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Community-Based Dialogue Sessions

on Human Rights Promotion and Protection
between the Armed Forces of the Philippines
and the Philippine National Police, and
Civil Society Organizations and Local
Communities 2011, Alternative Law Groups
(ALG), Commission on Human Rights of the
Philippines (CHRP), Philippine National Police
(PNP), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP),
Ninoy and Cory Aquino Foundation (NCAF),
Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) of Germany

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contents

**Community-Based
Dialogue Sessions**
on **Human Rights Promotion and Protection**
between the **Armed Forces of the Philippines**
and the **Philippine National Police**, and **Civil**
Society Organizations and **Local Communities**

2	Messages
8	About the Project
10	About the Partners
12	Hearing Each Other's Stories
14	General Directions 2011-2013
16	A First Step in the Right Direction
18	Giving Voice to the Vulnerable
20	Raising Awareness
22	Understanding Issues and Gaps
24	Finding a Venue for Dialogue
26	From Words to Action
28	Ways Forward
30	Feature Story: Zamboanga City
31	Feature Story: Pagadian City
32	Directory

Message

Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines



In a brief period of time, this project generated lessons and inspirations which future initiatives can build upon. Through its community-based dialogue sessions, it opens another possibility for conflict-stricken communities to realize their right to participate in the governance processes that directly affect their state of security and well-being. What makes this project commendable is the maturity and courage of its partners to explore the frontiers of community-based conflict management by forging multi-stakeholder engagement between local security forces and local civil society. Such engagement requires a great deal of mutual understanding and trust-building.

These multi-stakeholder dialogues, once institutionalized, enhance the chances for the most vulnerable in our society, who are most likely to be the victims of conflict, to take part in negotiations to resolve such conflict. It is the first step of peace-building as it paves the way for the synthesis of the diverse views regarding the causes and solutions to a conflict which later on translates to the synergy of peace-building efforts by various actors. It provides a venue where threatened right-holders can claim their rights in concrete circumstances and endogenously craft solutions from their own culture and context. Likewise, the experiences of these dialogue sessions offer insights and practices on how to craft a balanced solution to justice on human rights violations on the one hand, and reconciliation among warring parties on the other hand.

Current human rights work usually focuses on exacting accountability to immediate incidents of violation while paying less attention to its systemic causes. Integrating community-based dialogue activities can transform our human rights work to be more preventive and anticipative as it enables early detection of violations and prompts quick mitigation responses. A preventive approach, in effect, leads to a more strategic framework for human rights protection. By identifying and understanding the

structural factors of human rights violations, multi-stakeholder dialogues can generate long-term state responses that enable the transition of a locality from structural violence to sustainable peace.

In most community-based efforts, sustainability is always a challenge. At the state level, the challenge is how to institutionalize the collaboration between local civil society and local security force, translating grassroots discussions into concrete changes in the policies and practices of state actors.

Meanwhile, at the societal level, the challenge is how to embed values of peace and human rights into the lifeworld of communities through education voluntary activities until communities on their own can affirm, re-affirm and celebrate the culture of human rights. Responding to these forward challenges, the Commission on Human Rights accepts the two tasks conferred to it by this project – to be the lead coordinator of continuing multi-stakeholder peace-building efforts at the local level and to take a lead role in the upcoming top level policy dialogues.

We reiterate our commitment to cultivate the seeds of hope and trust we sown in this endeavour. Hopefully our nation shall reap the harvest from the culture of peace and human rights we collectively envisioned and engendered.

To our project partners for trailblazing an innovative path towards peace-building and human rights protection, kudos!

Loretta Ann P. Rosales
Chairperson





As we turn the page in the country's democratic history under the guidance and leadership of His Excellency, President Benigno S. Aquino, III, the Hanns Seidel Foundation/Germany (HSF) is pleased with its long-standing cooperation with the Republic of the Philippines in the service of democracy, peace and development.

In the common effort to strengthen democratic ideals, peace and security, and sustainable development amid the global challenges confronting us today, we look at the future with hope and optimism as we work together in pursuit of the Filipino people's aspirations for a better quality of life, good governance, social justice and equity, lasting peace, and national prosperity.

One of the main programs of HSF in the country is "support for public administration" focusing on "peace, democracy and human rights." The promotion and protection of human rights falls under this program which is being undertaken together with local partner organizations.

This publication is a concrete output of our work in this field in partnership with key local institutions, namely, the Alternative Law Groups (ALG), the Ninoy and Cory Aquino Foundation (NCAF), the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, and the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP). Titled as the project itself, ***"Community-based Dialogue Sessions on Human Rights Promotion and Protection between the Armed forces of the Philippines***

and the Philippine National Police, and Civil Society Organizations and Local Communities," this serves as an initial report on the dialogue sessions that captures the highlights of this singular undertaking in bringing together critical stakeholders in one venue to discuss human rights issues and concerns at the local level, "face-to-face" and in an open and constructive manner following the principles of dialogue.

With the project on its 3rd year and 2 more regions left before completing all the regions in the country, the results thus far of this joint undertaking have surpassed our expectations in achieving our goal and objectives. For the next phase, the project will work towards the institutionalization of collaboration between the security forces and civilians in the promotion and protection of human rights, leading to the establishment of regular mechanisms at the regional, provincial and/or city/town level. It has been agreed that after the community-based discussion sessions that had been conducted in different areas, there is a need to translate the issues and recommendations that had been identified in various regions, into policy changes to address the issues and problems that were identified during the dialogue sessions.

Finally, let me express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all our partners and the dialogue participants for sharing our vision, and for a good and productive cooperation.

Paul G. Schäfer
Philippine Resident Representative

Message

Armed Forces of the Philippines



On behalf of the Officers and Enlisted Personnel of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), allow me to express our profound gratitude and appreciation to the organizers and proponents of the Community-Based Dialogue Sessions on Human Rights Promotion and Protection. I wish to make special mention of the Alternative Law Groups (ALG), the Ninoy and Cory Aquino Foundation (NCAF), the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Commission on Human Rights-Philippines (CHRP), and the PNP Human Rights Affairs Office (PNP HRAO). Your partnership with us in the security sector, thru the AFP Human Rights Office (AFP HRO), manifests our common desire and unrelenting aspiration for the establishment of a culture for human rights not only amongst our respective organizations and institutions, but also in the very communities and people we are all serving.

This partnership will surely allow us to achieve a society wherein the basic and fundamental human rights are enjoyed fully by the people as these rights are respected and protected. These all redound to the objectives stipulated in the recently implemented Internal Peace and Security Plan (IPSP) "BAYANIHAN." This Plan puts emphasis to the mission of the AFP of "winning the peace" in order to help

the Filipino nation create an environment conducive for sustainable development and a just and lasting peace. In order to attain this, all our undertakings and operations are underpinned by two Strategic Approaches—the Whole of Nation Approach and the People-Centered Approach.

It can be gleaned, therefore, that our collaborative efforts in the various Community-Based Dialogue Sessions conducted nationwide clearly depict the Whole-of-Nation Approach. It is consistent with the concept and understanding that in the pursuit of peace and security, there must be a shared responsibility by all stakeholders from both the government and non-government sectors thru civil society organizations. On the other hand, our firm resolve towards strengthening respect, the understanding and protection of human rights of every Filipino, and in bringing the CBDS to the very heart of local communities, espouses the People-Centered Approach. It is only when the people's welfare and being are benefited, that we can claim success. And success may only be claimed when the human rights of the people are placed as the cornerstone of peace, security and progress. In view of these, the AFP will be true to its Constitutional mandate and twin-role as protectors of the people and the state.

