



Young People and their Role in the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Peace Negotiations

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Summary

Young people (ranging from ages 21 to 32 when they entered the process) have been playing various roles in the peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) since the process formally started in 1997. They have not only made up the bulk of the secretariat of both Peace Panels providing administrative and technical support, they have also been involved in shaping the content and language of agreements and in providing the necessary informal back channels that reshaped the dynamics and relationships across the negotiating table. Young people's motivations for joining the process ranged from a sense of duty (religious, familiar, and tribal) owing to their being born into the armed struggle, a desire to contribute and become part of the solution, and to the practical need to engage in gainful employment that would later find deeper meaning. Among the factors that facilitated their participation in the peace process are: inspiration born out of awareness and understanding of the conflict; the institutionalization of the peace process within the government bureaucracy thus providing a natural entry point for young professionals; trust born out of confidence in young people's abilities, as a function of security especially among the rebels, and in the ability of their peers as young people themselves opened up spaces for other young people to participate; young people's education, skills and experience; and the energy, dynamism and passion that comes with being young. Being young, however, was also a challenge as some senior officials are unable to take young people seriously, especially young women. On the MILF side, space for participation has also been limited to their inner circle. In order to harness the potential of young people in political dialogue processes, there is a need to equip young people with the necessary skills and expertise, inspire them to become part of the solution, channel their inspiration towards organizing and engaging dialogues among their peers, and create the space where they can professionally apply their skills or meaningfully participate and turn their inspiration into passion.

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ACRONYMS

AHJAG	Ad Hoc Joint Action Group
AMAL	Alliance of Muslim Advocates of Law
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BBL	Bangsamoro Basic Law
BDA	Bangsamoro Development Agency
BTC	Bangsamoro Transition Commission
CAAM	Conflict Affected Areas in Mindanao
CAB	Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro
CCCH	Coordinating Committee on Cessation of Hostilities
CIAC	Children Involved in Armed Conflict
COP	Culture of Peace
CPC	Civilian Protection Component
DOJ	Department of Justice
EA	Executive Assistant
FAB	Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro
FFI	Fact Finding Inquiry
FPA	Final Peace Agreement (with the MNLF)
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPH	Government of the Philippines
GNP	Government Peace Negotiating Panel
ICG	International Contact Group
IMT	International Monitoring Team
IP	Indigenous People
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LGU	Local Government Unit
LMT	Local Monitoring Team
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MinHRAC	Mindanao Human Rights Action Center
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MOA-AD	Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain
MSA	Muslim Students Association
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NPF	National Peace Forum
NYC	National Youth Commission
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation (formerly Conference)
OPAPP	Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process
PAPP	Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process
RPA	Revolutionary Proletariat Army
SAF	Special Action Force (Police)
SOMO	Suspension of Military Operations
SPED	Solidarity for Peace, Empowerment and Development
TAM	Transitional Arrangements and Modalities
TPMT	Third Party Monitoring Team
TWG	Technical Working Group
UBJP	United Bangsamoro Justice Party
UP	University of the Philippines

Introduction

On 27 March 2014, the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) ended their formal peace negotiations when they signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). The image (see Figure 1) that captured that moment shows the MILF chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal exchanging original copies of the signed agreement with his government counterpart

Figure 1: Signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (27 Mar 2014)



Source: Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (www.opapp.gov.ph)

various stages of the GPH-MILF peace talks.

Professor Miriam Coronel-Ferrer while the Malaysian Facilitator and Prime Minister, the Philippine President and his Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, and the Chairman of the MILF look on. This image, though historic, does not quite capture the many faces of those who have literally shed sweat and tears for the almost 17 years of formal talks, much less of those who have for decades fought in Mindanao. Among them are young people who played critical roles and made substantive contributions at

What follows, therefore, is the story of the GPH-MILF peace process as experienced by six (6) people between the ages of 24 to 32¹ (average age 26) when they first got involved in the formal talks. Their stories, culled out from interviews conducted between 06 June and 18 July 2017, are woven into the general flow of significant highs and lows in the talks commencing from 1997 until the present. The idea is to present a more personal and intimate narrative, particularly of the roles played by young people seated at opposite sides of the negotiating table, in the hope of painting a more human picture of peace processes that are often only appreciated after the ink has dried on the parchment. In analyzing young people's motivations for joining and roles in peace processes, the experience of 11 more young people (ages ranging between 21 and 32, with 27 as average age) directly involved in the talks as part of the Peace Panel Secretariats and indirectly involved through the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) are also presented. This case study, therefore, mainly utilized qualitative data gathered from the 17 young key informants, six (6) of which are women, and supplemented by interviews and correspondence with eight (8) senior peace process officials. The larger number of young people currently involved is in the peace process mechanisms that were created as part of the CAB's initial implementation (see current Peace Process architecture in Annex 1). They could be the subject of a separate and more extensive study of the roles young people play in the broader peace process.

¹ Although UNSCR 2250 (<https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>) and Philippine Republic Act 8044 (<http://nyc.gov.ph/republic-act-8044/>), which created the National Youth Commission, limits the definition of young people to 18-29 and 15-30 years old, respectively, the overall age range for young people in ASEAN Member States, which was used in the *First ASEAN Youth Development Index* report (ASEAN, 2017), is between 15-35 years. However, there is no official ASEAN definition. Moreover, UNSCR 2250 does note that "variations of definition of the term [youth] that may exist on the national and international levels." In the GPH-MILF peace process, young people are seen as those who are significantly younger than the more senior officials, regardless of age.

The Mindanao Conflict and Initial Attempts at Forging Peace

The problem in the southern Philippine region of Mindanao is partly a legacy of the almost four centuries of mainly Spanish and American colonization of the Philippine archipelago from the middle of the 16th century until independence was granted in 1946 as well as due to the land distribution and massive resettlement policies of the American, Commonwealth and post-independence Philippine governments. While colonization made Christians out of most Filipinos in the northern and central Philippine regions of Luzon and Visayas, it was the state-sponsored resettlement of Christian Filipinos to Mindanao since 1912 that effectively made minorities out of the regions' indigenous inhabitants, of which 13 ethnolinguistic groups embraced Islam since the 13th century (Majul, 1999; Gomez, 2000; Cagoco-Guiam, 2000; Kamlian, 1999; Rodil, 2003).

