

Theology and Practice of Just Peace and Pluralism

**Dialogue Among Religious Leaders, Youth and
Women Peacebuilders**

A Synthesis of Learnings

August 6 – 8, 2018

Royal Mandaya Hotel, Davao City, Philippines



BACKGROUND

The **Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, and the Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN)**, some of the prominent organizations in the area of interreligious peacebuilding, collaborated to bring together religious and spiritual leaders, dialogue practitioners, youth and women peacebuilders from different regions of Mindanao. Together with faith peacebuilders from Pakistan and the USA, the group reflected collectively on the theology and practice of just peace and pluralism in the context of the new forms of violence, extremism and radicalization.

The conference aimed for religious leaders, dialogue practitioners and peacebuilders to:

- Reflect on the theology and practice of just peace and pluralism in the context of Mindanao, Pakistan and the USA
- Celebrate and affirm current practices of interreligious action and peacebuilding that effectively address issues of violence, extremism and radicalization
- Enhance understanding and appreciation on the distinct roles of faith actors in peacebuilding and conflict transformation
- Formulate concrete actions to bolster and promote interreligious actions for peace in Mindanao, Pakistan and USA
- Strengthen and support network of actors and institutions involved in interreligious peacebuilding efforts

In the long term, the IRD learning symposium aimed to galvanize faith-based approaches in peacebuilding and nonviolence among the participants. The shared learning process was envisioned to affirm common values and commitment of religious peacebuilders to demand justice, foster solidarity and sustain peace amidst the continuing challenges of conflicts and violence in the region.

About the Document

This learning document attempts to encapsulate the myriad of insights, reflections and takeaways gleaned during the three-day conference. It summarizes the contents of the presentations given by the resource speakers, and the lessons learned on interfaith peacebuilding and nonviolent practices and approaches shared in the subsequent discussions and thematic dialogue sessions. The document also focuses on the challenges and the opportunities shared from the presentations and conversations, moving forward in promoting interreligious action in Mindanao.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

3Bs	Binding, Bonding, Bridging	GRP	Government of the Republic of the Philippines
ALIVE	Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education	ICD	Intercultural Dialogue
Abp.	Archbishop	IDP	Internally displaced people
BOL	Bangsamoro Organic Law	IP	Indigenous People
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao	IRD	Interreligious Dialogue
BTC	Bangsamoro Transition Commission	MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
BUC	Bishops – Ulama Conference	MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
CAB	Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro	MTYC	Mindanao Tripartite Youth Core
CRS	Catholic Relief Services	NUCP	National Ulama Conference of the Philippines
DepEd	Department of Education	Prof.	Professor
FAB	Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro	Rev.	Reverend
		VE	Violent Extremism

Introduction

The three-day interreligious dialogue began with an interfaith prayer led by Bishop Jeneses Ballos and Sultan Salik Makakena. In his opening message, Mr. Orson P. Sargado, Head of the CRS Davao Office and Mindanao Operations, expressed his delight in seeing the commitment of those present to continue to work for interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding throughout the years. The more than two decades of engagement between CRS and the different communities, characterized by various efforts and processes, aim to bridge relationships and transform structures. At the end of his message, Mr. Sargado challenged the participants to even do more and better in addressing the evolving conflict dynamics in Mindanao, and to meaningfully engage in the discussions and conversations in the course of the three days.



Two participants lead the interfaith prayer to start off the conference.

To further lay out the foundation and context in which the conference was organized, Ms. Myla Leguro, as main facilitator, gave a brief background. She explained that the focus of the conference and dialogue is to reflect on the current context of violence occurring in the respective communities of the participants. Emphasizing the need to understand *what is happening* and *why it is happening*, Ms. Leguro invited the participants to view these emerging contexts based on their respective faiths and the resources located in their faith.

After reiterating the specific objectives of the conference, Ms. Leguro also shared a brief history of how the group responsible for organizing the activity first emerged and the nature of their engagement together. The gathering was actualized through the combined efforts of CRS, Catholic Peacebuilding Network, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, and the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding.

In addition, the participants were also given an overview of the program of the conference. The conference is divided into several sessions with the first focusing on individual as well as communal experiences of violence and reflections drawn from these situations or conditions. The second session looks at the different theological understandings of just peace and pluralism, and how these interface with other disciplines and practices. Aside from presentations from selected speakers, there were also time for sharing and processing of questions, insights and addendums from the participants. Interspersed were conversations on specific questions meant to deepen the exchange of experience and knowledge on the topics. These small group conversation circles were also spaces for intra and interreligious dialogue among the participants themselves. Stories of personal trauma and healing were also shared during the conference as two renowned interreligious peacebuilders from the Philippines communicated their own story of faith.

Violence in Our World Today: Personal Reflections from Religious Peacebuilders

“Difficult as it was, something beautiful came out of it: That we are...led to experience our common humanity; that we are able to reach out to one another precisely because we share the same and common humanity.”

- BISHOP EDWIN DELA PEÑA

In the first session of the conference, four interreligious dialogue practitioners shares their experiences in the context of peace work and violence, and the various responses initiated by different communities to address violence in the Philippines and abroad.

Violence in the US and Bridging the Divides

Prof. Gerard F. Powers is the Director of the Catholic Peacebuilding Studies, and the coordinator of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network, a consortium of bishops' conferences, Catholic development agencies, universities, and independent peace organizations that aim to enhance the study and practice of conflict prevention, conflict management, and post-conflict reconciliation in war-torn areas. In the conference, Prof. Powers shared his expertise on religion, conflict and peacebuilding in the US.

