

Draft as of 22 May 2012

Civil Society: A Resource for Peace

By Charlito “Kaloy” Manlupig
Chairperson, BalayMindanaw www.balaymindanaw.org
Head of the Secretariat, Action Asia www.actionasia.org

A Paper Presented to the Panel Discussion
“Conflict Management and Resolution in Asia: The Role of Civil Societies”
26th Asia Pacific Roundtable, ASEAN/Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS)
InterContinental Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, May 28 to 30, 2012

I refuse to be victim. I am a resource for peace.

- *Dekha Ibrahim (1964-2011), a civil society peace activist, Right Livelihood Awardee*

I Introduction:

The late Dekha Ibrahim, a dear colleague in Action Global and other peace initiatives, has so eloquently provided a profound answer to the question posed to us in this panel discussion.

Before proceeding to the core of this presentation, let me just make a few points of clarification:

1. In this presentation and subsequent panel discussion, I shall refer to the term “role of civil societies” as the function or responsibility of the other stakeholders outside government and business. Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon defines civil society as 1) the aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens or 2) individuals and organizations in a society which are independent of the government. It is also referred to as a "third sector," distinct from government and business.
2. Instead of the term “conflict management and resolution”, I shall liberally use the broader term “peacebuilding” – a term introduced in 1976 by Johan Galtung, who is considered by many as the father of conflict studies. The term was eventually adopted by the United Nations in its Agenda for Peace formulated in January 31, 1992. Peacebuilding is used as a generic term referring to a spectrum of activities intended to build or maintain stable peace and development. It includes pre and post-conflict efforts, early warning, prevention, external interventions and initiatives taken by local stakeholders. It may also

include community empowerment, rights and equity, economic development, social justice, reconciliation, empowerment of disadvantaged groups and humanitarian work. During this decade, the term has become so broad to encompass the entire work toward conflict transformation or societal transformation. Peace practitioners now refer to the challenge of building the big peace as “Peace Writ Large”.

3. This Paper is a very initial mapping and overview of civil society initiatives in Asia, and will only cover those that I and my parent-institutions (I call them my “peacebuilding vehicles”), BalayMindanaw and Action Asia, are directly involved with. As a take-off for a discussion on possible roles of civil society, I will discuss BalayMindanaw’s ground-level, community-based initiatives in the violence-affected areas in Mindanaw and the peacebuilding efforts like peace education, peace process mediation, social enterprise, transparent and accountable governance, and networking, coalition-building and advocacy work in the Philippines. I will also discuss the initiatives of Action Asia as an Asia-wide peacebuilders’ network and its various in-country programs in Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Manipur and Orissa in India. I will discuss BalayMindanaw’s participation in various local, national, regional and global civil society peacebuilding networks and coalitions.

II My“Peacebuilding Vehicles”: BalayMindanaw and Action Asia

II.1 BalayMindanaw

BalayMindanaw Foundation, Inc. (BMFI) is a Filipino, Mindanao-based and Mindanaoan-led NGO founded on May 8, 1996. Initially focusing on land rights and advocacy for political parity and economic equity, it later evolved into a good governance and development NGO with the barangay (Philippine village, and smallest political and administrative unit) as the locus and focus of its intervention.

It was envisioned to be a vehicle for a few Mindanaoans to continue serving Mindanao in Mindanao. From the very beginning, it has been intended to be Mindanao-rooted, Mindanao-based, Mindanao-focused and Mindanaoan-led, with a desire to contribute modestly but significantly to the building of a home that is truly Mindanaoan. It eventually evolved into a peacebuilding NGO with ground-based, local, national, regional and international engagements. And recently, after the Typhoon Sendong Disaster that killed at least three thousand people in Mindanao, BalayMindanaw has also formulated its Disaster Response and Resiliency-Building Programme. This recent institutional evolution has somehow made it almost like a “complete package”.

