area among the most impoverished in the Philippines. The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) fares especially poorly on national economic indicators, with a 2006 official poverty rate of 55.3% and some 58.9% of ARMM women living in poverty (Dwyer & Gacoco-Guiam, 2013).

The peace and security issues in Mindanao have exacerbated the poverty and poor living conditions in ARMM. This "45-year Moro insurgency has killed 120,000 people, displaced 2 million and stunted growth in the poor but resource-rich Mindanao" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* [PDI], 2015) It also disrupted the delivery of basic services such as health care, education, infrastructure, and other social protection services. ARMM consistently had the highest poverty incidence among families with 40.5% in 2006, 39.9% in 2009, and 48.7% in 2012 (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2013). It also had the lowest literacy rate at 82.5% and the lowest school attendance at 59.3% (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2012). In the last 2013 elections, there was an 82.21% voters' turnout, where 1.2 million out of the 1.4 million registered voters actually voted (COMELEC as cited in the Official Website of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), 2013).

Women are one of the most vulnerable groups in the context of war. In a study conducted by Ibon Foundation (IBON) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2007, armed conflict affects women at various levels resulting in increased multiple burden and susceptibility to different forms of violence. Women's mobility may be severely affected during conflict leaving them unable to access employment, health services and markets. Furthermore, women and children are often dislocated for short or prolonged periods when they have to leave their homes because armed conflicts are occurring in their community. Conflicts arising from clan violence or *rido* put women at greater risk of violence or harassment. Thus women and children live in constant fear for their lives (Dwyer & Cagoco-Guiam, 2013; Asinas, De Dios & Dinglasan, 2014).

Gender roles and identities are also affected, as explained by one source:

In Mindanao, when clan or ethnic identity is perceived to be under attack, scripts for "appropriate womanhood" may become more central to identities, circumscribing roles and even creating divisions among women. In an atmosphere defined by extreme fragility, practitioners have struggled to address complex questions of female identity and their deep religious, historical, and cultural roots. To the extent that there has been some conflict-related transformation in traditional gender roles, there is also frequently a profound struggle taking place both within communities and among external agents about whether, and how, partial or significant gains in transforming gender roles can be maintained or even nurtured. (Dwyer & Cagoco-Guiam, 2013)

Women also take on heavier domestic tasks, family responsibilities, and added economic burden with the unmet basic needs and health issues in evacuation centers, resulting in a decrease in their quality of life. Also affecting their psychological well-being and mental health are both real and perceived threats of violence against them. One study (Mindanao Commission on Women, 2003) emphasized that women from ethnic communities experience another layer of burden as they occupy a lower status than men while at the same time, they are subjected to harassment by both government and secessionist groups in the midst of conflict. The same results emerged out of the research collaboration between Women and Gender Institute (WAGI) and OPAPP in 2010 (WAGI, 2010), which emphasized the urgent need to make counseling and other psychological services available to women who have been affected by war, especially in Mindanao. Supporting these findings, the Philippine Statistical Authority reported that in 2008, a considerable percentage of women in the ARMM experienced domestic violence, with 23% of women experiencing physical violence since age 15, and 13% experiencing violence perpetrated by their spouse.

The marginalization of women in conflict-ridden areas of Mindanao is reflected in their health, socioeconomic, education and literacy conditions. In terms of health, ARMM had the highest maternal mortality rate based on 2006 data of 350 per 100,000 live births, according to the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB). In terms of employment, more women (5.7%) than men (2.5%) were unemployed in ARMM in 2012. Poverty incidence among women in ARMM was at 58.9%, 28.8% higher than the national poverty incidence rate. ARMM had the lowest percentage of women who had at least completed elementary education in 2008, which was only at 46% while most regions were at the 60% to 80% range (National Statistical Coordination Board [NSCB], 2006a).

