



Centre for
Humanitarian
Dialogue

Mediation for peace

October 2012

OPINION

Women's involvement in
conflict early warning systems:
Moving from rhetoric to
reality in Mindanao

Mary Ann M. Arnado

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (the HD Centre) is an independent organisation dedicated to improving the prevention of, and response to, armed conflict. The HD Centre opens channels of communication and mediates between parties in conflict, facilitates dialogue, and provides support to the broader mediation and peacebuilding

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This Opinion is produced as part of the HD Centre's project, 'Women at the Peace Table - Asia Pacific', which brings together women active in peacemaking across the Asia-Pacific region to identify and employ strategies for improving the contributions of women to, and participation in, peace processes.

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“Today, our civil society counterpart is launching an all-women peace-keeping force, most likely the first we ever had in our history of waging peace in the country. I have always been optimistic that gradually and one day, we would live to see ourselves go beyond the rhetoric and witness women really move to the front and centre of the peace process.”

Teresita Quintos-Deles, Philippines Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, October 5, 2010¹

Introduction

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), hereafter referred to as 1325, calls upon United Nations (UN) Member States to recognise and promote the participation of women in peace and security processes. Since its agreement over a decade ago, women from conflict areas all over the world have been campaigning for the implementation of 1325 in peacekeeping operations, ceasefire

¹ Excerpt from the keynote speech delivered by Secretary Teresita Quintos-Deles during the launch of the All Women Contingent of the Civilian Protection Component in the International Monitoring Team. Reported by Carolyn O. Arguillas, *MindaNews*, 5 October, 2010.

monitoring, early warning, conflict prevention, rehabilitation efforts and in political negotiations between, and among, the protagonists of armed conflict.

This paper only focuses on early warning, conflict management and prevention systems in the Asia Pacific region, using Mindanao in the Philippines as a case study. To illustrate one way in which 1325 has been operationalised through conflict early warning systems (CEWS), this paper will examine the All Women Contingent of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) in Mindanao. This was established in 2009 and represents a strong example of good practice in the area of moving from rhetoric to reality.

The concept of CEWS and its gender dimensions

Early warning as a concept first came about during the "...Cold War in the field of national military intelligence to enhance the capacity of predicting potential (ballistic) attacks."² Stemming from a military concept, early warning was later introduced into the United Nations system as an instrument to forecast natural catastrophes such as tsunamis and earthquakes. It then evolved to include armed conflict and communal violence. Nowadays, early warning is employed to predict, or respond to, both natural disasters and violent conflicts. Thus, "early warning efforts do not intend to suppress conflicts, but to respond to the trajectory of a conflict."³ The objective of conflict early warning and crisis prevention initiatives, in this sense, is to prevent the use of violence.

² Von Keyserlingk, Niels and Kopfmüller, Simone, *Conflict Early Warning Systems: Lessons Learned from Establishing a Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) in the Horn of Africa*, GTZ Working Paper (Eschborn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, October 2006), p.3. Available at: www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-igad-Conflict-Early-Warning-Systems-Lessons-Learned.pdf. Accessed 18 March, 2012.

³ Von Keyserlingk, Niels and Kopfmüller, Simone, *Conflict Early Warning Systems: Lessons Learned from Establishing a Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) in the Horn of Africa*, GTZ Working Paper (Eschborn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, October 2006), p.3.

An early warning system (EWS) is defined as “...any initiative that focuses on systematic data collection, analysis and/or formulation of recommendations, including risk assessment and information sharing, regardless of topic, whether they are quantitative, qualitative or a blend of both.”⁴ Conflict early warning requires near real time assessment of events that, in a high risk environment, are likely to accelerate or trigger the rapid escalation of conflict. “It consists of data collection, risk analysis, and the transmission of information with recommendations to targeted recipients.”⁵

To date, conflict early warning systems have been largely gender-blind and have rarely specifically targeted the involvement of women, despite relevant commitments to 1325. As such, CEWS miss out on key information gleaned by women, as well as on the potential contribution of women in crucial conflict prevention processes. Involving women in CEWS means “ensuring that both men and women have the opportunity to report on their security situation, and that the different threats and concerns that impact men and women are considered and analysed”.⁶ Combining gender-sensitive conflict early warning information with the involvement of both men and women in the analysis and response can improve the quality of the analysis gathered as well as strengthen women’s roles in conflict prevention processes, and lead to gender-sensitive responses to security threats.⁷

Nonetheless, the biggest challenge confounding CEWS is that they have not yet been effectively transformed into a preventive response. While much time has been utilised for data-gathering, documentation, reporting and conflict analysis, there is still much to be done in terms of bringing the information back to the communities who may be in

4 Austin, Alexander, *Early Warning and The Field: A Cargo Cult Science?* (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, August 2004), p.2. Available at: www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/austin_handbook.pdf. Accessed 18 March, 2012.