It was only in 2003 that the work for conflict transformation became clearer to us. BMFI's engagement as independent mediator and independent secretariat in the peace process between the Philippine Government and the Mindanao-based Communist group, RPMM, opened so many doors to peacebuilding work. As the staff began to understand the essence of peacebuilding better and deeper, they began to become peacebuilders themselves. As BalayMindanaw continues to strive to bridge divides, it remains committed to work in principled partnership both with the civil society and government, military and police, and the non-state combatants in their efforts to transform themselves into builders of just and lasting peace.

The peacebuilding community welcomed us and opened more doors to meaningful engagements beyond Mindanao, beyond the Philippines, and even beyond Asia. Our involvement with Action Asia as the seat of the Secretariat has given us the chance to contribute to peacebuilding work in India, Nepal, Cambodia, East Timor, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar.

We have established a Peace Center, now named International Center for Peace in Mindanaw (ICPeace in Mindanaw – pronounced "I see peace in Mindanaw"), which is intended to be a space for dialogue, and a tribute to the Mindanaoan local peoples' and local communities' quest to build their own peace.

From one small NGO called BalayMindanaw Foundation Inc. (BMFI) in May 8, 1996, we began helping give birth to like-minded and like-hearted NGOs:

- The Resource Center for Empowerment and Development (Kab-otGahum: RCED) in April 27, 2000 – to pursue and enhance BalayMindanaw's work in empowerment thru research, information and education;
- Balay Alternative Legal Advocates for the Development of Mindanaw (BALAOD Mindanaw) in August 11, 2000 – to pursue and enhance BalayMindanaw's work in paralegalism and access to justice;
- BalayDabaw Sur Foundation, Inc (BDSI) in August 1, 2002 – to sustain BalayMindanaw's work in Southern Mindanao; and more recently,
- KatilingbanongPamahandisaMindanaw Foundation, Inc. (KPMFI) in October 17, 2006 - for social enterprise;
- BangkosaBalay Foundation, Inc. (BBFI) in October 16, 2007 for microfinance, and
- The Global Mindanaw Polytechnic, Inc. (GMP) in May 8, 2012 to help capacitate rural workers to be globally competitive.

These three youngest NGOs are envisioned to help create stories that would inspire local initiatives towards sustainable peace. They seek to help transform skewed economic relationships at the lowest possible level: the household in the barangay (village).

BalayMindanaw's Peacebuilding Program has the following features:

At the community/village/barangay level, peacebuilding through community organizing with special focus on training and formation of community-based peacebuilders, and helping in the establishment and strengthening of indigenous local conflict management mechanisms. Political and economic empowerment, access to justice and conflict transformation are the key concerns of the various interventions of this component.

In support of community-based peacebuilding work is BMFI's peace education program which seeks to help capacitate key stakeholders through the conduct of center-based and community-based peace courses called OP Kors! (Operation Peace Course). Among those who have gone through these courses are community and tribal leaders, local government officials and employees, people's organizations and cooperatives, NGO workers, Church leaders and workers, school teachers and students, and recently, military and police officers, soldiers and other security sector players.

A very special feature of BalayMindanaw's Peacebuilding Programme is its continuing involvement in the GPH – RPM-M Peace Process as Mediator and Independent Secretariat. This peace process which began in 2003 has been recognized locally and internationally as a new model which puts emphasis on community participation and conflict transformation. To date, consultations in 104 villages have been held and at least 80 local communities are implementing their own joint development projects. Six formal agreements have been signed since the process began in 2003. Unfortunately, the formal negotiations have been on hold since July 2010.

To strengthen and sustain the first two components is the effort at constituency-building with particular focus on the accompaniment and support for the expansion and further growth of LawigKalinaw (Peace Journey) – the movement of peacebuilders with OP Kors graduates and trained peacebuilders at the core.

BalayMindanaw also facilitates the formation of provincial partnerships, networks and movements especially in the area of peace-building and democratic participation in governance as it endeavors to contribute meaningfully to the strengthening and the sustained relevance of sub-regional and regional coalition-building and advocacy efforts like the Mindanao Coalition of Development NGO Networks (MINCODE), Mindanao Congress of Development NGOs (MINCON), Mindanao Peace Advocates Conference (MPAC), Mindanao Peaceweavers, KusogMindanaw (Mindanao Force), and other multisectoral movements for Mindanao development, and partnership work with the various government agencies. A new feature of this level of work is the facilitation of various processes leading to establishment of more local sub-regional and focused mechanisms to address conflict issues.

