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Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Pabotoy, Arlyssa Bianca
DOI	10.58863/20.500.12424/4278459
Publisher	Globethics Publications
Rights	Globethics Publications;Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International
Download date	2026-11-13 08:46:30
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Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/4278459

12

CHALLENGING VIOLENCE, BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE

Experiences and Lessons from the Center for Peace Education-Miriam College

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Keywords

Peace; Violence; Philippines; SDG 16.

Abstract

The Philippines is faced with various threats to peace and security: poverty, economic instability, violent extremism, inequality, war, community, and gender-based violence, among others. In 2020, the country ranked 129th of 163 in the World Peace Index, due primarily to high levels of internal conflict, extrajudicial killings, militarization, and vulnerability to the climate crisis.

The Center for Peace Education (CPE)-Miriam College is an advocacy center that promotes the building of a culture of peace through its education, advocacy, women and youth organizing, and networking programs. CPE's theory of change is that reduction of violence and a culture of peace can be achieved when people develop the will to address local and global problems, have the skills to resolve conflicts, and work collaboratively and non-violently for justice, equality and human dignity.

This article describes how peace education, interfaith dialogue, advocacy for arms control and disarmament, and the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security Agenda have helped change mindsets and attitudes of indifference, passivity and aggression to those supportive of action that will challenge various forms of violence.
Data used were drawn from interviews, project evaluations, surveys, focus group discussions, tracer studies, and personal observations and experiences*.

Introduction

Nestled in between the Pacific and Indochina, the Philippines is an archipelagic country of 7,500 islands, and a growing 109 million people, with the youth making 20% of its total population.[320] Composed of three major island groups, Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, the country's territory expands to a total of 298.000 square kilometers of land area[321]

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To quote this chapter: Paboto, Arlyssa Bianca and Nario-Galace, Jasmin, "Challenging Violence, Building a Culture of Peace" in: Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué, Divya Singh, and Jane Usher (Eds.), *Leading Ethical Leaders: Higher Education, Business Schools and the Sustainable Development Goals*, Geneva: Globethics Publications, 2023, pp.519-564, DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4278459 © Globethics Publications. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Visit: https://www.globethics.net/publications

[320] Philippine Statistics Authority, *2020 Census of Population and Housing (2020 CPH) Population Counts Declared Official by the President*, 2020, https://psa.gov.ph/content/2020-census-population-and-housing-2020-cph-population-counts-declared-official-president.

[321] World Bank, *Land area (sq. km)-Philippines*, 2020, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.TOTL.K2?locations=PH

and a total exclusive economic zone of 2.263.816[322] including the highly contested West Philippine Sea (South China Sea).

The country has gone through colonization and foreign rule, three times in recorded history, through: the Spanish colonization for 333 years (1521-1898), the American occupation and Commonwealth (1898-1946), and the Japanese occupation (1941-1945). Upon regaining its first declaration of independence in 1898, the Philippines has had a total of sixteen presidents – two of whom are women; gone through a dictatorship and Martial Law under the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos and organized two nonviolent People Power revolutions in 1986 and 2001.[323]

Living in the Philippines means living through a colorful mix of local languages, with about 78 major language groups spoken to this day and local cultures and practices across different provinces.[324] Despite the centuries of colonization, several indigenous peoples (IPs) remain intact to this day. Spread throughout the country, indigenous peoples constitute approximately 10-15% of the country's total population.[325] The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples reported a total ancestral land and ancestral domain covering more than 5.7 million hectares of land area of

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[322] Sea Around Us, *Catches by Taxon in the waters of Philippines*, 2016, http://www.seaaroundus.org/data/#/eez/608?chart=catch-chart&dimension=taxon&measure=tonnage&limit=10

[323] De La Salle University, *Philippine History*, 2002 https://pinas.dlsu.edu.ph/history/history.html

[324] Department of Foreign Affairs, *General Information*, n.d., https://thehaguepe.dfa.gov.ph/79-about-us/98-general-information

[325] Vera, D., *Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines: A Country Case Study*, 2007, http://www.iapad.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/devera_ip_phl.pdf

the country.[326] And though predominantly a Catholic country, Muslims make up a significant number mostly in the Southern part of the country.

Conflict in the Philippines

Despite its young history, the Philippines has and continues to be a host to armed conflict. The country has gone through many peace negotiations, and signed several peace agreements with groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and the National Democratic Front-Communist Party of the Philippines.[327]

Over 150,000 were killed in the decades-long insurgency between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) against the Philippine government in its fight to establish an independent Muslim region. The armed conflict in Mindanao is rooted in the peoples' continuing struggle for their right to self-determination brought about by the loss of their lands from migrants, continuing "historical injustices" and grave human rights violations committed against them.[328]

Meanwhile, the longest armed insurgency in Asia, the armed conflict between the Philippine government and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) began in 1968, and has claimed more than 40,000 lives, as cited by Conflict Resources.

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[326] Department of Agriculture, *DA eyes idle ancestral lands as food prod'n areas*, 2020, https://www.da.gov.ph/da-eyes-idle-ancestral-lands-as-food-prodn-areas/

[327] Conflict Resources, *The Philippines: the conflict in focus*, n.d., https://www.c-r.org/programme/southeast-asia/philippines-conflict-focus?gclid=Cj0KCQjw4eaJBhDMARIsANhrQAB3tS0pwmhaTv7GZLl0QkPaPEODze1breIuaTZJ4YgbLuf5HxQU2kEaAk1yEALw_wcB

[328] Bacarri, B., *The Mindanao Peace Talks: Another Opportunity to Resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines*, 2005, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr131.pdf

Peacebuilding and the Philippines

Peacebuilding in the Philippines is multifaceted and highly complex. In 2019, in an article by Amnesty International, the Philippines is to be at the most risk from the climate crisis with 47 percent of the country's population highly exposed to climate hazards such as earthquakes, tsunami, floods, tropical cyclones, and drought.[329] Meanwhile in the 2020 Global Peace Index, the country ranked 129 out of 163 countries[330] due to high levels of internal conflicts, extrajudicial killings, proliferation of illicit firearms, and presence of terrorist and non-state armed groups.

But peacebuilding in the Philippines is also resilient and ever growing. Civil society presence is strong with partnership and support from government and the international community. In several instances, civil society, composed of members from academe, non-government organizations, church, and basic sectors have proven their indispensable role in promoting peoples' well-being.

The Center for Peace Education-Miriam College

To reach peace, teach peace – this is the guiding motto at the Center for Peace Education (CPE), an advocacy center of Miriam College (MC). Founded in 1926 in Quezon City, Philippines, Miriam College is committed to the values of truth, peace, justice, and integrity of creation. These values are lived out in the many programs of its advocacy centers including the CPE.

