

Submission to the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security

## **Women's participation and inclusive peace processes: lessons learned from Mindanao and beyond**

March 2015

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Fifteen years ago the Security Council of the United Nations adopted resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. UNSCR 1325 is a landmark document, recognising women's unique experiences of and contributions to peace and security and calling for the full participation of women and the integration of a gender perspective in all peace and security efforts.

Despite UNSCR 1325, and other commitments to women's participation and inclusive peace processes, the field of peace and security remains male-dominated and exclusive. At Conciliation Resources we challenge the old ways of making and keeping peace, based on twenty years of hands-on experience of providing support to and conducting in-depth research into peace processes. We advocate for a paradigm-shift towards a peacebuilding approach that values and acknowledges decision-making processes beyond the negotiating table<sup>1</sup>.

This submission summarizes what we have learned about women building peace and how to support more inclusive peace processes. While our contribution is grounded in our experience supporting peace in different contexts, we have included a more in-depth analysis of the Mindanao peace process. We conclude the paper with concrete recommendations to key stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> *Peace processes* (Conciliation Resources position paper, 2015): [www.conciliationresources.org/resources/peace-processes](http://www.conciliationresources.org/resources/peace-processes)

## Women building peace

*“Conflict had its own consequences, but mostly it led to the silent suffering of women ... We brought women across community lines to a common platform. They shared their pain and voiced hopes for the future. It is our attempt to promote coexistence between communities, for it is important to focus on what the problem is, rather than who the problem is.”*

**Ezabir Ali, community peacebuilder, Kashmir**

Women have always played key roles in armed conflict, be it as nurses, carers, combatants or workers. Women also contribute to peace in a multitude of ways. Yet these contributions often go unrecognized and remain undervalued because they take place often outside official, high-level forums, or because they do not fit with activities traditionally associated with peacebuilding and conflict prevention. As a result, their skills, insights and energy are overlooked; and a misleading image of women as mere victims of conflict, and passive beneficiaries of interventions, prevails.

Our Accord Insight publication [Women building peace](#)<sup>2</sup> highlights the varied roles that women do play in addressing violence and building peace. The case studies show how women find innovative ways to contribute to peace, how their efforts influence the structural changes necessary for sustainable peace, as well as the challenges they face as women peacebuilders.

In our programmes we also look at the experiences and roles of women. We include initiatives to ensure women are part and parcel of peace efforts.

- In the Philippines-Mindanao, we are supporting civil society organisations in securing women’s political participation in the governance structures that will implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of March 2014<sup>3</sup>. For more in-depth analysis of the Mindanao Peace Process, please read the ‘Lessons from the Mindanao Peace Process’ section, below.

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<sup>2</sup> *Accord Insight: Women building peace (2013)*: [www.c-r.org/accord-project/women-and-peacebuilding-insight](http://www.c-r.org/accord-project/women-and-peacebuilding-insight)

<sup>3</sup> *Women speak up for a peaceful Bangsamoro (2014)*: [www.c-r.org/multimedia/women-speak-peaceful-bangsamoro](http://www.c-r.org/multimedia/women-speak-peaceful-bangsamoro); *Women of Bangsamoro stand up for inclusion (2014)* [www.c-r.org/news/women-bangsamoro-stand-inclusion](http://www.c-r.org/news/women-bangsamoro-stand-inclusion)

- In Jammu and Kashmir we supported a civil society initiative that brought together Islamic scholars, civil society representatives, and representatives of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons to discuss the situation of women whose husbands disappeared during conflict<sup>4</sup>.
- In areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army, in East and Central Africa, we promote women's engagement in local community protection efforts<sup>5</sup>.

## Challenges for women's participation in formal peace talks

*"There is no peace without development, and no development without peace – and neither peace, nor sustainable development without the active participation of women in both processes."*

**Rosa Emilia Salamanca, Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica (CIASE), Colombia**

While women make up half the world's population and make significant contributions to peace and security, they continue to be largely absent from official peace negotiations.