In March 1968 during the Presidency of Ferdinand Marcos, reports of the alleged massacre by the army of young mostly Muslim men undergoing clandestine training in an island in the bay of Manila, ignited the fire that brought the mounting Muslim discontent to a boil (Vitug and Gloria, 2000). Ideas of secession and independence, thus, emerged and attracted many young Muslim activists in Manila, in Mindanao and among those who were educated in the Middle East. The conflict would take a violent turn when deadly fighting between Christian and Muslim vigilante groups in Mindanao would erupt in 1970 due to social friction brought about by resettlement and the resulting conflict over land as well as political contestation along sectarian lines. State security forces sided with the Christian militias as the sectarian violence became more intense, which eventually led President Marcos to declare Martial Law in September 1972. Young Muslims, even those who had just graduated from schools in Manila, thus mobilized under the banner of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) under its founder Nur Misuari, who declared as its aim the liberation of their Bangsamoro² homeland. Fighting between the MNLF and the Philippine government forces would continue until a stalemate is reached and the government was forced to negotiate under pressure from what was then the Organization of Islamic Conference (McKenna, 1998; Kamlian, 1999).

The first attempt at negotiating a political solution to the Mindanao conflict happened in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on 18-19 January 1975 under the auspices of the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference then, now Cooperation) as mediator. This first meeting between the Philippine government and the MNLF was followed by another almost two years later on 15-23 December 1976 in Tripoli, Libya where they agreed to pursue autonomy for Muslim Mindanao. These negotiations would go on and off within three Philippine governments in the span of more than 21 years until a Final Peace Agreement (FPA) was reached on 02 September 1996 (Lingga, 2005).

Disagreement over the management of finances and the un-Islamic ways of many MNLF cadres would cause a split between the group of founding Chairman Nur Misuari and his Vice Chairman Salamat Hashim (Jaafar interview on 18 July 2017). Hashim's faction based mostly in mainland Mindanao branded themselves as the "New MNLF" and would later distinguish their group as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 1984 (Santos, 2005). The MILF at first maintained a stance that was supportive to the talks

² Bangsamoro is a combination of the Malay term for "Bangsa" meaning "nation" and "moro", the term the Spanish colonizers used to refer to Muslims, which gained a pejorative connotation among Christians. The MNLF re-appropriated the term and used it as a national identification around which the 13 ethno-linguistic and even non-Muslim Mindanaoans sympathetic to the MNLF's cause could unite.

between the government and the MNLF. However, it later concluded that the 1996 FPA did not suffice in addressing the problem. Thus, when the MILF first sat down to formally talk with the Philippine government on 07 January 1997, their proposed agenda was framed by just one question: “How to solve the Bangsamoro Problem?” (Jubair, 2007).

The GPH-MILF Negotiations as Experienced by Young People

Youth participation in the formal peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF was not seen as an issue in the same manner as women’s meaningful participation. The latter was given more focus due to the fact that staunch women’s rights advocates were at the helm of both the government’s peace process office (Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process or OPAPP) and peace panel. This is not to say, however, that youth participation was not given any attention. In general, those who worked for the peace process saw young people more as peace constituents – those who could support the talks through popular advocacies outside the very exclusive realm of the formal talks. Young people’s roles as part of the government’s Secretariat and later its Legal Team, as presented in this section, was incidental and part of their work as government (OPAPP) employees or as legal experts tapped to work for the process. On the MILF side, it was incidental to their being born to parents who were members of the Central Committee and were tapped to provide assistance to their peace panel. (For reference on “The Evolution of the GPH-MILF Peace Process Architecture”, see Annex 1.)

Esmael “Mike” Pasigan (1997-present)

Esmael O. Pasigan (Interview on 09 July 2017), or more commonly known as Mike Pasigan, was born into the revolutionary movement. A scion of Grand Mufti Sheikh Omar Pasigan, one of the ideological founders of the MNLF as well as the MILF, he grew up in a household that hosted meetings among the so-called “Egypt Boys”, young Muslim Filipinos (ranging from 25 to 38 years old) who studied in Egypt and became part of the Muslim revolutionary armed movement against the Marcos dictatorship in the in the early seventies. As a child, he remembers playing billiards with his brother at the ceasefire office of the MNLF in Cotabato City, in which his father was involved in the mid 1970s. He also remembers the meeting among “New MNLF” leaders when they decided to distinguish themselves from that of Nur Misuari’s MNLF in 1984 and officially declare the formation of the MILF.

Born in 1970, his role in the revolution started as early as when he was around 11 years old when he had to accompany his father in most of his engagements and translate for him in English. Later when he was in High School he would carry letters among MILF leaders in Cotabato and operate the phone when they called to Pakistan, where some of the MILF leaders were based. Because of his increasing role in assisting his father and other leaders of the revolution, he opted to stay in Cotabato to pursue a college degree even if he had opportunities to study in the capital Manila. He became particularly involved in the management of a Madrasah called Ma’ahad Kutawato Al-Islamie, which his father set up for the formation of the next line of Islamic revolutionary leaders. The school also hosted important meetings of the MILF including those in 1996 when they started considering the government’s offer of pursuing their own political negotiations.

