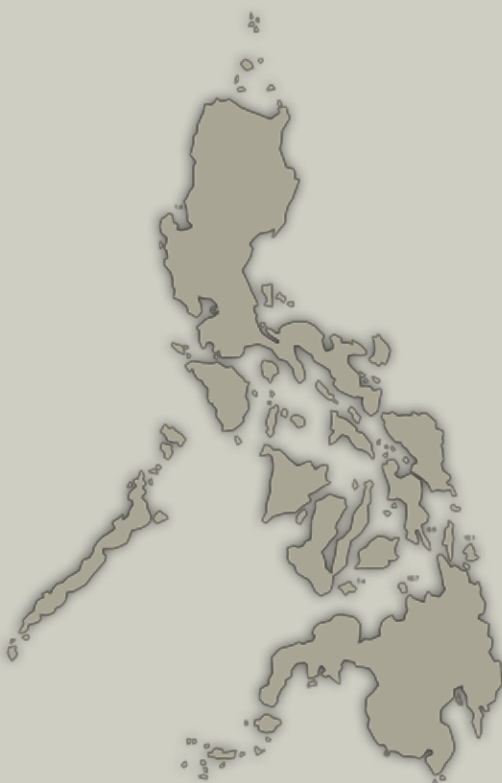




ARMM ROUNDTABLE SUMMITS ON PEACE AND SECURITY



Decentralization Program



Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung



INSTITUTE FOR
AUTONOMY AND
GOVERNANCE





Ryan Anson/IAG

The conflict in Mindanao between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Bangsamoro liberation fronts has been going on for more than three decades. Although the conflict has been violent, the main actors have been engaged in peace talks for most of the time.

The problem in Mindanao is sovereignty-based. The Bangsamoro liberation fronts assert sovereign right over a territory that the Philippine Government is currently exercising sovereign power over and which it considers part of the national territory. The foundation of the Philippine claim is that the territory was part of what the United States granted to the Philippine state when independence was proclaimed on July 4, 1946. On the other hand, the Bangsamoro contend that the incorporation of their territory into the Philippines was without their plebiscitary consent, a blatant violation of their human rights as guaranteed by various United Nations instruments guaranteeing peoples' right to determine their political status.

Before the arrival of the Spanish colonialists, the Bangsamoro were already in the process of state formation and governance. Their sultanates were engaged in trade and diplomatic relations with other countries in Asia, including China. The attempts of the Spanish colonial government to subjugate the sultanates never succeeded. For this reason, Bangsamoro nationalists insist that the Muslim territories were not part of what was ceded by Spain to the United States in the Treaty of Paris

of 1898, simply because Spain never exercised effective sovereignty over these areas.

Even during the American occupation, the Bangsamoro continued to resist attempts to subjugate them. They also continued to assert their right to a separate independent state. When the U.S. government promised to grant independence to the Philippines, the Bangsamoro leaders registered their strong objection to be part of the Philippine Republic. In the petition to the U.S. President dated June 9, 1921, the people of Sulu archipelago said that they would prefer to be part of the U.S. rather than to be included in an independent Philippine nation.

At a meeting in Zamboanga on February 1, 1924, Bangsamoro leaders proposed in their Declaration of Rights and Purposes that the “Islands of Mindanao and Sulu, and the Island of Palawan be made an unorganized territory of the United States of America.” They were anticipating a U.S. move to decolonize its colonies and other non-self governing territories, which would mean that the Bangsamoro homeland would be granted separate independence. In Lanao, the leaders who were gathered in Dansalan (now Marawi City) on March 18, 1935 appealed to the U.S. government and the American people not to include Mindanao and Sulu in the political entity to be organized for the Filipinos.

Even after their territories were made part of the Republic of the Philippines in 1946, the Bangsamoro people continued to assert their right to independence. Congressman Ombra Amilbansa filed House Bill No. 5682 during the fourth session of the Fourth Congress that sought the grant and recognition of the independence of Sulu. When the bill ended up in the archives of Congress, the then provincial governor of Cotabato, Datu Udtog Matalam, issued the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) manifesto on May 1, 1968 that called for independence for Mindanao and Sulu.