In the context of the US, despite its power and influence, and its vocal promotion of democratic values, the country is beset with problems on violence, particularly tethered to the perpetuation of political, racial, ethnic and even religious divisions. Outside its territory, the number of military interventions the US has made has dramatically increased since the period of the Cold War. Throughout history, it has been engaged in three major wars, including those in Afghanistan, Iraq, and recently with its active involvement in the war against terrorism. Internally, the country is riddled with incidents of school shootings, high rates of homicide and cases of racial violence. It is reported that 71% of extremist violence in the US is perpetrated by white supremacist groups. Anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments are also implicitly and even sometimes explicitly encouraged by the current Trump administration. Nonetheless, amidst these internal divides, social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, have begun to grow all over the country as a response to the increasing incidence of extremist violence.

Given these examples, Prof. Powers explained the differences of direct, structural and cultural violence. Direct violence, exemplified by the US military interventions and the cases of police brutality against black people, immigrants, and Muslims in the US, is the visible form of violence. On the other hand, structural violence is represented by the existence of systems and social institutions that cause harm, such as marginalization, repression, and inequality. Lastly, cultural violence is what underpins and justifies both the structural and direct violence, as it refers to a set of beliefs or an ideology such as violent extremism. Prof. Powers also connected these concepts to ethno-religious nationalism and civic nationalism, and how both can be negative and violent.

In conclusion, Prof. Powers talked about the role of the Catholic Church in countering violent extremism and negative forms of nationalism in the US. He explained that the Church has taken a hybrid approach that involves a strong sense of communitarianism and cosmopolitanism. Communitarianism allows the upsizing of the people's right to participate because it celebrates diversity and embraces it as a fertile ground for finding the truth. Cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, emphasizes not only the national common good but also the universal common good.

Violence in Marawi and Our Shared Humanity

Most Rev. Edwin Dela Peña is the Bishop of the Prelature of Marawi. He has been an inspiration to many peacebuilders and people working for interreligious dialogue in Mindanao. He was described in one of the local news articles as the bishop who plays the heart of a real missionary.

The Prelature of Marawi was established in 1976 on the intent of promoting interreligious dialogue and reconciliation in the island. It was part of the Catholic Church in the Philippines' commitment to the whole process of building peace in an area that has been plagued by unpeace and sporadic armed clashes. In a recent eruption of violence, Marawi became the centerstage in the global war on terrorism when a group of violent extremists took siege of the city for several months. During this time, Bishop Dela Peña became actively involved in various efforts that provided support to the victims and displaced people of Marawi. The Prelature became the conduit for aid and support among other dioceses all over the country. Eventually, *Duyog Marawi*, a program that seeks to accompany all the IDPs of the Marawi siege, was established to facilitate the safe return of the IDPs to their home-city and provide needed relief and psychosocial support.

In all of these, volunteers who were mostly young Muslim professionals and fresh graduates became instrumental in reaching communities that were not given adequate support and relief services. The existing relationship and partnership with key leaders such as Ebrahim Murad, Chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), also eased out the delivery of the relief to areas around the so called Peace Corridor. In addition, the program also facilitated the provision of trauma healing processes to the victims who were taken hostage by the extremist group. Volunteer doctors and psychotherapists provided the service to over a hundred survivors. The personal stories shared by the survivors emboldened the *Duyog Marawi* group to work even harder to accompany the IDPs.

Now on its third phase, the Bishop hopes that the program will be sustained with more involvement from the community members themselves. Furthermore, the group is looking at strengthening their efforts on giving alternative education to the children. An education-related initiative was already piloted in some of the evacuation centers in Balo-i, Lanao del Norte, which they hope to replicate in other areas.

Despite the tragedy, the Bishop expressed that everything that happened seemed providential, as it made many people realize that we share a common humanity – that feeling of being able to show compassion for one another beyond the deep-seated prejudice and biases of people against each other.

The Youth as Peace Animator and Advocate

Jana Jean Dacobor is a very active young peace animator and peace advocate. She is the Regional Coordinator and key mover of the Mindanao Tripartite Youth Core – a youth component of the Bishop-Ulama Conference.

The Mindanao Tripartite Youth Core (MTYC) is the youth desk of the Bishops-Ulama Conference, an interreligious group of Catholic bishops and priests, Ulama and Ustadz, and Protestant bishops and pastors that works for interreligious dialogue and understanding. In 2000, a group of young people gathered together and expressed their desire to actively engage in peacebuilding in Mindanao. Since then, MTYC started to expand its reach all across Mindanao, covering areas of Tawi-Tawi, General Santos, and Sulu. MTYC is able to sustain its presence in these communities through forging partnerships, collaboration and coordination with various actors.

Dialogue is the main thrust of the group as they hope to bring together youth of different religious and ethnic backgrounds to learn from each other and build solidarity. Aside from these, they conduct trainings,

teambuilding and friendship building sessions, while sharing stories that creates positive change. These processes resulted to the development of bridging programs by MTYC. *Lakbay Dialogo*, a program which allows people to learn and understand different cultures and traditions through learning exchanges and social immersions. *Ayuda Ranaw* is the MTYC's innovative response to the crisis that took place in Marawi. The group also engages in income generating efforts such as *Café Higala* and *Tienda Pakigdait* to sustain their programs.

One of the lessons shared by Ms. Dacobar is the importance of building relationships and working with friends. It is in this that the youth can become better Christians, Muslims and Indigenous People.

The Role of the Ulama in Preventing Violent Extremism

Prof. Moner Bajunaid is a consultant and specialist in different development, education, and peacebuilding programs and projects funded by various international organizations such as the World Bank, JICA, and USAID. He has taught for 10 years in the Mindanao State University – General Santos City, and has served as the University Chancellor for 5 years. His field of expertise is economics and Islamic studies. Currently, he is the Secretary – General of the National Ulama Conference of the Philippines (NUCP).

