

Indonesia-Aceh

Accord 20 (2008) 'Reconfiguring politics: the Indonesia-Aceh peace process'

Abstract

During the war, many women took on traditional male roles as breadwinners, decision-makers and community leaders. The author, an Acehnese human rights defender, describes how women organised to promote human rights and peace through lobbying and education. They developed the All-Acehnese Women's Congress, which met across the conflict divide and formulated recommendations for the negotiating parties. However, women and civil society

in general were excluded from negotiations, and women's interests were neglected in the resulting Memorandum of Understanding that ended the war. Women were also under-represented in bodies managing post-conflict recovery, although they did set up structures to monitor legislation and policy. The author stresses the need for policymakers to ensure women's involvement in decision-making for meaningful peace.

Background

Conflict in the Aceh province of Indonesia first erupted in 1953 when, fearing the role of Islam in Acehnese society and politics would be undermined, local elites and Islamic scholars supported an armed rebellion. This lasted until the early 1960s. A full secessionist uprising, led by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), developed in 1976 as a result of continuing grievances over governance, underdevelopment, the exploitation of natural resources and revenue drain to Jakarta elites.

Military repression and human rights abuses deepened already severe alienation from the Indonesian state, accelerating popular support for independence. The status of a Military Operations Zone was imposed in Aceh from 1989 to 1998, enabling mass violations to be committed indiscriminately as part of the counter-insurgency campaign. According to the International Crisis Group between 1,000 and 3,000 people were killed during this time, and another 900–1,400 went missing.

In 2000 the Henry Dunant Centre – an international NGO now known as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue – facilitated discussions to enable humanitarian access to the most war-affected areas of Aceh. This led in 2000 to a ceasefire known as the 'humanitarian pause' and in December 2002 to a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, which outlined a ceasefire, demilitarisation measures and 'all-inclusive dialogue' on autonomy provisions. However,

within months the talks collapsed and the Indonesian security forces launched their largest-ever military operation in Aceh.

The tsunami that devastated Aceh in December 2004 was a major turning point. GAM immediately declared a ceasefire, and within a month talks had re-started, mediated by another international NGO, the Finnish Crisis Management Initiative (CMI). By February, GAM had accepted 'self-government' within Indonesia, giving up their long-standing goal of independence. In July 2005 the fifth and final round of talks took place in Helsinki, resulting in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which set out details for the withdrawal of Indonesian troops, GAM's demobilisation and decommissioning of weapons, and a framework for effective self-government – the Law on the Governing of Aceh (LoGA).

Critics claimed LoGA offered very little in terms of special autonomy. However, an important part of the MoU were the provisions allowing for the establishment of local political parties and making independent candidates eligible to contest elections for the administration of Aceh. Elections held in December 2006 were seen as a critical step in the peace process and the transformation of GAM into a peaceful, democratic movement. GAM-affiliated candidates secured mayoral and district head seats in 6 out of 19 districts, plus the governorship of Aceh.

Agents for change: the roles of women in Aceh's peace process

Suraiya Kamaruzzaman

Suraiya Kamaruzzaman is a human rights activist and co-founder of Flower Aceh, an NGO set up to champion the rights of Acehese women during and after the conflict. She has worked to ensure women's safety, and has advised them on issues of economic and reproductive rights. She has also been involved in fundraising for peacebuilding in Aceh and lobbying

the European Parliament. In 2001 she received the Yap Thiam Hien award for human rights, and in 2012 was awarded the UNDP-sponsored N-PEACE award. She has provided gender analysis of Indonesia's draft bill on overcoming social conflict in line with UN Security Council resolution 1325 for the UN Population Fund.

Scant attention has been paid to the role that women played in the conflict in Aceh, their survival efforts or their involvement in development and peacebuilding. According to the historical narrative of violence and humanitarian tragedy in Aceh, women are vulnerable, victimised, suffer in submission and bear the consequences of being the wives and relatives of 'the enemy.'

This is not the whole truth: Acehese women played strategic roles, generated bright ideas and were able to find unique ways to survive. They were able to become agents for change, performing negotiations between the two parties involved in the conflict or engaging in efforts to save their husbands, sons or their community. When insecurity forced men to flee their villages, women became the main breadwinners and decision-makers and took over most of the social roles played by men in their community life. In addition, they worked together to clean and repaint *meunasah* (Islamic schools), went to the fields or gathered firewood. They took care of the children and financed their education. They hid boys being hunted because of their fathers' and uncles' political choices, and sometimes they had to carry them home and bury their dead bodies. Women also undertook various religious programmes such as rotating Koranic recitation gatherings from one house to another to build continuous communication, and accompany and console those who lost family members to the conflict.