These are the very reasons why the AFP shall soon publish and implement the AFP Human Rights Action Plan (AFP HRAP) 2011-2016. I have directed the crafting of this AFP HRAP in order to come up with sincere and concrete proactive measures to prevent violations of HR/IHL/ROL. It will also serve as the soldiers' guide in pursuing the AFP's advocacy for and compliance to all national and international laws, treaties, accords, obligations, and instrumentalities that guarantee the rights of all peoples. One of the major components of the AFP HRAP delves on activities such as the CBDS and the joint ventures between and by us such as the partnership we have already established and enhanced. The AFP HRAP pronounces AFP's zero-tolerance for human rights violations by anybody who will do so, much more by any member or unit of the AFP. Therefore, we will

continue to look forward to a continuance of our joint efforts, as you may also continue to witness and experience our active participation, unconditional support, untiring assistance, and unblemished commitment.

Let me assure all of you, the Filipino people, that your AFP will continue to strive to put the people's welfare at the center of all military endeavours and operations within the frame of human security as we give primacy to human rights. Each and every soldier and unit, shall collectively and individually implement measures to enhance the appreciation, understanding, and adherence to the protection of and respect for Human Rights (HR), the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and the Rule of Law (ROL). Our continuing reforms shall always include the professionalization of our ranks and the honing of the operational skills and capabilities of our soldiers to one that is HR/IHL/ROL-compliant. These efforts and that of IPSP "BAYANIHAN" is our modest contribution to the nation's aspiration to bring an end to armed conflict besetting our country, and to win peace for all of us. After all, we are SOLDIERS... we are HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES... and we are the GUARDIANS OF YOUR RIGHTS.

Congratulations and wishing you more success in all future human rights-based programs and endeavours. Mabuhay ang ating mga programa tungo sa pagpapahalaga ng karapatang pantao at sa pagpapatuloy ng Community-Based Dialogue Sessions on Human Rights Promotion and Protection.

Mabuhay tayong lahat!

Eduardo S.L. Oban Jr.
General **AFP**
Chief of Staff





On behalf of the men and women of the Philippine National Police, I would like to extend my sincerest congratulations to Hanns Seidel Foundation-Germany and other project partners who made the series of Community –Based Dialogues on Human Rights a resounding success. This publication is a testament to what we all can do and achieve together as fellow stakeholders in the cause of human rights.

Indeed, fostering peace and order in the community is only possible when all its members and other sectors of society are aware of challenges that affect their daily lives and our nation as a whole... when they are fully empowered to participate in solving social problems... and when they take responsibility to where every citizen's right is respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Knowing this, we have been very fortunate to forge strong partnerships with Hanns Seidel Foundation-Germany, other government agencies, human rights groups, and civil society to foster the values of transparency, accountability, civic responsibility, and respect for human rights

through open, constructive, dialogue. In different cities and provinces across the country, we have met and worked with outstanding groups and individuals who are truly committed to the total development of their community in terms of addressing local challenges to peace and order, including the protection of people's rights.

Through Community-Based Dialogues on Human Rights, we have taken major steps forward to identify human rights concerns and other problems from the city down to the barangay level. More importantly, we have mapped out and implemented solutions that would help both duty-bearers and claim-holders to achieve their shared goals and aspirations for their respective communities.

But surely, the work has only begun and we need to continue engaging stakeholders in a truly democratic, mutually beneficial, and solution-centered manner. It has been a truly enlightening experience to be a partner in implementing this project and we look forward to more opportunities to build more bridges to peace and understanding as we work to serve and protect the rights of our citizenry.

Atty. Raul M. Bacalzo, Ph.D.
Police Director General
Chief, PNP



Message

Ninoy and Cory Aquino Foundation



The Community-Based Dialogue Sessions on Human Rights Promotion and Protection Project is a breakthrough initiative that is showing the way towards greater respect for human rights, conflict resolution, and the activation of mechanisms and structures for community and local-level multi-sector collaboration.

Close to three years of successful implementation across several regions have shed light on the most critical of human rights issues affecting communities all over the country. These range from extra-judicial killings to natural resource-related conflicts, from urban and rural displacement to persecution of tribal, religious or political factions; from violations of international humanitarian law to the harassment, torture and disappearance of activists.

The project has involved high-ranking regional and provincial officers of the security sector and civil society leaders, along with communities and churches in many provinces. Significantly, it has been at the forefront of developing and cascading meaningful responses and effective solutions to long-standing human rights conflicts that have divided and oppressed communities.

All these have been done from the bottom up: by empowering local leaders to take ownership of matters of peace and order in their communities; and across the entire spectrum: by urging collaboration among all sectors despite the deep-seated trust issues between stakeholders.

While there remains much to be done and many other actors that must be brought into this effort—notably our local government officials and our legislators—much has already been achieved from which to build on. This has created an obligation to digest, analyze and share the experiences and the lessons gained from these dialogues. This publication, which is hopefully only the first of a series, shares many valuable insights, lessons and

recommendations that may both instruct and challenge the immediate stakeholders of the project as well as the broader community towards greater progress in the promotion and protection of human rights, and ultimately, in the improvement of the lives of our people.

The Ninoy and Cory Aquino Foundation (NCAF) is proud to be a part of this project. It embodies much of what the NCAF stands for: a society that holds human rights preeminent among its values, strong servant and spiritual leadership as the key to addressing any problem facing our country; and people power as the cornerstone of a just and prosperous country.

Let me take this opportunity to thank and congratulate the organizations that have jointly conceptualized, stewarded and championed this important endeavor: the Alternative Law Groups, the Human Rights Affairs Office of the PNP, the Human Rights Office of the AFP and the counterpart offices in the different services, the AFP's J7, the CHR and of course, our partner of many years in development, the Hanns Seidel Foundation.

Through this publication, may we see flourish the important practice of dialogue among community stakeholders towards the dream of societies where human rights, peace and development are championed by all and withheld from none.

Rafael C. Lopa
President and Executive Director
Ninoy and Cory Aquino Foundation





Through its various programs, the member-organizations of the Alternative Law Groups (ALG) have worked toward ensuring access to justice by the most vulnerable sectors in the country.

The Children's Legal Bureau, for one, has helped empower ordinary citizens through developmental legal assistance, trainings, and advocacy, in the longstanding fight against the abuse and exploitation of Filipino children as well as in establishing a juvenile justice system.

In these efforts, we recognize that the urgent challenge of protecting and promoting human rights in the Philippines is a shared endeavor.

Our project, the Community-Based Dialogues on Human Rights, exemplifies the value of pursuing active partnerships among civil society and local communities, as well as key institutions, the Commission on Human Rights, Armed Forces of the Philippines, and Philippine National Police. We salute our partners, which also include the Hanns Seidel Foundation of Germany, and Ninoy and Cory Aquino Foundation, for championing people-centered solutions like this.

It is the opportune answer to the call for good governance by President Benigno Aquino III, wherein collaborative action transcends the critical eye that civil society traditionally casts on government.

Dialogue enables our constructive discussion beyond areas of disagreement toward understanding and consensus-building, as well as action. By working together, we can do more.

Atty. Joan Dymphna G. Sanie
Chairperson, Alternative Law Groups
Executive Director, Children's Legal Bureau (CLB)



About the Project

The Community-Based Dialogue Sessions on Human Rights Promotion and Protection aims to contribute to the improvement of the Human Rights situation in the Philippines primarily through the enhancement of the relationship between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police, on one hand, and local communities and civil society organizations, on the other hand, in the common effort to promote human rights.