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[329] Amnesty International UK, *Philippines country most at risk from climate crisis,* 2020, https://www.amnesty.org.uk/philippines-country-most-risk-climate-crisis

[330] Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in A Complex World [PDF file]*, 2020, page 9.

The CPE works for Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. It helps address issues of conflict, insecurity, weak institutions and limited access to justice. Through its various programs, it helps contribute to the reduction of various forms of violence (SDG Goal 16.1), address illicit arms flows (16.4), and ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making through its education, organizing, capacity-building, research, advocacy, and networking programs.

The Center's mission is to build a culture of peace and nonviolence. A culture of peace and nonviolence is built when peoples' mindsets, values, modes of behavior, and ways of life reflect respect for life and human dignity, reject violence in all its forms, support the prevention, resolution, and transformation of violent conflicts, and recognize the importance of cooperation, tolerance, dialogue, and participation of the excluded.

Organizations like the CPE are found all over the world. Many of them have been here for decades working to reduce various forms of violence and death rates.

This article is focused on what a peace organization like the CPE can do to help fulfill Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.1. This paper posits that if the work of the thousands of peace and related organizations around the world on peace education, nonviolence, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, disarmament and arms control, promotion and protection of human rights, and peacebuilding are to be pooled and their impact assessed, we would have found significant reductions to violence and death rates everywhere.

The Center's programs connect and contribute to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda:

Peace Education: Teaching Peace to Reach Peace

The greatest resource for peacebuilding are the people themselves, for it is through them that peaceful relationships and structures are

created. Hence, educating people toward becoming peace agents is central to the task of peacebuilding. Peace education, or an education that promotes a culture of peace, is an important peacebuilding strategy. Peace education cultivates the knowledge base, skills, attitudes and values that seek to transform people's mindsets, attitudes and behaviors that, in the first place, have either created or exacerbated a conflict. Hence, peace education is a critical response to both the challenge of preventing violent conflict and the challenge of post-conflict peacebuilding.

In the 1980s, Miriam College started its peace education thrust by infusing peace and global perspectives into subject areas in the undergraduate level. This has become a three-unit undergraduate level course entitled "Introduction to Peace Studies" introduced in the curriculum of the International Studies Department in 1988. Since then, this initial course has evolved into a whole academic minor program called Peace Studies, open as an elective to all college students of various courses, and with many of its graduates working in civil society organizations (CSOs), and in government agencies such as the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP). Another curricular milestone in its Peace Studies is the inclusion of a three-unit Peace Education course in the Teacher Education curriculum of Miriam College, which has now evolved into integration into a related Education subject, "Guiding Children's Behavior and Moral Development". A Certificate Program in Peace and Conflict Resolution Program has also been initiated.

Although based in a school, the CPE's mission of advancing a culture of peace through education has gone beyond borders. Since the late 80s, it has been sharing its knowledge and experience with other educational and other institutions and groups within and outside the country. It established the Peace Education Network, a loose network of

individuals and organizations in the country using education as a vehicle to promote peaceful mindsets, attitudes and behaviors within and outside the school system.

The Peace Educators Network (PEN) is one example of the CPE's outreach to external peace stakeholders. PEN is joined by people who identify themselves as peace educators or are keenly interested in promoting education for peace and nonviolence in either the school system or through the community-based or alternative learning systems. The group is active in writing joint letters, statements and appeals addressing peace and peace-related education issues.

A Whole School Approach to Peace

With the Center's search for an education approach that can more effectively promote a culture of peace, the CPE found that the "Whole School Approach" (WSA) is a good organizing framework in doing peace education. This means that the school attempts to infuse the ideas, perspectives and values of peace into the various aspects of the school's life – curriculum; teaching-learning process; student development programs such as education sessions on conflict resolution, peer mediation, challenging prejudice and bullying; faculty and staff development program; materials development; organizational structures and policies, including a restorative student discipline policy; and its social-political actions.

The WSA also engages as many members of the school community as possible (students, faculty, administrators and staff), the wider community of parents and alumni, and the larger society outside of the school. Beginning 2001, CPE focused on conducting training workshops for teacher-educators including formal educators, community-based educators, and curriculum officers of ministries of education. With teacher-educators teaching hundreds of pre-service or prospective teachers each year, the teacher training workshops are a strategic move

because of its multiplier effect. In a monitoring survey that was conducted with two batches of participants at least six months after their training, the results showed that all the respondent teams were able to integrate peace education themes in various subjects in their Teacher Education curriculum.

The CPE's peace education training has also given birth to peace clubs in various schools throughout the country. These clubs have co-organized awareness-raising and advocacy activities (including visits to parliamentarians, and online campaigns) around peace-related events, e.g., International Day of Peace, Mindanao Solidarity Week and World Interfaith Harmony Week. It has also given birth to the establishment of Centers for Peace Education in other schools, the infusion of peace perspectives into the curricula, and the declaration of other schools in the country as Zones of Peace.

Knowing the importance of families in developing peaceful mindsets, values, and attitudes, the CPE with Miriam College's Family Studies program also launched Our Peaceful Classroom, an online space where parents, educators and other professionals come together to talk about ideas on how to promote positivity and peace within ourselves, our families, and communities.

The youth are often the target of mobilization for armed conflict and are often also the victims. Therefore, special efforts to involve them in processes of peace are crucial. Working with the youth emphasizes the long-term nature of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding needs a multiplicity of peacemakers and the youth definitely is a resource within a society that needs to be empowered to participate in the process.

An essential point that has to be made is that peace education is a critical response not only in a post-conflict scenario but also as a way of preventing violent conflict. It is because peace education teaches us to address the roots of conflict and encourages us to work for their

resolution and transformation through nonviolent ways. Peace education also encourages us to be more active and proactive in seeking ways for people to live together despite differences – with respect, justice and compassion toward all.

Peace Education Beyond The Classroom

The CPE's work is not confined to teaching peace. Peace educators need to engage with relevant government agencies because such collaboration (even if it is in a critical but constructive mode) is often fruitful. It is also important for local peace groups to work in solidarity with regional and global networks that give special attention to peace education. It is through this expanded networking that we can hope to put in place our vision of attaining a global culture of peace.

The Center engages with as many actors as possible, horizontally, with other peace groups, and vertically, government agencies, to enhance the impact of its work. Thus, the CPE is into advocacy specifically on arms control and disarmament, support for the peace processes, and women and youth's participation in peace and security.