5 Haider, Huma, *Preventing Violent Conflict: Early Warning, Direct Prevention and Structural Prevention*, (University of Birmingham: Governance and Social Development Resource Center, December 2009). Available at: www.gsdr.org/index.cfm?objectid=312C4DE5-14C2-620A-276426B564F1233E. Accessed 18 March, 2012.

6 Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Gender and Early Warning Systems. An Introduction*, (Warsaw: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2009), p.4. Available at: www.osce.org/odihr/40269?download=true. Accessed 18 March, 2012.

7 Moser, Annalise, *Engendering Conflict Early Warning: Lessons from UNIFEM’s Solomon Islands Gendered Conflict Early Warning Project*, (Solomon Islands: UNIFEM, January 2006). Available at: www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/go/home&id=54123&type=Document&langID=1. Accessed 18 March, 2012.

the position to generate the desired response to a particular threat of violence. This paper suggests that a key element in mobilising preventive action and responses to early warning is the greater involvement of women in CEWS.

A brief scan of CEWS in the region

A scan of the Asia Pacific region reveals dismal compliance with 1325 in terms of women's participation and involvement in CEWS. To date, only three National Action Plans have been agreed (in the Philippines, Nepal and Australia), providing one gender-inclusive conflict early warning framework. While there are mechanisms and systems that are already at work, such as those in Sri Lanka and Indonesia discussed below, there remains much to be done here in terms of policy and operations to bring to light, and make effective, the unique contributions of women.

Indonesia

The Institut Titian Perdamaian (ITP) based in Jakarta, Indonesia, is running a Conflict Early Warning and Early Response System (CEWERS) in five pilot areas: Poso; Ambon; Masohi; Ternate; and Jailolo.⁸ It has developed guidelines which could be replicated in other conflict areas. A key strategy which it strongly promotes is developing a synergy between early warning and peacebuilding programmes, as the latter are more comprehensive in terms of a long term strategic response to conflict. While the ITP has already made inroads into setting up this system (such as setting up secretariats in pilot areas, the publication of CEWERS modules and increased media coverage), there is a critical need for collaboration among various stakeholders in order to generate an early response. Here, women are a very important resource which, in this case, is yet to be tapped.⁹

The sporadic ethnic conflict in Ambon indicates that particular attention is needed from all parties to build lasting peace. With the support of the European Union, Kemitraan, a well-known governance reform

⁸ Institut Titian Perdamaian, www.titiandamai.or.id Accessed 20 May, 2012.

⁹ Institut Titian Perdamaian presentation during the *Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict – South East Asia (GPPAC-SEA) Workshop on Preventive Action*, November 29-30, 2011, Jakarta, Indonesia.

foundation, is working closely with ex-Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Eastern Indonesia who had been affected by the communal violence between, and among, Muslims and Christians.¹⁰ It has developed training programmes on CEWERS for youth leaders, religious leaders, government officials, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and others who can influence peacebuilding. The objective is to identify, and respond to, the potential cause of conflicts as well as to mitigate the negative effects of violent conflict including on displaced people. The training has been delivered in three regions in Maluku, Nusa Tenggara Timur and Central Sulawesi. It appears that a key ‘ingredient’ for making this early warning system effective is the active participation of women because they can easily relate to other women. They are also effective in building bridges in terms of communications, such as what is happening between, and among, Muslim and Christian communities in Ambon.