Sharing about their recent initiatives on preventing violent extremism, Prof. Bajunaid mentioned that the NUCP, in partnership with The Asia Foundation, has a program that aims to maximize the role of the madrasah and the influence of Muslim religious leaders in their respective communities to work for the prevention of VE in the country. This was affirmed by a recent study conducted by the Philippine Center for Islamic Democracy where the Ulama are considered to be the most influential people in the community. Thus, the NUCP asserts that the Ulama play a pivotal role in educating people in communities about Islam as a religion of peace. In preventing VE, the initiative offers a two-pronged approach: 1) conduct of *Khutba* or Friday sermons that focuses on the Islamic values of peace, moderation, harmony, tolerance and compassion, and 2) development of standardized modules on Islamic concepts of peace. These activities will be accompanied by a capacity building process to train the Ulama to be effective speakers in their community. The *Khutbas* will also be made available in different languages such as Arabic, English, Maguindanawon, Meranaw, and Tausug. On the other hand, the peace modules will be incorporated into various madrasah and in basic education under the Department of Education's Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) program.

In the prevention of violent extremism, the need to educate people of the appropriate understanding of Islamic concepts, and the participation of all sectors in society is essential.

Questions/ Insights/ Reflections

- One of the participants raised the question of the depth of violence in the US. To which, Prof. Powers responded that the best of the US ideals has contributed to peace and order in the world such as the case in Northern Ireland where Senator George Mitchell was instrumental, and in South Sudan where the Bush administration was able lead a peaceful cessation of the armed conflict, but like any other country with their set of ideals, has not always lived up to it. Nonetheless, there exists a high number of organizations and individuals working in the government who do try to live out to the ideals and values of the US.
- Another participant opened up about the role of American Evangelicals in the political and religious divide in the US today, and why majority of them voted for Trump. Prof. Powers clarified that there are various reasons why many religious conservatives voted for Trump. Part of this was how some saw the Obama administration as highly secular and promotive of policies that did not seem to be sensitive to certain religious liberties.

- One of the young Moro leaders among the group inquired about the initiative to prevent VE through the madrasah and Ulama, and how it is introduced to the grassroots, especially among those who have reservations engaging in peace and dialogue processes. Prof. Bajunaid responded to her by sharing that the Khutba is intended to benefit not just the Ulama, but more so people in the communities, those who listen to the sermons. They will develop the Khutba in such a way that the religious leaders can incorporate their own experiences and not just read the sermon in verbatim. The peace modules they will develop will also be not limited to the ALIVE program of DepEd, as they hope to make it available to those who want to conduct seminars outside of the formal schools as well. However, one of the Imams present also shared his misgivings about the khutba, as he is concerned about how those on the ground will receive them and whether it will certainly be applicable in their context. Prof. Bajunaid assured the religious leader that they are working together with other groups such as the Regional Darul Iftah and the Committee of Dawa. The important thing to remember is that there is no imposition in the use of the khutba and that what is essential is that these various efforts complement each other.
- A question was also raised regarding the role of the community in reporting the presence and movements of violent extremist groups. How can civil society encourage and strengthen the community so that they can come out and report activities of lawless elements without fear and insecurity? Prof. Bajunaid asserts that there should be a mechanism built by government for exactly that purpose.
- Terrorism and Violent Extremism are not the same. In civil society, Prof. Bajunaid clarifies that they differentiate the two as terrorism being closely related to the military and the use of arms as a response, while violent extremism is countered through ideas.
- Another religious leader asked about the difference of nationalism and patriotism. To this, Prof. Powers shared that because the world is composed of nation-states, it is only natural that nations push for the national common good, that is respecting the basic human rights and needs of its population. However, this should also extend to promoting the universal common good or the good for all humanity. Patriotism is a virtue to the extent that it must support both the national and global common good. Nationalism, on the other hand, when absolute, can turn into idolatry.



In clustered groups, participants engage in deep conversations.

A group of women peacebuilders focuses on sharing about the role of women in IRD.





Conversation Circle 1 | Violence in Our Communities: Personal Reflections

Clustered into five mixed groups, participants engaged in a dialogue encounter to share about their own experiences of violence, the patterns that are beginning to emerge, and why they think these are happening. They also discussed the challenges they each continue to grapple with, and the new and creative ways in which they attempt to address the violence in their communities. Some of the highlights of the conversation are found below.

Aspects of Violence

- Violence is everywhere and can happen anytime to anyone
- Vulnerability of the youth to violence
- Violence deprives freedom to express and practice faith
- Violence begins within
- Extremist views leading to violence
- Experiences of direct violence: bombing, shooting, killing, and armed conflict, human trafficking, rido

