

Building Sustainable Peace in Aceh, Mindanao and Southern Thailand

PROCEEDINGS OF THE Consolidation for Peace *Seminar 2*

2nd-6th September 2007

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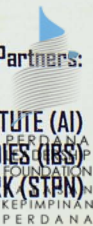
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Introduction

The Consolidation for Peace Process: Building Sustainable Peace in Aceh, Mindanao, and Southern Thailand

The Conflict Areas: Southern Thailand, Mindanao, and Aceh

Southern Thailand, Mindanao, and Aceh remain among the three longest running cases of self determination and identity type conflict in the Southeast Asian region. The questions that have been asked about these conflicts and why they still persist can still be asked today (although it is acknowledged that Aceh is relatively peaceful compared to the other two cases, having signed a peace memorandum and embarked on a relationship-rebuilding process). These questions include why the conflicts have continued? What are the lingering issues and what efforts are being done to resolve these issues? Who are the main actors and what are being done to consolidate the different positions of these actors? These are among some of the questions that this process was trying to answer in the two Consolidation for Peace Seminars (COP) that was organized in Penang by the Research and Education for Peace, Universiti Sains Malaysia (REPUSM) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), in 2006 and 2007.

As mentioned above the questions that can be asked about these conflicts still remain relevant today. In fact they have become even more relevant given the current situation of increased intensity of the conflict in Southern Thailand, the fragile situation of the current GRP-MILF peace process in Southern Philippines, and the uncertainty over the future of Aceh and the sustainability of the post-conflict and post-tsunami peace process there.

Southern Thailand is still deep in conflict with more than 2900 people killed since a resurgence of violence in January 2004. Numerous incidents of bombings, attacks on civilians, arbitrary arrests, shootings, and many others have become a norm in the southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. There were also incidences that have dramatically increased the intensity of the conflict situation like the attack on the military camp in January 2004, as well as the Kreu Se Mosque incident and the Tak Bai tragedy. Despite a change in the administration, as a result of the military coup in Thailand, followed by a change in the leadership to one, which despite having a military background was more accommodative to the people in the south, there was no improvement to the situation on the ground. The recent election that put former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's ally and alleged proxy into power, seemed to have the potential to make the situation even more difficult, given Thaksin's former policies as well as the current premier's allegedly uncompromising style. It is unlikely that general situation will improve in the short term. Long term efforts, however, should be continued. It is with this long term objective of contributing to peacebuilding work and creating space for future dialogue that the organizers of the Consolidation for Peace seminars have in mind for Southern Thailand.

The situation in Mindanao is at a different stage in comparison to Southern Thailand. The Mindanao case is experiencing a steady but slow progress with its Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace process since 1997. The participation of Malaysia and other countries in 2001 has brought more positive directions in the actual peace talks and in the peacekeeping mechanism that also involved Brunei, Libya, and recently, Japan. In terms of peacebuilding, the international community, including Japan, has contributed in various ways that support the advocacy for the resolution of the Mindanao conflict. However, the biggest obstacle lay in the ability of the GRP's administration to offer a viable resolution and successfully forge a peace agreement with the MILF. In as much as the civil society continue to be responsive and vigilant to the peace process, it is the government's political will that shall deliver peace in Mindanao.

Aceh presents a comparatively successful case of conflict management. Despite a long history of conflict between the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) and the Indonesian government, an agreement to end the conflict was quickly reached in August 2005 following intense negotiations, after the December 2004 tsunami, mediated by the Conflict Management Initiatives (CMI) led by the former leader of Finland, Maarti Ahtisaari. The background of the peace process in Aceh also include the involvement and contributions of the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC) in the previous rounds of negotiations, the roles of civil society organization from within and outside of Aceh, and leadership changes in Jakarta that have facilitated the transformation of the conflict situation. Aceh then went through a period of post-conflict adjustments, experimenting with the Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) process, facilitated by the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), headed by the delegation from the European Union. This was part of the balancing act that the people working for peace in Aceh had to contend with. For example, the stakeholders were put in a very difficult programming position – to concentrate on the post-tsunami reconstruction or the transitional phase of the peace process? Mostly, the balancing act has tilted towards the post-tsunami humanitarian efforts, understandably due to the gravity of the physical needs of Aceh. The National Agency for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation (BRR) in Aceh and Nias, for example, carried a post-tsunami focus. Even then, adjustments on accommodating the post-conflict issues of the community were also incorporated in BRR's programming along the line in its best effort capacity. This of course bears some shortcomings and gaps as an end result. Although various local organizations and donor communities try to remedy these gaps, there continues to be a compelling issue on the success of the peace process itself—from its transition phase to post-conflict development. The transition phase of the peace agreement implementation is not short of obstacles. For one, the Law on the Governing Aceh (LoGA) has been claimed to be not completely attuned to the "spirit" of the original peace memorandum agreement and the Aceh draft that has been prepared by the Acehnese, and later submitted to the Indonesian Parliament. Another is that the security arrangements and environment in Aceh has become volatile adding to some serious doubts of sustaining the peace process. For example, the local police reports indicated that crime rate has increased by 400 times over several months in 2007. Currently, Aceh is now at a crossroad. After having achieved peace through negotiations despite many years of armed struggle, and getting greater local inputs in politics and the economy, Aceh is now preparing itself for the next general election in 2009. This 2009 election will be seen as an important