Based on our extensive experience in supporting and documenting peace processes, we would flag the following challenges for increased participation of women in formal peace talks:

- **Lack of women in senior decision-making roles.** Women's general political participation is an issue; women are often not included in peace talks because they are missing from key decision-making posts, particularly those relating to peace and security.
- **The narrow base of participation in peace negotiations.** Formal peace talks are often essentially elitist processes that prioritize

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<sup>4</sup> Breakthrough ruling on Kashmir 'Half-Widows' (2013): [www.c-r.org/press-releases/breakthrough-ruling-kashmir-half-widows](http://www.c-r.org/press-releases/breakthrough-ruling-kashmir-half-widows)

<sup>5</sup> Supporting women in East and Central Africa: [www.c-r.org/featured-work/supporting-women-east-and-central-africa](http://www.c-r.org/featured-work/supporting-women-east-and-central-africa)

the participation of combatants above a more inclusive and cross-sectoral representation of society (see the 'Inclusive Peace Processes' section below).

- **Social norms.** Women's participation is hindered by men's and women's perceptions about women's place in society and in public life.
- **Practical issues.** Women are often restricted in their ability to participate in peace talks because of their limited economic freedom or competing demands on their time (e.g. childcare).
- **Lack of experience** of formal political engagement and advocacy.

It is important to note here that what is needed to support women's participation in peace processes varies from one context to the next. A range of factors that have been identified in practice include women needing support for further education, organizational and advocacy skills, as well as addressing structural barriers such as resistance to women's participation, the burden of unpaid care, and lack of access to resources. To determine what support is appropriate, solid gender analysis of the context at hand should be undertaken (see textbox below).

### **Gender and conflict analysis**

Conflict analysis is key to effective peacebuilding. Such analysis helps us gain a better understanding of what is causing conflict, the needs and interests of different stakeholders, the dynamics and patterns of conflict, as well as the opportunities for peace.

Effective and useful conflict analysis is gender-sensitive. Gender analysis is essential not only to understand and address gender inequalities, but also for understanding root causes and enabling factors of conflict, power relations, lived experiences, and existing and potential peace opportunities. Gender analysis furthers understanding of gender identities, structures, and symbolic meanings ('the gender power system'). It includes but also goes beyond an analysis of differences in experiences of men and women. Gender analysis pays attention to gender *relations*. It is attentive to how gender intersects with other power systems, such as race, age, and class. And gender analysis sheds lights on the links between gender and social processes such as war and peacemaking, including how these processes (re)produce power hierarchies.

In the forthcoming (2015) publication *Gender & Conflict Analysis: A Resource Pack*, CR provides practical guidance to gender-sensitive conflict analysis. It sets out how to design and implement gender-sensitive conflict analyses.

## Inclusive peace processes

*“Women are key – unrest affects them very deeply and if they are included in peace processes things that affect them specifically can be tabled as well ... It’s time for a change; it’s time to include women and innovative young voices in peace processes. We need new ideas and fresh perspectives.”*

**Elisha Bano, Fiji Young Women’s Forum**

Peace negotiations often overshadow the importance of other, more inclusive and democratic deliberation and decision-making processes that may be at least as relevant, and yet tend to be considered only of secondary importance. Practice has shown time and again that a peace agreement cannot be implemented without broader ownership in society; and that actions to address structural and cultural violence need to develop beyond the negotiating table.

A fundamental shift is needed to balance the asymmetry between the relevance of formal peace negotiations between armed actors, and the broader peacebuilding exercise that needs to include society at large. In addition to providing opportunities for a broader range of actors and interests to be represented in formal peace talks, there is a need to:

- Reduce the expectations placed on peace negotiations (e.g. to a primary emphasis on ending armed hostilities) so that greater space and momentum can be generated for initiatives beyond the negotiating table to decide how to transform or rebuild society.
- Democratize the peace process – identify and acknowledge the range of formal and informal efforts, at multiple levels of society, that contribute to sustainable peace;
- Encourage a shift from the hierarchy of peace ‘tracks’ to interconnected, complementary and diverse paths to peace – finding ways to link negotiations and official talks with unofficial initiatives that may take place primarily at civil society level;

## Lessons from the Mindanao peace process

*“We want equal rights for all women and men in the Bangsamoro. We want to be free from all forms of violence and discrimination. We want better access to education, health facilities, and other basic services.”*

**Froilyn Mendoza, Teduray Lambangian Women’s Organization, Philippines**

In 1969 violent conflict erupted in the predominantly Muslim areas of Central and Western Mindanao in southern Philippines between the Government and an armed separatist movement. Negotiations between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) began in 1997 and lasted for 17 years until reaching a Comprehensive Agreement in March 2014, which foresees the creation of a self-governing entity called the Bangsamoro.