Women occupy a lower status than men, which is also reflected in their weak involvement in governance, leadership, and other community roles. Women still perceive community participation as their performance of reproductive duties within their families. A study conducted by the Women's Peace Table in six conflict-affected areas revealed that approximately 50% of women in Cotabato, Isabela, Jolo, Lamitan, Marawi, and Zamboanga had

heard about the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro and the Bangsamoro Basic Law but did not know what they mean (Women's Peace Table, 2014). Consequently, about 50% of participants in the study did not understand terms such as referendum, political autonomy, fiscal autonomy, and ministerial system. About 60% of women had very little knowledge and awareness of the Bangsamoro peace process which did not augur well for women's active participation in this process. The study also showed that most women who were eligible to participate in the elections intended to do so as voters, and not as candidates or leaders of political parties (Asinas, de Dios & Dinglasan 2014).

The GPH-CPP-NPA-NDF Peace Talks

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) was established in 1968; it has led one of the longest communist struggles in the world today. Guided by Marxist-Leninist-Maoist strategy, it aimed to overthrow the national government, establish land reform and install a people's revolutionary government. In 1969, the CPP created the New People's Army (NPA), its armed wing, with guerilla fronts in Tarlac, Pampanga, Bataan, Southern Tagalog, and some areas in Visayas and Mindanao. In April 1973, the National Democratic Front (NDF), a coalition of left-leaning political parties, trade unions, and other allied groups, was established. Among its member organizations were the CPP-NPA. The CPP-NPA fought against foreign ownership of the country's resources. Their attacks targeted foreign-owned and operated mines, construction companies, logging concessions, among others.

Three years after the BPfA, on 16 March 1998, the Philippine government and the CPP-NPA-NDF signed the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) at the Hague, Netherlands. According to Sulong CARHRIHL, a citizen's network that advocates for the meaningful implementation of CARHRIHL, the Agreement: (1) provides protection to individuals and communities directly affected by the conflict, and sets concrete measures to promote HR/IHL; (2) holds both the GRP and the CPP-NPA-NDF accountable for their actions; (3) gives human rights victims additional recourse to seek justice for violations committed on and after 7 August 1998; (4) through active advocacy and enforcement, it serves as a mechanism for the prevention of HR/IHL violations and conflict, and promotes HR/IHL norms among all actors which is important in building a just and peaceful society; (6) through mutual respect of all parties, it enhances the environment for more substantial agreements leading to a peaceful settlement of the armed conflict. CARHRIHL only took effect in 2004 with the formation of the GRP-NDF Joint Monitoring-Committee (JMC). On 30 May 1999, the NDF terminated the talks, accusing the government of violating the principle of national sovereignty cited in The Hague Joint Declaration in view of the government's ratification of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) (Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, n.d.).

Between 2001 and 2009, peace talks were held on and off over issues such as the assassination of Congressman Aguinaldo by the NPA and the US listing of CPP-NDF-NPA as terrorist organizations. Six years after, efforts to revive the peace talks finally led to informal chair-to-chair meetings in December 2010 in Hong Kong. Both chairs agreed to the following:

- Unilateral Christmas suspension of offensive military operations by both sides from December 16, 2010 to January 3, 2011; and
- Conduct of preliminary talks on 14–18 January 2011 to pave the way for the resumption of formal talks on 15–21 February 2011 in Oslo.

Both parties also agreed to issue an 18-month timeframe to complete the negotiations. This was followed by the reconvening of the JMC of the CARHRIHL. Both panels further agreed to complete the draft comprehensive agreements on the remaining items of the agenda, such as the socio-economic reforms, political-constitutional reforms, and end of hostilities and disposition of forces. The Philippine government appointed two women leaders out of the five-member peace panel. They are Jurgette Honculada, an advocate of women and labor rights, and Maria Lourdes Tison, a peace advocate. The GPH Peace Panel Secretariat is also headed by a woman, Ma. Carla M. Villarta, another peace advocate.