Building Bridges of Friendship and Understanding: CPE's Twinning Project

Goal 16.b of the SDGs aims to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development with an indicator of the proportion of people feeling less discriminated against or harassed. At the Center for Peace Education, addressing this target comes in the form of our efforts to challenge prejudice and build tolerance, especially in a multicultural and multi-religious society like the Philippines.

A religiously plural society, Southeast Asia is home to believers of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity, Judaism and tribal religions. According to Castro (2006), this diversity continues

to be used as a reason to mobilize people toward rivalry and even violence -- a significant challenge up to this day.[331]

There continues to be a rise in extremism and fundamentalist religious movements. An example is the creation of ISIS, a Sunni jihadist group with a particularly violent ideology that calls itself a caliphate and claims religious authority over all Muslims.[332]

In the Philippines, experiences of discrimination and marginalization of minority groups including indigenous peoples, and the Bangsamoro, the native Muslim inhabitants particularly in Southern Philippines, fuel armed conflicts. Misinformation, fear, and the lack of communication fuel the formation of biases, stereotypes, and prejudices.

Hans Küng, a renowned theologian, drew the conclusion that "there can be no peace among the nations without peace among religions; no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions." (1991, as cited in Castro, 2006)[333] Interfaith dialogue and cooperation are critical components to peacebuilding, with an aim to open a space to improve communication, promote openness and trust, and enable an empathetic understanding of other religions. When education is used to seek peace and justice, it is a powerful tool that allows for interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

The CPE Twinning Project with a Public School Attended by Muslims in Mindanao

The CPE's Twinning Project seeks to create new relationships between two groups that have been divided by historical and

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[331] Castro, L.N, The Role of Education in Promoting Interfaith Cooperation, Northern Illinois University, 2006, page 1.

[332] RAND Corporation, *The Islamic State (Terrorist Organization)*, n.d., https://www.rand.org/topics/the-islamic-state-terrorist-organization.html

[333] Castro, L.N, The Role of Education in Promoting Interfaith Cooperation, Northern Illinois University, 2006, page 1.

geographical circumstances. Its theme is "building bridges of friendship and understanding" between two differing faiths and cultures. A bridge seeks to connect two places and enables easy access between those who live on both sides. This is the goal of the project: to connect two groups of youth that prior to the project have suffered from negative attitudes toward each other, to enable them to communicate and have meaningful encounters that can break the prejudices that divide them and, in its stead, build bridges of understanding.

Knowledge about and acquaintance with members of other groups make for tolerant attitudes and contacts that bring knowledge and acquaintance are likely to engender sounder and truer beliefs that may contribute to the reduction of prejudice (Allport, 1946 as cited in Castro, 2013).[334]

In the Philippines there have been countless reports of such prejudice, discrimination and exclusion, particularly against Muslims. Although it can be said that many Muslims in the Philippines also harbor negative stereotypes about the Christian majority, it is a fact that the latter's prejudices against the former are uglier, more serious and pronounced. Bias against Muslims and their socio-economic exclusion are among the underlying root causes of the conflict in Mindanao. In Castro's (2013) paper, "A twinning project between Muslim and Christian youth: An assessment", she cites that the Philippine Human Development Report 2005 recommended the building of a constituency for peace and that constituency must be built not only within the government but in the greater populace.

Historical circumstances have created and deepened prejudices between Christians and Muslims believers. Although the root of the armed conflict is not religious in nature, there are those who have used

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[334] Castro, L.N., *A twinning project between Muslim and Christian youth: An assessment (Conference presentation)*, Peace Practitioners Conference, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 2013.

religious differences to exacerbate the conflict. Generations of youth have been receiving negative messages about the other group, and this cycle has largely been perpetuated by fear of and ignorance about the other.

Armed conflict and displacement have disrupted thousands of people's lives in the conflict-affected areas in Mindanao for more than four decades. The armed conflict between the government (GPH) and the Moro National Liberation front (MNLF) as well as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has caused death, destruction and suffering to both combatants and non-combatants. The climate of distrust and prejudice was high in the early 2000s between Muslims and Christians, with the wars of 2000 and 2003, and complicated by the existence of criminal groups such as the Abu Sayyaf. This was the context when the Twinning Project was born. In 2004, there was an ongoing "formal peace process" between the GPH and the MILF and the Twinning Project was meant to accompany it with a so-called "people to people peace process."

The good news today is that the Bangsamoro Organic Law has been passed, and the region is already in a transition government. However the challenge of building bridges of understanding needs to continue. The long road to peace has just begun. The crucial step of building a peace constituency who will be supportive of peacebuilding goes on.

The Twinning Project is between Miriam College (MC), a Catholic school located in Metro Manila, and Rajah Muda High School (RMHS, now known as Rajah Muda National High School), a public school attended by Muslims located in Pikit, Cotabato, a conflict-affected area in Central Mindanao.

The Twinning Project's main goal is to enable the Muslim and Christian youth/ student-participants to develop beliefs, attitudes and actions that are peace-oriented, particularly those that break down the

barriers of prejudice between them. The project consists of exchange of letters, joint peacebuilding workshops and the publication of an annual joint newsletter named Pag-asa or "hope".

The Twinning Project enabled two youth groups to build friendships and initiate activities to promote peace and further understanding between two differing faith and cultural traditions,

One significant initiative of the RMHS students into the Twinning Project is the establishment of a Peace Club called "Suara No Kalilintad," a name in their native Maguindanaon language which can be translated as "Voices of Peace." In the case of the MC students, they organized short re-echoing seminars for their fellow students. A distinctive activity to which they contribute very actively, every year, is the annual celebration of the Mindanao Week of Peace/Mindanao Solidarity Week. The regular features of said week are awareness-raising activities and fund-raising to help their twin school, the RMHS, as well as to help Mindanao and peace-related causes.

Based on assessments conducted by the Center, there have been positive effects of the project on the participants' beliefs and attitudes which will hopefully stay with them and enable them to be agents of peace in their own spheres. Often mentioned is that of "aversion to war". Various reasons were given by those who mentioned this, including loss of life, disrupted education, hardships in evacuation centers, use of child soldiers, material destruction, among others. This is followed by the students' realization of their "role in building peace, including raising the awareness of others," and their conviction that "despite their differences, Muslims and Christians can be united and can help each other in promoting peace." These most frequently mentioned items are a fertile ground from which other peace-related attitudes and actions can spring.

