

Nonviolence: An Essential Basis for Building Peace A Philippine Perspective

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My Local Context: the Philippines



- An archipelago of over 7,000 islands, in SE Asia
- Population of more than 110 million (2021)
- Catholic 81%, Protestant 11%, Muslim 5%, others 3%
- Representative democracy -“Republic of the Philippines”
- Colonized by Spain, USA and Japan



□ **1970s until Feb. 1986 - under a dictatorship/Martial Law:**

Rise of 2 major non-state armed (NSA) groups: Communist Party of the Philippines- New People's Army- NDF (CPP-NPA-NDF)

and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)

□ **Feb. 1986- Nonviolent People Power Revolt –
(return to basic democratic institutions)**

□ **Start of peace talks**

□ **1996- Peace agreement between gov't of the Philippines (GPH) & MNLF ... granted autonomy to Muslim majority areas. However, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) – which split from the MNLF in 1994 – vowed to continue the struggle for independence**





- Ceasefire beg. 1997, continued peace talks with MILF... from goal of secession to meaningful autonomy
- March 2014- Peace agreement between gov't of the & MILF was signed.
- 2018- early 2019 - The *Bangsamoro Organic Law* was passed and ratified. The law completed the peace agreement.



Due to time constraint, I would like to focus only on 2 main points, to illustrate my direct experience with “NV as a foundation for building peace”.

- 1. Steadfast support (incl. by our Catholic Church leaders) for a ceasefire as a necessary condition to facilitate & enable the success of the peace process between belligerent parties: GPH & MILF**
- 2. Catholic schools’ renewed thrust toward mainstreaming peace education/a culture of peace, whose fundamental values are love, justice & nonviolence both among humans and between humans & our Earth home.**



1. Steadfast support (incl. by our Catholic Church leaders) for a ceasefire as a necessary condition to facilitate & enable the success of the peace process between belligerent parties: GPH & MILF

- **Armed conflict in the country for nearly 3 decades prior to the 1997 ceasefire agreement resulted into tens of thousands of deaths from both the GPH & MILF**
- **As the prospect for peace after the Martial Law era loomed in 1986, many intensified calls for a ceasefire in mil. hostilities & for peace talks between the NSA groups & the GPH**
- **As mentioned earlier, MILF entered into a ceasefire agreement in 1997 (due to public clamor for the end in fighting esp. from Peace CSOs & Church leaders, incl. Catholic bishops who have been active in Christian-Muslim dialogues)**



Why is this ceasefire agreement a significant milestone?

- **Acceding to a ceasefire enabled the belligerent parties to stop fighting, slowly build trust toward each other, & be immersed in the conciliatory spirit needed for the coming peace talks. (Compare this w/ the other NSA group.)**
- **A holistic approach to the peace process was supported by the drivers of the peace process esp. the 2 parties' negotiation panels, the peace CSOs & the religious leaders, & third-party countries, that is, stop the direct violence through the ceasefire & provide social & eco. development opportunities while the peace talks were going on as initial response to the roots of conflict/legitimate grievances such as eco. marginalization & cultural exclusion.**





Were there challenges during the many years between the ceasefire agreement & the Peace Agreement/Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL)?



Yes, there were “spoilers” & a big mis-encounter, but the Peace CSOs, faith-based groups, & the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) persisted in their calls for the parties to stay the course. The CBCP, etc., had issued Statements to this end.



In sum, I feel that if the peace process bet. the GPH & MILF did not begin with a ceasefire agreement (with its third party facilitators, monitoring teams, & very able panels), the peace talks would not have succeeded.

I posit further that the steadfast support by the Catholic Church, peace CSOs & the public for a nonviolent resolution of the armed conflict through a political settlement was a significant factor.

The BOL's creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) now has a transition government & is on its way towards "normalization."



2. Catholic schools' renewed thrust toward mainstreaming peace education/a culture of peace

As Catholic peace educators, our goal all these past years has been to mainstream peace education in the country. Our conception of peace embraces not only just & nonviolent relationships among humans but also between humans & our Earth home.

Why justice and nonviolence? This is anchored on our belief that they are the consequence of love, the primordial value associated with Jesus' life and teachings.

*To reach peace,
teach peace.*



▪ **We think of Peace Education as an important strategy for preventing violent conflict and for building peace because it emphasizes Nonviolence as:**

- ✓ **a spiritual orientation (rooted in the NV of Jesus & other Faith traditions);**
- ✓ **a way of life, where conflicts should always be resolved in nonviolent ways & with respect for human dignity;**
- ✓ **a practical tool in resolving conflicts & resisting oppression (we study our own NV people power revolt vs. dictatorship: protest & withdrawal of cooperation by the Catholic Church, the people, & security sector);**
- ✓ **& advocating against war, gun violence & nuclear weapons.**
- ✓ **NV is not passivity; one actively appeals to the heart & conscience of the other (e.g., use persuasion & other positive techniques)**



- ✓ **The Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) has a working group that focuses on promoting peace education to influence the mindsets, values & behaviors of its constituent educators & learners.**
- ✓ **Currently it has a project, “Cultivating a Nonviolent School Culture” as a part of this peace education thrust.**
- ✓ **It has also organized webinars attended by many hundreds in the last year featuring speakers from the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative of Pax Christi International.**
- ✓ **A CEAP member, our Miriam College-Center for Peace Education (MC-CPE), since 2020, has been a partner of the PH Commission on Higher Education in its capacity-building activities & development of Peace Education/Studies syllabi**
- ✓ **The MC-CPE has also actively sought a partnership with the Mindanao State University System because of their joint vision that MSU be the Peace Education & Advocacy Hub in the erstwhile armed conflict areas.**



Let me close with a quote that reminds us that the work for Peace is always a work in progress and is an ongoing one.

Rubem Alves, in his poem *“What is Hope?”*, says:

“Let us plant dates even though we who plant them will never eat them. We must live by the love of what we will never see. This is the secret discipline...”

And that is our work as peace advocates: We may not see the immediate results, but we plant the seeds just the same...

Thank you.