BalayMindanaw also participates meaningfully in partnerships, networks and other national and international movements for peoples' development. Among the key national engagements of

BMFI are its active participation in the CODE-NGO, National Peace Conference (NPC), PMP, and CAPP-SIAD.

Another significant breakthrough in BalayMindanaw's peacebuilding work is in the arena of engaging the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) – two of the key security sector institutions.

In response to the infamous Maguindanao Massacre, BalayMindanaw has also decided to be involved in the area by helping create venues for dialogue and engaging the military and police, the local NGOs, local governments, and the other stakeholders in finding lasting solutions to the on-going conflict. As a result of this intervention, the Good Wednesday Group for Peace has been established to be a venue for continuing dialogue among the military, civil society, local governments and other stakeholders.

II.2 Action Asia

(from the Action Asia website)

Action Asia (AA) is a network of individual peace practitioners and peacebuilding organizations in the Asia continent committed to action for conflict transformation through the sharing of skills, knowledge, experiences and resources.

The network was formed in March 2000 through the initiative of six core group members from Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. It now has over 300 members from 19 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The countries where AA members work are: Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand, East Timor, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Japan, South Korea, and Australia.

Action Asia brings together practitioners, researchers, academes in the field of conflict transformation and peacebuilding from the Asia-Pacific region in order to provide ongoing support, follow up trainings, and to more fully contextualize learning and knowledge in this field. Furthermore, Action Asia provides a safe forum to exchange learning and experiences, across contextual boundaries, in order to further develop theory and praxis of peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

The network has strategically worked on conflict issues affecting several countries within the Asia continent. Initially, Action Asia was focused on helping strengthen the capacity of peace practitioners in Myanmar. Action Asia has since expanded its operations, and now works in five different contexts.

From 2000-2008 the Cambodia-based Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT) housed Action Asia. In March 2008 Action Asia began operating under the legal auspices of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS), which is also based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. On

December 1, 2011, the Action Asia leadership and membership formally transferred the Secretariat role and office to BalayMindanaw in the Philippines.

Action Asia Country Initiatives

Action Asia develops and implements country programs at the request and initiative of local members, groups or organizations in order to uphold and enhance local perspectives, approaches, and strategically effective solutions to conflicts. Action Asia's conflict intervention ethos is to journey with local partners while strengthening their capacity to initiate social transformation towards a democratic and peaceful society.

Some of these country initiatives are:

Myanmar

The Myanmar Initiative was the first project undertaken by Action Asia. It started in 2000 through a conduct of needs assessment in order to determine insiders' perspectives on the state of peacebuilding and conflict transformation work in the country. Action Asia then analyzed the research and, in consultation with partner organizations, identified necessary and appropriate programs and projects towards the path of a culture of peace.

Since 2002 various training interventions related to peacebuilding have been conducted inside the country that included Training of Trainers, Peace Research Methodology, Intra-Organizational Conflict Management, and Active Nonviolence among others. Recently the 4th batch of the modular course on Conflict Transformation was concluded in collaboration with its partner-organization, Shalom Foundation.

When the Myanmar civilian government started opening its doors for reforms in the country, wide range of opportunities have emerged for civil society groups to take more active roles in the democratization process of the society. Members of Action Asia are actively involved in the advocacy efforts to influence international community's involvement in the reform process. On one hand, there are advocacy campaigns that have specific focus on effects of economic projects involving China, India or Thailand.

Nepal

In June 2005 Action Asia and some members from Myanmar undertook a Solidarity Visit to Nepal, and simultaneously conducted a needs assessment on how the network can collaborate with local groups in peace initiatives. After the turbulent and chaotic events of 2007, Action Asia sent a delegation to visit active peacebuilders in Nepal, and carried out a joint analysis of the situation to identify possible scenarios for the future and to develop strategic goals and interventions that can be realistically achieved.

