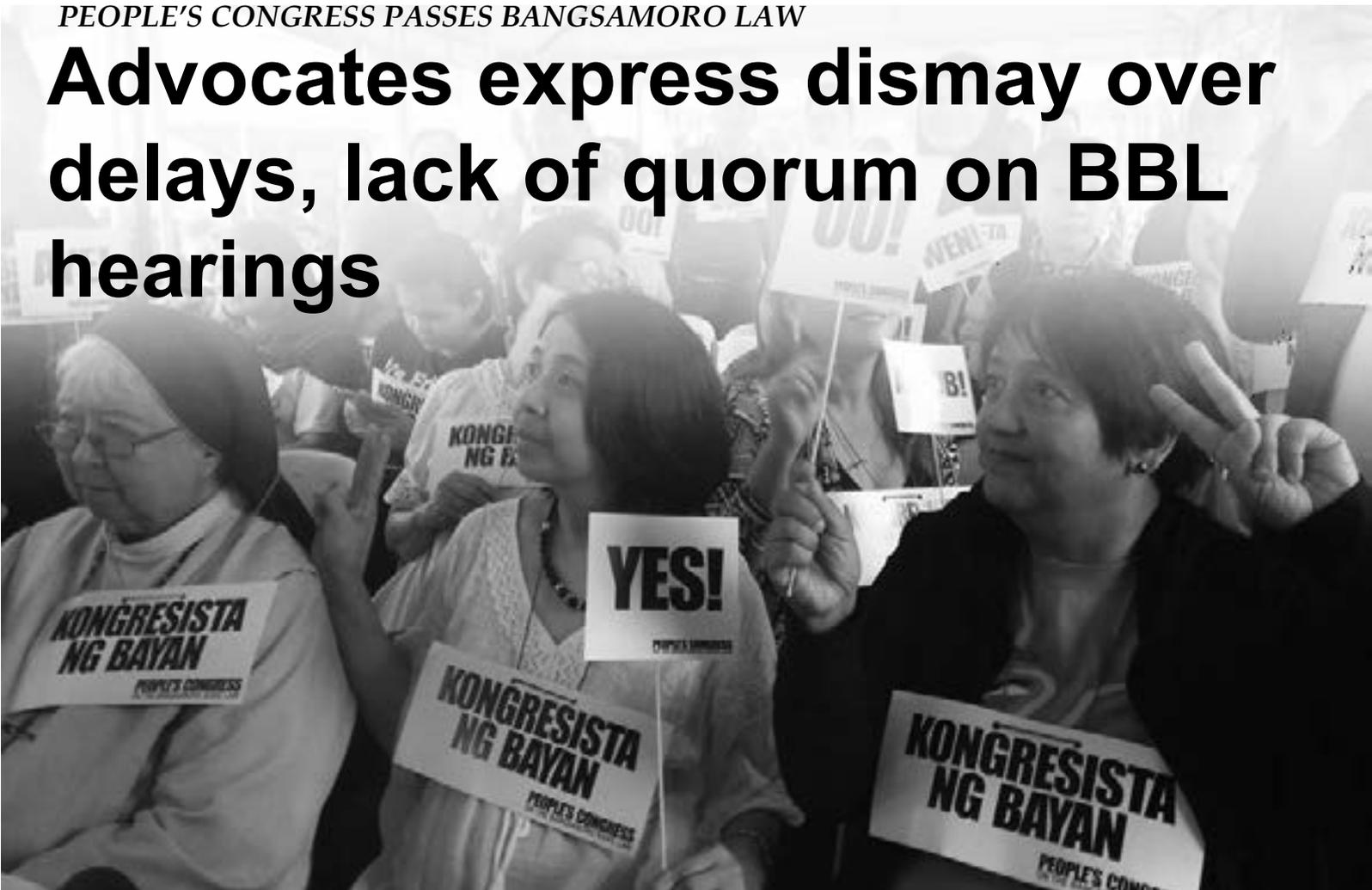


PEOPLE'S CONGRESS PASSES BANGSAMORO LAW

Advocates express dismay over delays, lack of quorum on BBL hearings



■ Gani Abunda II

WITH THE PASSAGE of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) facing a slow and rough sailing process in Congress, more than 300 peace advocates from various civil society organizations across the nation gathered on December 15 at the Peace Bell in the Quezon City Memorial Circle and 'symbolically enacted into law' a BBL through a 'People's Congress' they dubbed Kongreso ng Sambayanan.