This peaceful movement for independence was deflected when the Ilaga, which were government-backed Christian militias, attacked Muslim communities in the 1970s, burning mosques and houses, and massacring hundreds of people, including women and children. The Muslims were left with no other alternative but to fight back to defend themselves and their communities. The MNLF came into to existence to lead the struggle. In 1996, the MNLF entered into a peace agreement with the Philippine government for the establishment of the autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a splintered group from the MNLF did not agree to the terms of the agreement with the MNLF and is presently negotiating its own “version” of a settlement for Mindanao peace and development. The MNLF on the other hand is engaged in talks with the government over issues of implementation of the 1996 agreement.

The Mindanao peace process is the sum total of initiatives particularly the peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the discussions on the implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreements between the GRP and the Moro National Liberation Front (MILF) and the community-based peace programs such as interfaith dialogues, establishment of peace zones, and community mediation systems.

ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS



The pro-active support of local government units to these processes is indispensable for sustainable Mindanao peace and development. LGU participation and support are most needed in the different aspects of the peace process: security; reconstruction, rehabilitation and development; and the political settlement.

In the security component, the LGUs must support and participate in monitoring and enforcement of the ceasefire agreement between the GRP and the MILF. This participation and support is concretized in their active involvement in the Local Monitoring Teams composed of representatives from the GRP, MILF and local government units. It is observed that the involvement of the LGUs in the LMTs at the moment is minimal.

In reconstruction, rehabilitation and development, the support of the LGUs in current efforts by multilateral programs such as the Multilateral Trust Fund (MTF) by the World Bank and the Japan-funded Bangsamoro Initiatives for Reconstruction and Development is much needed in bringing dividends of peace to conflict affected areas even before the signing of any peace agreement. The LGU participation is needed for sustainability of these development programs.

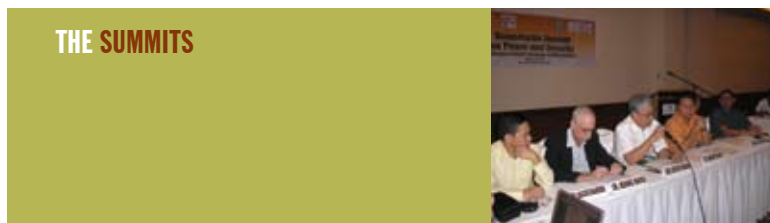
No political negotiated settlement that will reconfigure governance in the southern Philippines can be effectively implemented without LGU support. This support can only be harnessed when local government executives have broad knowledge of the dynamics of Mindanao conflicts and the important role they play in the forging and implementation of a roadmap for peace and development.

The summits for that include the newly elected local executives addressed the felt need for local government units in the conflict-prone Au-

tonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to be actively involved in the activities of the peace process particularly in helping maintain the ceasefire while the talks are ongoing; participating in the development of conflict-affected areas and eventually supporting the negotiated settlement for resolving the conflict.

The summits were conducted by the Institute for Autonomy and Governance in partnership with the Department of Interior and Local Government- ARMM, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (GRP and MILF CCCH), the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) and the International Monitoring Team (IMT).

This activity dovetails with GTZ's Decentralization Program of empowering LGU's as it helps clarify the role and capacitate the institutional capabilities of LGU's in the work for attaining sustainable peace and development in the southern Philippines.



The roundtable summits were held in three separate occasions. The first summit was held on August 14, 2007 at the Dynasty Hotel Conference Room in Cagayan de Oro City. This was attended by 45 local executives from Lanao del Sur and Marawi City.

The second summit was participated in by 58 local executives from Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. It was held on August 24, 2007 at the Garden Orchid Hotel Conference Hall in Zamboanga City.

The third summit was conducted on September 8, 2007 at the Marco Polo Hotel in Davao City. This was attended by 44 chief executives from Maguindanao and Shariff Kabunsuan.

The objectives of the summits were as follows:

1. To educate local government executives on the issues, developments and initiatives in resolving the violent conflicts in the southern Philippines;
2. To solicit support of local governments to the Mindanao peace process;
3. To clarify and gather the roles local government units can play in the peace process;
4. To link the ceasefire and peace process mechanisms to the local government units;

5. To raise capacities of local government units in conflict resolution, peace-making and peace-building.
6. To build alliances for peace and development in the provincial levels of the ARMM.