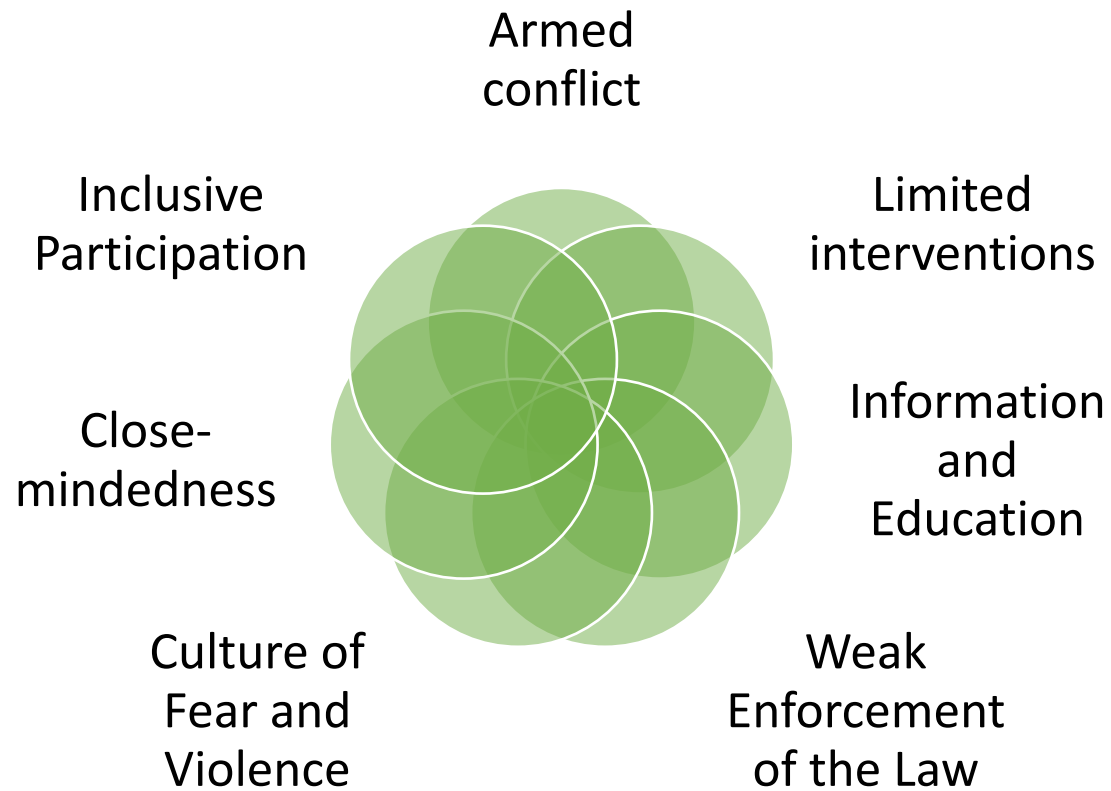
Patterns of Violence

- Bullying in the family, school, community and online (cyberbullying)
- Incidents of suicide among the youth
- Illegal drugs
- Displacements
- Ideology seeking justice
- Feelings of distrust and fear among groups (biases)
- Revenge killing

Reasons for the Violence

- Culture of fear and violence
- Deep-seated prejudices
- Social and historical injustices
- Depression
- Miscommunication, misinformation
- Ideology
- Justice-seeking

Continuing Challenges



Creative Responses to Violence

Dialogue

- Understanding the roots and the history of the conflicts
- More interreligious and intercultural dialogues in the community
- Being open-minded and listening to each other
- Peace tables in the community
- Thematic dialogues

Action

- Bridging with other groups and working together
- Acts of shared humanity
- Peace education for the young
- Capacity development on peace education and values formation
- Women in conflict mediation
- Trauma healing processes

Values

- Being grounded in the values and principles of peacebuilding and IRD
- Integration of peace values in Khutba

Theology of Just Peace and Pluralism in the Context of Current Global and Local Challenges

“Everyone tries to understand faith within the context of how they respond to the challenges of their faith traditions.”

- BRO. KARL GASPAR

The second session of the conference tackles the concepts of “just peace” and “pluralism” vis a vis the challenges present in the participants’ localities and in the world today. What is just peace? What is pluralism? How do we view such terms in the perspective of theology, history, anthropology and other disciplines?

Just Peace and Pluralism in Islamic History

Professor Mahan Mirza is the lead faculty for a Contending Modernities project funded by the Templeton Foundation. The project’s aim is to advance scientific and theological literacy in madrasa discourses in India. His field of expertise include Islamic Studies in relation to science, scripture, education, history and politics.

In his talk, Prof. Mirza used the historical lens to discuss pluralism in Islam. He also shared his personal experience and involvement in an educational program that Templeton Foundation is implementing in India and Pakistan. According to Prof. Mirza, there are two extreme responses to pluralism in the context of Islam: one, to impose full conversion to Islam, and second, to allow individuals to freely be converted in and out of Islam. In an age where democracy and human rights are the ideals, there must be an environment that fosters equal citizenship. As such, a shift in the theological sensitivity in Islam must be embraced.

By turning into history, Prof. Mirza explained how pluralism was institutionalized in the Islamic legal traditions. The Marrakesh Declaration was significant as a legal framework and a call to advance the rights of religious minorities in predominantly Muslim majority communities. This has brought contestations within and across various sect in Islam. However, despite differences in religious identities within Islam its Islamic intellectual traditions has sustained great conversations on foundational philosophical issues across the centuries. Prof. Mirza emphasized that this kind of theology should guide Muslim communities to continuously work for equality within Islam.

In this context, three steps were suggested in dealing with the internal diversity in Islam. Using the approach of CRS called 3Bs in interreligious dialogue (binding, bonding, and bridging), Prof. Mirza emphasized that in coming to terms with Islam intra-diversity, it is important to reconnect with its history. This is why educational program must be redesigned to value more the learning of history, particularly of Muslim communities. Based on their experience in the program, the outcome of using historical theology proved to increase tolerance and reduce sectarianism. The Ulama were viewed to be more pastoral and persuasive, and less authoritative, and students felt they had a choice. Lastly, Prof. Mirza mentioned the importance of a big history (a wide and more in-depth look on the cosmic story) in extending the idea of pluralism to all humanity. As well as, interfacing theology with other disciplines such as science and history to strengthen one’s understanding of Islam.

Theology of Interfaith Dialogue

Bro. Karl Gaspar is a Redemptorist Brother and a professor at St. Alfonso Theological and Mission Institute and Ateneo de Davao University. He began his experience on interreligious dialogue with the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference as coworker of Bishop Bienvenido Tuddud. He is also engaged in solidarity work to support the Lumad (Indigenous People) and Moro people in their struggle for self-determination.

In the Catholic perspective there are four aspects of Interreligious Dialogue: dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue in the context of our shared prayer contemplation and meditation. Among these, the dialogue of theological exchange has not been very much promoted. Although there are groups who advance this work, the challenge is really on how to bring it to the grassroots level. Theology, once an elitist and scholarly field, has now radically changed after the Second Vatican Council, where the council, through the Holy See, discussed the relationship of the Catholic Church with the modern world. Nowadays, theology is no longer just a space for scholarship. Everyone is encouraged to practice it especially with the understanding that theology is a “faith-seeking behaviour”. Everyone tries to understand their faith within the context of how they respond to the challenges of their faith traditions.