It has the following objectives: to raise the level of public awareness about the programs and initiatives of various sectors on human rights promotion and protection; to enhance understanding of human rights issues and gaps in human rights promotion and protection, in the context of the relationship between the AFP/PNP and the different community sectors in a particular area; to provide a venue for dialogue among various stakeholders, both government and non-government, on the need for cooperative efforts in the promotion and protection of human rights; to provide a venue for the collective formulation of concrete proposals for government and civil society action for the promotion and protection of human rights; to support local multi-sectoral cooperative efforts for the promotion and protection of human rights; and to institutionalize the partnership and collaboration between the security forces and the civilians, translating grassroots discussions into concrete policy and practice changes.

Now on its third year, the project has conducted 12 dialogue sessions, two joint training/planning sessions, two human rights week fora, and follow-through activities in different areas as of the end of 2010.

Each session has around 50 participants, with 10 representatives from the AFP, 10 from the PNP, and 30 from civil society organizations (CSOs). The regional officers of the Commission on Human Rights also attend the session and help discuss the human rights situation in the region.





FIRST DAY

PREPARATION

The separate caucus and orientation session for CSOs, and for AFP/PNP facilitate the preparatory stage. These help in the synthesis and presentation of issues and recommendations. A good Human Rights regional/provincial situationer is an important component of setting the context for the dialogue.

FIRST NIGHT

GETTING-TO-KNOW-YOU

The dinner-socials is an appropriate first interaction between the two groups. The activity serves as an ice-breaker for the participants and makes the second day more relaxed.

SECOND DAY

INTRODUCTORY SESSIONS

The synthesis of the first-day caucus is a helpful initial presentation of issues and recommendations.

SECOND DAY

DIALOGUE PROPER

Starting from people's experiences in relating with the AFP/PNP, and the AFP/PNP experiences in dealing with people's concerns, is an excellent starting point for the dialogue.

SECOND DAY

PLENARY DISCUSSION

The presentation of workshop outputs is lively and highly interactive. Representatives from CSOs, AFP and PNP actively and eagerly participate in the presentation. The discussion starts the opening of communication lines among the participants. Planning for the next steps is also an important component of the discussion.

FOLLOW-THROUGH ACTIVITIES

After each dialogue session, the participants continue their discussion and dialogue through region-level or provincial level activities. Some of the follow-through activities, like in Antique in April 2010 and Pagadian and Zamboanga in December 2010, were organized by the participants' own initiative.

JOINT TRAINING AND PLANNING SESSIONS

The project organizes inter-region activities in the form of joint training/planning sessions.

About the Partners



The project is a multi-sectoral partnership among the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, Philippine National Police's Human Rights Affairs Office (HRAO), Armed Forces of the Philippines, primarily through the Human Rights Office (HRO) and Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations (J7), Ninoy and Cory Aquino Foundation, Alternative Law Groups, and the Hanns Seidel Foundation of Germany.

The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines is a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) that was created under the 1987 Constitution. It is a state-funded body, exercising its authority independent from the three branches of Government. Composed of a Chairperson and four Commissioners, assisted by the officers and staff deployed at the central office in the Metro-Manila and in most regions of the country, the CHRP is tasked with the protection and promotion of human rights of all persons in the Philippines including Filipinos abroad.

Created on June 29, 2007, the Philippine National Police Human Rights Affairs Office (HRAO) is primarily tasked to implement the blueprint for action on human rights of the PNP. It serves as the focal point on the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the PNP human rights development program.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines Human Rights Office was created on January 12, 2007. Tasked to plan, implement and supervise programs, measures and mechanisms to uphold, protect, and promote respect for Human Rights/adherence to International Humanitarian Law and other international human rights instruments, it receives formal complaints on alleged violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law.

The Alternative Law Groups is a coalition of 20 legal resource NGOs that adhere to the principles and values of alternative or developmental law.

The Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations of the Armed Forces of the Philippines assists and advises the Chief of Staff, AFP in the exercise of command and management of all civil military operations (CMO). It also develops CMO concepts, doctrines and programs that will bring the people closer to the military organization and the duly constituted civilian authorities in government.

Established to perpetuate the memory, ideals and values of the late Senator Benigno S. Aquino, Jr. and the late President Corazon C. Aquino, the Ninoy And Cory Aquino Foundation supports activities that embody the spirit of people power as a strong positive force for societal change and reform. It sees itself as a center for helping bring the essence of People Power to fruition through Filipinos willing to transform their lives along the path of dignity, freedom, justice, self-sacrifice and, ultimately, community—actualizing God's vision of humanity.

The Alternative Law Groups is a coalition of 20 legal resource NGOs that adhere to the principles and values of alternative or developmental law. It engages in the dual work of empowering the poor and marginalized, and effecting justice system reforms, while primarily concerned with the protection of the human rights of vulnerable groups, promotion of social justice and gender equality, and defense of the environment.

The Hanns Seidel Foundation of Germany is a non-profit, non-governmental organization based in Munich, Germany with operations in more than 50 countries worldwide. It has been active in the Philippines since 1979, extending development assistance mainly in human resource development.

The project is being managed and coordinated by a Steering Committee composed of representatives of the partner organizations, with the ALG acting as the lead coordinator.



Hearing Each

“An enemy is one whose story we have not heard,” Atty. Marlon Manuel quotes peace activist Gene Knudsen-Hoffman in introducing the principles of the dialogue framework that the project adopts.



“Because what we have is a venue to exchange stories—not just to talk and talk—but to hear and understand each other,” he says.

In crafting the mechanics of their activities, representatives of the partner-organizations and institutions recognized the risk in fault-finding among participants from traditionally adversarial sectors. For them, it was important to underscore the goal as seeking solutions beyond identifying issues.

“We meant the tone as non-confrontational,” recalls Manuel, coordinator of the Alternative Law Groups. “Instead, the dialogues should be action-oriented.”

One key strategy proved to have tangible as well as symbolic value. Members of the Armed Forces and Philippine National Police were asked not to wear their uniforms when they attended the first set of the dialogue sessions.

According to Manuel, they were ‘civilians’ for the two-day activity. The rationale behind it was to remove the perceived barrier, as represented by their uniform. “We wanted to emphasize commonalities, that we are all citizens, rather than highlight the differences.”

During the Palawan session, the Hanns Seidel Foundation’s Paul Schäfer remarked that in their home country of Germany, they refer to police officers as “citizens in uniform.”

“The phrase captures the intent of the dialogue session design—no uniform—the AFP and PNP officers are citizens in uniform,” explains Manuel.

Ninoy and Cory Aquino Foundation’s Atty. Joey Mendoza adds that the dynamic of the dialogue as two-way was always

Other's Stories



“The military and police are usually asked about the human rights issues prevalent in their area and surprisingly, in many instances, there are common issues identified.”

NINYO AND CORY AQUINO FOUNDATION'S ATTY. JOEY MENDOZA

encouraged. It did not pit one party against the other—not the civilians versus the military or police nor the accuser in the face of the accused.

The questions that were often raised resonated in each participant. “We aimed for a genuine dialogue,” he says. “The military and police are usually asked about the human rights issues prevalent in their area and surprisingly, in many instances, there are common issues identified.”

Another practical yet meaningful strategy situated the first face-to-face “encounter” of the civilians and the AFP and PNP officers at the socials, over dinner and a videoke machine. “It was a light get-together, an ice breaker,” observes Mary Ann Co of the Hanns Seidel Foundation.

Later on, they would be called for

separate caucuses for civil society and security sector participants in order to prepare them for the dialogue proper. Divided into groups based on their provincial location, the discussion yielded insights that were “closer to the ground,” according to Manuel. “Local stakeholders can discuss issues that they are familiar with.”

As a result, at the end of what appeared as contentious debates, the participants would plan for community-based cooperative efforts towards human rights promotion and protection in the local areas in due course. Instead of a one-size-fits-all template, each region or group would often set their own targets and conceptualize future initiatives unique to their socio-political context.