Arm in Arm against Illicit Arms: Peacebuilding and Disarmament

A major component of peace building is securing safe spaces and dismantling tools that promote violence. Every year throughout the world armed violence kills around 526,000 people and more than 75 percent die in non-conflict settings (IISS, 2015 as cited in Nario-Galace, 2018).[335] Roughly 500 people in the world are killed because of violence committed with firearms.[336] Armed violence also triggers displacement. According to UNHCR, there were 65.3 million people who were forced to flee their homes in 2015 or an average of 24 people fleeing from home each minute.[337]

According to a fact sheet published by Reaching Critical Will, the cost of war continues to balloon in recent times. The military-industrial complex absorbs vast amounts of funding that could otherwise be spent on human security, including the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Funds reserved for development initiatives are increasingly spent on emergency relief and rehabilitation operations to clean up after violent conflict.[338]

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[335] Nario-Galace, J, *Women Controlling Arms, Building Peace: The Case of the Philippines*, The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security, 2018.

[336] Amnesty International, *Gun Violence - Key Facts*, n.d., https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/arms-control/gun-violence/

[337] Edwards, A., *Global forced displacement hits record high*, UNHCR Asia Pacific, 2016, https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html

[338] Reaching Critical Will, *Military Spending*, n.d., https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Resources/Factsheets/military-spending.pdf

Illicit Arms in the Philippines

The illicit trade and proliferation of loose firearms and weapons continue to be a key issue of peace and security in the Philippines. Small arms proliferation enabled and sustained the two major armed conflicts in the country. The supply of guns also allows for the formation of private armed groups (PAG) which enable political dynasties to perpetuate themselves in power.

In 2014, Filipinos owned an estimated 3.9 million firearms with some 2.1 million illegal.[339] Current laws in the country do not help in regulating the proliferation of small arms. Republic Act No. 10591 allows a citizen to own and possess a maximum of 15 registered firearms and more than 15 if the citizen is a certified gun collector. The law also exempts a long list of professionals from applying for a permit to carry their guns outside of their homes.[340]

Peace in Action: Disarmament Education and Advocacy

The CPE gives a premium to disarmament education to challenge militarism and prevent armed conflict and armed violence. Disarmament education seeks to be a countervailing force against the dominant militarized mindset that has made states and people rely on the possession of more and more sophisticated weaponry rather than on investing their resources on the fulfillment of basic human needs and on

[339] International Alert, *Where do illegal guns in the Philippines come from?*, n.d. https://www.international-alert.org/news/where-do-illegal-guns-philippines-come

[340] Official Gazette of the Philippines, *Republic Act No. 10591: An Act Providing For A Comprehensive Law on Firearms And Ammunition And Providing Penalties for Violations Thereof*, 2013, https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2013/05/29/republic-act-no-10591/

the development and promotion of nonviolent alternatives and processes.[341]

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' "Agenda for Disarmament: Securing Our Common Future" underscores the catalytic role youth play in security and disarmament and calls for empowering the young generation as the ultimate force for change.[342] CPE has always actively involved students in its advocacy work. Students lead on and offline campaigns, have spoken to parliamentarians and senators in congress, and organized mobilizations for disarmament and arms control.

In both UNSCR 2250: Youth, Peace and Security and the UNODA's Youth for Disarmament Agenda, young people's meaningful participation, and the creating spaces both on and offline for the youth to make meaningful substantive contributions can help facilitate the progress on disarmament.

The Center's disarmament work directly contributes to the fulfillment of SDG 16.4 - significantly reducing illicit financial and arms flows – at policy level. The changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic has made it clear that it is important to continue lobbying governments to put back the issue of armed violence and disarmament in their national agenda. Despite the lockdown in 2020, millions worth of arms exports to conflict-affected countries continue despite the shortage of medical supplies.

Gender and Disarmament

Weapons play a central role in putting women's security at risk. The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) Women's

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[341] Castro, L. and Galace, J, *Peace Education: A Pathway To Peace (3rd Edition)*, Quezon City: The Center for Peace Education-Miriam College, 2019, page 108.

[342] Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, page 67.

Network posits that the primary weapon holders, users and traders as well as majority of victims of death may be men but women suffer as well the consequences of weapons proliferation. Weapons, guns in particular, have been used to facilitate rape, sexual abuse and domestic or intimate-partner violence (Lyddon, 2011 as cited in Nario-Galace, 2018).[343]

Women also count largely among those who are caught in the crossfire and make up the majority of the displaced. As cited in Nario-Galace (2018), the Philippines, 68% of gun violence against women reported in 2007 in the Philippine Star, a local print and digital newspaper, were cases of rape. And while women may not be the primary weapon users in the country, they suffer from violence in the home or on the streets with the aid of guns.

It is important to recognize the changing nature of warfare, one that increasingly harms non-combatants. The Center for Peace Education, therefore, works towards specifically advocating for gender-responsive policies on arms control and disarmament.

Advocating for a Responsible Arms Trade

SDG16.4's goal is the significant reduction of illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime.

CPE is an active part of international coalitions working on arms control and disarmament. It takes part in meetings in the UN and with civil society groups around the world to advocate for then the adoption and now the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA on

[343] Nario-Galace, J, Women Controlling Arms, Building Peace: The Case of the Philippines, The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security, 2018.

SALW), and the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

The Center is an active member of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), a global movement working to stop gun violence particularly from Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). The movement monitors governments' commitments to the UN PoA on SALW, a politically binding instrument adopted by consensus in 2001 seeking to reduce the human suffering caused by the illicit trade in small arms. The International Tracing Instrument, a politically binding instrument outlining requirements on marking, record-keeping, and international cooperation and assistance that will enable tracing illicit small arms and light weapons.[344]

Part of the UN PoA is the voluntary submission of national reports which include information on states' implementation of the PoA.[345] As a member of IANSA Women's Network, focused on the gender implications of gun violence, the CPE, through IANSA, suggested to the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) the inclusion of gender considerations in the national reporting questionnaire, which UNODA reflected as follows:

10.1 Does your country take into account gender considerations?

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[344] United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, *International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons*, 2005, page 2.

[345] Parker, S. and Green, K., *A Decade of Implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons,* Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2012, page 3.

10.2 Does your country collect disaggregated data on gender and SALW?[346]

CPE is an active member of IANSA, organizing local initiatives of global efforts by the network such as the Global Week of Action Against Gun Violence, Wear Orange Campaign Against Gun Violence, and more. The Center also represents the network in the Review Conference and Biennial Meeting of States on the UNPoA at the United Nations.

From the Center's membership in the IANSA Network, CPE extended its campaign work for arms control by joining the Control Arms coalition. Control Arms is an international campaign to reduce armed violence and conflict through international arms control. It is a coalition of members of civil society, academia, and individuals across the world that campaigned for the creation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), a binding treaty on the global arms trade. The ATT aims to establish the highest possible common international standards for regulating or improving the regulation of the international trade in conventional arms with the purpose of reducing human suffering.