Pluralism is a concept that can be understood in many different ways. It can be understood using the lens of political philosophy, political theory, pluralist democracy and even religion. In its basic definition, pluralism denotes a diversity of views or stands rather than a single approach or method. Particularly, in a post-structuralist perspective, religious pluralism suggests the acceptance of all religious paths as equally valid. However, in reality, pluralism in the religious sphere faces a situation where there is no justice and peace. The challenge therefore is to find the kind of theology that will empower advocates of justice and peace.

In this context, Bro. Karl suggested that the theology that needs to be promoted is the theology of interfaith dialogue. For Roman Catholics the source of this kind of theology are the documents called *Dialogue and Proclamation* and the *Nostra Aetate*. In religious pluralism, dialogue is understood as all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. Bro. Karl emphasized that the more grounded we are in our faith tradition the more open we are to interreligious dialogue. Like Professor Mahan, Bro. Karl also affirms the importance of being grounded in our historical realities. This includes the understanding of the realm of religion, culture, and traditions within the social realities of our people. In doing so, we are more able to situate our presence and commitment within the frame of our faith traditions. As a parting reminder, Bro. Karl shared that “*the way of dialogue is one way in which the Church fulfills her roles as a sacrament, a sign and an instrument of communion with God, and unity among all people.*”

Pluralism is Engagement with Diversity

Aleem Alibasser Imam Abdullatif is the national speaker of the Ulama League of the Philippines and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Bishops Ulama Conference. He has been working as an English-Arabic translator in Qatar. He has also worked in different capacities as a government official in Binadayan, Lanao del Sur.

Imam Abdullatif expressed his concern of the violence and extremism that is being perpetuated especially among the young. He cited the Marawi siege as a clear example of how this generation has failed to mold the hearts and minds of the young to understand better their religion. The challenge now is for everyone to work more seriously and collectively for just peace and unity. With the signing of the Bangsamoro Organic Law, there is hope that indeed the roots of extremism and terror that has hounded Mindanao for generations will be finally addressed.

Being one of those directly affected by what happened in Marawi, Mr. Abdullatif shared that it was only now that he truly understood the consequences and struggle caused by the violent act. To him, violence affects those most vulnerable, particularly the children. It is multi-causal, that no single factor is the cause of violent behavior. It is rather a result of a combination of factors including the person’s socio-cultural environment. Islam, as a religion that espouses to bring peace to society, whether Muslim or not, denounces and forbids violence and terrorism strongly and absolutely. Those who use Islam to justify extreme actions may be a result of their ignorance, frustration, uncontrolled anger, and political ambitions. To illustrate this, he cites a passage from the Hadith, “*Acquire knowledge because he who acquire it in the way of God performs*

and act of piety, who speaks on it, praises the lord, who seeks it adores God, who dispenses instruction in it bestows aims; and who impart it to its fitting object, performs an act of devotion to God.”

In Islam, understanding is the most sacred goal. Thus, pluralism is not only acceptance of diversity but an engagement with it. Muslims are called not only to tolerate and accept others, but also engage actively with them.

Questions/ Insights/ Reflections

- A question was raised by one of the participants on the existence of “unjust peace”. Prof. Mirza answered this by saying that there is such a thing as *negative peace*, a common term in the field of peace and conflict studies. Negative peace is a kind of peace where although there is no war or armed conflict, the peace in the area is being managed through varied modes of persuasion, of an authority that does not feel fair to one or more parties. Such can be considered as unjust peace.
- On correcting religious-motivated violence, Prof. Mirza responded by saying that violent theology is generated out of political extreme situations. According to the book “Who Speaks for Islam”, a gallup survey was conducted among Muslims around the world and they had very interesting findings. The results were that those who justified violence always provided political justifications, while those who say violence against the innocent is never justified gave religious justifications. In such a matter, the important thing is to find ways to acknowledge the grievances of people, while also negating or delegitimizing the violent acts. Bro. Karl also pointed out that religious violence is not only among the Muslims. In the Philippines, there still exists Christian extremist groups who were part of the whole eruption of violence in Mindanao, as history would tell. Groups such as the *Ilaga*, *Baracudas*, and *Black Shirts* have not been totally eradicated, and in the weeks following the signing of the BOL, these violence-oriented groups may cause another round of armed encounters among Muslims and Christians. In this, one concrete step on the part of the Christians to prevent this is to permeate the evangelization program of basic Christian communities, to reach out to Christians who still have anti-Moro sentiments. Incorporation of the historical perspective of how the conflicts started into this education will also help.
- On the two questions raised, Bro. Karl also brought forward the idea that one possible important direction of IRD is in the field of climate change and promoting climate justice. Philippines is known to be one of the most affected countries in terms of both natural and man-made calamities. Despite the tragedies, however, it is during these moments that people of different faith groups come together and experience dialogue by helping each other and providing mutual support.
- A number of the participants raised questions on the appropriateness of some of the terminology and practices used by various sects within Islam. Such as the use of the word “*balik-Islam*”, which literally means *to return to Islam* in the vernacular in the Philippines. Prof. Mirza explained that the language used suggests the idea of reversion because Islam is understood from within as a religion of nature. Hence, the belief that if you do not follow Islam, it is as if you are moving away from your natural state which is ordained by God. It is a theological position from within the tradition. Nonetheless, one has to be aware of the context in which one speaks of it. In addition, he asserted that the idea of othering Muslims with a different perspective is highly anti-intellectual sloganeering. He suggested that people should retrieve history and attempt to understand the sacred texts by situating them in their own historical context. Sharing his experience, he tells them that the approach must be elicitive, which means that they make use of the resources within the madrasah, move away from sloganeering and more to a sophisticated historical engagement with the scholars.
- Commenting on pluralism, Prof. Moner shared that one of the ways to also explain pluralism is through Islamic history. As early as the days of Prophet Muhammad, the Medina Charter was made available to all new states and it guarantees the rights and obligations of every tribe, religious group and others. In a sense, it was the first document that supports a pluralistic society or federal system. To this, Prof. Mirza added that the real challenge is to shift control from exclusivity of the

Muslim community to a more shared authority. There are resources that can be used but people need to think of ways to reframe them in the larger context. The madrasah discourses must appreciate the teachings of jihad in the context where it happened, and engage classical conditions in contemporary context and reconcile creative tensions.