In the wake of the Mamasapano incident, the Communist Party of the Philippines expressed sympathy to the kin of the 44 slain Special Armed Forces (SAF) personnel and stepped up their call to “stand against the Aquino administration...and expose continuing US military interventionism in the Philippines,” reiterating their agenda to end EDCA, VFA, and other defense treaties with the US that they deemed “lopsided” (Locsin, 2015).

While the CPP has recently announced ongoing back-channel negotiations with the Philippine government, it is more optimistic about a truce with the military rather than a lasting peace, despite the fact that its political wing, the National Democratic Front, is finally returning to the negotiating table after a two-year impasse (Fonbuena, 2014). As a background, the Philippine government last formally ended peace talks with the CPP in 2013 (Locsin, 2015), but the history of failed negotiations goes further than that. In February 2011, the two parties met in Norway but could not reach an agreement on the release of detained communist insurgents and the declaration of a longer ceasefire (Fonbuena, 2014). However, Jose Maria Sison of the NDF recently expressed an interest in restarting the peace process, and, according to presidential spokesperson Edwin Lacierda, the government was willing to return to the peace table as of January 2015, but the talks needed to be “time-bound and doable” (Legazpi, 2015). There is no schedule yet for the meeting between Sison and Aquino, as there is also a lack of categorical indication that the suspended negotiations will resume before Aquino steps down in 2016 (Clapano, 2015).

Compliance with the BPfA

Strategic Objective E1: Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflict or under foreign occupation.

Strategic Objective E3. Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations

There is a serious commitment to increase the number of women involved in the peace process as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Participation of Women in Peace Panels

Formal Peace Panels	No. of Women	No. of Men	Percentage of Women
GPH-MILF Negotiators (2013–2014)			
GPH	2	2	50 %
MILF	0	5	00
GPH-CNN Negotiators			
GPH	2	3	40%
CNN	2	3	40%
Subtotal	6	13	31.6%
Relevant Technical Working Groups on FAB Annexes			
GPH TWG (2013–2014)			
Normalization	2	1	66.7%
Wealth Sharing	2	1	66.7%
Power Sharing	0	3	00
MILF- TWG (2013–2014)			
Normalization	0	3	00
Wealth sharing	0	3	00
Power sharing	0	3	00
Subtotal	4	14	22.25%
GRAND TOTAL	10	27	27%

Source: WEAAct 1325 and the Global Network of Women Peace Builders 2014

The National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP WPS) is the government's commitment to implement UNSCR 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security, 1820 (2008) on Addressing the Issue of Widespread or Systematic Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict, and 1888 (2009) on the Designation for a Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Ending Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict. Through Executive Order (EO No. 865), a National Steering Committee on Women, Peace and Security (NSCWPS) to Implement the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 was created. Headed by the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, it is composed of the Philippine Commission on Women as well as Secretaries and Heads of the departments of justice, foreign affairs, interior and local government, national defense, social welfare and the commissions on indigenous peoples and Muslim Filipinos (OPAAP, 2011).

The creation of the Philippine National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security supports the provisions of the *Magna Carta of Women*, particularly Chapter 4 (Section 9), which states that "all women shall be protected from all forms of violence as provided for in existing laws" (PCW, 2010). Section 9b of the said chapter provides for women's protection and security in situations of armed conflict and militarization. Furthermore, while Section 10 affirms women's right to protection and security in times of disasters, calamities, and other crisis situations, Section 11 asserts women's representation and participation in decision-making in the peace process (OPAAP, 2011).

Other than these two policies, the Philippine government also shows its recognition of women's unique needs in the context of armed conflict through the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2011–2016 (National Economic Development Authority [NEDA], 2009). Chapter 9 of PDP mentions that one of its specific strategies to address peace and security is to support the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

The Mindanao Peace and Development Plan 2020, which was crafted by the Mindanao Development Authority (MDA), likewise uses the participation of women and youth as "essential elements for the success of various peace and development interventions." Most importantly, the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), which was signed by the Philippine Government and the MILF as the foundation of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) and the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) highlights the basic right of women to meaningful political participation and protection from all forms of violence (PCW, 2014, p. 2).