"This People's Congress symbolizes our collective dismay and frustration over the delay of the passage of the BBL by Congress depriving the chance to make genuine autonomy work for all of us," Women Engaged in Action on 1325 (WE Act 1325) National Coordinator and Center for Peace Education Executive Director Jasmin Nario-Galace said.

She added, "This piece of legislation have suffered serious setbacks especially in the Lower House due to delays, unproductive interpellations, and the lack of quorum for the plenary deliberations to continue and legislators to perform their mandated duty of enacting

the basic law."

WAKE UP, DO YOUR JOB!

"Time is running out for the BBL passage but a number of our honorable lawmakers are still 'in a state of coma.' These elected officials should realize that much is at stake in the BBL: not only the future of the Bangsamoro, but the future of the whole nation. So, to our solons, please wake up from your slumber, roll up your sleeves and pass a Bangsamoro law," Gus Miclat, National Convener of All Out Peace (AOP) stressed.

See Page 8, People's Congress...

Solidarity!

“
Guided by IID’S
discourse on
people-to-people
dialogue and
south-south
internationalism,
we are committed
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relevant and
timely articles...”

”

The Editorial Team:

- Gus Miclat
- Gani Abunda II
- Marc Batac
- Juliette Loesch
- Raul Antonio Torralba

Welcome to the first issue of the SOLIDARITY!, the quarterly E-newsletter of IID. This is a re-launch of the same IID publication printed initially more than 28 years ago when IID was still in its gestation period.

At IID’s precursor organization, Center for International Learning (CIL) - Tuluyan San Benito based in Quezon City in the Philippines, the first issue of Solidarity - sans the exclamation point (!) - was born. It was produced by the then motley IID team of 5 people who believed in a better world if peoples from both the “South” and “North” and those in the “East” and “West” embrace the notion of “people-to-people internationalism”. Start-up and bold ideas and opinions such as “south-south solidarity” and questioning the relevance of the UN at a time of continuing strife even at the twilight of the Cold War were some of the issues that we tackled in the maiden issue.

This was a generation or so ago when there was no Internet, no smartphones, and no personal computers. Our first issue was literally cut and pasted from typewritten texts from a then borrowed “high end” IBM typewriter then to be laid out afterwards, photocopied, stenciled and mimeographed for distribution and mailed to partners, friends and donors. A Japanese-American volunteer intern who was the son of an Asian Development Bank high-ranking official did the tedious layout chore for us. Fast forward to 28 years or so after, a French volunteer-intern is helping us produce: edit, write and layout this re-launch issue together with the current Manila team of IID.

SOLIDARITY! has had other conceptions as IID unfolded: Kapatiran (Pilipino for “solidarity” or “fraternity”), Estafeta (referring to a child courier cum messenger of the clandestine movement in East Timor during their self-determination struggle of which IID was advocating and supporting then) and Dialogue – which all presented varying perspectives that focused on lingering conflicts between and among peoples, classes and states including post-Cold War issues.

SOLIDARITY! will now be a quarterly online publication that will promote IID’s discourse on human security, democratization and people to people solidarity. IID currently conducts policy advocacy and campaigns on issues on Burma/ Myanmar, Mindanao/Philippines, Southern Thailand, West Papua, Timor Leste and the Southeast Asia region at large focusing on processes related to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Guided by IID’S discourse on people-to-people dialogue and south-south internationalism, we are committed to publish relevant and timely articles that revolve not only around our thematic concerns but also of our immediate partners and networks in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

SOLIDARITY! aims to publish articles about pressing issues that have relevant impact on the lives of peoples in the region including analyses and opinion coming directly from civil society actors, peoples movements and grassroots formations engaged in various and akin advocacy initiatives.

This first issue will feature among others articles and analyses on the recent elections in Burma/Myanmar particularly on women peace-builder partners who won, and an update and analysis of the Mindanao peace process in relation to the stalled process to legislate a Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). A personal essay by our French intern on her reflections on the recent Paris carnage and its broader implication and relation to the peace processes in the Philippines and the region will also be highlighted.

SOLIDARITY! will be circulated to various social media platforms such as Facebook, blogs, Facebook pages and groups and the official website of IID (www.iidnet.org).

May we invite you to read and enjoy this issue as we look forward to your feedback, contributions and yes, solidarity!