Sri Lanka

Given the collapse of the ceasefire agreement and the outbreak of war in 2009 that killed thousands of innocent civilians and led to a controversial military victory, Sri Lanka may not offer a good example of CEWS. Still, it is noteworthy to mention that the Foundation for Co-Existence (FCE) has introduced a new early warning tool for civil society. Its approach was an experimental effort to integrate warning and response into one framework. The programme was designed based on a model for a citizen-based early warning system which required “the development of tools and techniques such as standard formats for events data collecting, databases for information storage and indicators for analysis”.¹¹ With strong community participation, the FCE has developed a reporting system that produces daily, monthly and annual reports. It has also provided regular briefings and meetings with multilateral agencies.

While its community-based strategy is laudable, the distinct role and participation of women in monitoring, documentation and reporting activities at the local level are not immediately apparent and observable. The slogan “Early Warning and Early Response system

¹⁰ See www.kemitraan.or.id/index.php/main/home. Accessed 20 May, 2012.

¹¹ Rupesinghe, Kumar, *FCE Citizen-based Early Warning and Early Response System: A New Tool for Civil Society to Prevent Violent Conflict*, (Sri Lanka: Foundation for Co-Existence, 2009), p.11. Available at: <http://earlywarning.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/fce-citizen-based-early-warning-and-early-response-system.pdf>. Accessed 18 March, 2012.

of citizens, by citizens and for citizens” may be popular and a step in the right direction and could be further enhanced with more gender-focused activities at the local level.¹² What makes it unique, though, is the actual presence and close proximity of the staff and monitors in the conflict-affected areas, thus enabling FCE to “understand the situation better and intervene rapidly and appropriately. By so doing, it intends to reduce the number of victims by preventing direct violence in community-based conflicts (micro-conflict).”¹³

Conflict in Mindanao

For more than 40 years, the armed conflict in Mindanao has become so familiar and predictable that many people living with it on a day-to-day basis have become resigned to it as an ongoing reality. As expressed by Mussah Tulawie, a mother of five children from Jolo, Sulu: “Violence seems to have become an ordinary, constant companion, it is almost shameful to admit that we have actually gotten used to it”.¹⁴ Fear, terror, “rido” (clan feuds) and military operations have become so much the order of the day that they, rather than preventing and resolving conflicts, have generated a false sense of chivalry and bravery among the Tausug tribe in the Province of Sulu. “If you seek safety in the evacuation centres, it is even shunned and considered an act of cowardice. So if this is the mindset that has been formed among the locals in the area, one cannot expect that the concept of early warning will even be considered necessary and relevant.”¹⁵

This paper examines how women’s engagement in CEWS has been incorporated into efforts to resolve and reduce violent conflict in Mindanao between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), who are also engaged in peace negotiations and are expected to sign a negotiated political settlement within the year.¹⁶

¹² Rupesinghe, Kumar, *FCE Citizen-based Early Warning and Early Response System: A New Tool for Civil Society to Prevent Violent Conflict*, (Sri Lanka: Foundation for Co-Existence, 2009), p.11.

¹³ Rupesinghe, Kumar, *FCE Citizen-based Early Warning and Early Response System: A New Tool for Civil Society to Prevent Violent Conflict*, (Sri Lanka: Foundation for Co-Existence, 2009), p.11.

¹⁴ Based on author’s interview with Mussah Tulawie, founding member of Bawgbug on 29 January, 2012 in Davao City. Bawgbug, which literally means serve, respect and protect is a human rights organisation based in Jolo, Sulu.

¹⁵ Focus Group Discussion with Civilian Protection Component women team leaders, led by the author on 31 January, 2012 in Davao City.

¹⁶ “President Benigno Aquino III is confident of signing a peace agreement with Muslim rebels in the next few months with Malaysia’s leader, whose government was brokering the talks between the government and

Violence is also prevalent among warring clans and this is another key area where women's conflict early warning skills are seen in action.

In the aftermath of the all-out war between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the MILF in 2000, which displaced close to a million people, there was an avalanche of interventions from international and national NGOs and UN agencies to help rebuild torn lives and devastated communities. Solutions, programmes and initiatives mushroomed addressing a range of challenges: relief distribution; water and sanitation; trauma healing; core shelter; unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearing; livelihood creation and support; inter-religious dialogue; increasing women's participation in peace talks; and organising and empowering internally displaced people.