A Nepal peace program called "Building Peace and Trust in Nepal" was subsequently developed in late 2007 under which a modular course was held over for one year period consisting of four modules: Understanding Conflict, Practical Approaches to Peacebuilding, Working in a Post-Conflict Situation, and Strategic Peacebuilding. An important part of this process was the building of trust, networking and relationship amongst various individuals who come from different districts, organizations, sectors and institutions in Nepal such as civil society, trade unions, Nepal police, Nepal Army, and government ministries. After the course, the participants formed their own network called Center for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Promotion (CPRP).

CPRP is actively collaborating with other networks and organizations in Nepal especially in monitoring and evaluating effectiveness of peace initiatives. CPRP has been working as a focal point in capacity building on Reflecting on Peace Practice (RRP) and its implementation in program design, monitoring and evaluation in number of peace building programs in Nepal.

It has rich experience of working with peace infrastructure, popularly known as Local Peace Committee in Nepal. Its engagement with the conflict affected people at the community level through such peace infrastructure on common community projects and peace dividend has shown positive results. The engagement further aspired to work closely with the Local Peace Committee for building their mediation and conflict resolution capacity. While working with such infrastructure, the approach has been able to link the local level issues to the policy level. CPRP is also undertaking internship program with other Action Asia partner-organizations for experience and learning exchange. CPRP has been hosting group exposure visits from other countries particularly from Orissa, India as part of its objective of sharing learning from the internally driven peace process of Nepal.

Timor Leste

Action Asia, in conjunction with local partners HAK Association (Hukum - Law, HakAsasi - Basic Rights, and Keadilan - Justice) and NGO Forum (FONGTIL), has developed a program which has a number of complimentary components. The program is based on the analysis, sharing, and learning drawn from the participants in Timor-Leste during initial consultations in November 2006 and February 2007 (including leaders of martial and ritual arts groups, gangs, NGOs, youth, Church leaders, and others).

The Timor-Leste programme components are specifically designed to respond to the key conflicts identified through ongoing analysis with local partners, reaching out horizontally and vertically by linking the different levels from the community to the top leadership. The program focuses on trust and capacity building for key change agents for peace (such as top- and mid-level actors), peacebuilding training for martial and ritual arts groups, and possibly with the security forces in the future.

From September 2007 to July 2008 a process-training on conflict transformation and peacebuilding - consisting of four modules - was completed among male martial and ritual arts

leaders. Subsequently, the female leader counterparts of these martial and ritual arts groups undertook the same process training, which culminated in April 2009. In order to realize their mission of pursuing peace projects in the society, these martial arts leaders formed an organization called Ita Ba Paz and has been carrying out various projects including collaborative efforts with police and military in community peacebuilding workshops.

Action Asia also conducted peacebuilding training to other groups like Fongtil-NGO Forum and Liquica, as well as facilitated two Training of Trainers workshops for various peace organizations including martial arts leaders.

In October 2007, General Raymundo Ferrer from Philippines together with officers of Balay Mindanaw made a visit to Timor Leste and had initial discussions with the military and police top officials. A month after, these top military and police officials spent a week of exposure visit to Mindanaw meeting with various groups including security sectors exploring possible collaboration on peace efforts. On September 2008, Action Asia together with military and police top officials met in Bali, Indonesia and designed a peacebuilding training curriculum for security forces of Timor Leste.

Through various programs, Action Asia with its partners aims to make the difference in developing and empowering a proactive movement of people towards building peace and strengthened democracy in Timor-Leste.

Orissa, India

Through the invitation of, and in partnership with, Solidarity for Developing Communities (SFDC) and the Network of Civil Society for Justice, Peace and Development (NCS-JPD), Action Asia ventured into a multi-faceted peace initiative in Orissa, India with a particular emphasis on Hindu-Christian relationships.