In the case of the security sector composed of the police and the military, women's participation has been steadily increasing to meet the target allocation. The Philippine National Police (PNP) is just 1% shy of its 15% allocation while the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is still 11% away of the 20% mark.

RA 7192 or the “Women in Development and Nation-Building Act,” which was authored by Senator Santanina Rasul and Senator Raul Roco opened the way for the admission of women to military schools, stating “[A]ny provision of the law to the contrary notwithstanding, consistent with the needs of the services, women shall be accorded equal opportunities for appointment, admission, training, graduation and commissioning” (RA 7192 Section 7).

In 2012, 92 women and 241 men were admitted in the Philippine National Police Academy (PNPA); and in 2013, the numbers were 86 and 171, respectively. Also in 2013, the 10% quota on the admission for women applicants was removed by the Philippine Public Safety College (PPSC) which led to a significant increase in the admission of women applicants to 33.3% in 2014 compared to 25% in the previous year (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2014).

At the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), 54 women and 311 men were admitted in 2013, and 92 women and 244 men a year later. In terms of graduation, Philippine Public Safety College (PPSC) graduated 19 women out of 143 in 2013 and 19 out of 203 in 2014 while the PMA graduated 34 women out of 268 in 2013 and 10 out of 202 the following year. In RA 8551 or the “Philippine National Police Reform and Reorganization Act of 1998,” it is stipulated in Section 58 that the PNP “shall prioritize the recruitment and training of women who were trained to serve the women’s desks and handle cases of violence against women.” The Women and Child Protection Center Directorate for Investigation and Detective Management said that in the 17 Provincial Regional offices, 1,857 women’s desks were established with 3, 737 women deployed for this purpose (WE Act and Women Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2014).

CSOs Working for Peace, Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights in the Context of Armed Conflict

The Philippine Commission on Women lists fifty (50) civil society organizations and women’s groups advocating for women’s empowerment and participation in peacebuilding. Broad networks of civil society organizations consisting of various sectors (religious, youth, academe, media, etc.) have increasingly collaborated with women peace advocates for greater impact.

Women’s groups working for peace formed the network to promote and implement UNSCR 1325 called WE Act 1325. In close coordination with OPAPP, member organizations of this network assist in the implementation of the NAP WPS through training, research, and advocacy. Member groups of the WE Act 1325 network aims to concretize and localize national government policies through community-based projects supported by a wide array of local, international, and intergovernmental donor organizations. Its notable activities include advocacy against small arms, and for security sector reform. (*See Annex I for list of WE Act member organizations.*)

Another network of women's groups actively engaged in the peace process is *Women's Peace Table*, composed of the Women and Gender Institute of Miriam College, the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy, the Mindanao Commission on Women, and Noorus Salam, a group of Aleemat or Muslim religious teachers as well as community leaders, educators and former government officials. It was organized to connect the formal peace tables with the tables of ordinary women from communities, schools and other institutions. It aims to:

- build a national constituency for peace among women and different strategic groups that will support not only the current GPH-MILF negotiations but more specially over-all peace in the country;
- ensure that the Basic Law on the Bangsamoro is gender responsive; and
- localize the implementation of the Philippine National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security and the Mindanao 2020 peace and development objectives in selected provinces and cities in Mindanao.

It serves as a bridge among strategic sectors, including women leaders in the peace movement, business, the religious sector, media, labor, cooperatives, academe, widows, orphans, and others in support of the peace process. Its most significant work thus far are lobbying for a gender inclusive Bangsa Moro Basic Law (BBL) compliant with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the formation of Women's Peace Tables among the youth; academe, religious sector, business, and media sectors.