What the planning sessions universally demanded were details—the groups must chart their next steps together. “It was evident from the many follow-through activities that were conceived,” says Co.

True enough, the participants demonstrated how deeply they were invested in the process. An army officer from Palawan, Maj. Neil Anthony Estrella suggested a tweak to the design—that in the last phase of the activity, they can wear their uniforms again. “So we can end the dialogue session with a symbolic acceptance of the AFP and PNP officers as citizens in uniform,” he had reasoned. His inspired idea was adopted. From here on, they have more stories—from setbacks to successes—to tell.

General Directions 2011-2013



The project looks further toward institutionalizing the collaboration of security forces and civilians in the promotion and protection of human rights and translating grassroots discussions—both issues and recommendations—into concrete policy and practice changes.

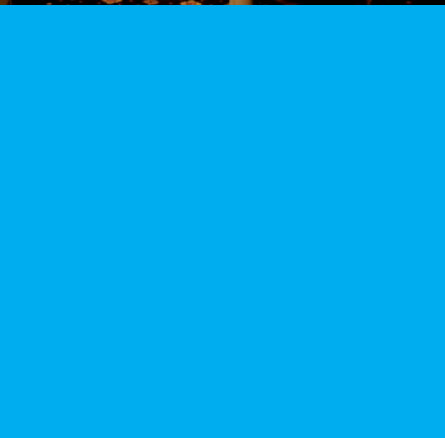
Among the plans for 2011 are: the establishment of Top Level Policy Dialogue Mechanism; support for follow-through activities in project areas; the conduct of Training/Sharing/Planning Workshop; and continuing coordination, monitoring and documentation.

The Top Level Policy Dialogue addresses the need for the dialogue sessions to translate into concrete changes in policies and operating procedures of the PNP and the AFP. The issues and problems that were identified during the dialogue sessions should be able to help in crafting new policies.

Scaling up the dialogue process from the grassroots to the policy arena would involve engagement with top-level officers of the security forces (AFP and PNP), government human rights bodies (CHRP) and the Presidential Human Rights Committee), other government agencies of the Executive Department (like the Department of Justice and the Department of the Interior and Local Government), members of the Congress and the Judiciary, and civil society organizations (especially the national networks and coalitions).

The constructive discussion of policy gaps and policy reforms can be implemented towards the promotion and protection of human rights, and the improvement of the relationship between the security forces and the civilians.





A First Step in the Right Direction

The dialogues tell us that more could – and should – be done

“We cannot change the country with one dialogue,” said Atty. Marlon Manuel, coordinator of the Alternative Law Groups. “What we have started should be sustained.”

At the initial session in Davao of the Community-Based Dialogue Sessions on Human Rights Between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police with Civil Society Organizations and Local Communities, there was less apprehension in achieving that aim. The diverse crowd of soldiers, police officers, government officials, and community advocates is only recognizing that more could – and should – be done.

After all, the odds are considerable. Human rights protection and promotion has been described as “deplorable,” according to research by Atty. Kristine Dacuyan-Eugenio for the project. It has drawn the attention of the international community, including an inquiry on extrajudicial executions conducted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Philip Alston. In 2006, then-President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo directed an independent body, the Melo Commission to investigate the rampant killings of media practitioners and activists.

Dacuyan-Eugenio echoed the latter’s concern that regardless of gaps in documentation and statistics by law enforcement and civil society organizations, cases of rights violations and deaths were “one too many.”

Allegations against security forces contributing to, rather than curbing the “culture of impunity” for their role in the Arroyo administration’s all-out war against insurgents, have not helped the cause of human rights in the country. These have also widened what one participant pointed out as the “historical divide” between the military and civilian sectors.

Extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and torture are among the worst human rights violations cited in the study. Ironically, they are committed against those who fight to uphold the very ideals of justice and equity. In 2008, the Commission on Human Rights received 986 complaints on these crimes, 1,541 alleged perpetrators and 1,264 victims. The report also documented the most number of cases in the National

Capital Region, Davao, and Zamboanga Peninsula while members of the police forces were said to have figured frequently in such incidents.

There are continuing reports on torture, according to the CHRP, including those involving members of the AFP, but the government still relies on palliative measures while lacking statistics to further substantiate findings. Citing documentation by the agency, the study refers to excessive force and torture, characterized by the use of electric shock, searing the skin with a lit cigarette, or suffocation, as “ingrained” in arrests and detention.

Despite the groundbreaking enactment of RA 9745 or the Anti-Torture Act of 2009, 22 years after it was first filed in Congress, the challenge foreseen is on how it will be implemented by law enforcement agents, especially those deemed to break it themselves. The gains from victims seeking protection through its provisions also remain to be seen.





Extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and torture are among the worst human rights violations cited in the study.

"Move a few steps back," reminded then-Deputy Director of the Directorate for Police Community Relations, Police Chief Supt. Roberto Rongavilla during the dialogue session held in Davao in November 2008, a self-professed witness to many human rights violations as a former activist before joining the army. "As long as the government uses force, different enemies emerge."

Dialogues are thus a welcome initiative towards a long-term and comprehensive engagement. Discussions on the problems help clarify the parameters of violations while refining current data for the benefit of those tasked to enforce the law.

Consultations at the barangay level also promote policy awareness and reform, while consolidating records of both government and non-government agencies. These in turn can inform

the appropriate House and Senate Committees on the relevant and responsive legislative measures. The judiciary also benefits from the insights drawn from these dialogues on access to justice.

Clearly, maximizing the areas for participation of civil society organizations with government authorities is crucial to collaborating on addressing issues that matter most to them. From 'enemies,' they are taking the first steps toward becoming allies.

"Everyone should appreciate the efforts of both sides," added Police Chief Supt. Rongavilla.

"This is a very big leap. It's good to open communication lines and erase stereotypes," said the Integrated Bar of the Philippines' Atty. Pia Palma-Gil, a participant of the dialogue session in Davao. "The first is just the start."



Giving Voice to the Vulnerable

The 'other side' hears them out

A 60-year-old woman was arrested while facilitating a consultation on CARHRIHL or the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law in Misamis Oriental, recounted Rita Melecio of Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) during the dialogue session held in Davao in November 2008. Held by a dozen military personnel in plain clothes and incommunicado for four days, she was subjected to torture and humiliation.

Father and son, both farmers in Compostela Valley, met some soldiers conducting anti-terrorist operations in the area. They were both tortured. The boy was only 15.

Throughout the country, the stories have become unfortunately familiar.

Atty. Alberto Sipaco, Commission on Human Rights director for Region 11, said that in the last five years, the number of reported human rights violations has risen.

He cited victims among women and children, adding that vigilantism, insurgency, terrorism and militarism as other pressing issues, also resulting in the discrimination against Muslims.

Threats against economic, social and cultural rights also abound. Forced evictions and demolitions suffered by informal settlers in urban areas have yielded allegations of brutality, according to the CHRP.

Prisons in the Philippines have been scored for their "sorry state." The Manila

City Jail, as an example, housed 2,000 inmates in 2002 despite its capacity for only 500. In addition to substandard physical conditions, characterized by poor ventilation and sanitation as well as scant medical supplies, there have been complaints of inhumane treatment from jail guards and other inmates.

At the Dagupan District Jail, 15 people raped a 17-year-old in 2002. The warden and guards were reportedly involved, according to the CHRP.

Based on data from the TFDP, the number of political prisoners incarcerated in 63 jails across the country, including minors, rose from 197 in 2002 to 234 in 2005. Even the innocent must endure imprisonment and torture, as the resolution of their cases is stalled by delays in the justice system.

