

# Mindanao Community-based Institute on Peace Education

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Strengthening Grassroots Interfaith, Dialogue and Understanding (SGIDU) Program  
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Griffith University Multi-Faith Center



## “Interfaith Dialogue & Education Toward a Culture of Peace: A Response to the Mindanao Conflict”



## Background

Mindanao is home to three major groups, referred to as the island’s *‘tri-people’* adhering to diverse cultures which show divergent beliefs and practices. Based on the total Mindanao population of 16 million (1995 census), the indigenous people, the Lumads comprise 5 percent; the Islamized people, the Moros 28.23 percent or 5 percent of the country’s population; and the Christians, the settlers and their descendants 71.77 percent (Notre Dame Journal, 1995).

The long years of conflict in Mindanao have left several communities bereft of the peace and development that they rightfully deserve. The roots of these unrests could be traced to among others, the prejudices and biases usually evident in a multi-

cultural society. Rodil (2002) described the conflict in Mindanao as a social problem with the existence of deep-seated prejudices characterized by mutual distrust and mutual suspicion.

Interfaith dialogue and peace education has been proven to be one of the more effective approaches to address this social problem. The challenge of the interfaith movement in Mindanao today is to bring the movement to the communities, to the very people whose faith are often shaken by painful experiences; and to the schools and classrooms to create a culture of interfaith dialogue among the youth.

The Mindanao CIPE seeks to provide a forum for educators (formal and Nonformal), policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders to share their experiences on interfaith dialogue and peace education and learn from each other to further strengthen the movement locally and globally. Specifically, it aims to:

- Explore avenues for institutionalizing peace education, the Mindanao peace process and interfaith dialogue in the formal and non-formal education processes in the Philippines;
- expose the peace educators, policy makers and practitioners on the various interfaith and peace education conceptual frameworks and practices;
- consider conducting collaborative researches on peace education and interfaith dialogue; and
- to dialogue for networking locally and globally.

## Panel 1: “Educating toward a Culture of Peace”

Peace education is actually social transformation, wherein peace educators are challenged to strive toward being active agents in the process of social transformation. The fundamental guiding principle should be cooperation and community building. This was emphasized by the speakers in the first



panel presentation. The panel is composed of **Mr. Tony Jenkins, a co-coordinator of the Peace Education Center of Columbia University, New York, Dr. Akihiro Chiba, a visiting professor of the International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan and Dr. Virginia Cawagas, an adjunct Professor of Griffith University, Brisbane Australia and Program Officer of its Multi-faith Center.**

Tony Jenkins, traced the philosophical and value foundations of International Institute and Community Institute on Peace Education - learning communities that embody the importance of “learning how to learn together” as an essential part in the process of social transformation, and learning communities that are sustained by the values of cooperation and community. Jenkins stressed that the process of “seeking solutions” through reliance of so-called “experts” may not be the best way to go in effecting social transformation. Instead, he suggested that transformative learning and community learning approaches, one that involves the participation of everyone involved, may be the better way in engaging structural, cultural, and political barriers to peace.

Professor Akihiro Chiba, on the other hand, expounded on the contribution of education to peace, kyousei, conviviality. He detailed Mindanao as an island of contradictions, an island of conflict and peace movements, of underdevelopment yet rich in development potentials, of division moving on to conviviality.

Dr. Virginia Cawagas, emphasized that the primary goal of any peace education effort must be transformation – healing of the physical, psychological, and even spiritual scars of the past that limit the potentials of the present and the future, and developing among learners a commitment to the cultivation and promotion of values, attitudes, and practices that define peace.

Overall, all three speakers attempted to define the fundamental philosophy surrounding developing an education for peace, discuss the necessary qualities for peace educators, and envision the ultimate goal of peace education.

## **Panel 2: “Interfaith dialogue and Peace Education”**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Plenary session on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007 saw four speakers coming from different social backgrounds speak on their thoughts



and experiences on interfaith dialogue and peace education. The speakers were **Aleem Elias Macarandas of Mindanao State University, Marawi; Archbishop Fernando Capalla, Archbishop of Davao; Ms. Beatriz Colmo, of the Obo Manobo tribe of Mt. Apo and representing the views of the Lumad; and Dr. Toh Swee-Hin, of Griffith University Multifaith Center, Australia.**

Aleem Macarandas began by sharing his early interfaith experiences as a young boy living in the Lanao province, went on to discuss the commonalities between Islam and Christianity and how history has often stressed differences and separation. He, however, carefully noted that differences are natural occurrences and that these should be celebrated instead of being used as a divisive tool. He ended his talk by presenting challenges to the people of Mindanao, to defeat the true sources of un-peacefulness and problems in Mindanao – poverty, corruption, inequality, and marginalization.

In his talk, Bishop Capalla offered that what is crucial to attaining peace is contributing to the process of healing of the mind, healing the physical and psychological wounds inflicted by Mindanao's long-history of conflict. He also stressed the importance of understanding peace as “Shalom (wholeness, integrity)” instead of simply as ceasefire or signed peace accords; the importance of addressing the demands of justice; and the possibility of forgiveness through facilitating face-to-face encounters between victims and victimizers. Reverend Capalla concluded his talk by underscoring the idea that without forgiveness there could be no future.