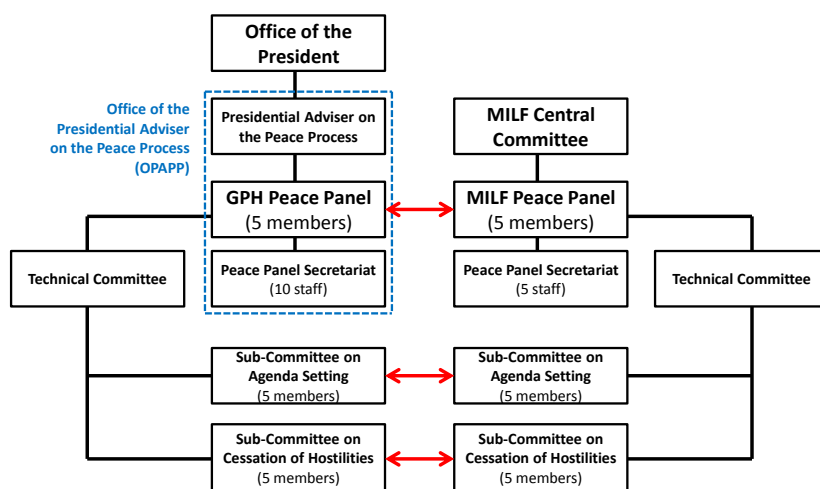
Mike was 26 years old when the Philippine government started informally reaching out to the MILF even before it signed a Final Peace Agreement with the MNLF in September 1996. Ghadzali Jaafar, who was then the MILF’s Vice Chairman for Political Affairs, was tasked by the MILF Central Committee to meet with

President Fidel Ramos' emissary, Executive Secretary Ruben Torres, in Davao City. Mike, whose father is Jaafar's uncle, became part of Jaafar's delegation providing familiar security (Jaafar interview on 18 July 2017). When the talks formally began in 1997, Mike provided technical and secretariat support (e.g. drafting correspondences for their government interlocutors) being the only person in the MILF's negotiating team with a computer and who had the ability to operate it and other gadgets. His formal entry into the talks as part of the MILF Peace Panel's Secretariat was, thus, unanimously endorsed by members of the MILF Central Committee due to his experience as his father's constant companion, messenger, driver and even host in the numerous meetings held in their house and in Ma'ahad.

Mike recalls that during the domestic phase of the talks, or when the talks were held in Mindanao from 1997 until the first half of 2000, Panel-level or high-level meetings between representatives of Government and the Central Committee were very rare as the negotiations happened mainly between their Technical Committees, for which he provided Secretariat support in the discussions concerning both cessation of hostilities and agenda setting. The negotiations were organized within two levels – the Peace Panels and their Technical Committees which were composed of subject matter experts who provided substantive

support to their respective peace panels. The Technical Committees divided into two Sub-Committees with one working on the agenda for the panels' discussions while the other worked on cessation of hostilities aimed at providing a more conducive atmosphere for the talks (MILF Peace Panel, 2015). Mike was the only young person providing technical support for the MILF then as the MILF Peace Panel was composed mainly of senior members who had played various roles in the armed revolution since the early seventies.

Figure 2: GPH-MILF Peace Talks Set-Up (1997-2000)



Ceasefire or putting a stop to the numerous skirmishes that plagued the initial phase of the GPH-MILF peace process became the pre-occupation of the numerous meetings between the GPH and MILF Technical Committees. The signing of the Agreement for General Cessation of Hostilities on 18 July 1997 and the subsequent creation of the Coordinating Committees on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) laid the foundation for the process' ceasefire mechanisms. Alma Evangelista (Interview on 15 July 2017), who was part of the Government's Sub-Committee on Agenda Setting since 1997 and later head the Government's Technical Committee, recalls that the CCCH were manned by young people on both sides. She also intimated how the talks then suffered from severe lack of trust across the negotiating table and how the military approach was dominant on the Government side. Thus, though the Technical Committees were eventually able to lay out the substantive agenda for the formal talks that began on 25 October 1999, the process could not be sustained as sporadic armed skirmishes in various areas in Mindanao escalated

into a declaration by Philippine President Joseph Estrada of an all-out military offensives against the MILF from March to July 2000. This led to the peace panels eventually abandoning the talks and the MILF's main camp Abubakar in Maguindanao province falling into the hands of the Philippine military (MILF Peace Panel, 2015).

National political developments eventually led to the ouster of President Estrada and the new government of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo wanted to breathe new life into the peace process. Malaysia's assistance was sought by the government to bring the MILF back into the negotiating table. This signalled the start of a new phase in the GPH-MILF peace process with Malaysia acting as the formal Third Party Facilitator and the talks at the Peace Panels level resuming in Kuala Lumpur in March 2001. After their initial meeting in Malaysia, the parties met again in Tripoli, Libya where they signed the Tripoli Agreement on Peace in June 2001. This agreement structured the substantive discussions between the two panels along three aspects – security, rehabilitation and development, and ancestral domain (MILF Peace Panel, 2015).

Mike's role expanded in this new stage of the talks, especially after the parties signed the Tripoli Agreement, as they could now move beyond ceasefire negotiations. On top of his role in the Secretariat, Mike became involved in informal back channels in his early 30s. Former Government Peace Panel Secretariat Head Diosita Andot recalls such back channels with Mike in the Philippines to get an initial sense and "test the waters" on the MILF's take on government's ideas before the start of the formal negotiations in Kuala Lumpur (Andot interview on 05 July 2017). Starting in 2001, communication of proposals between the parties had to be formally coursed through the Malaysian Facilitator and meetings between the Panels and their Technical Committees or Working Groups were all held in Malaysia. The informal communication established through Mike, thus, helped the parties prepare for the talks. The MILF Peace Panel's reliance on Mike reached a point that when the Malaysian Facilitator would call for an informal meeting between Peace Panel Chairs plus one more person from each side, the MILF Panel Chair would often take Mike. Mike would later also get directly involved in negotiating agreements in the Technical Committee and Technical Working Group levels.

Mohajirin Ali (2001-present)

Mohajirin Ali (Interview on 28 June 2017) was 24 years old when he officially joined the MILF's Peace Panel Secretariat in 2001. But before that, he was informally involved in the peace process as he accompanied his father, Atty. Lanang Ali, Sr., in his meetings in Cotabato City in the latter part of 1999. His father was the head of the MILF's Technical Sub-Committee on Cessation of Hostilities, negotiating with the government on ceasefire. Mohajirin had just earned his Mining Engineering degree in Manila and passed the licensure exam when he returned to Mindanao to assist his father. His tasks involved driving his father to his meetings and providing him physical security as his father preferred not to be accompanied by armed security. "My presence was security enough for him", Mohajirin explains.