Indigenous peoples are as disenfranchised, despite existing laws that should safeguard welfare and rights to their ancestral domains, including the mandated environmental

assessment of development projects that displace them from their own homes.

Even the human rights advocates and media practitioners that help tell their stories have not been spared. In 2005, more than 100 mass leaders, journalists, media personalities, judges and prosecutors have been murdered, purportedly implicating police, military and local officials.

The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility claims that 165 members of the media have been killed from 1986 to 2009. With 30 casualties, the 'Maguindanao massacre' in 2009 embodied the height of lawlessness among those in power.

"The country often hears lip service about human rights," admitted Atty. Sipaco. "There's only one demand—respect for the dignity of men and women."

It's about time that the voices of the vulnerable are truly heard. In gathering representatives from non-government and people's organizations, religious and

civic groups, including student and local community leaders, the Community-Based Dialogue Sessions on Human Rights Promotion and Protection raises public awareness on existing programs and initiatives on this advocacy.

By engaging officers from the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police across the different regions, the issues and gaps are uncovered to facilitate understanding between the two sectors, often perceived as antagonists rather than allies.





Threats against economic, social and cultural rights also abound. Forced evictions and demolitions suffered by informal settlers in urban areas have yielded allegations of brutality, according to the CHRP.

The project also provides a venue among state and civil society stakeholders for more cooperative efforts to advance the cause, while drawing much-needed support for such initiatives. Participants are then tasked to contribute to formulating concrete proposals and action.

“Justice could not be met without all the pillars working together,” explained the NCAF’s Atty. Joey Mendoza.

Former PNP-HRAO’s chief, Chief Superintendent Lina Sarmiento stressed the need for a “constructive relationship” among them. “Emotions are hard but we all have our share of experiences. I look forward to the day when all Filipinos will respect each other’s rights.”

Major Rolando Dumawa, AFP J7’s former public information officer, agreed that mechanisms for communication are essential. “We may have different perspectives,” he said, “but we can also find a common ground.”



Raising Awareness

“‘Colonel, your soldiers probably need to smile,’” Col. Ariel Bernardo of the AFP’s 91st Infantry Division recalls being told by the mayor of Tabaco City at the dialogue in Naga in November 2008.

It’s not only amusing advice, but one that he and others appreciate, especially with the perceived lack of sensitivity, even arrogance, among the country’s men and women in uniform.

The gesture also embodies their continuing efforts to reach out in what he describes as “the shared responsibility” of human rights promotion and protection.

Few are aware of these initiatives, which constrain favorable impact on the community and enhancing them with greater public involvement. The dialogue sessions were an opportunity to show that other side, which may have been overlooked.

Since 2007, the Human Rights Office of the AFP has been tasked to plan, implement and supervise programs, measures and mechanisms to uphold, protect, and promote respect for human rights, and adherence to international humanitarian law and other international instruments in this regard. It also receives formal complaints on alleged violations.

The PNP on the other hand, also one of the key partners from government in the project, created the Human Rights Affairs Office in June 2007, to primarily

carry out the blueprint for action on human rights by the agency. It also serves as the focal point on formulating, implementing and monitoring the PNP’s human rights development program.

“To serve and protect is upholding human rights through competency and professionalism,” the HRAO’s Former Assistant Chief Police Supt. Gerry Dia explained.

Maj. Alex Salgado of the AFP-HRO said that while mechanisms within the AFP are already in place, the participation of the rest of society in the human rights endeavor is important, including in breaking existing barriers.

“Aggrieved parties should file cases at the proper forum,” he added. “Cause-oriented groups are also encouraged to help victims seek recourse through the justice system instead of automatically tagging the AFP.”

The controversial “Oplan Bantay Laya 2” (Operation Freedom Watch 2) was also tackled by Maj. Salgado, who clarified that it focused only in addressing “armed elements of insurgency.” “The label ‘enemies of the state’ is reserved to those who subscribe to violence in undermining Philippine



“To serve and protect is upholding human rights through competency and professionalism.”

**POLICE SUPT. GERRY DIA OF
POLICE REGIONAL OFFICE 1**



sovereignty," he explained. "We abhor conflict as an instrument of policy, and we will not stifle principled critique from different groups in society."

The AFP, according to Maj. Salgado, continues to monitor violations among its ranks for immediate inquiry and investigation. Both domestic and international human rights laws are also integrated in the curriculum of military schools at all levels, in addition to ongoing directives for implementation.

To complement the office, two officers in the different major services and unified commands have been designated as human rights and international humanitarian law action personnel.

"We have the appropriate military courts to litigate and prosecute violators," said Maj. Salgado. "But we are also instituting other necessary measures from attending meetings, fora and conferences with various stakeholders."

For their part, the PNP enumerated its advocacy programs, such as the integration of human rights education in the curriculum of mandatory courses and training programs, and the regular conduct of Police Information and Continuing Education (PICE) in all its offices nationwide.

Police Chief Supt. Lina Sarmiento, current chief of the Police Security and Protection Group, shared several milestones, such as the establishment of 1,744

human rights desks all over the country.

"We also intensified human rights trainings and seminars," she said. Written exams for personnel; information and education materials for dissemination such as Citizen's Primer on Law Enforcement, PNP Guidebook on Human Rights-based Policing, Human Rights Desk Operations Manual, and poster on the Rights of Persons Arrested, Detained and Under Custodial Investigation; taking part in other

groups' initiatives; random inspection of lockup cells in the National Capital Region; the launching of the "HR Time Check"; a focus group discussion on current issues, creation of the Human Rights Resource Center, assessment tools on human rights-based policing, and the ongoing Multi-sectoral Dialogues by the PNP and AFP with local communities and civil society organizations which both institutions hope to sustain, are

among the PNP's diverse and creative menu of solutions.

"These programs are for peace and progress," said Lt. Col. Jose Feliciano Loy Jr., former chief of the AFP-HRO.

"It's not the time to point fingers when we can combine our efforts for the common mission to promote and protect human rights," added Police Chief Supt. Roberto Rongavilla, current district director of the Manila Police District. "We are all in this together."

"We have to bridge the gap, advocating and at the same time, setting up policies and procedures."

POLICE CHIEF SUPT. FRANKLIN BUCAYU



Understanding Issues and Gaps

“The concept of dialogue is an underutilized and overlooked mechanism in formulating effective policy for something as broad and encompassing as human rights,” former chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights and current Department of Justice secretary Leila de Lima said.

In her keynote speech at the project’s joint planning session, then Chairperson de Lima conceded that the process “so far has not been an easy one,” noting the challenge of suspicion and mistrust built up over time and magnified even by today’s headlines. “Notwithstanding this history and these serious and fundamental differences, there is a way forward.”

The dialogues have concretely identified these issues in each situation report culled from the conduct of the session in all regions: harassment, threat, branding or labeling, surveillance, torture, disappearances, killings, summary execution, military encampment, and violence by non-state armed groups.

At the same time, in uncovering the problems, potential solutions have been sought, such as continuing the dialogues, maximizing linkages, and providing updates on human rights cases. More multi-sectoral approaches are also recommended to enhance transparency on processes, open communication lines, and educate the military and police as well as communities.

“Most of our troops already recognize human rights, but the level of understanding may not

be the same throughout,” admitted Col. Onesimo Bañaga, former chief of the AFP Human Rights Office and current chief of the Philippine Army Human Rights Office.

Police Chief Supt. Franklin Bucayu, former chief of the PNP Human Rights Affairs Office and current Police Regional Director of Region 1 realized the pervasive misconceptions among their personnel. “In our sorties, they are wary and see human rights as a hindrance to police work. They say observing it strictly keeps their hands tied. And historically, these are tools used by anti-government forces,” he said. “We have to bridge the gap, advocating and at the same time, setting up policies and procedures.”