milestone in Aceh history because it will determine whether the Acehnese will finally put their "separatist" aspirations to rest and work within a revised framework of Indonesian nationhood. The worry is always there that despite the overwhelming support for peace, there might still be unresolved issues, unhappy groups, and other spoilers that will jeopardize the path to peace and resulting in a resurgence of fighting and armed conflict. As such, the Aceh situation still needs to be diligently monitored.

The Consolidation for Peace (COP) Seminar: Peacebuilding and the Need for Consolidation

The first Consolidation for Peace (COP) Seminar, or the Penang Peace Seminar, was successfully organized by Research and Education for Peace, Universiti Sains Malaysia (REPUSM), the Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network (SEACSN), and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) from 23rd to 26th January 2006. This Seminar involved 40 participants from Aceh, the Philippines, and some observers from Southern Thailand. The resource persons involved were members of the REPUSM, SEACSN, JICA, and a few invited guest speakers from the Malaysia and overseas. Other observers included staff from JICA, USM, and the Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia.

The first COP used the strategy of the dialogue-seminar-workshop-strategic planning (DiSWoS) approach to peacebuilding. Resource persons were invited to discuss relevant points about the peacebuilding process and discussions were carried out using these points as references. Activities were also geared towards maximum interaction between the participants, not only within each group, but also between groups. The success of the seminar then depended not only upon the presentations and knowledge acquired during formal discussions but also on informal interactions during breaks and after the formal workshop hours. Some of the relevant points from this approach as explained in the first seminar are repeated below.

There is a general understanding that conflict parties need to consolidate their views and actions as part of a peacebuilding process. This "consolidation for peace" intends to bring together the major parties and other stakeholders of the conflict in an attempt at finding a middle ground that can help facilitate the consolidation of positions and interests. From here, the parties involved in this consolidation process can move on to a discussion about the future and make strategic plans that can contribute to the peacebuilding process.

Peacebuilding is an exercise that intends to build the foundation for peace in a conflict situation. It helps the peacemaking process by creating a constituent base that can positively respond and react to settlements reached between the conflict parties. It is usually necessary to do this in protracted conflict situations. In general, there are various challenges for peacebuilding as described by the COP.

- It needs to take into account the "protractedness" of the conflict and develop a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy for ending violence and achieving and sustaining reconciliation.
- It needs to acknowledge that protracted conflict, both the "vertical" and the "horizontal" types, is a system that must be transformed by taking a comprehensive and innovative approach to the people who operate it and the setting in which it is rooted.
- It needs to help in the process of conflict resolution by building and sustaining the foundation for peace; building trust; and provide the incentives to prevent minor armed conflicts from becoming full scale wars.

- Peacebuilding also heavily relies on the reconciliation of conflicting parties. In many cases the conflicting groups live in close proximity to each other, and in many instances within even the same neighbourhood. The victims usually have direct experiences of violent trauma which is associated with the perceived enemies, and tied to a history of grievances and enmity over generations. Severe stereotyping is evident and the conflicts are characterized by deep-rooted and intense animosity of the perceived enemy. As such, reconciliation is needed as a way out of the status quo – moving away from the issues towards a frame that focuses on the restoration and the rebuilding of relationships. Reconciliation helps promotes encounter between open expression of the painful past and a search for articulation of long-term shared and interdependent future.
- Peacebuilding also involves finding ways for building sustainable peace by creating short and long term development plans and programs that will help the parties rebuild their lives and reconstruct their societies – through institutional, social, political, and economic reforms. It involves making concrete short and long term plans, identifying potential actors and contributors, sourcing out potential funding bodies and donors, and making plans for implementation and monitoring of the process.

The Consolidation for Peace (COP) Program Objectives

The first COP program in 2006 had a more academic approach and there were many presentations by invited resource persons that intended to provide knowledge about various aspects of peacebuilding to the participants. The focus for the 2007 COP program has been modified to take into account current needs. Firstly, it continued the discussion about peacebuilding issues that might be relevant to the participants and to their conflict areas. Secondly, the program intended to draw more output and knowledge from the participants themselves. The participants themselves were the major resource persons and the organizers were tasked with facilitating the sharing of knowledge and lessons learnt between the participants from the three conflict areas.

The specific objectives of both programs as laid out in the terms of references sent to the participants are as follow.

1. To enhance the peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and strategic planning knowledge and skills of the participants.
2. To provide a platform for support, networking, dialogue, and sharing of ideas and experiences between the participants from the three conflict areas.
3. To come up with concrete plans of actions for peacebuilding and development for the conflict areas.
4. To enhance and support the current peace process.
5. To promote the peaceful and sustainable resolution of conflicts in the Southeast Asian region.