Friends of Bangsa Moro is an umbrella network of Mindanao-based and Metro Manila-based NGOs that have banded together to ensure greater support for the passage of the BBL. It has also played a big role in countering the public and media campaign against the MILF and BBL in the aftermath of the tragic killing of 44 SAF soldiers. It has metamorphosed into an alliance called *ALL OUT PEACE* to start a campaign to resume the legislative deliberations on the BBL and for peace, reconciliation and healing.

The concerted and often coordinated campaign by women's groups and peace advocates has had some visible success in terms of integration of gender issues in the proposed BBL and the Annexes to the Framework Agreement on the Bangsa Moro (FAB) (OPAPP, 2012) (See Table II).

Strategic Objective E2. Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments.

In his annual state of the nation address to the Congress (2012), President Benigno Aquino III urged lawmakers to pass an Armed Forces modernization bill that would add 75 billion pesos (\$1.8 billion) for defense spending over the following five years to acquire more weapons, personnel carriers,

TABLE II: Gender issues addressed in peace agreements
Annexes to the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB)

Agreement	Program/Population	Provision
Annex on Revenue and Wealth Sharing (2013)	Gender and Development	XII. "In the utilization of public funds, the <i>Bangsamoro</i> shall ensure that the needs of women and men are addressed. For this purpose, the <i>Bangsamoro</i> shall set aside at least 5% of the official development funds that it receives for support programs and activities for women in accordance with a gender and development plan. "
Annex on Power Sharing (2013)	Governance Structure: <i>Bangsamoro</i> Ministerial Government	<p>"2. The <i>Bangsamoro</i> assembly shall be representative of the <i>Bangsamoro</i>'s constituent political units, as well as non-Moro indigenous communities, women, settler communities, and other sectors. The <i>Bangsamoro</i> Basic Law shall ensure that the representation in the assembly reflects the diversity of the <i>Bangsamoro</i>."</p> <p>"7. There shall be a <i>Bangsamoro</i> council of leaders composed of the Chief Minister, provincial governors, mayors of chartered cities, and a representative each of the non-Moro indigenous communities, women, settler communities, and other sectors. The <i>Bangsamoro</i> council of leaders shall be chaired by the Chief Minister."</p>
Annex on Normalization (2014)	Socio-Economic Development	<p>"3. Special socio-economic programs will be provided to the decommissioned women auxiliary forces of the MILF."</p> <p>"5. The Parties recognize the need to attract multi-donor country support, assistance and pledges to the normalization process. For this purpose, a Trust Fund shall be established through which urgent support, recurrent and investment budget cost will be released with efficiency, transparency and accountability. The parties agree to adopt criteria for eligible financing schemes, such as, priority areas of capacity building, institutional strengthening, impact programs to address imbalances in development and infrastructures, and economic facilitation for return to normal life affecting combatant and non-combatant elements of the MILF, indigenous peoples, women, children, and internally displaced persons."</p>

frigates and aircraft. In light of the inroads in Philippine territorial waters by China, President Aquino said that the country needs to improve its military capability (Aquino, 2012). In 2013, President Aquino announced that “10 attack helicopters, two naval helicopters, two light aircraft, one frigate and air force protection equipment will also be arriving. At this moment, the armed forces are canvassing equipment such as cannons, personnel carriers and [additional] frigates” (Philippine Defense Spending, 2015). This increase is attributed to the situation in the West Philippine Sea and the territorial dispute with China which is claiming the Spratlys islands and the Baja de Masinloc both of which are also claimed by the Philippines.

Defense spending as a proportion of national government expenditures grew during former President Corazon Aquino's tenure from a 1985 low of 7.7%, to 9.1% in 1989. However the increases, did not reach the levels during the Marcos regime. In 1979 the Philippines spent more than P17 billion (US\$806 million) a figure that represented almost 17% of the government's budget. This does not yet include the security assistance from the United States of America, which increased tremendously during the Aquino administration as part of the Military Assistance Program (Philippine Defense Spending, 2015).