When the talks resumed outside of the Philippines in 2001, his father, who was then a Senior Member of the MILF Peace Panel, requested the late MILF Chairman Salamat Hashim to include Mohajirin in the official delegation to provide assistance in matters concerning his health. Mohajirin, thus, considers his initial involvement as being merely incidental. However, then MILF Peace Panel Chairman Al-Haj Murad Ibrahim requested Mohajirin's father to make him part of the Panel Secretariat. The first official meeting he

attended was the resumption of the talks in 2001 in Kuala Lumpur and then in Tripoli, Libya where he witnessed the signing of the Tripoli Agreement on Peace.

“As part of the Secretariat, you take care of recording the minutes, of keeping the signed documents safe, and basically of anything the Panel required, both in terms of technical and logistical support. For instance, in Libya, we were directly engaged with our counterparts from the government side in securing documents.” Mohajirin highlighted the role he played along with Mike in making sure that the text in the document to be signed was according to what was agreed. “You act as the eyes of the Panel in finalizing the text. The moment they agree, you see to it that what was agreed should not be changed.” This cautious approach of double checking the text has been ingrained in their Secretariat and was born out of their learning from the MNLF peace process where, allegedly, additional text was inserted by the government side in both the 1976 and 1996 agreements the MNLF signed.

Mohajirin’s role would later expand along with the creation of additional mechanisms and bodies within the process. When the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) was created in May 2002 as part of the ceasefire mechanism, he and Mike Pasigan were assigned to provide Secretariat support. “Our tasks broadened from providing support at the level of the Peace Panels, we went down to the level of the ceasefire mechanism to help provide a conducive environment for the talks.” But despite this additional security mechanism, the process would suffer another violent blow in February 2003 with the government’s offensives against criminal elements that allegedly fled towards the Buliok complex in Maguindanao. Buliok at that time served as the MILF’s headquarters. The scale of the assault and the resulting spill over of the fighting in Central Mindanao eventually caused the parties to once again abandon the talks.

The Malaysian facilitator found a way to bring the parties back to the table where they worked to strengthen the ceasefire mechanism by reorganizing leadership of their CCCH and inviting members of the OIC to act as international ceasefire monitors and form the International Monitoring Team (IMT). They also continued discussions on Ancestral Domain and, after hurdling through several impasses, the parties announced in July 2008 that they had reached a breakthrough over the last interim agreement that would complete the Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001 – the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). However, on 4 August 2008, a day before its scheduled signing, the Philippine Supreme Court granted the petitions for injunction of local government leaders from Mindanao, which prevented the Government Peace Panel from signing the MOA-AD. The Philippine government would later abandon the agreement entirely and the Supreme Court would declare the MOA-AD unconstitutional. The peace process would, thus, suffer another collapse and violence once again erupted on the ground in Mindanao.

During the negotiations for the MOA-AD from 2004 to 2008 when Mohajirin was 27 to 31 years old, he often accompanied Mike Pasigan when he engaged the head of the Government’s Peace Panel’s Secretariat in backchannel informal discussions in preparation for the Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur. Mike also recalled how the informal contacts he established with the government side, particularly while the MOA-AD was being negotiated, was extremely useful.

Ryan Mark Sullivan (2004-2010)

Ryan Mark Sullivan (Interview 08 June 2017) was 31 years old when then Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Quintos Deles asked that he heads the Secretariat for the Government’s Peace

Negotiating Panel (GNPN) for talks with the MILF in February 2004. His initiation into peace work, however, happened in 1999 at 25 years old when he joined the National Peace Forum (NPF), an office that briefly spun off from the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) and was tasked to localize, or bring down to the level of communities, the peace negotiations with communist rebels. After the ouster of President Joseph Estrada in 2001, he joined OPAPP as a Technical Assistant to OPAPP's Executive Director.

He was OPAPP's focal person on matters concerning Children Involved in Armed Conflict (CIAC) and provided secretariat support (i.e. taking minutes of the meeting, arranging logistics, and conducting informal back channel discussions with the rebels) for the review process of the Government's agreement with the Revolutionary Proletariat Army (RPA), which was signed only weeks before President Estrada was ousted. It was there where he gained considerable experience and honed his leadership skills in providing support to peace negotiations, which included organizing meetings among relevant government agencies.

Ryan started his career as a Legislative Staff in the Philippine Congress and also worked in different government agencies, then dabbled briefly in a personal business venture before getting in to the peace process. According to him, joining the peace process was mostly coincidental, after his attempt at being a fish entrepreneur failed. "So I ended up moving from 'fish process' to the peace process", Ryan jokingly recalls. He was initially very reluctant to accept his new assignment as he was already very comfortable at the RPA process. Nevertheless, he credits Deles for providing him the opportunity to step up to the challenging role.

As someone coming from the central area of the country in the Western Visayas region, Ryan admits to entering the peace process knowing barely anything about it, and sharing the same biases most people have against Muslim Filipinos. He recounts that in his childhood, his elders would tell him that the Moros who would take him if he did not take that afternoon nap. Ryan admits that he struggled in the first few months when he became Head of the Secretariat of the Government Panel negotiating with Muslim rebels. He said he had to unlearn a lot of things and had to check if his reaction to the MILF's proposals was informed by his biases or a legitimate one coming from someone who was there to safeguard the interests of the state. The GPH-MILF peace process was his first genuine exposure to Muslims and their communities.

Although he was Head of Secretariat, Ryan recalls that the roles he played were not limited to the provision of administrative/operational and technical support but also had political and relational dimensions. The operational role involves managing logistics and ensuring accountability in terms of the finances required to facilitate movement of people within the process and its complicated structure, which includes the ceasefire mechanisms. "On the technical side, you will be expected to generate right away the minutes of the meetings and you are also expected to brief the various interagency committees. All of these would require a lot of writing. You prepare the briefing paper of the Peace Panel to the President and his cabinet on the positions that they intend to clear. You need to be intimately aware of the substantive issues and the positions not just of your side but also of the other side so that when you prepare something you can already do some initial staff-level calculation on where the middle ground could possibly lie."