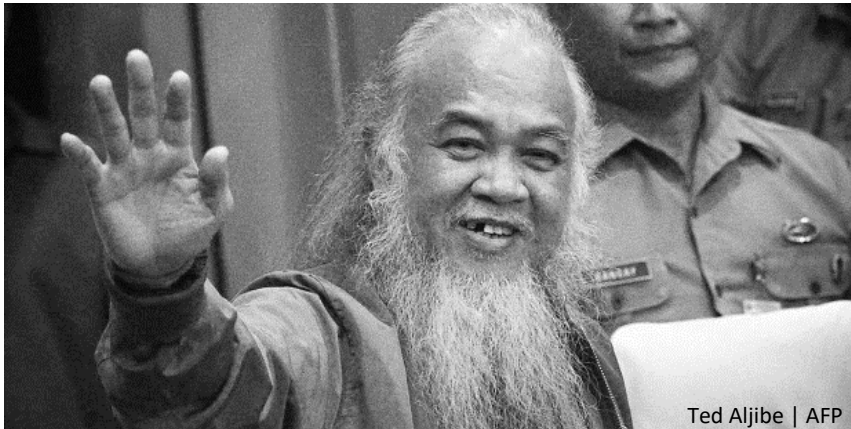
- Pointing out the limitations of the Philippine educational system, Bro. Karl shared his misgivings about the state of the level of basic education under the Department of Education. There are still basic services that are required that are not provided in this particular field. Amidst the initiatives to engage the madrasa, there is also a parallel struggle in terms of pushing for reforms in the educational system of the country. We still need to grapple with how to deliver education so that children, especially Moro and IPs, who are most vulnerable, are able to learn to read and write.
- Archbishop Capalla shared a quote from an Indian friend that goes: *“To dialogue is to understand others as they understand themselves, so that they can understand us as we understand ourselves.”* He explained that to effectively dialogue with others of a different faith, one must learn to dialogue with themselves first. Intra-religious dialogue is a pre-requisite to interreligious dialogue. In terms of how to engage others, Bro. Karl further pointed out that face-to-face encounters within grassroots communities or groups of people, or even within the household, is what matters most. These little contributions or acts of goodwill will hopefully impact a much bigger scale. Despite the great confusion, the many complications and fragmentation of this generation, there is a dramatic shift towards a greater consciousness of the differences and the acceptance of the plurality and multi-culturalism of the world. Even as we move towards a more globalized world, there is also the contradiction that there is more acceptance and tolerance now of the multiplicity of identities. The changes may not be quantifiable in this lifetime, the important thing is to begin, and begin where you are.
- Lastly, Mr. Abdullatif shared that the conflict now, in the region of Mindanao, is no longer about religion. It is about the strong feeling of injustice. It is the hope of many that the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) will indeed bring about this healing.

“There will always be naysayers. People who will make fun of you for sitting with the Sultan or for talking to other people but... we need to be able to dream and imagine a world where we are right now, at the margins, becomes the new center.”

- Prof. Mahan Mirza

A Journey of Life and Faith in the Palms of My Hands

Fr. Chito Suganob, the parish priest of Marawi, shares his story. He was held captive for nearly four months. He had seen death a thousand times. But his tale is still one of courage, humility, steadfast faith, and life.



Fr. Chito Suganob was ordained a priest in 1994.

He was assigned in Marawi as parish priest in 1995, after then Bishop Bienvenido Tutud initiated the establishment of the Prelature of Marawi as part of the recommendation of Pope John Paul II to offer reconciliation to the Muslim communities of Marawi. It was the Pope's directive to form a Christian community that will go into a thickly populated Muslim community and offer reconciliation, become vulnerable and to respect Islam as a religion.

After giving a background of his vocation story, Fr. Chito recounted the fateful day when he was held hostage by armed extremists in the city of Marawi.

It was May 24, 2017. Everyone in the parish was busy preparing for the fiesta of St. Mary Cathedral when the ground fight broke out. During that time, everyone noticed that the fighting lasted longer than the normal encounters they experienced in the past. Everyone was worried. In fact, they had already received messages from friends advising them to leave Marawi. However, Fr. Chito decided to stay along with five other parish workers. At night, they saw the police station and the Dansalan College were both on fire. Eventually, a van tried to run the parish gates over and unidentified armed men threatened to kill them if they refuse to step out of the building.

Fr. Chito gave a detailed description of how he was held captive by the extremist group. He recalled how difficult the situation was. They were moving from one area to another trying to find a safe refuge amidst the massive air strikes and ground assault. He also shared several occasions how he witnessed the violent death of other hostages including members of the extremist group, and his own close encounters with death when he was held hostage. Fr. Chito emphasized that all these experiences tested his faith. He recalled the many instances when he questioned God, and all the times he wished that he died from the crossfire. But all of these made Fr. Chito realize a lot of things. He humbly shared his reflections and told everyone that these moments of despair brought him closer to God. In these violent times, he actually felt God was with him and he could talk to God. It was also profound to see how the extremist group, despite the violence, held on to their faith until the last days of the fighting. He recalled seeing them religiously practicing their *salah*, amidst the massive assault from the government forces.

Fr. Chito is planning to write a book about his experience. It will be entitled: *Journey of Life and Faith in the Palms of My Hands*.

At the end of his sharing, the group encircled the priest and said a prayer for him and all those who were victimized by the Marawi siege.