In her sharing Beting Colmo recounted her own experiences of war and conflict in Mindanao, painting vivid images of violence encountered from her childhood. She pointed out that as a child she never was able to understand conflict and war. As a Lumad, whose lives and actions are geared toward harmony and wherein peace is seen as both a way of life and as a responsibility, it puzzled her no end, as a child and now as an adult why war and its vicious end products of violence and hate occurred. Yet, at the same time, she maintains that war and conflict despite directly affecting the Lumads have failed to destroy the fibers of peace that define their culture.

Dr. Toh Swee Hin in his presentation expounded the essence of interfaith dialogue and in the process made a synthesis of the talks of the previous speakers as he presented a more theoretical picture of Interfaith Dialogue and peace education, connecting various experiences of shared journeys in building a culture of peace using established models and principles on the Interfaith Dialogue, peace, and peace education.

## Panel 3: “The Mindanao Peace Process”

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and final plenary of Mindanao CIPE also saw four speakers – **Ret. Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia**, head of the GRP-MILF peace panel; **Ms. Era España**, clan chief of the Obo Manobo tribe from Mt. Apo; **Dr. Danda Juanday**, Executive Director of Bangsamoro Development Authority; and **Atty. Benedicto R. Bacani**, Director of the Center for Autonomy and Governance and former Dean of the College of Law at Notre Dame University, Cotabato City.



Ret.Lt.Gen. Rodolfo Garcia began the plenary by presenting updates on the GRP-MILF talks. It appears that the negotiations, despite having been stalled in 2003, have had a number of successes. Issues on domain seemed to have been fully resolved and armed skirmishes between GRP and MILF troops have drastically lessened since 2004. While so much is yet to be done, members of the peace panel are optimistic that continued negotiations would bring in results satisfactory to both parties.

*“We are not included in the talks.”* This was Ms. España's contention as she gave a moving narrative of the Lumads struggles brought about by conflict and war not of their own making. She stressed that the peace process may have failed to include the Lumad's aspirations and to consider that they, too, keep ancestral domains that they expect other groups to honor.

Dr. Juanday's analysis of the Mindanao peace process focused on the importance of development, one based from people's aspirations, apart from addressing issues on domain and armed conflict. He introduced the vision, structure, and programs of the Bangsamoro Development Authority and narrated how development has provided gains in terms of the peace process. He was careful to note, however, that development alone cannot guarantee peace in Mindanao. The long road to peace must also include addressing oppression and injustice.

Atty. Bacani began by pointing out the promising developments of the peace process stressing that it has good local and international support and well informed as past lessons are available and that the panel members from both parties involved are the best. He emphasized, however, that despite these developments many challenges and obstacles persists, particularly toward the goal of signing a peace agreement and implementing a meaningful peace pact. The emerging formula of the peace talks itself,

one that Atty Bacani fears could lead to more division and conflict as it attempts to cut up political boundaries in Mindanao, may be the biggest barrier of all.

## Buzz Group Sessions: Some Insights

The Learnings and questions from the presentations as shared in the buzz session of panel 1 revolve around both content and strategy for sustaining the effort in the promoting peace education. . The need to reach out to major stakeholders such as the government, peace enforcers, school administrators and program implementers was emphasized.



The concepts of “forgiveness” and “reconciliation” were emphasized in the interfaith dialogue buzz session as important ingredients in dialogue. The process was also discussed highlighting the need for intra-faith dialogue and involving different faiths and different Christian denominations in the discussion of the culture of peace.

“*Constructive engagement*” is the word we can use to describe the learnings derived from the panel 3 presentation. Constructive engagement among the moro groups (MILF & MNLF), the intercultural moro groups, and among peace advocates. Indigenous peoples concerns and a major concern of all Mindanaons (Christians, Muslims and IPs) , the meat of the on-going peace process were also highlighted.

## Conclusions

The participants, facilitators and organizers were extremely satisfied with the outcome of the first Mindanao Institute on Peace Education. The support provided by SGIDU and the other partners were very much appreciated bringing together almost a hundred school administrators (formal and nonformal) peace education and interfaith dialogue practitioners, advocates and activists to sit down and listen to various perspectives, insights, experiences on the theme “Interfaith Dialogue & Education

Toward a Culture of Peace: A Response to the Mindanao Conflict” and sharing of successes and difficulties in implementing peace and interfaith education programs.

The post-MCIPE survey results of the post-CIPE survey show the new knowledge the participants acquired from the MCIPE. The following were some of those listed: the many faces of Interfaith dialogue(IFD) and how to integrate it in peace education; deeper understanding of the Indigenous Peoples’ spirituality and the peace process through the stories of the two IP presenters; the history of IFD and its impact on the Mindanao problem; better understanding of peace education concepts and approaches and the various complexities surrounding it; current peace education programs (formal and nonformal) and the organizations implementing them; updates on the peace education framework and avenues for institutionalizing peace education; understanding better the Mindanao problem; need to know the history of Mindanao and its relation to the Mindanao conflict; processes of building constituency for the Mindanao peace process; rights of IP communities to their ancestral domain.

To sustain this, efforts to keep the interest burning were put in place through networking locally and globally, conducting collaborative researches and undertaking common interfaith and peace education projects especially in support of the Mindanao peace process.