"The political aspect has to do with the informal back channels with the other side. This is where the Secretariat is able to play an assistive role to the process. The peace talks have protocols and rules and

regulations especially that it is facilitated by a third party. So when the two Peace Panels sit down there, everything is already official. When the Panel Chair relates with his counterpart and the Malaysian facilitator, it is quite formal. Whatever comes out of his mouth will be taken as policy or as the formal position of government. In this rigid set -up, there is little room to discuss creative ideas. When you go there, you are already nailed to a certain position, which you have already cleared with the cabinet.”

Because of the trust reposed on him by the Peace Panel Chair, Ryan became an informal liaison to the MILF side and to the Malaysian Secretariat. In the process of liaising with his counterparts from the MILF, he would get their reaction informally, which provides the opportunity for them discuss how to bring their differing positions much closer. Ryan recalls working very well with Mike Pasigan of the MILF Secretariat in these back channels. When asked why Mike and not his direct counterpart or the MILF Peace Panel’s Secretariat Head Jun Mantawil, he pointed out to the fact that he and Mike were not far apart in terms of age. Ryan was 31 and Mike was 33 when they first met in Kuala Lumpur in 2004. “During breaks, it’s just but natural that people of the same age bracket would tend to come together and talk. Mike Pasigan, Mohajirin Ali and I started to converse and we three sort of formed a troika. I believe they saw my sincerity and that I was not just reaching out to fish for information. So we were able to relate with each other, all three of us, on a very human level.” Mike Pasigan confirmed this and emphasized that while he was already informally back channelling with Ryan’s predecessor Diosita Andot in the past, their relationship was more that of a mother and son while that with Ryan was more among peers (Pasigan interview on 09 July 2017). Thus, deeply embedded in the political aspect of his role in the Secretariat is the relational aspect as well.

Initially, their interaction happened only at the sidelines of the peace negotiations in Kuala Lumpur. However, as the negotiations became more complex when the issue of ancestral domain was being negotiated between late 2004 and mid-2008, Ryan felt it was necessary that prior to the formal negotiations, the Government’s TWGs could already benefit from advance information on the MILF’s thinking. This meant needing to reach out to Mike and Mohajirin while in the Philippines especially at very crucial moments that could no longer

wait for the next round of talks in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, Ryan also had to develop very good relations with the Malaysian Secretariat, whom he would inform regarding his informal meetings with the MILF Secretariat. Mohajirin affirms that their meetings with Ryan were crucial in allowing the two parties to reach agreement over the MOA-AD (Ali interview on 28 June 2017). Mike also confirmed that they exerted a lot

Figure 3: GPH-MILF Formal Talks in Kuala Lumpur (2006)



Ryan Mark Sullivan (1st on the left table), Mohajirin Ali (1st on the right table) and Esmael “Mike” Pasigan (2nd on the right table) with the full Philippine government (left table) and MILF (right table) peace panels with the Malaysian Facilitator (middle table) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. (Photo courtesy of Esmael Pasigan)

of effort in their informal back channels with Ryan especially at the tense and crucial moments in July 2008 before agreement over the MOA-AD was reached (Pasigan interview on 09 July 2017).

Ryan recalls the discussions regarding territory as being particularly problematic during the negotiations. In fact, the talks suffered a year-long impasse between October 2006 and November 2007 and once again from December 2007 until July 2008. He pointed out how his informal discussions with the MILF Secretariat helped the government understand the MILF's position on a particular aspect of territory. Ryan, thus, considers this informal channel as "a vital pipeline to keep things breathing when the process is already comatose." This became apparent when the process collapsed after the demise of the MOA-AD and violence erupted in certain areas in Mindanao. This informal channel contributed in facilitating the Suspension of Military Operations (SOMO) that stopped the fighting, as well as the vetting of the idea of the International Contact Group (ICG) with the MILF, which eventually led to the resumption of the talks. This proposal for an ICG satisfied the demand of the MILF for an additional layer of international observers to observe the talks.

According to Ryan, what helped educate him about the Bangsamoro struggle and overcome wrong notions about Muslims was "getting to know the people behind the label." This allowed him to see commonalities that humanized the so called "rebels." "You then sense that both of you feel the need for this process to succeed. You build on that mutuality and slowly you find a way to work together and at the same time try to tone down biases."

Unlike in the wars of 2000 and 2003, during the fighting in 2008 the ceasefire mechanism was not suspended and the parties eventually found their way back, albeit informally, into the negotiating table in Kuala Lumpur in July 2009. By September, they agreed to create an International Contact Group (ICG) of states and non-government organizations that would both observe the talks and provide advice when needed. A Civilian Protection Component (CPC) was also added to the IMT, thus ushering in the entry of local and international NGOs for the conduct of human rights monitoring at the level of communities. The formal talks restarted in December 2009 but no substantive agreement could be reached before a new government administration took over at the end of June 2010 (MILF Peace Panel, 2015; International Crisis Group, 22 Nov. 2011).

Johaira Wahab-Manantan (2010-2014)

Johaira Wahab-Manantan (Interview on 20 June 2017) was 25 years old and had just been admitted to the Philippine Bar when she joined the Government Peace Panel in July 2010 to head its Legal Team upon the invitation of the then newly appointed Peace Panel Chair Marvic Leonen, the Dean of the University of the Philippines College of Law, from where she graduated. The Legal Team was an additional feature of the fresh set of Peace Panel appointed by the new government of President Benigno Aquino, III. Coming in barely two years after the MOA-AD was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, the appointment of a lawyer as Panel Chair and the creation of the Legal Team signalled a focus on ensuring that the next set of agreements must pass legal or constitutional challenges.