The program was divided into three parts:

- Panel Presentation and Discussion on the Roots and Causes of Violent Conflicts and Insecurities in Mindanao
- Presentation and Discussions on the Peace Process and the Ceasefire
- Workshop on Roles, Strategies and Recommendations by local executives

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS



Cagayan De Oro Summit

The local chief executives of Lanao del Sur pointed to the prevalence of rido (inter-clan conflict) as the major cause of violent conflicts in the province. Accordingly, rido is generally triggered by injustice, violation of human rights, violation for freedom of religion, crimes against chastity, land grabbing and discrimination in terms of race and creed. It was emphasized that the employment of peaceful means is the most effective principle in addressing the problem of rido. The following approaches have been suggested: consultations and dialogues, adopting the Moral Recovery Program of the government, intensifying awareness on Islamic values. In addition, they recommended the following as vital strategies: representation of traditional leaders, (Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) into the Conflict Resolution Councils of the LGUs, and tribal membership of the resident tribal groups into the local police unit.

The “Balik Armas” program of the government should be fully implemented all over the ARMM and should be sustained with “From Arms to Farms” program. This is based on the principle that the actors see each other as partners, rather than as enemies. It is important that people perceive these programs as more of sustaining livelihood rather than just giving money in exchange of guns.

One possible way of addressing the proliferation of loose firearms

in the communities is to sell all guns to government and create common provincial fund to buy a bus company which will be owned and operated by Maranaws. This is progress-oriented thinking, which also renders irrelevant the passion for guns among Moro societies. Another suggestion was to request the Office of Muslim Affairs (OMA) to accept guns as payment during the Haj (One of the 5 pillars of the Islamic faith where Muslims go on religious pilgrimage to Mecca).

Genuine development is not just a product of peace but is also a pre-requisite to peace. Many of those engaged in armed-conflict are actually working for peace and not really consumed by the idea of war. Thus economic factor is also a major cause of these conflicts.

The Local Monitoring Team (LMT) in the GRP-MILF peace talks is only in the provincial level and is currently composed of 5 members: 1 governor, 1 priest, 1 Imam (Muslim religious leader), 2 Non-government Organizations (NGOs). The governor is the designated chair of the LMT. This composition can be strengthened through the inclusion of more representatives of the LGUs. It was suggested to expand the membership to 10 including representatives from the academe.

There is need to establish proper coordination mechanism between the LMT and PPOC. The functions of the LMT and the Provincial Peace and Order Councils (PPOC) are not necessarily identical. While the PPOC is a government instrumentality, the LMTs include members of non-government actors, such as the MILF. At the very least, this coordination can start with by inviting the LMT representatives in PPOC regular meetings.

Zamboanga City Summit

The local executives of the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi asserted that violent conflicts are linked with the historical, political, and socio-economic issues obtaining in their localities. Accordingly, the government's heavy employment of military solution to all these issues is the major cause of violent conflicts in the areas. There is apparently mistrust by military and police towards local officials that brings about failure or weak coordination in operations against terrorist groups.

They strongly suggest the following approaches to address the problem: improve civil-military relation and cooperation, strengthen LGU-military coordination and cooperation, strengthen justice system, inclusion of the Ulamas (Muslim religious leaders) into the official legal structure, intensify the government livelihood programs, and facilitate wider access to formal education among the youths.



The complexity of the Mindanao problem demands more comprehensive strategies beyond the employment of the already problematic military approach. Among others, it should be anchored on the sincere awareness of its interrelated character and nature. Considering this, it was recommended to intensify rural livelihood and economic development programs.

The Malay identity can be a unifying factor amidst the diverse and pluralistic societies. This must be pursued as one of the approaches in addressing the Mindanao problem.

Many of the members of the Abu Sayyaf are young. No member is older than 30 years old. Many of them are out-of-school-youths. Obviously, it is the lack of education which makes them prone to Abu Sayyaf recruitment. Considering this, education should be the main approach to stop the aggressive recruitment of the Abu Sayyaf among the youths. Parallel to this, government efforts should be directed towards providing livelihood to the local people.

Peace does not flow from the barrel of the gun. Poverty is indeed one of the major sources of conflicts. It even generates the domestic, local, and national conflicts. Livelihood programs should be intensified and should really address directly the local community contexts, such that the overall impact connects with the economic conditions of these communities. It should be a collaborative effort of many sectors. The military can continue to run after the lawless elements. But other groups should also continue to pursue collective endeavors for peace and development. The peace process should be continuously supported and pursued.

Another cause of conflict is inadequacies of the justice system. There are very few judges to hear the cases. Oftentimes, aggrieved parties seek the assistance of lawless groups for redress. This is a case of injustice in the form of people being denied access to the legal mechanism.

Cooperation and coordination between the military and the LGU should be strengthened, in order to improve civil-military cooperation and overall relations. Local and traditional mechanisms should be exhaustively utilized before any arrest is carried out. It is worth noting that oftentimes, arrests (especially those without sufficient legal basis) lead to the escalation of conflicts.