This initiative includes the modular course on Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding. Participants are senior-level staff from partner-organizations who are directly involved in peace and conflict issues. The course aims at equipping participants with skills and knowledge of the subject, and provides a safe space for them to begin dialoguing with each other about the challenges their respective communities face at the intra- and inter-communal levels. One of the most important components of this modular course is the participants' application of their learning from every module in their areas of work. Teams are created to apply their learned skills either in their own communities or in conflict areas that they are working with. The 3rd batch for this modular course will be conducted within year 2012.

As a follow-up, a training of future peace trainers will be offered to enable participants to train others or to serve as facilitators and mediators on peace processes. Though it will include skills on training methodology the ToT will be particularly focused on peace processes.

A 3-day workshop on RPP (Reflecting on Peace Practice) was also conducted to senior staff of NGOs and peace practitioners in Orissa who have not yet been exposed to RPP frameworks and

tools particularly in designing strategic interventions in conflict areas. RPP lessons learned around the world, tools and theories are aimed to enable NGO leaders to plan effective strategies to build peace in a divided society deeply wounded by several years of protracted violent conflict.

Another important training offered in Orissa was the Peace Research Methodology that was attended by peace practitioners who do not have formal training in academic research. The training provided a basic understanding of the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical foundations for research in the social sciences and of foundational concepts and theories in peace studies and peace research. After the training, all participants proceeded with their respective research project which will be collated and published soon.

A Recall Session for all past modular course participants and meeting of potential Action Asia members were held last February 2012.

Manipur, India

In February 2010 Action Asia conducted a conflict and context analysis in Manipur, India to determine potential future peace programs in the area. The series of meetings and dialogs with several individuals and peace organizations concluded that there was a serious need to respond to the situation in Manipur. The groups recognized the necessity of enhancing the capacity of peace practitioners in this State of India and identified the following trainings and activities to be carried out: Modular Course on Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding, Reflecting on Peace Practice Workshop, Peace Research Methodology Course, Peace Journalism, and sharing the Mindanao Mediation Process.

Action Asia and its contact groups in Manipur have been facing difficulty in sourcing funds for Manipur peacebuilding programs. Despite the scarceness of funds however, Action Asia – through the assistance of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies – has managed to realize two activities in 2011.

A four-day training on RPP (Reflecting on Peace Practice) was conducted in August 2011 and it was participated in by main ethnic groups of Manipur broadly categorized as Kuki, Naga and Meitei. Participants came from different backgrounds who are experienced workers in the field of justice, peace, human rights, development, as well as academes. The four smaller groups who were formed during the workshop made a thorough analysis of their identified conflicts as well as the larger context of Manipur. During the training, the Kuki-led highway blockade had been going on for more than 100 days and this situation provided a more meaningful conflict analysis for the participants.

Towards the end of the training, they identified gaps on peacebuilding work in Manipur and most prominent ones that they named were: responding only to the symptomatic problems, not on the

roots of the conflict; need to link to key people; updated mapping and analysis on who is doing what and where; solid and credible civil society with solid common voice.

On 7 to 9 November 2011, three resource persons from Mindanao were invited to share their mediation experience in one of the peace processes being undertaken in the Philippines. This was in collaboration with Change and Peacebuilding Action (CPA) and the Center for Manipur Studies (CMS) based at Manipur University.

The visit involved one-on-one dialog with key individuals and a 2-day workshop with NGOs and other civil society leaders in Manipur, who represented different ethnic groups. The sharing of 3 resource persons about their experience on the mediation process generated important questions from participants. At the end of the session one participant commented: “This session gave opportunity for different NGO and civil society leaders to think together about the binding factors between different ethnic groups in Manipur”.

Sri Lanka

Action Asia has longstanding relationships with local network partners working on peace in Sri Lanka who are experts on their own context having worked at different levels of leadership – top, middle, and grassroots communities most affected by the conflict. In December 2008, Action Asia brought together Sri Lankan peace practitioners who are working directly on the conflict to analyze the current situation and discuss potential strategies for intervention.

With the change in the country context in 2009, a new round of reflection, conflict analysis and strategic planning will be undertaken this year.