For the year 2015, the Philippine government allocated Php144.5 billion to the military sector, an increase of 17.3 % over the previous year's expenditure of Php123.2 billion. This places National Defense in the top ten most prioritized departments of 2015 (DBM, 2014), and it is also indicative of a rising trend in Southeast Asia wherein most countries are expanding their military capacities, “making it one of the fastest-growing regions for defense spending in the world” (The Economist, 2012).

US aid allocation to the Philippines prioritizes the latter's defense sector as well, as can be gleaned from the fact that the US recently lifted restrictions on military aid to the Philippines (Lee-Brago, 2015) and that, from 2002 to 2013, the US obligated 312 million USD in military aid to the Philippines and it has also promised to help modernize Philippine defense equipment (Lum, 2012). The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between the US and the Philippines has been met with virulent criticism based on the argument that a more robust US presence violates Philippine sovereignty (Amador 2015).

Strategic Objective E4. Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace.

Ensuring that a culture of peace is developed across the country is a long term project that requires the participation of the government, civil society and communities. Among the government agencies, only a few such as OPAAP expressly articulates this. However, major policy decisions of the government show promise. For instance, through the Department of Foreign

Affairs (DFA), the Philippines ratified the treaty on the establishment of the International Criminal Court and the filing of a complaint against China in the International Court of Justice. It has also ratified the Geneva Conventions, several Protocols, and almost all human rights treaties.

Only a few schools have incorporated peace education in their curricula. Miriam College with its *Center for Peace Education* and *Women and Gender Institute* has introduced peace and gender subjects and has endeavored to undertake training among public and private schools at the elementary, secondary and tertiary levels. Ateneo de Davao, Notre Dame University and Mindanao State University have also introduced academic subjects as well as research topics on peace.

Rarely do media consciously promote peace; in fact, they have been accused of sensationalism when covering stories of conflict. The Mamasapano tragedy was covered by media with such sensationalism that it created an environment of pity and sympathy for the families of the *Fallen 44* and such high levels of hatred and negativity towards the Muslims in general and against the MILF and the BBL in particular. The overly emotional depiction of the tragedy resurrected long held biases against the Muslims and a public that can be swayed to embrace all out war against the Muslims often perceived by many as non-Filipinos.

Strategic Objective E5: *Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women.*

The cost of the long-standing war between the government and the MILF is staggering not only in terms of the casualties of war but also in terms of social and human costs. Each encounter results in deaths, displacement and disrupted lives of people including their economic livelihood and the education of children. The government has mostly engaged armed opposition through military engagements and campaigns alongside peaceful dialogue in formal peace tables. However, the trend since the Mamasapano incident during which the 44 SAF soldiers were killed has been escalation rather than decrease in military action.

From August 2008 to May 18, 2009, a total of 693,158 people were displaced in Mindanao due to the escalation of armed conflict between the MILF and government forces following the aborted MOA-AD signing in August. Fighting started in North Cotabato province in early August and rapidly spread to 10 other provinces in Mindanao. By mid-March 2009, an estimated 400,000 people had managed to return. But as of May 18, 2009, at least 240,000 people were still displaced inside and outside 127 evacuation centers, spread over eight provinces of Mindanao. The majority were concen-

trated in 3 provinces: Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, and Shariff Kabunsuan (Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, 2009).

As a result of the recent military Abu Sayaf encounters and the killing of 44 SAF members in Mamasapano, the renewed military campaign against the Bangsa Islamic Freedom Fighters since February 2015 has caused the displacement of some 64,600 people in North Cotabato and Maguindanao (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2015).

In response to such continued suffering, 30 women leaders from the provinces of Lanao, Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sulu and Basilan Islands, representing the various Moro, Lumad and Christian tribes of Mindanao, committed to working for the protection of civilians, particularly of women, and to finding peaceful solutions to the conflict in Mindanao. They initially gathered together in a conference at Eden Resort in Toril, Davao City to craft a *Mindanao Women's Framework for Civilian Protection*.