Johaira comes from the same Muslim ethno-linguistic group, Maguindanaoan, as the Chair of the MILF Peace Panel Mohagher Iqbal. Her father was a Shariah judge and some of her relatives are affiliated with the MNLf, the MILF and even the Philippine Army. She recalls how, when she was still a child, their house

in Mindanao would have three separate receiving areas to cater to them separately. Despite this familiarity with the conflict actors, however, she admits to not knowing much about the peace process before the MOA-AD issue exploded in Manila in August 2008.

She was in her senior year in law school in Manila, at 23 years old, when the Supreme Court granted an injunction against the government's Peace Panel from signing the MOA-AD on 4 August 2008. She remembers how there was tremendous confusion in Manila and people were asking what the MOA-AD and the peace process was all about. The Alliance of Muslim Advocates of Law (AMAL), an organization of Muslim law students in Metro Manila which she co-founded in 2006, was concerned and wanted to do something as the confusion was apparent even among their membership. They, thus, hastily organized a forum for law students and invited speakers from Mindanao to talk about the MOA-AD, even without any funding support. Johaira admits that before their forum she knew very little about the peace process in Mindanao.

Dean Leonen attended and observed the forum Johaira helped organize. She got a call from him the week after asking her to work as Research Associate at the Dean's office to work particularly on an intervention that civil society groups had asked Leonen to file at the Supreme Court, which was deliberating on the MOA-AD at that time. However, since the government abandoned the MOA-AD, their intervention was no longer filed. She was then asked in 2009 to work on a concept paper for a consortium of academics who wanted to conduct round table discussions and come up with recommendations for next steps the succeeding government administration could take in moving the peace process forward after the rejection of the MOA-AD. The consortium was chaired by Dean Leonen and his Vice Chair was Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer of the UP Political Science Department. They submitted their output to Teresita Quintos-Deles who was then supporting the campaign of Presidential Candidate Benigno Aquino, III. Their output became his campaign's peace process agenda and after winning the Presidency, Aquino appointed Leonen and Ferrer in the new government Peace Panel as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, and Deles as his Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process.

Her invitation to join the process thus flowed naturally from her prior engagement with the new Panel members. But the motivation for accepting the invitation came more from her desire to work for minority rights. This desire was informed largely by her engagement as Research Associate at UP Law School's Institute for Human Rights since 2005 and her involvement with the Muslim women's rights group Nisa Ul-Haq Fi since 2007, when she was invited to a study group in Davao for a session on Islam and Women's Rights. It was there that she met Yasmin Busran-Lao and Raissa Jajurie, Muslim women's rights advocates who would later also get involved in the peace process, albeit at opposite sides of the table, with Lao as part of the government Peace Panel and Jajurie providing legal support to the MILF Peace Panel.

In the beginning, defining her role was challenging as there was no such position in the previous panel, unlike the role of Head of Secretariat, which relatively was more clearly defined. As head of the legal team, she saw her role primarily as providing the panel advice about the law and its permissions and parameters. The panel would often check with her on the language being proposed, which she, however, understood to be heavily political and, thus, not quite properly measured solely on the basis of the law.

"As far as I was concerned, I was just giving them the law. But when the Panel asked our team to propose the language or text for the peace agreement, we had often found that merely knowing the law was not

enough. Mainly because when you craft language, there is a policy decision that goes into it, and law is just a part of that policy. As a lawyer, and a young lawyer who was participating for the first time in political negotiations, I felt unprepared to make that kind of a policy call. I could give them the law but I hesitated to make a policy choice through some proposed language.”

She started with the assumption that her mandate was limited but later on she found herself going further and defining her mandate more broadly. “[I had] to always remember that nothing is purely legal in these negotiations, whether that means I need to propose language or that I need to think about the law differently. Once you realize that nothing is purely legal, it has many implications.” The first time it became clear that her work was not purely legal was when the Panel instructed the Legal Team to come up with a draft peace agreement as a way of consolidating previous positions of the MILF, as well as attempting to read into the drift and prevailing environment under the new administration. “Drafting an agreement is not legal. But considering what happened to the MOA-AD, you cannot draft an agreement without knowing the law.”

Owing to the new government Panel’s desire to exercise legal due diligence as well as ensure that other government agencies were consulted, it was not until January 2011 when the parties formally met again in Kuala Lumpur. But the biggest political turning point in the process was when President Aquino met with MILF’s Chairman Murad Ibrahim in Japan in August 2011. Euphoria and high spirits coming out of this meeting was short-lived as the GPH and MILF Peace Panels rejected each other’s proposals when the parties met just 18 days after the Aquino-Murad meeting. Fortunately, the International Contact Group (ICG) sprang into action and shuttled between the parties in Kuala Lumpur and averted another collapse of the talks (Arguillas, 24 Aug 2011).

After the GPH and MILF Peace Panels hurdled the initial challenges of its first few meetings, they were able to cover considerable ground in terms of the substantive aspect of the talks after they reached agreement over the “10 Decision Points on Principles” on 24 April 2012. This simple document was a very significant turning point in terms of substance as the parties once again found common ground from which to launch the rigorous negotiations that would follow. It took them barely six months from then to reach agreement over and signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) on 15 October 2012, which laid the foundation for their final peace agreement.

As the negotiations progressed, the Panel would entrust Johaira with more tasks. She was present in most meetings with the President and his cabinet. She would work with government stakeholders crucial to the peace process and its confidence building measures, such as the armed forces and the Department of Justice. During negotiations in Kuala Lumpur, another role Johaira played was to share her insights on cultural cues from the other side, which was important to avoid misreadings of tone or language the Parties used during the negotiations.

Johaira’s role also included conducting informal back channels with Mike Pasigan from the MILF Secretariat. Coming back from Kuala Lumpur, they would meet and discuss some of the more difficult points encountered during the formal talks and this would give her an opportunity to explain further, in a more informal and lengthy manner, where the government was coming from while Mike would do the same from the MILF’s end. Sharing the same ethnicity with those in the MILF Panel, they would reach out to her informally and ask her to explain things to her Panel. However, Johaira emphasized that she did not

negotiate through these informal channels. She merely provided the link. Nevertheless, she affirms that this informal channel helped to ensure that the two Panels worked closely together.