Davao Summit

The local executives of the Maguindanao and Shariff Kabunsuan Provinces pointed to the series of violent encounters between the LGU police and para-military forces with the MILF combatants as the major cause of violent conflicts in their areas. The armed encounters between the CVOs and the MILF



105th command were specifically mentioned as major irritants due to its recurrent, intense, and violent nature, which oftentimes result in many deaths and large-scale evacuation among communities in Maguindanao. The local executives strongly pushed for a formal meeting between the LGU and MILF top level officials in order to discuss the matter. This move is their response to the perennial complaint that mayors are usually left-out of the ceasefire mechanism and conflict resolution activities in the GRP-MILF peace talks.

Local Chief Executives cannot always rely on police force because there are very few police personnel in many towns. Others have no police officers assigned to them except PO1 or PO2, while others lack ammunition and gun supplies. The peace and order council is oftentimes rendered ineffective. In some LGUs, peace and order councils are never convened.

The LGUs should be allowed to exercise their functions to the fullest over a conflict situation before any military approach is implemented. They know the contributory factors better and therefore, they are in strategic position to approach and eventually resolve the problem.

The Local Chief Executives are often charged of being sympathetic to the rebels due largely to the simple fact that they have relatives among the rebel forces. There is need to establish venue for all military commanders to dialogue with LCEs in order to harmonize and level-off on perceptions, understanding, and approaches. Lack of proper communication increases the probability of conflicts to arise. The peace process should not be exclusive only to the MILF and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP). Rather, it should be more inclusive to broaden the base of stakeholders.

The municipalities of Buldon and Barira are planning to organize the Local Peacekeeping Force. This will include the government forces and the MILF forces. There is plan to create a registering system of guns which is designed to officially recognize the government and MILF registering bodies.

There is need for a mechanism to establish and harmonize the mutually agreed procedures in accosting civilians between the MILF and the government forces. Constant meeting between AFP and MILF commanders is a welcome phenomenon among the civilian populace. This can be further strengthened and improved through the technical support of the academe/peace centers.

It has been observed that in Maguindanao province, the MILF tend to meddle in local problems – thus complicating the whole situation and eventually rendering it unmanageable. The LGU can certainly address intra-family conflicts if only the MILF forces do not intervene in favor of one of the parties.

Local chief executives need to meet the MILF in venues like the roundtable summits to open communications between the LGUs and the MILF in Maguindanao. The LGUs, in general, doubt the sincerity of the MILF.

One positive direction is towards creating a pilot area for MILF to share in governance. This will allow the MILF to officially participate in local governance. However, this approach needs further study, considering the peculiarities of local contexts, as well as the dissimilarities of mindsets among MILF commanders.

RECOMMENDATIONS



At the end of the summits, the participants reached a consensus on recommendations to advance peace and security in their localities. These are:

Lanao del Sur

1. Actively participate in the local monitoring teams. Expand its membership to include representatives from the League of Municipalities and the academe.
2. Involve LGUs in the GRP-MILF negotiations.
3. Support and substantiate government instrumentalities sustaining socio-economic welfare of the people.
4. Define coordination mechanisms between LMT and PPOC. (e.g LMT representative be regularly invited to the PPOC meeting).
5. Peacefully resolve the on-going crisis in Sulu and Basilan.
6. Exercise bridging leadership in our communities where we bring together contending parties in dialogue, coordination and cooperation for peace and development.
7. Strengthen alliances for peace and development among local leaders to include the military and police. Toward this end, membership of peace and order councils must be expanded to include traditional leaders and elders.
8. Revitalize the “Balik-baril” program and licensing of loose firearms.
9. Rationalize personnel complement in local police stations.
10. Support the peace process by conducting and supporting peace advocacy activities.

11. Develop preventive mechanisms to avert impending conflicts.
12. Establish Muslim Mindanao Peace and Development Policy Center under the supervision of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP).
13. Promote and protect LGU rights to participate in the exploitation of aquatic and mineral resources specifically in Lake Lanao.
14. Explore ways to reduce power costs and promote energy efficiency in Lanao del Sur.

Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi

1. Focus education programs to counter the problem of lack of education among the youth.
2. Promote better coordination and cooperation between the PNP, military, and local government units. Recommendations and suggestions of LGUs should be seriously considered.
3. Strengthen the local justice system. The Ulamas (Muslim religious leaders) should be involved in resolving conflicts.
4. Through mutual agreement of all parties, initiate dialogue between and among LGUs, MNLF, PNP, and the AFP.
5. The government should make its presence felt in terms of livelihood and economic development programs in the local community level.
6. LGUs should bring-out their local issues, concerns, and problems on top of the table with the military and other groups and then engage each other in sincere and honest to goodness discussions with the aim of finding common, collective and collaborated approach towards solving those problems.
7. Recognize local conditions in policies involving deployment of military troops, activation of Citizen's Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGUs), Civilian Volunteers Organizations (CVOs), and police auxiliaries.
8. Activation of CAFGUs and Police Auxiliary in Basilan.
9. PNP and army troops deployed in Basilan must be from Basilan.
10. There shall be no para-military groups in Sulu.
11. Establish local zones of peace in the areas.



Maguindanao and Sharif Kabunsuan

1. Involve LGUs in the pursuit of the peace process. Allow LGU representation in the negotiations at least as observers.
2. Through mutual agreement of all parties involved, initiate dialogue between and among LGUs and the MILF.

3. Strengthen the local justice system by involving the Ulama (Muslim religious leaders) to intensify spiritual advocacy within the system.
4. Facilitate constant meeting and coordination between AFP, Local Government Executives, PNP and MILF commanders.
5. Recognize local conditions in crafting policies involving non-government groups in the formation of local conflict resolution mechanisms.
6. Capacitate the Municipal Peace and Order Council (MPOC) and or the Local Monitoring Team (LMT) on conflict resolution and peace-building strategies and methodologies. There should be LGU representatives in the LMTs.
7. Rationalize and capacitate police manpower in the municipalities of Maguindanao and Shariff Kabunsuan.
8. Newly-assigned police and military officials from outside of Mindanao should undergo formal orientation on traditional, cultural, social, and religious ways and sensibilities of the peoples of Mindanao.
9. Ask the police and the military to coordinate with concerned LGUs the arrests of persons charged under the provisions of the Human Security Act.
10. Urge the ARMM Regional Legislative Assembly to establish the Human Rights Commission in the autonomous region.



ACCOMPLISHED GOALS



One notable contribution of the summits is that they generated concerns on conflict and peace in Mindanao which are considered important by the local government executives. It is very significant to note that in the summits, the chief executives of local government units in the six provinces in the ARMM highlighted distinct issues they want addressed. This indicates the need to “customize” peace strategies in order that they can be more responsive to the peculiarities of conflicts in the localities.

In the summit for Lanao del Norte, local executives are more strongly concerned about rido (clan conflicts) as a source of violent conflicts. In the summit of local executives of Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi, they

are concerned about terrorism and the role of the AFP in countering terrorism in Western Mindanao. They highlighted their general perception that the military does not trust local executives in the drive against terrorism. The local chief executives called for more open communications and dialogue between the military, police and local executives in the island provinces.

The chief executives of Maguindanao and Shariff Kabunsuan point to the recurring conflicts between the local police and CVO's against the elements of the 105th base command of the MILF. The political dimension of the conflict is also most felt in Maguindanao and Sharif Kabunsuan which are known strongholds of the MNLF. In these two provinces, local executives demand that they should at least be consulted on the issues in the peace negotiations that will impact on the configuration of political powers in the provinces. They also called for the conduct of local dialogues between the local government executives of Maguindanao and the leadership of the MILF.

Crosscutting all summits are the concerns about the effectiveness of peace and order councils to address violent conflicts in their areas. It was observed that peace and order councils are not regularly convened and they lack the capacity for conflict resolution and peace-building. In terms of conflicts involving revolutionary groups, the summits showed the limitations of the local peace and order councils which are purely government instrumentalities in keeping the ceasefire and helping push a negotiated settlement.

The summits demonstrated that the Mindanao conflict has local dimensions which can be addressed by local peace and order councils in collaboration with the ceasefire mechanisms such as the CCCH, AHJAG and IMT. Important alliances were built out of the summits. First, was the alliances on the provincial levels where local executives reached a consensus on the most critical causes of violence and conflicts in their areas and second, the alliance between local executives and the existing ceasefire mechanisms that involves not only government, the AFP and the PNP but also elements of the MILF. The discussions in all the summits brought fore for the first time the urgent need to build partnerships between the LGUs, local peace and order councils and the ceasefire committees.