Conflict prevention, conflict transformation, peacebuilding, creating a culture of peace and peace education have been fashionable for 10 years from 2001-2010 with funding support pouring in and leading to an explosion of local and national NGOs in Mindanao attempting to deliver local services and programming, as well as the influx of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). In varying degrees, they managed to do everything and more except fundamentally resolve the conflict and stop violence.

In Mindanao, women from the frontlines of conflict have also joined their colleagues from across the globe to fully operationalise 1325 and subsequent Security Council resolutions such as 1820 (focused on curbing sexual violence in war). At the beginning, this was a difficult task considering the fact that there is a divide within the women's movement on approaches and tactics, as well as between the latter and the peace movement in Mindanao, in particular, and in the Philippines in general.¹⁷ While feminists and women's rights activists have greatly advanced their struggles to tackle violence against women as a societal norm, they have not been as active in addressing the violence that women experience from war and militarisation in Bangsamoro communities. This may be related to wider divisions within Filipino society around the right to self-determination for the Bangsamoro people who are

the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)...", Excerpt from Gil Cabacungan, "Aquino expects final peace pact with MILF soon" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 9 September 2012. Available at: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/266954/aquino-expects-final-peace-pact-with-milf-soon>. Accessed 12 September 2012.

¹⁷ Based on the author's interview with Baileng Mantawil, Bantay Ceasefire Monitor, on 31 January, 2012 in Davao City.

asserting their distinct identity, culture and way of life from the majority of Filipinos who are predominantly Christian. This probably stems from cultural precepts, which tend to abhor feminism as a Western concept and therefore are anathema to the identity-based struggle of the Bangsamoro people.¹⁸ This does not mean, however, that women in the conflict areas have no notion of gender sensitivity and women's empowerment. There is, in fact, much enthusiasm to address gender-based violence, albeit with a degree of scepticism stemming from the imperative they feel to ensure that it will not erode their distinct identity and culture.

Different levels of early warning systems

The involvement of women in conflict early warning systems is more pronounced and defined at the community level than in prevailing formal structures. As the structures get more formal and hierarchical, women's roles tend to become more obscure and invisible. This is evident in government structures at the provincial and municipal levels, and especially in the male-dominated security sector. If we are to encourage women's involvement, these systems and structures need to work at the grassroots level and increase community-based interventions. To do otherwise will just play lip service to 1325 and all the gender-sensitive policies that have been devised to date. The most effective way to get women involved is for initiatives to be as local as possible to where the women actually live and where they experience the effects of conflict or the tensions surrounding them. It doesn't mean, though, that CEWS should be limited to community-based approaches. It is important to scale up community efforts at early warning to the formal structures so that they will be able to influence policies and decisions. With the mandate posed by 1325, the challenge for CEWS is how to make the community level efforts and the formal structures meet so that each one will be able to build on the strength of the other.

To encourage more women to get involved in early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms, it is important to consider what added value those mechanisms should bring to the sense of security and well-being in the communities where many women play central tasks in the nurturing and sustenance of relationships. If the process of early warning is only extractive of data and information that serves external purposes, that system is not only alienating but also an exercise in futility for women in the conflict-affected areas who are in dire need of accurate and real time information.

¹⁸ Based on the author's interview with Baileng Mantawil, Bantay Ceasefire Monitor, on 31 January, 2012 in Davao City.

Among indigenous peoples in Mindanao, CEWS are located within a spiritual context. For example, the Matigsalug and Manobo tribes are composed of about 70,000 people who have been in continuous possession and occupation of their ancestral domain which is located along the plains and mountain ranges of Marilog, Arakan, Kitaotao, Kibawe and San Fernando municipalities in the tri-boundaries of Bukidnon, North Cotabato and Davao City. When asked how they can detect early signs of conflict, Bae Magdalena Suhat, a woman leader from the Matigsalug tribe and the Chair of the Council of Elders of the tribe said that “we can see the early signs of conflict through our dreams. It must be strange to you but for us that has always been the practice of the tribe. That is how we survived the war of attrition and genocide committed against our people since time immemorial. That is a proven and tested indigenous knowledge system”.¹⁹

A report from a UNIFEM CEWS programme in the Solomon Islands clearly identified some of the disparities between how men and women perceived violence and their varied responses to tension and conflict.²⁰ Men, for example, rated inter-ethnic relations as a high source of tension, while women rated them only as a medium source of tension. “Existing inequalities and different roles during conflict can lead men and women to perceive threats and vulnerabilities in different ways. The same signs and occurrences will not necessarily elicit the same reaction in both men and women”.²¹ This observation also holds true among Moro women in Mindanao who managed to cross ideological, political and ethnic divides with much more ease and practicality than their male counterparts. Women members from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front are far more able to work together with their sisters from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and could easily identify common issues affecting them as Moro women regardless of the political lines and revolutionary fronts that they belong to.