Action Asia Peacebuilders' Forum

Every two years Action Asia organizes a conference for peacebuilders around the continent to share experiences and learning, as well as revitalize one another to sustain their commitment to building peace in their respective areas of responsibility, in the region, and in the world. Action Asia has held three forums: the first in Mindanao, Philippines in 2006; the second in Kathmandu, Nepal in 2008; and the third in Siem Reap, Cambodia in 2010. The Fourth Action Asia Peacebuilders' Forum will be held in Timor Leste in September 2012.

III Civil Society as a Resource:

A Case of Civil Society Refusing to be Victims

In August 2008, the escalation of the armed conflict between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Philippine Government forces following the aborted MOA-AD signing in August 2008 caused the death of hundreds and the displacement of 700,000 people (at that time, this was

the biggest number of IDPs in the whole world). The fighting started in a village in Aleosan, North Cotabato province in early August and rapidly spread to tenother provinces in Mindanao.

In August 2010, BalayMindanaw fielded its community-based peacebuilding team in Aleosan with the mission of “helping plant the seeds of peace” by living, working and journeying with the local people and communities.

In August 2011, the peace process between MILF and the Philippine Government was dangerously heading to an impasse, with both sides swapping accusations and counter-accusations against each other in public statements and media interviews. What the two sides did not realize was that they were pushing the situation to the brink of crisis similar to the 2008 war. The two opposing sides did not immediately realize that their rhetoric was causing panic especially among the residents of the villages traumatized by the 2008 violence.

However, the residents of Aleosan, now more organized after going through a process of local peace consultations, began mobilizing themselves and the other communities. They urged their local officials to join them in conducting a village-to-village information campaign aimed at clarifying the issues and convincing the people not to do or say things that would only aggravate the heated situation. They even went to the extent of seeking dialogue with the MILF right inside the latter’s main camp. Local, regional and national coalitions of civil society peace advocates held dialogues and issued calls for sobriety as they urged both sides to continue talking. “Talk to each other instead of talking about each other in the media”, the Consortium of Bangsa Moro Civil Society (CBCS) asked the opposing camps. International civil society organizations represented by the International Contact Group (TAF, CR and CHD) also did an excellent job in bridging and facilitating backchannel negotiations.

The feared war was finally averted. The big difference between 2008 and 2011?: In 2008, the people practically just waited helplessly for war to happen. In 2011, the people did not allow it to happen. The key: organized and concerted efforts of the stakeholders, from local to international levels.

This experience shows the significant evolution of the peace constituency within and among the communities. This is an inspiring story of people in war-torn and conflict-prone communities have effectively responded to their situation in courageous and creative ways out of their common desire for peace.

IV The Challenge

The Mindanao case demonstrates the key role of civil society in managing conflicts and preventing the occurrence of violence. However, I have to quickly add that credit should and could not be attributed to a single player or sector.

As one practitioner noted: “Peace requires that many people work at many levels in different ways, and, with all this work, you cannot tell who is responsible for what.” Moreover, when the goal of just and sustainable peace is so grand, and progress toward it immeasurable in its multitude of small steps, then anything can qualify as peace practice. In the face of this complexity, practitioners often say, “I have to assume that, over time, all of our different activities will add up.” (CDA, Collaborative Learning Projects)

Some significant gains have been achieved by the communities and the organized civil society. However, the long-term impact, sustainability and irreversibility of these initial gains remain to be tested through time. There are definitely many inspiring stories of local initiatives successfully implemented by local peoples and communities. But how are these stories related to each other so that they become part of one bigger storybook? Are not these local victories mere isolated stories of “putting out small fires”? But peacebuilding or conflict transformation is not just putting out fires that may recur anytime.

In most Asian countries, basic economic resources such as land and water are also considered political and cultural resources. In many cases, the inequitable ownership and control of these resources have caused the marginalization and continuing powerlessness of the majority. These factors of continuing inequity, injustice and marginalization have consequently become the main or root causes of the continuing unpeace and violent conflicts. One key challenge, therefore, is bringing about peace by addressing the roots of these conflicts - the conditions of inequity, underdevelopment, poverty and marginalization.

These challenges can be daunting but definitely not insurmountable. We are a rich resource for peace.