Philippines launches *Chega!*

- a report on Timor Leste ■ Ruby Rose Lora

In observance of its 10th anniversary, *Chega!* (a Portuguese term which means Stop! or Enough!), a report by the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor Leste was launched in the Philippines at the Malcolm Theatre, University of the Philippines College of Law on December 14, 2015.

The report, which captures the narratives of the victims of violence in the country from 1974-1999 under Indonesian occupation, contains more than 200 recommendations addressed to the international community, the UN, the Indonesian and East Timor governments and other policy actors.

Asked on the significance of the report, Pat Walsh, a consultant of the Commission, said, “It is our hope that *Chega!* will serve as helpful reference for educational institutions and to groups and organizations who are engaged in peace building work.”

“The Philippines was chosen for the launch as it shares common colonization history with East Timor. It is also East Timor’s way of recognizing the valuable contribution of Filipino solidarity groups in the country in their struggle for self-determination,” he added.

According to Gus Miclat, Executive Director of the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID), a co-organizer of the event, “the launch comes at an opportune time when the Transitional Justice and



Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) has just submitted its report to the Philippine Government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Peace Panels. The Bangsamoro process can hopefully learn some pointers from East Timor’s process.”

Among the recommendations is the establishment of an international tribunal under UN auspices ‘should other measures be deemed to have failed to deliver as sufficient measure of justice and Indonesia persists in the obstruction of justice.’

IID also shared the

recognition it has received from the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste - the “Ordem de Timor Leste Medalha”, having served as the Secretariat of the Asia Pacific Solidarity Coalition for East Timor (APCET), which was coincidentally organized at the UP Malcolm Hall in 1994. It was via APCET that the struggle of the East Timorese people for their right to self-determination gained support from various solidarity groups in the region.

An APCET veteran present in the occasion was emotional while holding the East Timorese flag saying “who would ever think that we will, one day, have the chance hold in our hands the East Timorese flag, a symbol that they indeed have gained their independence as a nation.” Solidarity groups present renewed their commitment to continue its accompaniment of Timor Leste, which continues to face challenges in its nation building since gaining its independence in 1999.

The event was attended by representatives from human rights, community-based, peace organizations, government, the diplomatic corps, and academic community.

Talking about Solidarity

■ Juliette Loesch



I HAD JUST landed in Davao when Paris was attacked. I remember how I anxiously monitored the police raid over the Bataclan, while keeping on questioning myself: how could this even happen? It sounded so impossible that I remained numb for a few hours, wishing that this were not for real. Yet, it was, and after the denial came the anger, the sadness and, worst, the fear.

The object of my visit to Mindanao this day was to accompany a delegation of humanitarian workers from Northern Myanmar. They were here in order to exchange knowledge and stories on armed conflict resolution with stakeholders of the Bangsamoro peace process. These people deal with war, death, internally displaced persons and so much more on a daily basis. While our confidence was only just struck down, they have known terror for years, if not for decades.

This notwithstanding, nobody in the group even thought of minimizing my suffering. On the contrary, they all stood with me, and showed concern and support, while condemning the absurd loss of so many lives. At the same time, the entire world sent its thoughts and prayers to the victims and the people of France, illuminating streets, national monuments and even social networks with the beautiful blue, white and red colors of our flag.

But discordant voices soon entered the picture... and brought back on the table this seemingly insurmountable fracture between two worlds that are allegedly not meant to be reconciled.

The very day of the attacks, a fellow peace advocate from the Philippines made fun of how the world immediately went crazy for the death of "only" 150 people when it gave almost no attention to a conflict which has made more than hundreds of thousands of victims during the past four decades. She then compared the post-Paris emotion to the hysteria which shook social networks after the death of Cecil the Lion, thus placing what happened in Paris to the category of "futile" issues of first world inhabitants.

It is evidently true that France, along with other countries, bears an important share of responsibility in the making of terrorists and the prosperity of ISIS. We indeed have a colonialist past (Africa, South-East Asia) and promoted military interventionism (Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo), two policies which contributed to the advanced dismantlement of formal and informal institutions and the disruption of indigenous

structures and social fabric. We also have severe immigration issues that tend to deepen the cracks in our already weakened social contract. A traditional political Jacobinism which supposes the rejection of all kind of communitarianism but paradoxically led to the social and economic marginalization of a part of the population, especially stemming from immigration, banalization of racism, Islamophobia and the rise of right extremism... So are the modern plagues of our society.