Atty. David Bermudo of the CHR-Region 6 acknowledged that the AFP and PNP are making positive strides. “They have gone a long way in trying to improve the human rights situation in the country. In my experience in the Eighties, they won’t even offer you a seat and coffee,” he said, half in jest. “Now there’s coffee, and food too.” His remarks were meant to signify that their agency now has a “working relationship” with both institutions, which the dialogues can further enhance.



“Most of our troops already recognize human rights, but the level of understanding may not be the same throughout.”

COL. ONESIMO BAÑAGA

“This project undertaking came about in response to a critical need to bring together the key actors concerned with human rights promotion and protection, especially those from the communities, in one venue to discuss and resolve issues and concerns in their respective areas, and collectively agree on a common effort.”

PAUL G. SCHÄFER, PHILIPPINE RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HANNS SEIDEL FOUNDATION OF GERMANY

The joint planning session covering the first four areas yielded consensus principles and proposals on human rights after a discussion of concepts, such as labor rights, anti-terrorism legislation, freedom from torture, women's rights, right to food and shelter, and right to freedom of association, while referring to other countries as case studies.

On labor in the Philippines, participants suggested the full implementation of the law against contractualization, provision of benefits for contractual employees, sanctions against illegal dismissal and union-busting, and improvement of working conditions, including providing hazard pay and implementing the minimum wage law.

They also focused on the discussion of the Philippines' Human Security Act, and proposed the review and repeal of the law. Other measures on upholding human rights were advised, such as the enactment of laws against torture (the Anti-Torture Act was passed in 2009) and enforced disappearance, availment of the Writ of Amparo and Writ of Habeas Data, and compliance with the UN Convention Against Torture.

Enforcing provisions of RA 9262 or the Anti-Violence Against Women and the Children Act of 2004, and Magna Carta for Women were also cited, including information dissemination through community orientation and tri-media advocacy campaigns.

Values formation on the fundamental right to food and shelter among military and police personnel, public consciousness activities, and consultations were listed as among the key efforts to pursue, along with livelihood assistance to evacuees.

As for the right to freedom of association, dialogues between mass demonstration organizers prior to the conduct of assemblies to discuss terms and conditions were encouraged, in addition to the practice of maximum tolerance. Designating protest areas, conducting human rights lectures to security forces, and using physical barriers between the police and protesters were other practical and sustainable solutions cited.

The ideas generated truly exemplified what Chairperson De Lima mentioned as “the way to protect and promote human rights. It is by talking to people,” she said. “When public hearings end, policy is engraved in letter and law, and when the time for implementation is imminent, it has been increasingly clear that public consultation should continue. This is how far consultations must go. Who protects and who must be protected must have a name and a face.”

“This project undertaking came about in response to a critical need to bring together the key actors concerned with human rights promotion and protection, especially those from the communities, in one venue to discuss and resolve issues and concerns in their respective areas, and collectively agree on a common effort,” added Paul G. Schäfer, Philippine Resident Representative of the Hanns Seidel Foundation/Germany. “Partnership and cooperation are key.”



Finding a Venue for Dialogue

“The dialogue is not room for accusations,” said Mercedes Darlucio, Barangay Human Rights Action Officer of Catalunan Grande in Davao City. “Instead we should find ways to better relationships for the benefit of the community.”



“Human rights are not the making of philosophers, lawyers, commissions or parliament. These are concrete rights to be claimed in concrete circumstances.”

**ATTY. JONNIE DABUCO
OF CHR REGION 6**

Threats to life and dignity, along with the ensuing tensions arising from the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front according to Task Force Detainees of the Philippines' Rita Melecio, underscores the importance of Mindanao as the first venue for dialogue.

“Human rights in Region 11 has not been that ideal,” admitted the CHRP's Atty. Alberto Sipaco. Participants in their presentations brought attention to problems unique to conflict areas, among them an alleged military bombing in 2007 and the illegal discharge of firearms in New Cortez. But with these are potential solutions, including paralegal training on criminal procedures, orientation on the mechanisms for redress of grievances, and sensitivity training among members of security forces for a better understanding of the Moro and indigenous peoples' cultures.

Creating venues for the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police to discuss human rights promotion and protection with communities and civil society organizations has generated similar cooperative efforts throughout the country in three other dialogues as part of its initial phase, held in Naga for Region 5 in 2008, Iloilo for Region 6 in 2009, and Baguio for the Cordillera Region in 2009. A Human Rights Week forum was also organized in 2008 to present results of the first two sessions.

“I think the idea of engagement that's really a battle of ideology, and when what I think is right and what you think is right, and there is a healthy exchange that will allow us to bring the best out of everyone,” said former Naga City mayor and current Department of Interior and Local Government

Secretary Jesse Robredo, addressing attendees of the dialogue. “Hopefully this will allow us to understand each other. It will allow us to discern why that mindset is so.”

According to CHRP Region 5 director Atty. Pelagio Señor Jr., the situation in Bicol also betrays the failure of government to honor signed treaties on human rights. “These are not seriously followed or implemented,” he noted.

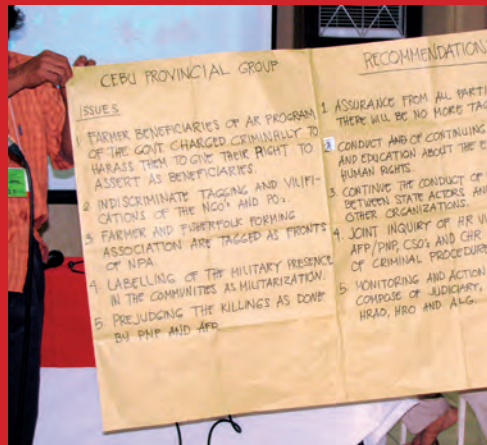
Masbate paralegal Cynthia Estrella shared several suggestions culled from the dialogue, among them, creating tripartite human rights bodies in all provinces, institutionalizing human rights desks in every city and municipality, and training the AFP and PNP on human rights and social legislation.

“I'm hopeful that the efforts of NGOs and local communities will be seen from a wider perspective, and civil society can also understand the responses of the AFP and PNP,” added Tanggol Kalikasan's Roy Layosa.

In Iloilo, participants from the province, as well as Capiz, Antique, Guimaras and Negros Occidental, also rose to the challenge offered by PROCESS Foundation-Panay's executive director, Wilfredo Homicillada to be active and take the initial steps to elevate their consensus efforts to the provincial level.

University of the Philippines-Visayas professor Joseph Anthony Loot cited ongoing militarism, lack of awareness of human rights among government authorities, insurgency, and distrust as some of the key issues to tackle.

“Human rights are not the making of philosophers, lawyers, commissions or parliament. These are concrete rights to be claimed in concrete circumstances,” said Atty. Jonnie Dabuco of CHRP Region 6.



“I think the idea of engagement (is) really a battle of ideology, (so between) what I think is right and what you think is right...there is a healthy exchange that will allow us to bring the best out of everyone.”

FORMER NAGA CITY MAYOR AND CURRENT DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECRETARY JESSE ROBREDO

“The definition itself is a subject of struggle and debate.”

Tasked to address and not just bare the issues of the day, the various groups and agencies committed to forming a Technical Working Group that would take the lead in facilitating local human rights dialogue sessions if not the provincial level. They also planned to involve more participants from the grassroots as well as local government units in promotion activities.

In Cordillera, even the right to life is “threatened,” according to University of the Philippines-Baguio professor Celia Austria. “People are marginalized and poor—they lack nutrition and education, and they lose land and other resources.” Addressing human rights issues are thus crucial to change. “These efforts are a key to development,” she added.