This could confirm the suggestion that women were better able to maintain inter-ethnic alliances, even during tense times, while men generated stronger in-group identification. It also reaffirms that men and women do, indeed, have different perceptions: both of which it would be of value to consider.

¹⁹ Based on the author’s interview with Bae Magdalena Suhat on 14 February, 2012 in Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon.

²⁰ UNIFEM being the former name of the UN agency for women’s rights, UN Women.

²¹ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Gender and Early Warning Systems. An Introduction*, (Warsaw: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2009), p.4. Available at: www.osce.org/odihr/40269?download=true. Accessed 18 March, 2012.

Good practice example: Civilian Protection Component of the International Monitoring Team

On October 27, 2009, the peace panels of the Philippine Government (GPH) and the MILF agreed to establish a mechanism to protect civilians. This was in response to the alarming trend of civilians being deliberately targeted by soldiers and rebels alike who avowedly claimed they were there to protect the people. Following the 2008 fact-finding mission to Mindanao, Amnesty International reported that “the renewal of violence between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has been, and continues to be, accompanied by human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law by both sides.”²²

Under the GPH-MILF Agreement on the Civilian Protection Component (CPC), the International Monitoring Team (IMT), an independent third party, monitors the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the civilian protection mechanism of the peace panels. It is composed of representatives from the Governments of Japan, Norway, Brunei, Libya, Indonesia, Malaysia and the European Union. The MILF and the GRP have committed their respective combatants to observe the following:²³

- Refrain from intentionally targeting or attacking non-combatants, prevent suffering of the civilian population and avoid acts that would cause collateral damage to civilians;
- Refrain from targeting or intentionally attacking civilian properties or facilities such as schools, hospitals, religious premises, health and food distribution centres, or relief operations, or objects or facilities indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and of a civilian nature;
- Take all necessary actions to facilitate the provision of relief supplies to affected communities;

²² Amnesty International, *Shattered Peace in Mindanao: The Human Cost of Conflict in the Philippines*, (London: Amnesty International, 2008). Available at: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA35/008/2008/en. Accessed 17 March, 2012.

²³ Agreement on the Civilian Protection Component of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) signed on 27 October, 2009 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Available at: www.opapp.gov.ph/resources/agreement-civilian-protection-component-international-monitoring-team-imt. Accessed 18 March, 2012.

- Take all precautions feasible to avoid incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, and danger to civilian objects;
- Ensure that all protective and relief actions shall be undertaken in a purely non-discriminatory basis covering all affected communities.

To monitor compliance with these commitments, the peace panels invited four organisations, the Mindanao Peoples Caucus, the Non-Violent Peace Force, the Mindanao Human Rights Action Centre and the Muslim Organisations of Government Officials and Professionals to become part of the CPC. While protection work is not new to these NGOs, doing it under the auspices of the IMT is new. The opportunity to work within a recognised formal mechanism opens possibilities to institutionalise protection work.

All Women Contingent

The Terms of Reference of the CPC includes references to 1325 and 1820 under Article I/8.²⁴ Article I on References cited eight documents such as the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and International Humanitarian Law including all relevant protocols and instruments, the SPHERE Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and 1325 1820 which protect women and girls from all forms of violence, particularly during and after armed conflict.

This is the only interim agreement in the history of the peace talks between the Philippine Government and the MILF where specific references are included on women's rights. This is not only a breakthrough but also a golden opportunity to promote the meaningful participation of women in the formal mechanisms of the peace process. Another milestone to consider is the recently concluded negotiations in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on April 24, 2012 where the parties signed the "GPH-MILF Decision Points on Principles as of April 2012" which enshrined, in addition to basic rights already enjoyed, the "right of women to meaningful political participation, and protection from all forms of violence". Given these windows of opportunity, the challenge ahead hinges on the capacity and determination of women's empowerment champions to translate these principles into clear operational terms.