Explaining terrorism by the sole lens of colonialism firstly tends to minimize the responsibility of Daesh, which, we should not forget, is the actual thinking head of the attacks, and should be the one to be held accountable for waging war in Syria and threatening the lives of thousands of civilians. As correctly underlined by Pierre Rousset and François Sabado, two French left activists and proponents of international solidarity, Daesh cannot be considered as a simple reaction to Western imperialism any more, but should be addressed and combated for what it is: an extremely violent and highly organized group that pursues its own agenda of death and destruction and is now able to mobilize and arm tens of thousands of people¹.

Exclusively blaming French policies for the rise of violent extremism furthermore conveniently justifies other countries' inaction regarding this threat. What are the contribution of the ASEAN and its member states to the containment of ISIS and the stabilization of Middle East? Nothing much. Yet, it is not sufficient anymore to say that Asian countries are not responsible for fixing something that they have not started in the first place. The atrocities committed by ISIS are an insult to humanity in its entirety and doing nothing against this should from now on be considered as a form of passive collaboration. And this is not to mention the fact that ISIS directly threatens the ASEAN as hundreds of youth from Indonesia and the Philippines have already traveled to Syria.

In the end, a "third world" explanation of the rise of violent extremism certainly entails a part of truth but fails to give a complete picture. How could

we explain then that this perspective was so widely approved and shared? My humble idea is that this was made possible because lots of people, groups, nations, etc. could see in this trend the reflection of their own prejudices – prejudices of peoples against others, prejudices of a rightfully exasperated South against an aggressive North. Blaming France for the attacks ("they earned what happened to them") was certainly a way to express feelings of mistrust, frustration and resentment... Those exact same feelings that I observed in this fellow peace advocate's remark and which contribute to the persistence of a counter-productive competition between two "parts" of the world.

But this separation does not have to be a fatality: policies are a matter of governments while solidarity is a matter of people.

I would like to conclude this essay with some reflections on the media coverage of the Paris attacks and their aftermath. It must be said that it was certainly disproportionate with regard to other conflicts that do not receive that much attention. Yet, I do not think that it should exclusively be analyzed as a disinterest of the international community regarding third world issues – an impression that I felt was bitterly shared by a number of my friends and colleagues here in South-East Asia (the comment on Paris and Cecil the Lion, again, among others.)

Some analysts advanced, and I share their opinion, that one of the reasons why the Paris attacks were extensively covered was in fact more due to the shock deriving from the unexpectedness of that kind of attacks in a supposedly stable and safe country. This is not to say that a lost life in a conflict has less value than a lost life in a peaceful place, but it rather emphasizes the fact that ISIS has reached a turning point regarding its outreach capacity. It must also be reminded that peace in France is the product of

a radical rejection of war after two of the deadliest conflicts in human history, and that violence had almost been banned from our streets for the past 70 years.

Instead of immediately denouncing a Northern coalition of international press groups with multinational companies and neocolonialist governments (although I am not saying that it is not a possibility), I would advise, in this particular case, to take a little bit of time to reflect on the context of the attacks and understand why Paris did get that much of attention... and why it was in fact so crucial in order to remind everybody of the fragility of peace and of the real danger represented by ISIS.

I also regret that all the media bashing only happened because it provided an opportunity to voice a frustration against France... and, especially, that it was not followed by any kind of action. Why not keep this energy to actually build a media union which would be truly international, civilian-led and people-oriented? I nonetheless would like to acknowledge those who dug and reposted information about the attacks that struck the world during the past year. No matter whether they knew already about them or not or whether this was only made in order to counterbalance the attention that was given to Paris. What is important here is that this kind of mass civilian monitoring really has to be sustained.

So, to all those persons and the others, if you care that much about giving a voice to everybody, please become the actors of the rise of a worldwide consciousness of all peoples' suffering... and this regardless of whether they are from the East, the West, the North or the South.

Juliette Loesch is an intern of the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID). This is an abridged version of the original with the same title. The full version can be read at www.iidnet.org and at IID FB page - Editor



AP Photo



On January 12, 2016, Myanmar begins with the much-anticipated political dialogue on Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) between the government forces and the eight (8) of the seventeen (17) ethnic armed groups. This, however, coincides with the landslide victory by the National League of Democracy (NLD) in the November 8 General Elections, garnering more than 80% of seats in the national and local parliaments. Nevertheless, Myanmar still has a long and difficult road ahead of it before achieving democratization in its truest sense, with challenges including constitutional reform, issues concerning ethnic minorities, women, and religious conflict. While support from the international solidarity groups continues to be important in this conjuncture, the efforts and tremendous sacrifices, with which Myanmar citizens and the civil society have sought brighter future and peaceful society, will hopefully play an increasingly significant role in this nation-building process.