Atty. Jose Mencia Molintas, member of the United Nation’s Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, drew attention to the plight of indigenous peoples in the region. “Their struggle always goes back to their right to land,” he said.

Col. Onie Bañaga of the Philippine Army-Human Rights Office further amplified the importance of identifying prevailing concerns in the area, and how each sector can contribute to answering them, while Baguio mayor Peter Rey Bautista expressed support for later endeavors shared by participants themselves, such as quarterly forums to further lessen gaps and sustain partnerships, publication of reports to disseminate information on results of the dialogue, organization of an interim body for tasking and consolidation of inputs, and continuing education.

Now on its second phase, the project continues to span other regions of the country in order to sustain gains of the previous activities, by facilitating the implementation of local cooperative efforts for human rights promotion and protection. Joint planning sessions were also organized among representatives from these first four areas in 2009, refining and reinforcing both the concept and context of human rights. More dialogue sessions were conducted in the same year, including Cagayan de Oro for Region 10, Cebu for Region 7, Palawan, and Batangas for Region 4A, followed by a second Human Rights Week Forum.

True to the hopeful words of Glenda Dasco from the Naga City People’s Council, “We will see each other again.”

From Words to Action

For every story told, there are lessons learned. The project partners envision that by sustaining the dialogue sessions through their collective effort and commitment, they can soon carry out plans of action toward concrete changes, even policy reform.



“We should recognize the AFP and the Philippine National Police as community partners.”

POLICE CHIEF INSPECTOR ROSALINA DUMARAN

“We are not after you,” an Armed Forces of the Philippines representative told a human rights activist in Cebu. It was just one of several impassioned debates among members of the law enforcement agencies and staunch human rights defenders on the first dialogue for Region 7 in Cebu held on September 2009. But it was also informative and insightful, reminding the participants welcomed by board member Agnes Magpale, of the “power of communication,” according to Col. Onie Bañaga of the Philippine Army-HRO

“It’s good that progressive groups were invited, otherwise the dialogue would have been futile,” added Regional Trial Court judge Meinardo Paredes. “Everyone should leave behind their respective biases to achieve its goal and objectives.”

In response to pressing concerns on extrajudicial killings, land conflict in Cebu, and strong opposition to Negros Oriental’s Ordinance No. 5 that regulates medical missions, fact-finding

investigations and relief operations, including religious activities, comprehensive initiatives were suggested, including information, education and communication programs and other fora. A joint inquiry on violations, in addition to putting up a police detachment on land disputes, engaging government agencies like the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, were also proposed as these can be promptly undertaken. Setting up monitoring and action centers and multi-sectoral groups, aside from involving citizen participation in community security, were also foreseen.

“We do not simply need a bill of rights that remains on paper or the pages of the Constitution but one that is in action, a bill of rights that works,” as Palawan vice-governor David Ponce de Leon put it, “and this is for the benefit of our people.”

Atty. Robert Chan, executive director of the Palawan NGO Network Inc. (PNNI) equally stressed the need to uphold social justice with

the “preferential option for the poor,” presenting cases that favored powerful interests over the marginalized. Social Action Center of the Apostolic Vicariate of Taytay director Rev. Fr. Ed Pariño also illustrated the plight of indigenous peoples of Alimanguan, San Vicente with their problem on burying the deceased at the cemetery within their ancestral domain.

“In a way people have contributed to the problem,” according to Ahmad Melendres of the Moro National Liberation Front, by voting for corrupt officials that exacerbate such social inequities, emphasizing land grabbing as an example. “But they can help solve, the problem.”

“We should recognize the AFP and the Philippine National Police as community partners,” said Police Chief Inspector Rosalina Dumarán, one of the participants that signed the two petitions on creating a CHRP satellite office in Palawan and enacting the proposed bill on the Commission of Human Rights Charter.

In Cagayan de Oro, Kaisahan's Cheryl Polutan said there have been many instances of engaging the PNP and AFP in the community. Despite their biases, Nestor Banuag Jr. of Kristohanong Katilingban sa Pagpakabana-Social Involvement Office of Xavier University appreciated the process of exchange, "to make the students and faculties get informed and involved."

Participating groups, mostly based in Bukidnon and Cagayan de Oro, recognized that in clarifying recurring issues related to flash floods, the illegal arrest and detention of suspected insurgents in Misamis Occidental, demolition cases against the PNP, among several questions raised, regular interaction among the civil society and security sectors was crucial. Organizing a human rights monitoring committee to facilitate such dynamic is among the next steps.

Pasakami chair Juanito Lumawig, who also heads their federation of tribal Mangyans in Mindoro, pointed to "poor linkages and working relationships" with the local government and even the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the agency tasked in ensuring their rights and interests. Noting the contribution of partnerships, he cited an existing Memorandum of Agreement with the PNP for activities to study and document their native culture.



"Although the efforts of the AFP and PNP are welcome developments, these are not enough if relations with civil society and local communities are not developed."

GOVERNOR VILMA SANTOS-RECTO

in a message read by Assistant Provincial Legal Attorney Dennis Macatangay

Similarly, Vida Gonzales of Tanggol Kalikasan in Batangas shared how stakeholders have successfully reached out in their environmental protection efforts in the past, as shown by fishing communities in the Taal Lake. "They engaged and capacitated local government units to take better care of it," she said, with 16 mayors of coastal communities becoming active members of the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB). Assisting in law enforcement is another collaboration geared towards removing illegal fish cages.

While Col. Aurelio Baladad expressed happiness that the CHR reported a downward trend of violations committed by the AFP and PNP, as presented by former regional director Cresencia Pedrosa, he still stressed that their target is "0 percent."

With immediate plans

on conducting more multi-sectoral dialogues in Mindoro, education campaigns against child abuse and violence against women in areas of Cavite, Batangas and Laguna, and meetings on agrarian reform issues in Quezon to complement later consultations and research, his line is hardly wishful thinking.

"Although the efforts of the AFP and PNP are welcome developments, these are not enough if relations with civil society and local communities are not developed," governor Vilma Santos-Recto said in a message read by Assistant Provincial Legal Attorney Dennis Macatangay, at the dialogue. "This is one venue where we can all get together to discuss the thorny issue of human rights protection and promotion, and plan for future concerted actions towards a full and encompassing program."

Ways Forward

“There is a way forward,” as former chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights and current Department of Justice Secretary Leila de Lima said during the project’s joint planning session in 2009.

“While the morale of security sector personnel should be considered during the dialogue presentations as it is essential to confidence-building between parties, it cannot be overlooked that the government still has the primary obligation to protect its people. The sentiments of all people involved are important.”

**KAREN GOMEZ
DUMPIT, DIRECTOR OF
GOVERNMENT LINKAGES
OFFICE OF THE CHR**

The gains from the continuing partnership between government and civil society on common concerns have been considerable. They are rising above past conflicts and challenges on human rights promotion and protection and moving closer toward lasting cooperation, and even consensus.

“The project has achieved more than what was expected,” observed Paul G. Schäfer, Philippine Resident Representative of the Hanns Seidel Foundation. “This is exactly what we had wanted to initiate, because it is better to dialogue with each other than to debate on issues.”

Noting one of several next steps that participants proposed themselves, he expressed support for pursuing educational and training input on human rights for representatives of the Philippine National Police, Armed Forces of the Philippines and community groups.

“The project partners may also look into linkages with other institutions,” he added, to sustain these positive strides.

Atty. Marlon Manuel, coordinator of the Alternative Law Groups, shared the popular sentiment that success stories, especially how early setbacks were overcome, must be told. “There is really a need to increase the information dissemination regarding the activity and the results to the larger public,” he said.