The Center's participation during the ATT negotiations proved critical. CPE was one of the main campaigners from the coalition that actively lobbied for the inclusion of the text on Gender-Based Violence (GBV). This text was adopted in the final version of the treaty, and is under the risk assessments requirement of Arms Trade Treaty states parties:

Article 7.4: The exporting State Party, in making this assessment, shall take into account the risk of the conventional arms covered under Article 2 (1) or of the items covered under Article 3 or Article 4 being

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[346] IANSA and WILPF, *Room for Improvement: An analysis of "gender considerations" in the 2020 Programme of Action national reports,* 2021, pages 3-4.

used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children.[347]

The inclusion of this line of gender makes the ATT the first legally-binding international regime to acknowledge the link between the international arms trade and GBV. The Center for Peace Education continues to be an active Asia-Pacific and gender campaigner for the coalition during the Conference of States Parties to the ATT and the UN General Assembly First Committee; representing civil society in national meetings with the Office of the Special Envoy on Transnational Crime, the office fostering the ATT in the Philippine government.

Campaigning for Disarmament: Weapons of Mass Destruction

The CPE is also the Philippine campaigner for the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). ICAN is a coalition of non-governmental organizations that campaigned for the passage, and is now promoting adherence to the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), or the Nuclear Ban Treaty. The TPNW is the first legally-binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons with the ultimate goal being their total elimination.

In 2013, the Center was invited to be a partner organization to the campaign, and thereafter became part of the civil society representatives in the negotiation conferences held in Norway, Mexico, and Austria. These conferences focused on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons should they be detonated internationally or accidentally. The TPNW was adopted in 2017, and opened for signatures from UN Member States. It entered into force on 22 January 2021.[348] On February 1, 2021, the TPNW was ratified by the

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[347] United Nations, *The Arms Trade Treaty,* 2014, page 6.

[348] International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, *The Treaty*, n.d., https://www.icanw.org/the_treaty

Philippines and the CPE took a leading role in campaigning for this ratification by organizing groups to lobby for it. This role was acknowledged by ICAN and the country's Department of Foreign Affairs.

CPE's Disarmament Efforts within the Philippines

The Center for Peace Education works closely with the Office of the Special Envoy on Transnational Crime, lobbying for the ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty signed in 2013, and the fulfillment of the country's commitments to the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. Though unsuccessful, the Center has lobbied for the amendment of the gun law which allows ownership of up to 15 guns and allows almost every Filipino citizen to carry these guns in public without a permit.

The Center has organized public actions, in-person and online lobbying, education sessions, public actions, and other activities to help control arms proliferation and irresponsible use of these weapons. Awareness-raising efforts go beyond the campus and involve the general public. The CPE has written op-ed articles for print media, organized events for the Nuclear Abolition Day and Wear Orange Day activities, initiated and supported petitions for arms control, and conducted Disarmament Education workshops and capacity-building activities to empower local communities to take action against arms proliferation and violence.

The Center's engagement with the Department of Foreign Affairs, the legislature, and pertinent offices on the government's executive branch has also helped see through the country's signing of the Arms Trade Treaty (2013) and the ratification of the TPNW (2021).

By advocating for the Philippines' ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty, and strong commitment and implementation of the UN PoA and TPNW, the Center not only works to curb the illicit flow of arms and

armed violence in the country, but also works to build a norm that does not glorify weapons. Engagement on these issues on peace and security raise awareness within stakeholders in the government, trade and arms industries of the humanitarian issues tied to the arms trade, and that young people, students, and civilians are keeping a close eye on the accountability of stakeholders on these weapons.

Interventions on Key Peace and Security Issues: Preventing Violent Extremism

Violent extremism remains to be one of the rising concerns affecting international and local security. The growing rise of extremist ideologies, implemented through acts of terrorism such as suicide bombings have grappled the Philippines in the past years. While there is no universally agreed definition of the term 'violent extremism', according to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime:

What may constitute what 'violent extremism' has, to some extent, been shaped by the activities of terrorist groups such as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al Qaeda and Boko Haram, which spread messages of hate and violence as well as religious, cultural and social intolerance. In doing so, groups engaged in violent extremism often distort and exploit religious beliefs, ethnic differences and political ideologies to legitimize their actions as well as to recruit and retain their followers.[349]

In the Philippines, homegrown terrorist groups such as the Abu Sayyaff, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, and Maute Group, among others, have evolved and consequently adopted ideologies

[349] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Module 2: Conditions Conducive to the Spread of Terrorism*, 2018, https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/radicalization-violent-extremism.html

espoused by regional and global terrorist organizations. According to Franco (2020), these local terrorist groups have also affiliated themselves with the known terrorist regional groups such as the Jemaah Islamiyah, and international terrorist group ISIS/Daesh.[350] The presence of these groups in Mindanao have made the third largest island in the Philippines host to recurring and protracted conflict.

According to Franco (2020), longitudinal study suggests that occurrence of conflict is predicted by disparities in access to resources, education, and other security issues such as clan feuding, local political conflicts, and weak governance. Illicit trade and the "shadow economy" in Mindanao remain to be a key factor generating conflict and competition between local armed groups.

Factors that push and enable the context of radicalization include poverty and economic hardship; ethnic and religious marginalization; and frustration with the government. According to RAND Corporation's 2020 report entitled, "Countering Violent Extremism in the Philippines":

Various extremist groups have been in on-and-off negotiations with the government over the status of Mindanao. The lack of an arrangement for an independent, Muslim Mindanao that satisfies all parties to the conflict has been a major grievance and driver of radicalization.

According to Rhoades & Helmus (2020) what pulls recruitment are active recruitment through material incentives, in-person networks, and online propaganda. Potential recruits, e.g., impoverished youth, join as a means of providing for themselves and their families. According to an interview for a study conducted with former members of the Maute Group, responsible for the Marawi Siege in 2017, recruiters offer a regular salary between PHP 20,000 to 50,000 -- about USD 400-1,000

[350] Franco, J., *Peripheral Vision: Views from the Borderlands (Fall Bulletin)*, X-Border Local Research Network, 2020, page 1.

(as cited in Rhoades & Helmus, 2020).[351] Uneducated youth and school dropouts who are susceptible to radical ideologies and are promised to be provided with an Islamic education with no moderate Islamic education to challenge radical teaching, are the new targets for recruitment.

In 2018, the Philippines started the process of drafting its National Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism acknowledging the need for a whole-of-nation, multidisciplinary, and holistic approach on the growing issue. Conducted through consultation across the country, the Center for Peace Education-Miriam College participated, acting as a facilitator in these drafting workshops, and supporting the review and refinement of interventions.