Persisting Inclusive Peace Process: A Fresh Thinking

■ Daw Seng Raw Lahpai, 2013 Ramon Magsaysay Awardee

Daw Seng Raw Lahpai is a Kachin woman leader who has made long-term interventions in regenerating and empowering conflict-affected and disaster-stricken areas, using her unique ability to work with both the military regime and the ethnic armed groups. As one of the only two Patrons of the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) along with Nobel Laureate Jose Ramos Horta, we take pride in sharing her valuable insights and many of the challenges she foresees in Myanmar's changing political and social landscape. She is also the founder and former director of Metta Development Foundation. The following are excerpts from Daw Seng Raw Lahpai's lecture in 2014, which remains to be very relevant today.

Hope for change?

Since President Thein Sein assumed office in March 2011 we have seen a truce between the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), as well as an amendment to the Election Law to allow the NLD to participate in future elections. The government has also abolished pre-publication censorship, relaxed Internet and press controls, and expanded the right of assembly. These reforms were followed up by 15 amnesties, and the Thein Sein government has since released a total of 1,071 political prisoners.

The President also sought to solve the armed ethnic conflicts, successfully reaching bilateral ceasefire agreements with 14 groups. This has fostered dialogue in different parts of the country between the ethnic opposition and government representatives regarding the necessary guarantees for political reform for reaching a nationwide ceasefire agreement. As things stand, many observers believe the potential for reconciliation between the central government and the country's disillusioned and defiant ethnic minority groups is higher than ever.

Obstacles Remain

Nevertheless there have also been major setbacks and contradictory developments during the past three years, with violence and conflicts erupting every now and then. Among the challenges are the limited progress made toward amending a flawed constitution, continued armed conflicts, and a lack of any serious attempt to

resolve sectarian strife in Rakhine State.

In particular, the latest conflicts have created over 500,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) nationwide. 100,000 Kachin IDPs remain on the border with China, while up to 140,000 Muslims have been displaced and often confined in Rakhine State. In fact, during the past three years half of Metta's project communities in the Kachin State have had their homes razed to the ground and they have been forced to seek refuge in IDP camps. The fact is that no matter what material help we provide the IDPs, and no matter what efforts we make to empower them, as long as the root causes of armed conflict remain unresolved, the cycle of displacement, poverty, violence, human rights violation and resettlement will continue.

Additionally, one large barrier to peace in our country is the resource trade. Many of these natural resources are located in the ethnic states which have experienced prolonged armed conflict, while in places where armed conflict has decreased, abuses such as land-grabbing, rights violations, and environmental destruction have increased. This has led many to wonder if there really is any difference between war and peace. On the other hand, what is encouraging is that we now have a greater presence of civil society. In my view, the transformation process will be faster in regions where community mobilisers are strong and where civil society works well with all stakeholders, including state and non-state actors, as well as political parties.

Inclusive peace and empowerment for all

At this point in time, it is not realistic to expect civil society's work for peace to be on the same level throughout the country nor will the competence to act be equally spread. The harsh reality is that the socio-economic gap between ethnic minorities and the majority ruling ethnic group is so wide that a more level playing field needs to be created first. We



need to narrow the space between the educational opportunities available to the Burman urbanites and to the ethnic minorities in the rural areas. This inequality alone prevents the establishment of true democracy.

Nevertheless I want to emphasize that successful social transformation requires the empowerment and involvement of all communities, as well as support for local organizations. To create peace we must include everyone. The country's pivotal moment for change is here and now, and the role of NGOs and CBOs is more crucial than ever. We cannot allow the peace process to be a solely government-driven, top-down process.

Instead what we need is a comprehensive peace process involving grassroots people and civil societies, not just military and political leaders. We have to include a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the process; otherwise we could end up with a number of disgruntled groups who might be unwilling or unable to contribute to the transformation because their needs were never properly considered. The more stakeholders we have, the more people are going to identify with the process, defend it and work to make it a success.