Mohajirin Ali (Interview on 28 June 2017) of the MILF Secretariat affirms this and recalls working closely with Johaira and the Head of the Government's Peace Panel Secretariat Iona Jalijali especially after the "10 Decision Points" were agreed. Some matters would even be easily resolved at the Secretariat level rather than at the plenary discussions of the two Panels, where personalities of Panel members across the table had a tendency to clash. Thus, the MILF Panel Chair would sometimes tell Mohajirin and Mike to sort out some matters at the Secretariat level with their counterparts from the government to hasten the process or avoid complications. This problem solving approach at the level of the Secretariat was apparently utilized until the Parties reached agreement over the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in March 2014.

Figure 4: Young Woman in the Talks



Johaira Wahab-Manatan (standing) reviews a document with then newly-appointed Government Peace Panel Chairperson **Miriam Coronel-Ferrer** (Jan. 2013, photo care of Andrew Alonto).

Among the things that Johaira considers memorable in her work with the Panel was helping contribute to the inclusion of the word "meaningful" to the phrase "right of women to meaningful political participation" (underscoring mine) in the "10 Decision Points on Principles."³ She was part of the Ad Hoc Technical Committee along with Mike Pasigan from the MILF that initially worked on this agreement. By then Johaira was already 27 years old and barely 2 years in the process while Mike was already 42 years and had the institutional memory on the MILF side of all the points agreed with the government after being involved in the process for 16 years. The MILF had already included "political participation of women" among the enumeration of basic rights in their Draft Compact. However, acting on the basis of her knowledge and experience with the cultural context, Johaira felt that this phrase could be improved. She credits her involvement with Nisa Ul-Haq Fi and her exposure to Muslim women's rights issues for her sensitivity to the potential impact of the language of the agreement to the lives of ordinary women. Furthermore, she credits her courage to the many women present in the negotiating room, from the Head of the Government Panel Secretariat, members of the Government Panel, to the women members of the MILF Panel's own Secretariat, in creating an atmosphere in the talks that meant and communicated that women were not merely tokens in peace negotiations. "One less woman in that room would have changed the dynamics of the talks", Johaira emphasized.

Another contribution she fondly recalls was the opportunity to clarify and establish the constitutional basis for the view that a Parliamentary form of government in the proposed autonomous region was constitutionally feasible. The Panel's legal memorandum on this issue was adopted as the official government view and allowed for the inclusion of Point No. 4 in the 10 Decision Points on Principles. To

³ See "GPH-MILF Decision Points on Principles as of April 2012" at <https://peace.gov.ph/2012/11/gph-milf-decision-points-principles-april-2012/> (retrieved on 21 July 2017)

this day, the parliamentary (or “ministerial”) form of government, as initially proposed by the MILF, is one of the key features to the envisioned Bangsamoro Government that marks a departure from the political status quo.

By the latter part of 2012, when the process for the creation of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) started, the Government Panel told Johaira that she would be appointed as commissioner to ensure continuity and preserve institutional memory in the Commission, especially on the side of Government. Her initial hesitation to be part of the BTC, she bared, came from the fact that she would no longer be just advising decision makers about the law and that she would have to make her own calls and the policy decisions herself. She then became the youngest of the 15 Commissioners tasked to draft the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which would serve to legally entrench the political agreements she helped negotiate. She was 28 years old when President Aquino appointed her to the post in the beginning of 2013. She would join Mike Pasigan who was made Executive Director of the BTC as well as Mohajirin Ali was assigned as Head of the Socio-Economic Office of the BTC.

Anna Tarhata Basman (2010-2016)

Anna Tarhata Basman (Interview on 04 July 2017) was 24 years old when she joined the Government Peace Panel’s Legal Team as Research Associate in 2010. A senior law student then, she left to take the Bar examinations in 2011, briefly returned as Legal Researcher from December 2011 to March 2012 but left again to join a law firm. She was 26 years old when she rejoined the process and took over as Head of the Legal Team in March 2013, when Johaira Wahab left to join the BTC. She held this position for three (3) years until March 2016.

Anna was born to and raised in Manila by a Maranao father, one the 13 ethno-linguistic groups in Mindanao that embraced Islam, and a mother who comes from the Northern Philippines. As a Muslim woman who wears a hijab, she has experienced discrimination and been at the receiving end of negative stereotypes against Muslims. Although she did not grow up in Mindanao, her bedtime stories would be about the conflict there and her father’s role in drafting the first Organic Act in 1988 that became the basis for the creation of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). However, she did not know much about the peace process. It was this detachment from the conflict that fuelled her desire to join the peace process. “I would count myself lucky not to have gone through the atrocities of war and the poverty that continues to persist in the area. It is my tiny way of giving back.”

In 2008, at the height of the MOA-AD controversy, she attended a forum where UP Law Dean Leonen and UP PolSci Professor Ferrer spoke about the peace process, the MOA-AD and its implications. The two would later become Anna’s principals in the Government Peace Panel from July 2010. Johaira Wahab, whom Leonen invited to head the Panel’s Legal Team, asked Anna to join her as Research Associate. Anna was already a Research Associate at UP Law’s Institute of Human Rights and it was not advisable for senior law students to take on more responsibilities. Nevertheless, she felt it was an invitation she could not refuse. “It was a little bit of an obligation but it was more an opportunity you could not pass upon; to be involved in something that is relevant to the people that you belong to, to your roots.”

At the time when the new Government Panel was undertaking due diligence and studying all previous agreements and positions, Anna did legal research and looked into parliamentary systems, the

deliberations of the ARMM's original Organic Act, the deliberations of the framers of the 1987 Philippine Constitution over the provisions on the creation of autonomous regions, among many others. While the talks were ongoing in Kuala Lumpur, Anna and other Research Associates would be on standby at the Secretariat at the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) in Manila.

Anna started joining the talks in Kuala Lumpur when she became Legal Researcher in December 2011. The talks had gotten intense so she remembers accompanying the panel once every month for the three brief months that she played this role. During the negotiations, she was tasked to take down notes of the proceedings and keep track of documents or laws alluded to during the discussions in case she needed to pull them out for the Panel's perusal.