Commissioned by UN Women Asia-Pacific, CPE helped draft a complementary manual entitled, "Implementing Gender Provisions: National Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism in the Philippines". This guide has been designed to be used as a resource to help ensure gender-sensitive and gender-responsive implementation of the NAP. The guide has been published in 2019 and is accessible through the UN Women Asia-Pacific website.

Participation in key policies influencing peace processes in the country has been a strategic practice of the Center to ensure that efforts for peace are inclusive, participatory, and rooted in nonviolence. It enables for the assurance of inclusion of gender sensitive and gender responsive policies. This setup also encourages strong partnership between the security sector, government, academe and civil society through indispensable contributions towards a holistic localization.

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[351] Rhoades. A. and Helmus, T., *Countering Violent Extremism in the Philippines,* California: RAND Corporation, pages 23, 26.

Helping Women Count: Women, Peace and Security

The passage of UNSCR 1325, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in 2000 reaffirmed the indispensable role of women in the matters of conflict resolution, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, among other peace efforts. Comprising half of the total population of the world, women's perspectives, and experiences in peace and conflict cannot be discounted. The WPS Agenda significantly pushes for women to be more involved in formal roles in peace processes, and to bring a gender-lens to the discourse around peace and security.

Sexual violence continues to shadow armed conflict. In a conflict situation, insecurity and fear of being victims of rape and sexual abuse increases. Used as a tactic of war, sexual violence encompasses rape, forced prostitution, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy or sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of a comparable gravity (ICRC, 2016).[352]

A culture of silence towards reporting is also enabled from the reluctance to report due to cultural considerations, such as the avoidance of bringing dishonor and shame to women's families or communities. In the Philippines, rape victims or survivors remain reluctant to report or file complaints against their perpetrators because of stigma and the embarrassment and trauma of recalling their ordeal to authorities (Flores & Diaz, 2010).[353]

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[352] International Committee on the Red Cross, *Q&A: sexual violence in armed conflict*, 2016, https://www.icrc.org/en/document/sexual-violence-armed-conflict-questions-and-answers

[353] Flores, H., and Diaz, J, *9 women raped daily in RP in 2009*. Philippines: Philstar Global, 2010, https://www.philstar.com/metro/2010/02/23/551776/9-women-raped-daily-rp-2009

UNSCR 1325: Women, Peace and Security

In Asia, the Philippines was one of the pioneer countries to create a National Action Plan on the agenda. The CPE as a member of Sulong CARHRIHL (Comprehensive Agreement on Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law), co-initiated the formulation and adoption of the first Philippine National Action Plan (NAP) on Women Peace and Security. It worked with government agencies and women and peace organizations throughout the country to develop the NAP. The NAP on 1325 is meant to increase women's participation in decision-making processes that relate to conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Women's voices are normally not heard in these processes and mechanisms when they make up half of the world's population and can offer unique perspectives. CPE co-organized and co-facilitated the consultations from Kalinga to Marawi, co-wrote the plan, and saw through its completion and adoption as a government executive order. That whole process took more than three years.

To ensure implementation of the NAP, the women from civil society who collaborated to write and launch the NAP formed the Women Engaged in Action on 1325 (WE Act 1325), a loose network of women and peace groups throughout the country. The CPE served as its first Coordinator and Secretariat.

In an essay it contributed to the Journal of Social Encounters Vol 5, Issue 2 (2021),[354] CPE outlined a few of the achievements by civil society in implementing the NAP:

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[354] Nario-Galace, J., *Women Count for Peace and Security: A Story of Collaboration in the Philippines*. The Journal of Social Encounters: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, 59-65, 2021.

Localization of the Philippine National Action Plan on WPS

From 2011 – 2016, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) and the Women Engaged in Action on 1325 conducted a series of Localization of 1325 workshops that resulted in the adoption of local resolutions, ordinances, and Local Action Plans (LAPs) in some municipalities in the country affected by various kinds of conflict. The Localization of 1325 is a bottom-up strategy for the effective implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the supporting Women, Peace and Security resolutions at the local level.

The Localization strategy enabled local government officials, security sector, community women, the religious sector, indigenous peoples, and members of the academe to work together to adopt provisions of the PNAP as local legislations and policies. LAPs included the allocation of seats for women in local special bodies particularly peacekeeping and human rights mechanisms; funding legal, economic, educational psychosocial support and spiritual services for women and girl survivors of conflict, and provision of emergency and livelihood assistance to children and women victims of armed conflicts (Maligalig, 2016).

The Localization of 1325 in the Philippines, supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), also paved the way for the inclusion of women in age-old village decision-making platforms that traditionally did not include women. The Matagoan Bodong Consultative Council, a Council of Elders in Northern Philippines, for example, began to include women in the decision-making body breaking what used to be a glass ceiling.

Increased Women's Participation

Monitoring on women's participation in decision-making processes made by civil society in partnership with GNWP and Norway indicated a significant increase in the number of women in senior decision-making

positions in the executive branch of government from 2010-2012 (WE Act 1325, 2012). WE Act 1325 (2014) also noted significant progress in the percentage of women in the security sector and peace negotiating teams from 2013-2014 while moderate progress was noted in the number and percentage of women participating in constitutional legislative reviews including security sector reviews and the justice sector.

Promotion of Gender Perspective

The monitoring report made by WE Act 1325 (2014) in partnership with GNWP and with the support of Norad also saw significant progress in the detailed breakdown of gender issues addressed in peace agreements. It also noted significant progress in the number of CSOs in task force/committees on UNSCR 1325 and 1820 and in the number and quality of gender-responsive laws and policies. Such an increase was also observed in the number and percentage of pre-deployment training and post-deployment programs for military and police incorporating UNSCR 1325 and 1820, international human rights instruments, and international humanitarian law.

Operationalizing the NAP in the Security Sector

Partnership efforts between WE Act 1325 and GNWP paved the way for the operationalization of the NAP in the plans, programs, and activities of the Philippine National Police and the Philippine Army. Nario-Galace and Viar (2015) reported that various civil society-organized WPS trainings in the Police resulted in the incorporation of NAP provisions in its 'PATROL PLAN 2030 or the PNP Peace and Order Agenda for Transformation and upholding the Rule of Law. The Philippine Army, meanwhile, published and implemented several policy directives promoting gender equality in training assignment, utilization, career path and promotion of female military officers. More women

members of the Army are now deployed as civil-military relations staff working on community-based peace and development initiatives in conflict-affected areas. Both PNP and the Philippine Army integrated WPS in their Gender and Development Plan and Budget. (Nario-Galace and Viar, 2015)[355]

Gender-Responsive Bangsamoro Law

Supported by the UK Embassy in Manila and Conciliation Resources, WE Act 1325 members organized and conducted several consultations to know what women from communities wanted to be included in the law. Results of consultations were put together and crafted as lobby points. To ensure the integration of gender perspectives in the Bangsamoro law, advocacy trainings were organized to help women come up with strategies and activities to push for women's meaningful participation in the Bangsamoro. These lobby points were taken to members of Congress and the members of the government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace negotiating teams.