This includes expatriate Myanmar. Those of you who have been champions of the democracy

movement must recharge yourselves, and work harder than before. I urge you to participate actively and ensure the policy-makers of the country you live in understand the reality on the ground in Myanmar so that they are able to provide us with effective support. Peace is a social state and building robust civil societies is the most effective response to the challenges that the transition period brings. Investing in healthy, engaged and democratic civil societies is critical to any reform because it looks beyond the immediate needs.

The continued need for political reform

Although Myanmar has had three constitutions since independence the government remains a centralized unitary system. Since 1962, there has been only one party in power, and the military's presence throughout the government is seemingly indomitable. As such, if amendments to the current 2008 constitution are not made, and issues of political power and resource sharing are not addressed, there is a real danger of a new generation of ethnic grievances developing in the country at the very time when peace and reconciliation



should be its greatest priority. This is exactly what occurred in 1948, 1962 and 1988, when ethnic grievances were left unaddressed and the result was continuing state failure.

This tragic history of state failure should not repeat itself during the present political. We need a parliament that represents the whole of the electorate and all peoples. It is therefore clear that the work of rebuilding and reconstructing of conflict-affected communities will continue for some years to come, until our country is able to find ways to resolve political differences.

From Page 1, People's Congress...

He added, "What is there to legislate if the lawmakers don't attend the plenary hearings and cannot even muster a quorum? For months now, empty blue chairs dominate the plenary hall—a sign that lawmakers do not see the urgency of this bill."

Since Malacanang had transmitted to the Senate and House of Representatives the original BBL draft in 2014, both chambers have already conducted separate public hearings with a substitute bill known as the Basic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Regions (BLBAR) currently pending in Congress.

The AOP however paid tribute to the painstaking efforts of some Congresspersons and Senators including some

of their leaders in trying to shepherd the BBL into fruition. Their attempts however have been thwarted by either the lack of quorum or the filibustering of some oppositors in Congress. 'CAB-COMPLIANT' BBL

Participating organizations in the People's Congress vowed to continuously lobby both Houses to enact what they call a 'CAB-compliant BBL' and asserted that any version of the BBL should be consistent with the spirit of existing peace agreements between the Philippine government (GPH) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) such as the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) and the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB). The AOP reiterated that while they call for a CAB-compliant BBL, they also seek the adherence of all other prior agreements

enacted for the Bangsamoro.

"We hope to see a passage of a CAB-compliant BBL and one that adheres to the principles of the existing agreements between the GPH-MILF. The BBLAR that is currently being offered and deliberated by Congress will not address the root-causes of conflict in Mindanao and will never resolve the decades-old historical injustices committed against the Bangsamoro," Miclat added.

After signing a document called 'People's Declaration on the BBL', participants composed mostly of Bangsamoro, Lumads and Christians enumerated challenges for civil society that include addressing the lingering prejudice against Muslims and the Bangsamoro, and the mobilization of international actors to continuously support the Bangsamoro peace process.

Winners of Burma polls urged to review Constitution, peace process

■ Gani Abunda II

WHILE congratulating the National League for Democracy (NLD), Burma's biggest opposition party led by Nobel Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for its landslide victory in the last November 8 elections, democracy supporters in the Philippines under the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict - SEA (GPPAC-SEA) and the Asia-Pacific Solidarity Coalition (APSOC) urged all election winners to make the review of the 2008 constitution and the ongoing peace process their top priorities when they assume the reins of government next year.



IMAGE COURTESY OF DEMOCRACYFORBURMA.WORDPRESS.COM

"We are fully aware that the peoples of Burma perceive Burma's constitution needs immediate amendments especially on provisions that consistently entrench the military's hold to state power. Five decades of military dictatorship must come to an end and the new government should know by now that it cannot rule Burma with a flawed constitution," he added.

GPPAC-SEA and APSOC, which formed an election monitoring team during the elections also called for a more inclusive peace process in Burma, given more than half of the armed ethnic groups were reportedly excluded in the October 15 signing of

The NLD won nearly 80 percent of the seats in the Assembly of the Union (235 in the House of Representatives and 135 in the House of Nationalities) according to Myanmar's Union Election Commission (UEC). It can be recalled the NLD also won 82% of the parliament seats in 1990 but never assumed power following a military crackdown.