The Moro Struggle for Self-Determination

Speaking in behalf of Mohagher Iqbal, who is the Chair for the MILF Peace Implementing Panel, **Mr. Wahab Jahlal** presented updates on the Bangsamoro peace process. He initially provided the background of the peace process starting from the GRP-MNLF peace talks in 1975. He emphasized that there were about 200 documents signed related to the peace process and it culminated with the Framework Agreement of the Bangsamoro in 2012 and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in March 27, 2014. While the peace process was ongoing, he also noted that there were about 3 major wars that took place in 2000, 2003, and 2008. Another significant strain on the peace process was the Mamasapano firefight in January 2015.

The peace process, according to Mr. Jahlal, will not end until the exit agreement is signed. He emphasized that it is all about peace-making, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution. It is a mixture of politics, diplomacy, changing relationships, negotiation, mediation, and dialogue in both official and unofficial arenas. At this point the former "peace panel" was changed into the Peace Implementing Panel which continue to convene and discuss matters related to peace in Mindanao. As a matter of agenda, it has three tracks of implementation: security-related measures; normalization; and the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law, which is now the BOL-BARMM or RA 11054, and is up for ratification through a plebiscite January of 2019.

The first track, which is concerned with security-related measures, facilitated the establishment of peacekeeping mechanisms such as the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities and the local and international monitoring team. The normalization process on the other hand, ensures the creation and implementation of transitional mechanisms including the decommissioning of MILF weapons and combatants, transformation of MILF camps, capacity building for MILF combatants and their families, and others. Lastly, the passage of the BOL ensures the legal translation of the FAB and CAB into political documents through the BTC.

In closing, Mr. Jahlal discussed the legal and political context of the BOL. He also emphasized that the continuing struggle for peace require reforms in the government specifically in the context of ARMM. He believed that governance should move towards the principle of common good and responsive governance. Looking forward, the Peace Implementing Panel hopes to see the implementation of all agreements signed by the parties; the implementation of plebiscite; the transformation of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority to a regular Bangsamoro government; and the signing of the Exit Agreement.

Questions/ Insights/ Reflections

- Several of the participants expressed concern regarding the process of the decommissioning. To which Mr. Jahlal responded that there is an independent body responsible for that. It will be headed by Norway. A mechanism to properly identify the firearms and combatants to be decommissioned will be implemented. However, he does not discount the reality that there are also private armed groups (some of which are clan-based) that must also be included in the process. The proliferation of loose firearms is also the reason why the normalization process will be phase by phase, to give time for all armed groups to surrender their arms while also keeping the security in the area in place. There is also the worry that the decommissioning will not help those on the ground. Examples were shared of a few places where those who were already part of the normalization process did not receive proper reparation. There is still the challenge of the implementation of the mechanisms.
- In terms of Federalism, there is an understanding that the push for such can enhance the BARMM. What is not included or clear in the BOL can be addressed through a federal form of government.
- Distinguishing *parity of esteem* and *parity of subsidiarity*, Mr. Jahlal explained that the former refers to the equal status of the national government and the Bangsamoro government, while the latter refers to the principle of the local government.



Conversation Circle 2 | Common Challenges, Values and Actions

In another circle conversation, the participants grouped into their geographical areas and discussed their takeaways from the 3-day conference. In their small groups, the participants identified key values and principles of just peace and pluralism as guide for interreligious peacebuilders in Mindanao. In addition, the groups exchanged on common challenges they need to address, and the ways in which they will address them. Below is the synthesis of their sharing:

Common Values

- Faith in God
- Acceptance and Respect
- Love and Compassion
- Openness
- Understanding and Wisdom
- Harmony and Solidarity
- Trust
- Knowledge
- Humility
- Justice
- Sincerity
- Commitment and Perseverance
- Patience
- Reconciliation

Common Challenges

- Miseducation, misinterpretation and misinformation (distortion of the truth)
- Discrimination - biases, prejudices, bullying, fear and suspicion, close-mindedness, stereotyping
- Vulnerability of the youth to VE
- Gender inequality and inequity
- Disunity among religious leaders
- Intra and intergroup conflicts
- Lack of trust and transparency
- Lack of resources

Common Actions

- Revisit and revive Peace Education in schools
- Maximize personal influence
- Strengthen educational system
- Strengthen one's spirituality and faith
- Information dissemination on BOL, VE and other pressing issues
- Recognize the role of women in peacebuilding
- Continue intra and interreligious dialogue
- Community initiatives and advocacies
- Form youth groups

Additional Reflections

- What makes the group distinct in their peacebuilding work is their faith motivation. Faith in God is an essential element in their work of promoting justice, peace and pluralism.
- Among the many values affirmed by the small groups, there is always the challenge of living them out in their daily lives, especially given the current political and economic context that we are facing.
- Education is an important aspect of IRD practice. Whether it is in the formal setting of developing peace education in schools, or informal through information drives and learning sessions in communities, education plays a crucial role in pushing for more intra and interreligious understanding.
- In intra and interfaith dialogue, it is also crucial that they uphold the principle of inclusive participation in the various engagements they conduct.
- Lastly, understanding and dialogue should lead to common peace actions in the communities. This is particularly exemplified through the current peacebuilding work that many of the participants are already engaged in such as community services and awareness campaigns on the BOL and VE.

In order to close the circle conversation, Ms. Leguro offered a definition of interreligious peacebuilding that came out from similar learning processes that were implemented by CRS over the years.

Interreligious Peacebuilding brings together individuals, groups, and institutions of different faiths and cultural traditions and draws on their spiritual values. It engages in the processes of dialogue, mediation, reconciliation, mutual problem solving and practical actions that promote greater mutual understanding, respect, and social equity to achieve harmonious coexistence for the common good. The effort involves identification of commonalities, modification of peace conceptions, and acceptance of differences. It often strives for individual transformation and healing as well as work to build greater cohesion within and among groups. While recognizing that religion can be manipulated to promote disharmony and dominance, it can also provide a prophetic voice for justice and peace.