Crafted in September 2009, the *Mindanao Women's Framework for Civilian Protection* was presented to the Philippine government as well as the heads of the MILF with hopes of incorporating its provisions into the Framework for the Protection of Non-Combatants as stipulated in the GRP-MILF July 29, 2009 Joint Statement. As civilian protection is based on universally recognized laws, the *Mindanao Women's Framework for Civilian Protection* invoked and recognized various international documents including Geneva Conventions (Protocols I and II), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, EU Guidelines on Women and Children, United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on Women, and Peace and Security, among others. Parties to armed conflicts are thus bound to honor and respect the human rights of non-combatants/civilians in armed conflict situations (Asinas, de Dios & Dinglasan, 2014).

Many women in Mindanao, especially Moro and Lumad women, are victims of poverty and violent conflict. They need urgent attention. On top of security and protection issues, women in areas where there is conflict are deprived of economic opportunity, reproductive health services, basic services such as shelter, water and food, among others. Women in these situations are so burdened by multiple domestic tasks that often they are not able to participate in public life. Women in evacuation camps suffer doubly. (See Table III)

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge facing women peace advocates and other CSO has been the negative impact of the Mamasapano tragedy where the lives of 44 SAF soldiers, 18 MILF soldiers and several civilians were lost. The mishandling and the inept crisis management could cause the total collapse of the BBL and the peace process of the Aquino government, and with it, the rapid advancements in terms of laws and policies that aim to address women's

TABLE III. Protection Issues and Concerns of Women in Mindanao

Indiscriminate conduct of war	Women are concerned about indiscriminate bombings, shellings and aerial attacks in thickly populated areas. The conduct of the war hardly distinguishes between combatants and civilians. The reckless military shelling of villages has deprived women and their families shelter and has destroyed farms, water systems, health centers, schools, mosques, communication facilities and other vital physical infrastructures.
Internal Displacement	As of April 2009, an estimated 600,000 persons had been displaced by the renewed hostilities between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Majority of these evacuees are Moros from the poorest regions.
Subhuman conditions in the evacuation camps & inadequate relief goods	Relief assistance comes late, is inadequate and not sensitive to the needs of women and children and inattentive towards women's specific reproductive and health needs. Expired food items and medicines and discard goods are dumped in evacuation centers with little consideration of their nutritional value. Some relief agencies treat the IDPs as beggars, having become dependent on relief for their survival.
Arson, theft and looting and deseccration of places of worship	The attacks and military incursions into villages have swept clean communities of what little resources have remained for women and their families to survive and build on as arson, theft and looting continue to be committed by these armed men. Military operations have likewise converted some madrasahs, mosques, schools and plazas into camps and sleeping quarters for the military.
Forced recruitment	Forced recruitment of indigenous peoples into rebel groups, as well as the anti-insurgency paramilitary groups, which have divided communities and aggravated the conflict.
Proliferation of unexploded ordnance	As a result of the indiscriminate bombardments and mortar shellings, hundreds of UXOs are littered across many farms and civilian communities. This presents a clear threat to the safety of returning IDPs.
Arrests, abductions, strafings and killings	The indiscriminate firings at civilian communities, along with arrests, harassments and killings, have deprived us of our right to life and security as we now live in constant fear for our lives. Our farmers and fishermen and their families could not now move between farm and villages without risking their lives and those of us who try to accompany our men are often subject to these same attacks.
Sexual violence and psychosocial trauma among women	Military access to civilian territory makes sexual harassments and sexual assaults real threats to women. While it is open knowledge that rape and other forms of sexual violence are committed against local women, these are suppressed or unreported because of existing cultural taboos. VFA exercises in conflict areas have likewise further threatened civilian life. In Sulu Islands, rape of a local woman has been reportedly perpetrated by a US soldier.
Hostaging and use of women as carriers of weapons of war	The use of civilians and especially women and helpless children as human shield is often resorted to by armed groups as pursuit operations intensify. Women are also sometimes used by partisan armed groups to carry weapons and other war paraphernalia.
Mutilations and beheadings	These barbaric methods of conducting war are especially noted in the Sulu and nearby Basilan Islands, and are committed by both rebel and government forces.

issues in armed conflict situations, most specifically the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.