It participated, organized, and co-organized several public actions to push for provisions in the law that will uphold women's right to participation and leadership in decision-making and peace and security processes. The lobby points that WE Act 1325 pushed came from its consultations with thousands of community women affected by conflict. The efforts have not been futile. The document submitted by the BTC to the Office of the President contained language affirming women's meaningful participation, as cited in Nario-Galace (2021). The Bangsamoro Organic Law signed in July 2018 has provisions for the participation of women in the Bangsamoro Cabinet and other mechanisms (GNWP, 2019 as cited in Nario-Galace, 2021) as well as

[355] Nario-Galace, J. and Viar, I, *We act 1325: Women preventing war, building peace*, Unpublished report, 2015.

provisions for their meaningful participation in the conceptualization and implementation of development programs and projects.

Enhanced Capacities for Leadership and Participation

Women in communities affected by armed conflict were trained on skills necessary for meaningful participation. With support from the Australian and Canadian Governments, women were trained on advocacy, public speaking, conflict prevention, conflict resolution. and mediation skills. Capacities were also enhanced concerning political participation in the Bangsamoro where women were trained on political platform development, winning elections, and resource mobilization. In the elections that followed the training, some of the women threw their hats into the election ring. Some won, some lost. But what really won was their ability to conquer their fears and demystification of the belief that only men belong to the public sphere.

WPS and Arms Control

In the same consultations for the National Action Plan, participants validated the security threats brought about by the illicit trade and presence of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the Philippines. Guns were identified as enablers of armed conflict and tools that empower and sustain armed groups. Thus, mechanisms to regulate the transfer and use of SALW, a tool of violence in armed conflict, was included under the action point of the National Action Plan to "Develop, enact, and implement policies that ensure protection and security for women affected by armed conflict."

The inclusion of the language of arms control created and raised consciousness that arms control is necessary to protect women's rights and prevent violence. This also opened a space for the role women can play in addressing the impact of arms proliferation at the community level, given its disproportionate impact on them while connecting it to a

larger framework on their meaningful participation in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

This inclusion proved an important tool in lobbying engendered policies such as UN PoA, Arms Trade Treaty, and national Firearms legislation. It was also helpful in calling attention of policymakers to the link of women and armed violence

WePeace

The CPE continues its work with women on the ground. In 2019, a nationwide training for women's peacekeeping with the Center's long-standing partners had been conducted in four provinces across the country through the program, the Women's Agency in Keeping the Peace, Promoting Security, or WePeace.

WePeace is a localization of the WPS Agenda promoting horizontal peace while simultaneously supporting the WPS Agenda's pillar of participation. Conducted through a capacity-building training, each area had about 15-20 women participants per area, chosen and nominated by CPE's partner organizations.These training sessions reached 83 community women leaders from four distinct communities addressing four different conflict lines: (1) clan wars, locally called "*rido*" in Aleosan, North Cotabato; (2) internal displacement in Surigao del Sur; (3) tribal wars in Tabuk City, Kalinga; (4) and development aggression, in the form of development projects that violate indigenous peoples' rights, in Infanta, Quezon Province.

The conception of WePeace was inspired by the experience of women peacekeeping teams from Bontoc, Mountain Province and Lagawe, Ifugao, which are provinces of the Cordillera Administrative

Region (CAR), whose population is largely composed of closely related indigenous peoples (IPs).[356]

The Bontoc Women's Brigade from Mountain Province, conduct peacekeeping by ensuring the strict compliance to ordinances on drinking bans and local curfew. They have been an active women peacekeeping group supporting the Philippine National Police (PNP) and barangay councilors since 2001. In the neighboring province of Lagawe, Ifugao, another all-women peacekeeping team also conducts nightly rounds in specific areas to ensure compliance and implementation of drinking bans and local curfews.

The WePeace training were accompanied with modules, written by the 12-women training team composed of peacebuilders with different expertise from government, academe, civil society, religious, and indigenous groups. These modules have been compiled in a 2019 outcome document, *At the Frontline: Women Peacekeepers in the Philippines* which has been distributed to the participants and partners to use should they want to do training with other community members. A full-length documentary, *Sparks of Peace: Women Peacekeepers in the Philippines* was also produced documenting the beginnings of the Philippines' National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in 2010; women and peacebuilding at the grassroots level; and stories of the women of WePeace from Kalinga, Quezon Province, North Cotabato, and Surigao del Sur.

The production of learning materials, in this case the modules and documentary for WePeace, ties efforts of awareness raising of SDG 16 at the same time promoting peace and security issues through quality education (SDG 4). The Center consciously produces materials that can

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[356] Cordillera Peoples Alliance, *The Cordillera: Its land and people*, 2006, https://www.cpaphils.org/cordillera.htm#targetText=A%20big%20bulk%20of%20the,Ibaloy%2C%20Ifugao%2C%20and%20Bago

be used by audiences beyond the communities we work with. For example: together with the premiere of the documentary, the Center prepared an official programme offering background information and guide questions to help audiences process and dive deeper into the realities and situations raised by the women in the documentary.

Gains: Beliefs and Attitudinal Change

The approach of the localization of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda through education and training challenges associations among violence, power, small arms, and masculinity. Training helps change the participants' view on what is necessary in providing personal and community security. It enables a new perspective on their perceived roles in the homes and community.

In the case of gender and disarmament in the PNAP-WPS, significant differences were found in the youth's beliefs and attitudes towards arms control prior to and after training. After the training, the youth's belief that peace and normalcy will be more possible if arms were reduced, their proliferation controlled, and armed groups disbanded improved significantly (Nario-Galace, 2018).[357]

In testimonies documented in the 2019 publication, "At the Frontline: Women Peacekeepers in the Philippines," participants from WePeace pointed out that by participating in community peacebuilding and peacekeeping, the entire community's perception on women's participation is challenged as well. One participant shared that she has witnessed people who have been resistant to slowly participating in more and more peacebuilding activities.[358]

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[357] Nario-Galace, J, Women Controlling Arms, Building Peace: The Case of the Philippines, The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security, 2018.