Lt. Col. Dickson Hermoso of the AFP-OJ7 offered to take the lead in optimizing media mileage for the project and beyond that, drawing enduring focus and attention

to the issue through strategic and creative means, citing the annual celebration of the Human Rights week as an example.

Boosting the number of representatives of the various stakeholders would be another aim for the project, according to Police Chief Supt. Franklin Bucayu of the Police Regional Office 1. “Their selection must also consider the permanence of their assignments so the continuity of the program among the participating partners is ensured,” he explained.

The dialogues will also be tapping more participants from the government, particularly local government unit executives and offices with regional presence, like the National Economic and Development Authority and Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The project proponents agreed that a monitoring mechanism at the local level should be established to closely track developments after the dialogues.

“Feedback gives the group vital information,” Schäfer said. Both the PNP and the AFP, which had created Human Rights from the national headquarters down to the field units and NGO networks can rise to the occasion in this regard.

The ALG is also facilitating coordination and monitoring meetings in each area to sustain the link between the project partners and participants from the different organizations and offices of the past dialogue sessions. Aside from identifying current challenges to better



The project proponents agreed that a monitoring mechanism at the local level should be established to closely track developments after the dialogues. “Feedback gives the group vital information.”

PAUL G. SCHÄFER, PHILIPPINE RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HANNS SEIDEL FOUNDATION OF GERMANY



integrate their efforts toward human rights protection and promotion, there are also exchanges on the positive developments as a result of the previous activities. “We want to hear the good stories and share them,” says Manuel, “so more people are inspired to build on their own experience.”

This follow-through activity, which has been conducted in several regions, also enables the communication of project updates and prospects so that participants can collectively chart the next steps, including the forthcoming top-level policy dialogue envisioned by the group.

Karen Gomez Dumpit, director of Government Linkages Office of the

CHRP, acknowledged that while the morale of security sector personnel should be considered during the dialogue presentations as it is essential to confidence-building between parties, it cannot be overlooked that the government still has the primary obligation to protect its people. “The sentiments of all people involved are important,” she said. “We should come up with a common premise on human rights, how it impacts on people and the experience of the victim.”

“Policy efforts arise from these matters,” Atty. Joey Mendoza of the Ninoy and Cory Aquino Foundation pointed out. “And concerns are often not settled or resolved during

the dialogues.” Consequently, the initial policy issues culled from the activities can lead to further study on policy implications, and later on, policy and legislation proposals may be presented. “It will take time,” Lt. Col. Hermoso admitted, as they realized that often they are seen by communities as “monsters” when they are also “just human beings.” “We will go doing our job and tell them that they are not alone in their efforts. The AFP and PNP are trying to reach out. These institutions are going out of the box. Once people overcome the distrust and bias, the communication line is open.”

From there, more can be said and done.

Zambo's Human Rights Advocates, 'just a text away'

In Zamboanga City, soldiers themselves are teaching each other about respecting civilian rights—even those deemed as from the 'other side.'

Col. Wilson Mitra of the Western Mindanao Command proudly shares that members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines are conducting advocacy lectures on human rights and International Humanitarian Law as part of their implementation of its Internal Peace and Security Plan.

"We want to share what we have learned," he says. One of their recent 'teachers,' Commission on Human Rights lawyer Sharon Belisario whom he met during the community-based dialogue session for Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga City, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, and Zamboanga Sibugay held from November 10 to 11 in

2010, was even the source of their PowerPoint presentation.

At the said activity, participants were welcomed by Brigadier General Nonato Alfredo Peralta Jr., former deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations and Director General Raul Bacalzo, Philippine National Police chief. The latter had quipped on the scientific definition of matter as "anything that occupies space and has weight" before expressing optimism in saying, "Everybody who is present will matter especially in human rights issues." In light of gains by the provinces that took part in the dialogues, his words seem to prove prophetic.

Belisario admits that coordination between their office and the security sector has improved since the activity. "Almost everyone is just a text away," she says. "There's less hesitation to contact each other."

From perceived adversaries, rights advocates in government and non-government agencies are starting to see the AFP as well as PNP differently.

Munib Kahal of AS-Salam credits the PNP for their successful sponsorship of a media forum on human rights that was facilitated by civil society participants in the project. The event drew coverage by two national and one local media network. In human rights promotion and protection where information and communication are crucial, these are modest but meaningful strides.

"Text messaging makes consulting the CHRP and PNP fast and convenient," he says, recalling how they handled the case of a salvage survivor in Basilan. The CHRP and civil society groups were able to shepherd the investigation by the PNP, resulting in the relief of the police personnel involved.

Both the AFP and PNP were also quick to act on requests by the CHRP for security escorts during speaking engagements and investigations in conflict areas, adds Belisario.

"I think it's because all members of the core group that was formed from the dialogue are more conscious that we expressed a commitment to each other and the cause," she says. "So everyone wants to honor that."

This includes ensuring accountability even among their ranks, according to SPO3 Edwin Duco of the PNP's Human Rights Affairs Office. He reports that they have intensified monthly lock-up cell inspections in 10 stations with Police Information and Continuing Education (PICE) sessions, including the distribution of copies of the Anti-Torture Law.

"We're also constantly updating the list of our personnel manning our Human Rights desks. Everyone has to submit their mobile numbers for the directory," he says. "We want to show that for the protection and promotion of human rights, help is within reach."



"Everybody who is present will matter especially in human rights issues."

**POLICE DIRECTOR
GENERAL RAUL BACALZO**

Bright spots in Pagadian's peace efforts

At the Ilaw ng Kapayapaan (Light of Peace) event in Pagadian last 8 February 2011, 1st Infantry Division Deputy Commander Brig. Gen. Alexander Dicang joined civil society advocates who lit candles as a symbolic gesture for peace in Mindanao.



Group consensus has also led to planned efforts in answering the public's clamor for a more proactive local government, which seems to have traditionally sidestepped such issues.

Organized by core group members that attended the multi-sectoral community-based dialogue session for Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga City, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, and Zamboanga Sibugay held from November 10 to 11 in 2010, it drew more than the usual crowd of champions for the cause.

"It was the first time that an army general showed up," Consortium of the Bangsamoro Society-RMC chair, Sultan Maguid Maruhom recounts. "There was also an inter-faith prayer."

He calls it "confidence-building," adding that they are able to contact head commanders to take part in these efforts. The activity also served as an expression of support for continuing dialogues by the government with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and National Democratic Front (NDF).

Aside from representatives from the military and police, they welcomed the participation of the Department of Education (DepEd), also seen as potential partner in human rights promotion and protection.

"The more, the merrier," says Lt. Col. Samuel Leria, recognizing the need for more active players across sectors in peace initiatives in the region marred by human rights abuses

also linked to 'rido' or clan wars. "And then there's politics, which is the worst kind of rido," he says, noting the unchecked prevalence of private armed groups.

They have sought to seize opportunities in expanding the dialogue and similar efforts through the project. "We have to reach even 'the other side,'" he says, referring to militant groups.

Group consensus has also led to planned efforts in answering the public's clamor for a more proactive local government, which seems to have traditionally sidestepped such issues.

"We want our local mayors to support our advocacy activities," according to Police Supt. Primitivo Planta Lorenzo, Pagadian's chief of police. "Leaders need to set an example for the communities to follow."

Aside from the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Philippine National Police also intends to tap the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to address violence and crime linked to drug trafficking.

Father Felix Tigoy of the Inter-faith Forum for Solidarity and Peace looks forward to the necessary growth of their grassroots initiatives at the national level. "We know that there is a lot we can do by working together," he says.



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