The First Consolidation for Peace (COP1)

The first COP was held on the campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia, in Penang, from 23rd to 26th January, 2006. The focus areas were Aceh and Mindanao, although a few observers from the Southern Thailand peacebuilding community were also present.

The four-day seminar "facilitated the discussions about peacebuilding, shared lesson learnt about peacebuilding efforts, fostered intra-group and inter-groups interactions, promoted networking among the actors of peacebuilding in the region, and facilitated brainstorming about future plans and strategies for peacebuilding" in the conflict areas of Mindanao and Aceh. The strategy of the using the "dialogue-seminar-workshop-strategic planning (DiSWos)" approach has created a highly conducive environment for meaningful discussions among the participants. With the appropriate selection of participants among the broad spectrum of the conflict situation stakeholders, the richness of topics and presentations by resource speakers, and effective facilitation among the groups, it has brought forth many constructive analysis of the conflict situation that they are in, and the possibilities of moving forward with its conflict resolution and peacebuilding prospects. The formal sessions were divided into two. One is the seminar approach where invited resource persons presented their ideas to the participants for discussion, with topics which include peacebuilding, peacekeeping, post-conflict developments, the roles of international actors, peace impact assessments, and community's involvement in peace process. The resource persons include two professors from the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford in the UK – Professors Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, two professors from Indonesia – Pak Ichsan Malik of University Indonesia and Pak Lambang Trijono of Gadjah Mada University, Professor Jayum Jawan of Universiti Putra Malaysia presenting on the indigenous peoples of Malaysia, the Director General of the Department for Unity and National Integration of Malaysia – Dato' Azman, the first Head of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) in Mindanao – General Dato' Zulkifeli Mohd. Zin from Malaysia, the Executive Director of the Alliance for Conflict Transformation, Cambodia – Mr Soth Plai Ngarm, and the Senior Advisor of Peacebuilding at the JICA headquarters in Tokyo – Ms. Sachiko Ishikawa. Second, the participants were also involved in workshop sessions to map the conflicts, and to come up with strategic plans for peacebuilding in their respective areas. The workshop sessions involved all represented stakeholders and provided a venue for them to articulate their worries, hopes, and aspirations, in a non-threatening, open environment.

Some of the highlights of these strategic plans are as follow:

For the Mindanao Group:

- 1) Writing and submitting a letter of appeal to Philippine president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to empower the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) as an important interface of rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development in the conflict affected areas of Mindanao
- 2) The need to organize and facilitate peacebuilding "exchange programs" within the Southeast Asian region. This was based on the fact that the participants feel the need to visit and experience the different conflict areas and not merely listening to presentations about those areas¹⁾
- 3) The need for the intensification and diversification of peace education that would especially include the Philippine military and its police force

- 4) To push for and articulate the potential role of the Government of Japan as a member of the International Monitoring Team (IMT), especially as civilian monitors in the areas of socio-economic development assessment and monitoring.
- 5) To encourage the opportunity for the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to engage the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) as its partner in Mindanao
- 6) Recognising the urgent need for the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process to draw up a Mindanao Peace Process information plan and implement it
- 7) To advocate a study on the more effective engagement of the local government units (LGUs) in crisis management and to hopefully, include conflict management at its level of constituency
- 8) Recognising that more dialogue and advocacy campaigns must be directed to the hardliner sectors or to those who are "anti-peace process."

For the Aceh Group: Short term

- 1) To promote immediate economic and livelihood opportunities for all Acehnese
- 2) To propose that public consultations be held regarding the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Indonesian Government and Free Aceh Movement as well as its proposed introduction as legislation in the Indonesian Parliament
- 3) Organising dialogue sessions between various Acehnese groups and sectors as a way of promoting peace
- 4) The reintegration and mainstreaming of Free Aceh Movement former combatants into the general Aceh society
- 5) Proposing capacity building programs especially for Acehnese widowers who were victims of the armed conflicts
- 6) Organising a special dialogue with the victims of both the armed conflict and tsunami victims
- 7) Organising lobbying activities to persuade the Parliament of Indonesia to prioritize the implementation of the peace agreement
- 8) Conducting leadership trainings
- 9) Incorporating civic education in the school curriculum
- 10) Organising capacity building programs for the local police
- 11) Strengthening the Acehnese refugee communities in Malaysia
- 12) Building alliances and advocacy campaigns to prepare for the upcoming institutionalization of Aceh's "new regulation" or its local laws, and lobbying the government for a quick implementation of these new regulations.
- 13) Organising civilian monitoring of the upcoming "pilkada" or Aceh's local elections in June 2006
- 14) Organising dialogue about and the reintegration process, especially in Central Aceh.

Long term

- 1) To conduct constant advocacy and monitoring to ensure that the letter and spirit of the RI-GAM MOU is incorporated in the formal legislations
- 2) The establishment of a democratic form of government
- 3) The introduction of effective law enforcement for Aceh
- 4) To push for economic development and progress for all.