Although the Bangsamoro Basic Law operates under the guiding principles provided by the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro which asserts the right of women to “meaningful political participation,” this concept has not been clearly defined and operationalized in the draft BBL. Many women residents of communities that lie within the proposed Bangsamoro political entity have expressed that they do not have enough knowledge about what the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) and BBL are all about.

The leadership of the MILF will have to compete in the 2016 elections to consolidate the gains of the peace process. However, their inexperience in electoral politics may cause them to lose the elections. It would be unfortunate if, after all the years of the peace process, the same clan and patronage politics will prevail in Bangsamoro.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Intensify the campaign to regain the trust of the public and Congress to pass a reasonable and acceptable BBL in light of the Mamasapano tragedy.
- Resume peace talks between the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in accordance with the Hague Joint Declaration and other bilateral agreements. This should include exploring and identifying areas for cooperation among the parties.
- Intensify efforts to train and support women as community conflict resolvers, and to provide them with programs that offer women mediation, monitoring and research skills in local languages.
- The National Action Plan (NAP) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security needs to be mainstreamed in other programs and projects of the government to facilitate the Bangsamoro transition to normalization. This includes sustained capacity development for NAP implementing agencies especially in the establishment of NAP data system and harmonization of sex-disaggregated data.
- Women's groups and other civil society organizations should continue to lobby in Congress for the inclusion of gender provisions in the BBL to ensure that the law that will be enacted will be gender-responsive and will provide a clearer definition of “women's meaningful political participation.”
- There should be a systematic documentation of the involvement and work of women in peacebuilding efforts and initiatives including engagement to the peace process and negotiations with CPP-NPA-NDF.
- The government, in collaboration with women's peace groups and other civil society organizations working on the ground, should channel its efforts to information dissemination through culturally and linguistically sensitive media that

may be easily accessed by women and other members of conflict-affected communities.

- The Bangsamoro leadership will have to prepare for electoral politics and win some major seats to preserve the gains of the Bangsa Peace negotiators and implement the BBL, which may in the end, be a weaker one as a result of the mistrust of Congress and the public, and constitutional infirmities of the original version.
- Sustain engagement with religious leaders who can help in clarifying religious interpretations that are being used to impede women's participation. Popularize these interpretations and make them accessible to affected women.
- Reduce government allotment for military expenditures and instead increase budget allocations for basic social services such as health, education, and food especially in conflict affected areas.

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ANNEX 1

List of Organizations Active in WEACT 1325 Coalition

- Aksyon para sa Kapayapaan at Katarungan (AKKAPKA)
- Al- Mujadillah Development Foundation, Inc. (AMDF)
- Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
- Asian Circle 1325
- Balay Mindanaw Foundation, Inc. (BMFI)
- Balay Rehabilitation Center Inc
- Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government
- Conflict Resolution Group Foundation, Inc.

- Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute (GZO)
- Generation Peace Youth Network (GenPeace) Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) Isis International
- Katungod han Samareña Foundation, Inc. (KSFI)
- Kutawato Council for Justice and Peace Inc.
- Lupah Sug Bangsamoro Women Association
- Mindanao Commission on Women
- Mindanao Peoples' Caucus
- Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro, Inc. Paghiliusa sa Paghidaet-Negros
- Philippine Action Network to Control Arms (PhilANCA)
- Philippine Coalition for the International Criminal Court Pilipina, Inc
- Pinay Kilos (Pink) Saligan
- SLCB-Cultural Heritage Research Center Téduray Lambangian Women's Organization (TLWO)
- Women and Gender Institute (WAGÎ)