²⁴ May 5, 2010 Terms of Reference of the Civilian Protection Component of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) signed on 27 October, 2009 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Available at: <https://acrobat.com/app.html#d=OFCZe3vbMzlrKafQmWMnPw>. Accessed 17 March, 2012.

The Mindanao Peoples Caucus decided to deploy an All Women Contingent to the CPC.²⁵ Their reasoning was that it should be all-female so that their male counterparts were left with no choice but to deal with women on equal terms. It was felt that many men, through force of habit, relegate women to serving food, preparing coffee and taking down notes in situations of this kind. With an all-female team, it was an effort to not only give women their rightful place in civilian protection work, but to sensitise their male counterparts about gender equality with the end in view of accelerating de facto equality among men and women.

Now stationed in five protection sites (in the Lanao del Norte, North Cotabato, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat and Davao areas), the CPC women conduct regular patrols, community visits and generate daily and weekly reports to the CPC headquarters and the IMT on any violations of the above-mentioned commitment to protect civilians such as direct acts of violence; threats against, and intimidation of, the civilian population; desecration of places of worship; attacks against schools and learning institutions; and the condition of the IDPs in the evacuation centres. This is part of fulfilling the mandate to “establish a functioning system and effective mechanism for monitoring, verifying and reporting of the compliance or otherwise of the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to their commitments under international and national humanitarian laws and human rights laws to take constant care to protect the civilian population.”²⁶

Since the establishment of the protection sites, there has been a significant increase in reporting of the situation on the ground from women at the grassroots concerning ceasefire violations, the needs of displaced people, human rights and civilian protection.

The presence of the CPC women has not only affected the lives of civilians but has also sensitised their male counterparts, soldiers and rebels alike, to the importance of women’s participation. Colonel Dickson Hermoso has reflected that “mothers, sisters, daughters, aunts and nieces – these women bring a unique perspective and a different approach in protecting the safety of their homes and communities. They are the best people to monitor civilian protection because they know in their hearts the needs and concerns of the family. Women are more effective because they are not threatening and people can easily connect with them.”²⁷

²⁵ The Mindanao Peoples Caucus (MPC) is an alliance of indigenous, Bangsamoro and Christian settlers that promotes a peaceful resolution of the armed conflict in Mindanao. Organised in 2001, the MPC is implementing programmes on peacebuilding, human rights, civilian protection, conflict prevention and ancestral domain. For more information see www.mpc.org.ph.

²⁶ Section 1. Overall Objective. Civilian Protection Component (CPC) Operational Guidelines.

²⁷ Interview with Colonel Dickson Hermoso, former head of the Government Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities and currently head of the Office of the Peace Process of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, 7 February, 2012, Davao City.

General Ariel Bernardo, Commanding General of the 10th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army and former Chair of the Government Ceasefire Committee has expressed support to the CPC and remarked that “our soldiers are now more afraid to commit any violation against civilians because of the women monitors who are constantly watching their movements and behaviour in the communities. The CPC women in a way have helped the AFP discipline our ranks as the women serve as deterrent for any abuse from our ground forces. The deterrence lies in the knowledge that the women are constantly monitoring, documenting and reporting to the higher-ups any abuse, threat or attack against civilians.”²⁸

On the website of the MILF, a 2010 editorial described the Front’s scepticism and “wait and see” attitude in relation to the All Women Contingent in the CPC: “Indeed, the decision of the Mindanao People’s Caucus (MPC) to send all-women peacekeepers is a bold step that is neither negative nor positive. It all boils down to how they perform their task on the ground. It is not fair to say at this point in time that the decision is not correct or correct.”²⁹ Despite the inclusion of 1325 and 1820 as references in the Terms of Reference of the CPC, the burden of proving the worthiness of women to be there hangs like the ‘Sword of Damocles’. To overcome this burden, capacity-building support, mentoring, coaching and technical assistance would be very useful for these women, as well as ongoing outreach about the impact and effectiveness of their contributions.