Key Reflections and Insights

“Dialogue is to understand others as they understand themselves, so that they can understand us as we understand ourselves.”

- ARCHBISHOP FERNANDO CAPALLA



In the concluding session, the participants and resource persons were given the opportunity to express their reflections and key insights about the entire three-day dialogue process. This session formally wrapped-up the IRD learning conference and allowed the participants to situate their own learning reflections based on the reflections of their co-participants.

Prof. Gerry Powers expressed how members of the learning conference are engaged not only in working for structural and policy change but also cultural change. While he recognized that both theories of change are important, cultural change provides a necessary way to move forward with policy and structural changes. He observed, based on the discussions and learning conversations, that Mindanao peacebuilders are engaged in the process of drawing from their own faith resources. This has sustained them in their peacebuilding efforts especially with the current realities and challenges of the time. There is always that commitment to go back to their own faith tradition and find resources for peacebuilding. Thus, there is this desire and need to continue intra-religious engagement and faith formation. Furthermore, Prof. Powers also articulated his admiration towards everyone’s commitment in seeing peacebuilding work as part of their religious vocation.

Prof. Mahan Mirza related his reflection to a line that he had recently read from a report. It says, “*The best way to fight bad theology is with good theology*”. This according to him reflects what everyone has been doing in the past 3 days and in their respective engagements in their own communities. He emphasized that everything that we do in interreligious dialogue leads to good theology. The experiences and knowledge that we gain from these experiences helps us confront our religious creeds and helps us reflect on them in order to see how it can be applied and lived in actual reality that we face everyday. In conclusion, Prof. Mirza reminded everyone that good theology can be built from interfacing our own faith traditions with new learnings and new experiences so it can remain relevant in the context of our current times. He also added that these new learnings and experiences can be gained from our efforts in conversing and understanding each other through interreligious dialogue. Thus, theology needs to always revitalized, regenerated and reproduced.

Ms. Adel Ditucalan started her sharing by explaining how the United Mothers of Marawi was organized. Responding to the crisis in Marawi, the United Mothers of Marawi was conceived from the need to take action. The initiative is a result of a coming-together of mothers who tried to understand the context of the violence that is happening in Marawi. Her experience in interreligious dialogue started when she was invited to speak about her experience in one of the processes organized by CRS. This experience allowed her to see the need to enrich one’s understanding of their own faith in order to meaningfully engage with others. And she believed that more opportunities to dialogue is needed in order to do this. Also, she put emphasis on connecting first with God because it will help in upholding all the virtues needed in order to build good relationships with one another.

Bro. Raymond Martin articulated that it is his first time to be part of this kind of gathering. And his involvement helped him confront his personal biases and prejudices against other faith traditions. He expressed that he is now opening himself to the process of healing, and he is ready to understand other faith traditions which he recognizes to be an important step in carrying out the responsibility of forming other youth in Basilan. In closing, he looks forward to be engaged in similar processes in the future. He believes that interreligious dialogue can help in making people understand their common humanity.

Dean Amad Ismael expressed that he learned so much from the process especially from the speakers. He articulated that the three-day activity was about learning morals. The conference showed him how the values of respect, unity, understanding, faith, and pluralism are lived out by different participants who are engaged in various peacebuilding work. This, according to him is very important because knowledge should be rooted in these values and morals. Dean Ismael also emphasized that learning is important and knows no age. So everyone should engage in learning especially in the process of learning from others.

Archbishop Capalla expressed that he is a little bit disappointed that there was not much time spent on the discussion regarding the concept of violence. Although, the conversations about the effects of violence in our communities and how to challenge it are relevant themes for discussion, he also felt that there is a need to deepen the understanding on the discourse of violence. Looking at it as a complex issue, Archbishop Capalla wants to understand why we are violent and why violence has spread rapidly across the world. He hopes someday that CRS will organize a learning conference about the philosophy of violence. He believes that in understanding theology we should understand philosophy first. On the other hand, he also expressed some of his significant learnings as a long-time practitioner of IRD. For Bishop Capalla, IRD is the only way to resolve human problems and conflicts. However long and tedious this process is, he firmly believes that this is the only way. He also reminded everyone that to dialogue is to understand others as they understand themselves so that they can understand us as we understand ourselves. Given so, he provided 3 ways in making dialogue more effective. He suggested that in making dialogue more successful one should reflect on the following principles: 1) without silence, words lose their meaning; 2) without listening, speaking will not heal; and 3) without solitude, the community cannot save.

To formally close the process, participants were given post-its and were asked to write down their commitment to peace. Participants posted their commitment on the board provided while an AVP of Ms. Deng Giguiento's journey as a prominent interreligious peacebuilder was presented before the group.

Book Launching

Wrapping up the sharing of reflections and learning insights, Mr. Azar Hussein and Ms. Deng Giguiento also shared their book on interreligious peacebuilding.

Mr. Hussein explained his personal engagement in working with various Madrassas in Pakistan. He is involved in a project that promotes modern education by training students and Imams. The project also has an interfaith component and they are involved in conflict mediation and dialogue with different actors to promote peace in the area. He then read an excerpt from a chapter of the book to give everyone the sense of what the program is all about.

Ms. Deng explained how she experienced challenges in writing her story for the book. She expressed that she nearly gave up on the task because the process has brought out a lot of bad memories. Writing her story made her realize that peacebuilders work so hard that they often forget to address themselves. The experience of writing her story was challenging but it made her realize that as a peace actor she needs to deal with her own devils in order to become a better peacebuilder. Sultan Salik Makakena and Ms. Myla Leguro assisted Ms. Deng in reading an excerpt from the chapter she wrote entitled: *Dili Sayun ang Pagsunod kang Kristo* (It is Not Easy to Follow Christ).