There is a strong clamor from the local executives for participation or at the very least getting involved as observers in the peace negotiations. A consensus was reached during the summits that the LGUs and the police must be involved in the expanded local monitoring teams (LMTs) that will not only monitor the ceasefire but will have advocacy functions as well. The ceasefire committee has committed to bring to the next negotiations the need for more participation by local government units in the peace process.

FORWARD STEPS



The statements signed by the local officials on the sources of conflicts in their respective areas and their recommendations will serve as the basis for programs and resolutions in the local legislative councils and the peace and order councils. The statements will also be disseminated to policymakers in the ARMM and Manila so that they get to know the sentiments of local executives in the ARMM.

As next good steps, it is recommended that the following activities be undertaken.

- Embark on capacity-building programs in conflict resolution for peace and order councils in the ARMM.
- Identify pilot areas to promote coordination and communication between peace and order councils and the ceasefire committees.
- Conduct roundtable sessions/dialogue between peace and order councils and the ceasefire committees on the modalities for cooperation.
- Organize and capacitate local monitoring teams with representation from the LGUs on conflict resolution and mediation.

The dialogue among and between local executives and the other stakeholders for Mindanao peace must be sustained. The summits provided the seeds for further engagement of local executives with the military, police and other stakeholders and reasserted their leadership and powers as promoters of peace in their areas.



**INSTITUTE FOR
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Established in 2001, the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) is a policy think tank that provides research, training and technical assistance to promote meaningful autonomy and governance for peace and human security in the Southern Philippines.

Since its establishment, IAG has conducted research, forums, roundtable discussions and conferences on the ARMM, the Mindanao conflict and the peace processes. It has published policy papers on political, economic and security issues that defined the much needed measures to be undertaken for meaningful autonomy in the region.

IAG is an institutional partner of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) in the Philippines.

Contact: ATTY. BENEDICTO BACANI
 Executive Director
Address: Alumni Center, Notre Dame University,
 9600 Cotabato City, Philippines
Telephone: (+63 64) 421-2071
Website: www.iag.org.ph

The KAS, more popularly known in the Philippines as the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, is an independent, non-profit German political foundation guided by the principles of the Christian Democratic Movement.

KAS activities include political education, grants for research and scholarships for gifted students. The main aims of the international work are: Training political and social leaders; Introducing democratic institutions and processes; Encouraging political and social elites of focus on development in their actions; Promoting international political dialogue and the worldwide exchange of information and experience.

KAS has been active in the Philippines since the 1960s. The main activities of KAS in the Philippines have focused on Social Market Economy, Institutional and Political Reform and Peace and Development in Mindanao.

Contact: KLAUS PRESCHLE
Country Representative
Address: 3/F ALPAP I Building, 140 L.P. Leviste Street,
Salcedo Village, Makati City, Philippines
Telephone: (+63 2) 8943737; 8943427
Email: info@kaf-mnl.com
Website: www.kas.de/philippinen

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In the Philippines, the GTZ has assisted in a number of local government projects in many regions of the country, specifically in the Visayas and Mindanao. The GTZ, through its **Decentralization Program (DP)** aims to enable the state, economic sector and civil society in Visayas and Mindanao to act in a framework beneficial to decentralization, in effect helping local governments improve governance and service delivery. Its three components, namely, political, fiscal and institutional decentralization, are meant to reinforce GTZ's and its implementing partners' initiatives at making decentralization work by (a) replicating best practices, (b) increasing local government revenues, and (c) improving the delivery of basic services.

For decades, the GTZ has worked with government and communities in the Philippines, sharing the best in German technology and its wealth of experience in international cooperation. GTZ's overarching goal in the Philippines is to contribute to the reduction in poverty and inequalities, ensure sustainable development, and enable Filipinos to address issues such as conflict, health and environmental management through the facilitation of small grants and the multi-stakeholder approach.

Contact: DR. HERWIG MAYER
GTZ-Decentralization Program Manager
Address: Unit 2A, PDCP Bank Centre cor. V.A. Rufino &
L.P. Leviste Streets, Salcedo Village, Makati City, Philippines
Telephone: (+63 2) 8136821
Website: www.gtz.de/philippines



Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH
German Technical Cooperation

GTZ - Decentralization Program
Unit 2A, PDCP Bank Centre
cor. V.A. Rufino & L.P. Leviste Streets
Salcedo Village, Makati City, Philippines
Telephone : (+63 2) 813-6821
Fax : (+63 2) 892-8843
Website : www.gtz.de/philippines