Because of the presence of the CPC women, the conduct of soldiers and rebels is regularly monitored and any breach of the agreement will be documented and submitted to the respective peace panels of the government and MILF. If there is any breach, the unit involved could face disciplinary sanctions from their respective leaders. For instance, in the armed clashes between the elements of the 112 base command of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces and the Philippine Army on October 18, 2011 in Al Barka, Basilan, the responsible officers of the military were relieved from their posts and had to face court martial proceedings. The MILF are also expected to discipline erring members who will not follow the commitments agreed upon in the CPC.

²⁸ Interview with General Ariel Bernardo, former Chair of the Government Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities and presently the Commanding General of the 10th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army, 7 February, 2012, Davao City.

²⁹ Dated 8-14 October, 2010. See http://luwaran.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48:all-women-peacekeepers&catid=38:gggg. Accessed 13 September 2012.

Conclusions and Recommendations

CEWS in the Asia Pacific region do not exist in a vacuum. There are political realities and historical antecedents dating back to pre-colonial times that need to be addressed by government leaders and policymakers if we are to seriously eliminate the underlying causes that feed into ongoing armed conflict. For instance, it is important to clearly establish the link between CEWS on the one hand and peace talks on the other hand, considering that these interventions are interconnected and the roles of women need to be considered in all such processes.

Crucial to the operationalisation of 1325, especially in relation to early warning, will be the presence of a vigilant peace constituency who will champion early warning and conflict prevention at the grassroots level. A grassroots, multi-stakeholder will and determination to overcome conflict and build peace will ensure sustainability of CEWS. The success of women's involvement in CEWS will not be measured in terms of the amount of data encoded into databases, or other superficial indicators, but on their ability to generate early responses to save lives, protect children and make family homes safe and secure.

The following recommendations are suggested:

- Set a 30% quota for women's representation in CEWS. In keeping with the principles of 1325, it is important to set quotas for the involvement of women in order to ensure their participation. Quota setting is important, especially at this stage when there is no conscious policy or deliberate action to harness the unique contributions of women. If there is a quota, it can be easily verified quantitatively. Thus, for donors and policymakers who provide funding for CEWS, quota setting could facilitate the need to institutionalise women's involvement in early warning and early response mechanisms.
- Develop mentoring programmes that will provide coaching, training and mentoring for women who are involved in CEWS. It is not enough that early warning systems increase the quantity of women's representation, women also need support to be more effective and confident in areas such as documentation and reporting, debriefings and networking.

- Establish a link between CEWS and formal diplomacy such as in peace talks, ceasefire monitoring and civilian protection mechanisms. Again, women will play a key role here because the mandate of women's participation and involvement in peace and security processes encompasses the whole spectrum of conflict from early warning and conflict prevention to peace talks and ceasefire monitoring including post-conflict reconstruction and the implementation of signed agreements. Critical here will be the extent of advocacy work that will be undertaken by women's organisations in order to convince government and non-state actors to fulfil the mandate of 1325.
- For donors, funding institutions and UN agencies to ensure that funding assistance is accessible for women in conflict-affected areas that urgently need, and rarely have access to, support. Access to funding for grassroots women has been a constant challenge given the attendant security hazards, poor communications facilities, language barrier and lack of technical capacity e.g. in proposal-making, budgeting, planning, using monitoring tools etc. In order to overcome this challenge, extra effort must be given to identify potential women partners/organisations from the grassroots and train them on fund sourcing and finance management so that they can become effective project partners in conflict-affected areas. This is especially relevant and useful for some indigenous women leaders who are yet to understand the language, mechanics, requirements and tools of the funding world.

About the Author

Mary Ann M. Arnado is the Secretary General of the Mindanao Peoples Caucus, a grassroots network of indigenous, Bangsamoro and Christian settlers who are working together to put a final closure to the armed conflict in Mindanao through a negotiated political settlement. Ms Arnado is the Convenor of the Bantay Ceasefire (Ceasefire Watch) and the All Women Contingent in the Civilian Protection Component. A lawyer by profession, Ms Arnado represents cases of indigenous peoples, IDPs, women and human rights defenders. In 2009, she received the World Vision International Peace Prize and the prestigious Benigno Aquino Fellowship for Public Service. She is also a Fellow of the Women PeaceMakers Program of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, University of San Diego, USA.

