

MINDANAO COMMISSION ON WOMEN

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**WOMEN AND PEACE**  
**MOTHERS FOR PEACE**

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## MCW - MINDANAO COMMISSION ON WOMEN

## A MINDANAO AGENDA FROM A WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE



We assert our right to envision a future for Mindanao that is free of poverty and violence, where women and men are enabled to fully participate in and benefit from peace and development.

The Mindanao Commission on Women was established in 2001 by Muslim, Christian and indigenous women leaders of Mindanao as a vehicle to influence public policy and public opinion about peace and development.

From the beginning, it was clear to the founders that MCW was not about pursuing a so-called women's agenda. Instead, MCW was going to be a significant voice in articulating a Mindanao peace and development agenda from a women's perspective.

Since then it has mobilized, educated, persuaded, and lobbied to make women's issues central to the decisions about peace, believing that no peace agreement can be implemented or can peace be sustained without the leadership and participation of women.

**Our experiences and expertise as women playing multiple roles in our family and community put us in a unique position to provide leadership in many critical areas in our society.**

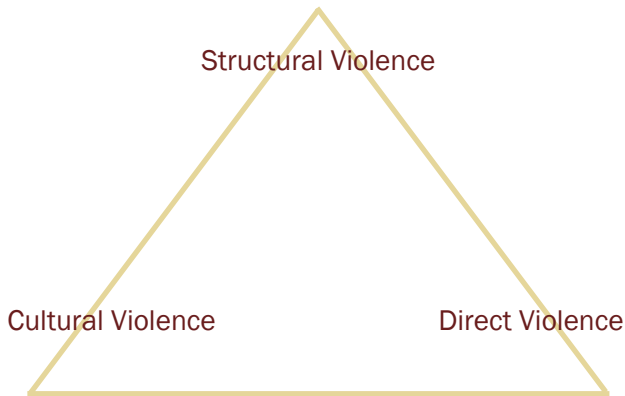
To help in the building of peaceful and prosperous communities for our families, the MCW chose three interlinked areas of work, namely, peace and multiculturalism, poverty reduction, and politics and governance.



## PEACE AND MULTICULTURALISM PROGRAM

The MCW peace and multiculturalism program has chosen to intervene in the following areas known as the *conflict triangle* (as formulated by Johan Galtung).

Putting women in a position to influence the decisions that affect their lives and those of their families and communities primarily by engaging the panels of GRP-MILF involved in the peace negotiations.



Fostering peaceful values such as non-violence (*working for peace in the ways of peace*) and multiculturalism in which diversity becomes a source of productivity and happiness rather than the source of conflict.

Ensuring the maintenance of the ceasefire through the proper functioning of the ceasefire mechanism.

## STRATEGIC APPROACH

### Grassroots

MCW has organized the Mothers for Peace Movement and the Mindanao Young Women Leaders Forum.

### Middle Level

MCW is involved with broad sectoral networks, with business, religious, academe, Moro and Indigenous People's groups, through a campaign called "Mindanao Rising!"

### Top Level

MCW makes sure it is "at the table" where important decisions are made about peace in Mindanao by lobbying for membership in the peace panels (two MCW officers have been members of the last two GRP peace panels); and taking positions on substantive issues on the table.

The strategic approach is to influence *key* people to make the right decisions for peace, and to organize and educate *more* people to make the peace durable and to hold the decision-makers accountable. MCW has deliberately formed a vast network of people and organizations for peace at all levels and from various sectors.



## PEACEMAKING AT THE TOP : GRP-MILF PEACE TALKS

Stakeholders are normally not involved in peace negotiations that are largely undertaken by the elite of the disputing parties. MCW believes it is necessary, in fact essential, for as many women as possible to have a voice in the peace talks.

In 2005, MCW embarked on a series of eight consultations among conflict-affected communities in Mindanao to enable women from across ethnic and religious lines to give their input on the substantive issues being discussed by the negotiators. Participants at the Mindanao Women's Peace Summit in February 2006 presented a position paper to the head of the GRP Peace Panel and a representative of the MILF panel. Among the important Summit recommendations included the establishment of a Special Fund for Women to ensure that women get their fair share of resources after a peace agreement is signed; the appointment of a Special Representative for Women and Children in the monitoring body being envisioned; and demilitarization of Mindanao, instead of the traditional demobilization, disarmament and rehabilitation (DDR) embodied in peace agreements. MCW is one of five NGOs accredited as observers to the formal peace talks.



## INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

As a response to the current impasse in the peace negotiations due to the failure of the two parties to sign the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA AD), MCW has also embarked on a project called "Track Two Diplomacy". The term refers to private citizens negotiating topics that are usually reserved for official negotiations. MCW is the lead convenor of a group of peace advocates from academe, business, Moro, and IP groups trying to influence the formal peace negotiations by providing a draft "working paper" containing their recommendations. Public participation in the ongoing peace process is critical in obtaining public support for a peace agreement that will finally resolve the demand for self-determination by the Bangsamoro people.

Thinking ahead of the post-conflict (or post peace agreement) scenario, MCW organized an Asia Pacific conference in 2004 not only to learn from the experiences of women in Cambodia, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka but also to plan ways to avoid the marginalization and exploitation of women after the signing of the peace agreement.

MCW also participated in workshops at the Asia Pacific Conference in Bangkok preparatory to the Beijing +10 assessment being undertaken by the UN. That same year, MCW was invited by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, the Philippines' national machinery, to be a member of the official delegation to the Beijing+10 meeting at UN headquarters in New York. Secretary-General Kofi Annan cited MCW's interventions in the GRP-MILF peace negotiations in his report to the UN Commission on the Status of Women.



## PEACEBUILDING FROM BELOW

Mothers for Peace started as a campaign in 2003 when government forces assaulted the Buliok Complex in Maguindanao even while the peace negotiations were ongoing. Alarmed by the hundreds of thousands of people, many of them women and children, internally displaced by the war, MCW immediately engaged women's organizations from all over the country to support our two demands: for an immediate ceasefire and for the government and the MILF to return to the negotiating table.

We brought our campaign to Luzon and the Visayas because we believed that the so-called Mindanao problem was not Mindanao's alone. It was a national issue. A "roadshow" took us to Pangasinan and Batangas in Luzon; and Bacolod and Cebu in the Visayas. Maranao, Maguindanaon, and indigenous women who were internally displaced by the war spoke to thousands of other mothers in these major cities and provinces to tell them about the pains of living under incessant violence. To reach a national audience, we also embarked on a mass media campaign. We found support from the Advertising Foundation of the Philippines whose members – prestigious ad agencies, the country's biggest advertisers, and major national media outlets – gave free services and media time and space. The campaign's 45-second TV ad, which drew attention to the protracted nature of the destructive conflict, won the award for Best TV Ad of the Year in Public Service. The campaign, also joined by other peace groups, resulted in a ceasefire being declared by both parties within two months from the start of the campaign. Soon after, the two parties returned to the negotiating table.



## MOTHERS FOR PEACE

The massive outpouring of support from mothers all over the country as well as from young people led MCW to organize the Mothers for Peace into a movement and to form the Mindanao Young Women Leaders Forum.

There are now more than five hundred peace circles all over Mindanao, the main structure of Mothers for Peace and the young women's forum. The three pillars on which the peace circles stand are: values, skills and food security. Values formation provides the important underpinning for personal and interpersonal peace. All members are trained to be "Thirdsiders" or the third party with skills in conflict prevention, resolution and containment to be able to deal with conflict at home and in the community. Food security, a critical need in conflict-affected areas, is provided by community gardens and income-generating projects supported by the Mothers for Peace Fund.



**Mothers for Peace**



## ADVOCACY FOR PEACE

### **Building the Peace Constituency: Million TAPS for Peace**

In 2008, MCW and Mothers for Peace undertook a campaign entitled “Million TAPs for Peace.” It was a nationwide campaign to collect a million thoughts and acts of peace from ordinary people who otherwise didn’t believe they had a role in peacebuilding. The response was overwhelming. Instead of a million, the campaign collected 2.8 billion thoughts and acts of peace.



### **Addressing the Triggers of Conflict: the Anti-Rido Campaign**

The violence in Mindanao does not come from armed conflict alone. Many more deaths are in fact the result of clan wars or rido. MCW has undertaken community consultations and studied customary laws and religious texts in order to organize an education campaign for the use of non-violent ways to settle conflict and to highlight the significant role of women in settling rido.

### **Advocating Policy to Promote Diversity**

MCW has advocated for a policy of multiculturalism as a basis for peace. In 2004, the UNDP Human Development Report entitled, “Cultural Liberty in Today’s Diverse World”, had its only out-of-Manila launch in Davao City with MCW as the organizer.

MCW has also helped to set up local institutions to ensure respect for the diverse cultures in various areas. In Iligan, MCW facilitated the establishment of the Office of Higaonon and Maranao Affairs to give the two groups a voice in city affairs and a venue for working cooperatively. In Basilan, MCW initiated Harmony Day, an annual event to celebrate the multicultural character of the province.