Unified voices

Women have also taken organised action in response to the conflict. Groups of women have undertaken peaceful campaigns, lobbying, information dissemination, human rights education, negotiation and data collection. Some brought human rights violations to the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Many of these women faced pressure, intimidation, terror, rape or sexual harassment because of their actions.

In October 2000 the United Nations passed Security Council Resolution 1325 on the theme of women, peace and security. It stressed the importance of women's roles in conflict prevention and resolution and highlighted the need for women's equal participation in maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Months before this, Acehese women had rolled out their own agenda at the first All Acehese Women's Congress (*Duek Pakat Inong Aceh*). Nearly 500 women from all

possible backgrounds, many of whom had suffered the direct consequences of armed conflict, sat together in dialogue in February 2000. They shared their painful experiences, formed strong bonds and planned for the future. Sharing the hope that they would be able to make Aceh better – and that peace was an absolute requirement for a better Aceh – they called for the prioritisation of dialogue towards resolving the conflict and for greater women's participation in all political decision-making. They distributed their 22 recommendations to various parties, including to Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid. That summer, a women's group lobbied various parties to involve women in the process of negotiating and implementing the Humanitarian Pause then being facilitated by the Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

“ Women were considered only as objects of political processes, not active subjects”

Exclusion from peacemaking

Unfortunately their voice did not resonate for long, and when the conflict parties engaged in peace talks, women were once again excluded. Despite a record of advocating for peace and fostering reconciliation, women were barely involved in the stop-start dialogue processes spanning over five years that finally culminated in the *Memorandum of Understanding* (MoU) between the government and GAM in August 2005. The kind of gender-aware conflict resolution mandated by Security Council resolution 1325 was not achieved.

This was mirrored in other political processes as well: when Islamic shariah law was introduced to Aceh, women's shariah representatives were once again not involved. Women were considered only as objects of political processes, not active subjects.

Without underestimating the great importance of the MoU and the hard work, skill and patience of its architects, it ignores the contribution of civil society, including women's groups, to peacemaking. The peace process was simplified into an issue between the government and GAM, negating other dimensions of conflict that had lasted for nearly 30



An Indonesian woman holds flowers and stickers protesting against the conflict in Aceh during a peace demonstration in Jakarta, May 2003 // © ADE DANHUR/AFP/Getty Images

years, wherein numerous and complex issues intertwined and impacted upon the life of all Aceh's people. As a result of women's exclusion from the peace processes, their interests are poorly covered by the agreements.

Peace is not realised simply at the negotiating table: sustainable peace can only be achieved if it involves women and men equally in processes of reconciliation, rights-based development, the rule of law and the dignified fulfilment of justice for victims. Signing the peace agreement is only the beginning; the next great task for all of Aceh's people is to undertake reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation. Various institutions have been established to facilitate this, but women's voices are still not receiving the attention they should. Of the 43 members of the Aceh Reintegration Board (BRA), only three are women. The Aceh Transition Committee (KPA), the organisation for ex-GAM members, does not have a single woman in a strategic position in its decision-making and policy group. In the first-stage list of compensation receivers for former GAM combatants, there was not a single woman among the 3,000 names listed, despite the fact that since 2000 photos and information about troops from GAM's women's wing (*Inong Balee*) have frequently been used in media campaigns to show women's role in GAM's struggle.

Persistence

Despite such negations by the policymakers, Acehese women have not been sitting idly, but have responded with new determination. The Women's Policy Network (established 2004) has been monitoring the development and implementation of the *Law on the Governing of Aceh* (LoGA) and of *qanun* (local laws) that will detail provisions

of the LoGA to promote the equitable inclusion of women's interests. The Women's Peace Network (established December 2005) comprises 26 organisations and seeks to socialise the MoU and strengthen women's participation in peacebuilding strategies. A Gender Working Group has been established as the hub for monitoring the policies of all parties involved in the reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation processes to ensure that they take into account the gender perspective in policymaking and application and budget development. At the grass roots level, women's groups perform political education and strengthen individual and organisational capacity through various training, workshops and seminars.

Such efforts are not sufficient in themselves. The big, unanswered question is: when will the policymakers start to open their minds and harness the great potential of women as a force for building a lasting peace in Aceh? It is imperative that the Indonesian government implements UNSC Resolution 1325 in its national policies and builds a monitoring system using clear indicators. Civil society needs to be involved and information on 1325 widely disseminated. The government should engage women in efforts to build peace in conflict areas like Papua. In Aceh, the BRA should consult women's organisations before carrying out any intervention. Applying women's experience should be a basis for strategy and ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in all programmes. More than lip-service needs to be paid engaging them equally in reintegration and reconciliation processes. There needs to be affirmative action to promote women as leaders and ensure their involvement in decision-making, especially ahead of the 2009 elections.