### Prominent women in the Mindanao peace process

**Teresita 'Ging' Deles**, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Processes since 2010.

**Miriam Coronel-Ferrer**, Chairperson of the Philippines Government Peace Negotiating Panel for Talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front since 2012.

**Yasmin Busran-Lao**, Member of the Philippines Government Peace Negotiating Panel for Talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front since 2011.

**Raissa Jajurie**, Legal adviser to and alternate member of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front Negotiating Panel for Talks with the Philippines Government; member of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission.

**Irene Santiago**, CEO of the Mindanao Commission on Women; Member of the Philippines Government Peace Negotiating Panel for Talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) 2001-2004; Senior Adviser to the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process 2006-2008.

**Froilyn Mendoza**, Founder of indigenous communities’ Teduray Lambangian Women’s Organization; Member of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission.

**Jasmin Galace**, Lead convenor of the network of Women Engaged in Action on 1325 (WE ACT 1325).

**Fatima Allian**, Director, Nisa Ul Haq (Muslim women's organisation in Mindanao)

**Noraida Abo**, Director, UnYPhil-Women

The Mindanao peace process is notable for the high level of meaningful participation by women in both the formal negotiations and parallel peacebuilding efforts undertaken at a societal level.

Conciliation Resources supports women's contributions to peace at both levels: as a member of the International Contact Group (ICG)<sup>6</sup>, a mediation support initiative for the formal peace talks that provides advice to the facilitator and both negotiating teams; and through informal peace initiatives that promote the voices and perspectives of women across society and strengthen their links to the formal negotiations. A number of lessons about (support for) women's participation in peace processes can be drawn from the experiences of Conciliation Resources' partners and other actors involved in Mindanao.

First of all, there are a number of important lessons to be drawn regarding the **importance of understanding and being sensitive to culture and politics**.

Women's expanding role in the peace talks happened as part of increasing emphasis on inclusiveness and civil society engagement more broadly in the Philippines.

Promoting women's participation in the Mindanao context appeared challenging due to conservative and patriarchal customs that limited women's active agency in public and political affairs. Bangsamoro women have diverging perspectives and priorities regarding the role of women in society.

Yet women's participation was achieved by grounding efforts to promote it in a pragmatic understanding of, and engagement with, resistant attitudes and beliefs. Rather than simply appealing to normative international standards, Conciliation Resources and others engaged in a process of listening and observation in order to understand objections and identify potential actors of change and windows of opportunity. Conciliation Resources invited a Muslim woman peace negotiator from Aceh to share her experience with women in Mindanao; and produced a publication on the role Muslim women have played in peace processes in other contexts<sup>7</sup>. These two activities provided women as

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<sup>6</sup> *Innovation in mediation support: The International Contact Group in Mindanao (2013)*:  
[www.c-r.org/resources/practice-paper-innovation-mediation-international-contact-group-mindanao](http://www.c-r.org/resources/practice-paper-innovation-mediation-international-contact-group-mindanao)

<sup>7</sup> *Muslim women in peace processes: Reflections for dialogue in Mindanao (2013)*:  
[www.c-r.org/resources/muslim-women-peace-processes-reflections-dialogue-mindanao](http://www.c-r.org/resources/muslim-women-peace-processes-reflections-dialogue-mindanao)

well as male power-holders with practical references from other Muslim contexts for women's participation.

Through direct conversations with the MILF negotiating panel Conciliation Resources understood the importance that advocacy for women's participation comes from MILF constituencies rather than mainstream civil society. CR subsequently partnered with Muslim women's organizations and convened multiple focus group discussions, trainings and forums for women from different social, ethnic and political backgrounds to draft a common agenda with the constructive title of "Women's contributions to the Bangsamoro Basic Law"<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore, the Mindanao peace process reveals the importance of understanding sensitivities of language to develop more conducive and collaborative efforts to promote women's participation. MILF's principle in negotiations focused on 'parity of esteem' between the Central and the Bangsamoro governments, and the overall Filipino and the Bangsamoro peoples. This same principle was then harnessed by others to encourage MILF to apply it as well to women's participation within the new self-governing entity. On the other hand, whilst MILF expressed objections to the concept of *equality* between sexes, they had less difficulty with the concept of *women's empowerment*.