[358] Pabotoy, A., *At the Frontline: Women Peacekeepers in the Philippines*, Quezon City: The Center for Peace Education-Miriam College, 2019, page 58.

Challenging associations of weapons, masculinity, peace and security requires a commitment to gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence. This can be done through peace, gender, and disarmament education, and other programs that educate on gender norms and that promote tolerance, nonviolent expressions of masculinity, gender equality, and nonviolent resolution of conflicts.

By using the nationwide consultation as a key guideline to the Philippines' WPS localization, other key issues beyond peacebuilding, such as this multiple-lens approach to key issues is a key example of the synergies amongst the Sustainable Development Goals 16 on Peace and Strong Institutions, 4 on Quality Education, and 5 on Gender Equality.

Amplifying the Voices of the Young: Youth, Peace and Security

In 2016, an estimated 408 million youth (aged 15–29) resided in settings affected by armed conflict or organized violence.[359] With conflict and humanitarian crises becoming protracted, young people are on the receiving end of the cost of the conflict, and with warfare and weapons evolving into becoming more difficult to recover from, leaving communities devastated, young people are at the heart of living through economic, health, and environmental crises. But young people have also proven a resilience and power for change like no other. Global movements that have shaken and challenged governments and industries, such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and the Youth Strike 4 Climate, are all composed and led by young people.

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[359] Hagerty, T., *Data for Youth, Peace and Security: A summary of research findings from the Institute for Economics & Peace,* Institute of Economics and Peace, 2017, page 2.

In the Philippines, young people have been at the forefront of initiatives for peacebuilding. Young people are organizers of humanitarian response through efficient and highly organized calls for and distributions of donations to relief responses for victims of natural hazards. Young people are trainers of capacity building programs for different advocacies such as peacebuilding, climate change, gender equality, and human rights. Thus, young people cannot be left out of the table of peacebuilding and security. They have always been key players in driving sustainable change forward, and stakeholders of the gains of negotiations and agreements made today.

In 2015, the UN Security Council adopted the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda recognizing that "young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security." In his 2018 UNSCR 2250 progress study presented to the Security Council, UNSG Antonio Guterres stated, "many young people are frustrated by the tendency of their Governments and international actors to treat youth as a problem to be solved, instead of as partners for peace."

UNSCR 2250 identifies participation, protection, prevention, partnerships and disengagement, and reintegration as the five key pillars for action. The agenda urges Member States to give space for young people to meaningfully participate in peace processes. As SG Guterres emphasized: "For peace and security policy and programming to be effective, it is essential to understand how the experiences of young people vary over time in response to changing social, political and cultural landscapes." Young people's voices and perspectives cannot be left out if we want long-lasting peace.[360]

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[360] Guterres, A., *Identical letters dated 2 March 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council*, United Nations, 2018, pages 3-4.

The CPE has always championed giving young people, especially young women, the space to participate in peacebuilding efforts and campaigns. Peace education does not only mean learning within the confines of a classroom. Peace education involves empowering young people to express their ideas, and find cooperation with different leaders in society and amongst each other, in order to eliminate violence and build sustainable peace in our individual lives, communities, and societies.

Youth, peace and security cannot be disconnected from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a partner to the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, CPE was the implementing partner of the Young Women+ Leaders for Peace in the Philippines.

Young Women+ Leaders for Peace

Active in five countries, the Young Women Leaders for Peace (YWLP) helps young women and girls gain the skills and build confidence to become leaders in their communities. Since 2014, the program has reached over 7,000 young women and girls driven by the reality that when their leadership and peacebuilding potentials are realized, they are a positive force that transforms communities and societies for the better.[361]

In the Philippines, YW+LP started in 2018, then called the Girl+ Ambassadors to Young Women Leaders, with the initiative to organize a youth training on women, peace and security and its intersection with human rights and the media. Unique only to the Philippines, the "+" symbol signifies the inclusion of male allies and members of the LGBTQIA+ in the network.

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[361] Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, *Developing the Leaders of Today and Tomorrow*, n.d., https://gnwp.org/what-we-do/young-women-leaders-for-peace-program/

A Growing Network of Young Women Peacebuilders

The main output of the 2018 Girl+ Ambassadors to Young Women Leaders training was a social media plan that promoted accountability to gender equality, women's rights, human rights, and peacebuilding policies. This was then followed by the formation of the Girl+ Ambassadors for Peace Network – a network composed of young women leaders from different provinces in the Philippines, engaged in different sectors, offering different perspectives to approaching peace and peacebuilding. The network was the avenue for the youth to engage not just with the members of their organizations and localities, but the Philippines as a whole in upholding these principles through the use of social media.

In 2019, the Girl+ Ambassadors for Peace changed its name to the Young Women+ Leaders for Peace. Continuing the momentum in 2018, members in the Mindanao region conducted a campaign on the plebiscite of the Bangsamoro Organic Law. A 2019 Training of Trainers was also organized, led by GNWP. This training concluded with proposals of community-focused youth discussions on electoral education in time for the Philippines' national midterm election happening in the same year. Implemented across all three major island groups in the country, these discussions were organized to ensure that youth continue to play an active role in the narrative of sustainable peace.

COVID-19 and YW+LP

The Covid-19 pandemic brought adjustments and restrictions to the face-to-face community outreach. YW+LP Philippines rose to the challenge organizing various social media campaigns and online training which responded to the many social issues in 2020. Offline, members in areas where possible, distributed humanitarian aid.

Beneficiaries include young women and men, children, internally displaced mothers, women vendors, and low-income families impacted by the global health crisis. Interventions include psychosocial activities, and distribution of hygiene and safety kits, educational kits and healing packages. The interventions were coupled with an awareness campaign on COVID-19 prevention. All projects are implemented by the YW+LP Members across the Philippines with funding from the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders.

Towards the 2030 Agenda

Through the years, the Center for Peace Education-Miriam College has consciously aligned its work with local and international efforts on peacebuilding and participation, applying a holistic and synergized approach to all its projects and programs. Establishing partnerships with other organizations and experts working on key issues on peace, education, disarmament, gender, and youth, among others, allows the CPE to approach peacebuilding in a holistic and inclusive manner.

This reinforces the need to invest in synergies among different efforts, agendas, and policies from top to bottom. The decisions and commitments made by world governments in the UN will not reach local grassroots communities, who need it the most, if other key issues related to it are ignored.

Has the Sustainable Development Goal 16 to 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels' been achieved these past years since the SDGs were adopted? If thousands of peace and related-organizations all around the world continue their efforts and are accompanied by governments' political will, then the answer will be closer to the affirmative.

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