The current military-drafted constitution, which was approved in 2008 amidst a boycott of NLD in the aftermath of cyclone Nargis, however guarantees that Burma's military will automatically take up 25% of the seats in the parliament and have a veto power over constitutional amendments. They also automatically control key ministries such as defense, interior and border and police ministries. Also, the 2008 constitution states that the military can take direct control of the government, including management of the economy, 'if it deems it necessary'.

"Democracy is still a work in progress in Burma and we, solidarity activists in the region view the election results a positive development. Now, we urge the election winners to review the 2008 constitution and the peace process as these are crucial indicators of further broadening democratic spaces inside Burma," said Gus Miclat, GPPAC-SEA regional initiator and head of IID.

the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). The groups reiterated that Burma needs an inclusive peace founded on the fundamental recognition of democratic rights and the just and peaceful aspirations of all the peoples of Burma.

Among those who have not signed the ceasefire agreement on October 15 were the Kachin Independence Organisation, along with the Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP), commonly known as the Shan State Army, the New Mon State Party, the Karenni National Progressive Party and the National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State.

"The peace process is integral to Burma's growth as a nation and these recent reports on continuous military attacks against ethnic nationalities and other non-signatories to the ceasefire agreement may stunt that growth. The government must resolve the conflict within the framework of a sincere and genuine political dialogue," Miclat concluded.

/with reports from Malou Tabios-Nuera



PEOPLE'S CONGRESS ON THE BANGSAMORO BASIC LAW

PEOPLE'S CONGRESS ON THE BANGSAMORO BASIC LAW

The People's Congress vowed to continuously lobby both Houses to enact what they call a 'CAB-compliant BBL' and asserted that any version of the BBL should be consistent with the spirit of existing peace agreements between the Philippine government (GPH) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).



MYANMAR POLLS 2015:

Women activists push 5-point agenda

“IT’S HIGH TIME that women assume crucial political roles in shaping Burma’s future and have an upper hand in advancing pro-women laws that could institutionalize justice and peace for the whole country.”

This was how the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict – SEA (GPPAC-SEA), the Asia - Pacific Solidarity Coalition (APSOC) and the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) concluded their report on their ‘electoral monitoring mission’ conducted during the recent November 8 elections in Burma.

According to the mission, women candidates in major territories have won with a wide margin over their political rivals mostly belonging to the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) party.

Women candidates in this year’s election campaigned for a 5-point agenda that includes: advancing women’s human rights, push for women’s meaningful political participation, campaign for the 30% women participation in all decision-making levels and processes, implementation of the National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, promotion of gender budgeting in every sector and safeguarding women’s participation prior to and during the conduct of the November 8 elections.

Election monitors of IID, GPPAC-SEA and APSOC were accompanied by other election monitors of the Women’s Initiative’s Network for Peace (WINPEACE), Women Can Do It - Myanmar, Karen Women’s Empowerment Group (KWEG), Phann Tee Eain (PTE), Women’s Federation for Peace (WFP), Women’s Organizations Network of Myanmar (WON), and Htoi Gender and Development / Civil Society Network for Peace-Kachin including individuals from various ethnic states and regional divisions in Burma.

The election monitors said

that eight hundred (800) women in Burma ran for state and national parliament positions with a goal to enact laws against gender-based violence and bias, and empower women to achieve political, economic, and equal representation in the decision-making body.

Women garnered 13 percent of the parliamentary seats. This accounts to almost tripling the representation of women in the existing decision making body.

“The women’s role in Burma politics is important not only to address the various issues that directly affect them but also on matters of inclusive governance, peace and democratization. Their voices must be heard within the halls of the parliament in Naypyidaw when they assume power next year. Women should also be active players in the ongoing political dialogue following the recent signing of a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA),” Malou Tabios-Nuera, member of the APSOC women and coordinator of IID’s Burma program asserted.

Despite being a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), women in Burma have been vulnerable targets of discrimination and various forms of violence such as rape mostly in the ethnic areas.

“We must put an end to this cycle of discrimination and all forms of abuses against the women of Burma. Enacting laws that are pro-women, pro-democracy and laws that promote and protect the human rights of the peoples of Burma are therefore necessary. Women candidates who won the elections vowed to prioritize these issues inside the parliament,” Tabios-Nuera explained.

SOLIDARITY!

is a quarterly online publication of the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID). IID is a Philippine-based advocacy institution promoting human security, democratization and people to people solidarity. IID conducts policy advocacy and campaigns on issues on Burma, Mindanao, Southern Thailand, West Papua, and Timor Leste.



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