Secondly, there are lessons to be drawn around **international support for women's participation** in peace processes. The British and the Norwegian embassies to the Philippines and the European Union delegation provided significant financial and political capital to the peace process, supporting not only the formal negotiations but also engaging in important work to promote an inclusive peace process. The UK Embassy was particularly vocal in promoting women's participation, institutionally endorsing the work done by grassroots women's organisations and thereby empowering them to expand their work. The UK embassy also played a convening role amongst international actors, raising awareness of the outcomes of consultations, trainings and forums conducted by grassroots women's organisations.

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<sup>8</sup> *A better Bangsamoro for all: women's contributions to the Bangsamoro Basic Law (2014):* [www.c-r.org/resources/better-bangsamoro-all-womens-contributions-bangsamoro-basic-law](http://www.c-r.org/resources/better-bangsamoro-all-womens-contributions-bangsamoro-basic-law)



On a less positive note, the international support to the Mindanao peace process highlighted the gap between policy and practice, as governments with National Action Plans, as well as international NGOs committed to gender equality often struggled with identifying specific actions for supporting women's empowerment. The International Contact Group actually increased the underrepresentation of women, as 90% of the delegates were male.

Last but not least, and following on from the previous point, there are lessons around how to approach **gender-sensitivity** and the promotion of women's participation in peace processes. Whilst the participation of women in both formal negotiations and in societal consultations did help to raise the perspectives and needs of women, a conscious effort was made, particularly in formal negotiations, to avoid reinforcing the perception that women's participation be limited to a narrow agenda of 'women's issues'. Conciliation Resources was the only member of the ICG to be represented by a woman; yet Conciliation Resources' male representative conducted the engagement on issues of gender and women's participation, challenging the gendered assumptions around the roles and interests of men and women.

## Recommendations

We recommend that the study should consider and integrate the following priorities for UN member states and agencies:

- To further prioritise and invest in **context analysis, specifically gender analysis**. Support to women's participation needs to be context-sensitive; peace and security efforts need to be gender-sensitive. To this purpose gender analysis should be mainstreamed throughout all peace and security analysis efforts. Support needs to be provided to staff on how to conduct gender-sensitive conflict analysis, including trainings.
- To provide greater **political and financial support to women peacebuilders**, and civil society organisations including but not limited to women's rights organisations. Women's contributions to peace processes need to be acknowledged with greater financial and political support.

- To **rethink understandings of and approaches to peace processes** and mediation support. Support to peace processes should be based on an understanding of such processes as encompassing a series of complementary and mutually reinforcing initiatives to bring about an end to armed conflict, create the basis for a new inclusive political settlement and support reconciliation. This involves both formal and informal efforts to help parties to the conflict and wider society reframe the conflict, reform institutions and transform relationships.
- To **practice what is preached**. International support should lead by example and ensure gender balance in any mediation support structure. This entails appointing women to peace and security top jobs and shaping a culture of inclusion to address institutional resistance to women's participation in elite peacemaking processes.

## References

*Accord Insight: Women building peace (2013)*

[www.c-r.org/accord-project/women-and-peacebuilding-insight](http://www.c-r.org/accord-project/women-and-peacebuilding-insight)

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[www.c-r.org/accord-project/legitimacy-and-peace-processes](http://www.c-r.org/accord-project/legitimacy-and-peace-processes)

*Gender, violence and peace: a post-2015 development agenda (2014)*

[www.c-r.org/resources/gender-violence-and-peace-post-2015-development-agenda](http://www.c-r.org/resources/gender-violence-and-peace-post-2015-development-agenda) \*Joint publication with Saferworld

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*Gender in Peacebuilding (Conciliation Resources position paper, 2014)*

[www.c-r.org/resources/gender-and-peacebuilding](http://www.c-r.org/resources/gender-and-peacebuilding)

*Peace processes* (Conciliation Resources position paper, 2015): [www.c-r.org/resources/peace-processes](http://www.c-r.org/resources/peace-processes)

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**Conciliation Resources** is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. We provide advice, support and practical resources to help divided communities resolve their differences peacefully. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end conflict, to improve peacebuilding policies and practice worldwide.

**Further information and examples of Conciliation Resources' work of in conflict areas around the world and our analysis and comparative learning on conflict issues can be found at: [www.c-r.org](http://www.c-r.org)**

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