When Anna took over as Head of the Legal Team in March 2013, the parties had already signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and negotiations were now at the Technical Working Groups (TWG) level over the Annexes to the FAB. The parties and their respective TWGs had been meeting since January 2013 and continued to do so until January 2014, within which period they reached agreement over the four Annexes and an addendum that along with the FAB would make up the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) – (1) Transitional Arrangements and Modalities (27 Feb 2013), (2) Revenue Generation and Wealth Sharing (13 July 2013), (3) Power Sharing (08 Dec 2013), (4) Normalization⁴ (25 Jan 2014) and (5) Addendum on Bangsamoro Waters (25 Jan 2014). With the end of the formal negotiation process, the GPH and MILF TWGs met in Manila in February 2014 to finalize the CAB, which was signed on 27 March 2014 (MILF Peace Panel, 2015).

During the negotiation period, President Aquino's instruction was to involve all relevant government agencies in reviewing positions. The Government Peace Panel, thus, had to conduct numerous meetings and consultations with various government agencies as part of preparations for the talks. While the meetings were arranged by the Peace Panel Secretariat, Anna's Legal Team took charge of preparing the briefing papers for both the Panel Members and the representatives of government agencies. "We would flag to them the issues relevant to their respective agencies, the relevant laws that are currently in place, the effect if the government agreed to the proposed provisions, and the options in terms of language that could be proposed." The Panel members and the agency heads would be involved in the highly technical discussions in the beginning but they would entrust further discussions to the Legal Team and the agencies' technical staff. These meetings would happen in Manila before and after every round of talks in Kuala Lumpur. Issues discussed with the technical teams of government agencies would then be raised to higher levels within those agencies then to the level of the cabinet as the President wanted an all of government approach. Anna was, thus, in close contact with the technical staff of various government agencies and sometimes even directly with some cabinet officials during both the government's 'internal negotiations' in Manila and over the phone when the FAB Annexes were being negotiated in Kuala Lumpur.

During the TWG level negotiations in Kuala Lumpur, Anna's Legal Team was divided among the Annexes, which were being negotiated simultaneously. She was assigned to the Power Sharing Annex. At first, her main responsibility was to provide the two more senior members of the TWG briefing papers concerning the provisions of the Annex. But as the negotiations, particularly on Power Sharing, dragged on until December 2013, she found herself actively involved in the discussions as well. The TWGs, however, did not make the decisions. Although they did the first layer of negotiations, bringing the positions of the

⁴ The parties preferred the term "Normalization" instead of "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration" or DDR.

parties closer, matters would be eventually elevated to the level of the Panels who called the shots. Anna also found herself doing back channels with various members of the MILF Panel's Secretariat and Legal Team.

Just like Anna, Mohajirin Ali also eventually became involved in direct negotiations at the TWG level, particularly over the Annex on Wealth Sharing where his background as a Mining Engineer became particularly useful in the discussions that ensued over metallic and non-metallic mineral resources. Mohajirin turned 36 years old when the parties finally reached agreement on and signed the Annex on Revenue Generation and Wealth Sharing in July 2013. He was also the youngest member of the MILF's TWG that negotiated the Annex on Normalization. With his active involvement at the TWG level, he acknowledges that his role evolved from being a mere keeper of documents to "someone who already had an influence on the outcome" of the talks. Mike Pasigan, on the other hand, was involved in the TWG that worked on the agreement on Transitional Arrangements and Modalities (TAM) and he worked on the MILF's initial proposal on the Annex on Power Sharing.

After the parties signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in March 2014, Anna's role shifted towards public engagements aimed at explaining the CAB to various sectors. She found herself attending various fora as a resource person explaining both the peace process and the need for the agreements. Their engagements with legislators, which had already started even before the CAB was reached, providing them updates and explaining the contents of the agreements also increased. Her team would prepare the briefing papers for the members of Congress and engage with their technical staff. When the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) drafted by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) reached the halls of Congress in September 2014, Anna's team directly engaged with members of Congress to help explain the law and its importance to the implementation of the CAB.

Unfortunately, the draft law did not make it through the end of the Aquino administration in June 2016. The draft legislation was subjected to intense deliberation in a Congress where barely a quarter of its members are from Mindanao and not all were supportive. But the final nail to the BBL's coffin was the police Special Action Force (SAF) operation in January 2015 against a high-valued target, an Indonesian bomb maker and terrorist, who took shelter in the village of Mamasapano, which was not far from the position of MILF fighters. The police operation that failed to make use of the coordination mechanism for interdiction of criminal elements established as part of the ceasefire mechanism resulted in a gun battle between the MILF and the SAF that led to the death of 44 SAF members, along with MILF fighters and civilians.⁵ This pitted national sentiments against the MILF and the peace process, which made the prospects of passing the BBL in Congress impossible at that time.⁶

After President Rodrigo Duterte was elected and sworn into office in June 2016, he made good on his campaign promise to continue the peace process with the MILF. A new BTC had to be reconstituted in January 2017 and a new version of the BBL was submitted to the President on 17 July 2017. Meanwhile, the GPH and MILF Peace Panels have been rebranded as the GPH and MILF Peace Implementing Panels in assertion of the fact that the negotiations were over and the process is now in the implementation phase.

⁵ For a detailed timeline of the Mamasapano clash check out <http://www.rappler.com/nation/82827-timeline-mamasapano-clash> (09 July 2017)

⁶ How Mamasapano tragedy affected BBL. (2015, May 15). ABS-CBN News. Retrieved from <http://news.abs-cbn.com/nation/05/15/15/how-mamasapano-tragedy-affected-bbl> (09 July 2017)

Marjanie S. Mimbantas Macasalong (2017-present)

When the MILF met with its government counterparts in Malaysia on 21 March 2017 to agree on their new Terms of Reference (TOR) as Implementing Panels, they introduced a new member of their Panel – Marjanie S. Mimbantas Macasalong. At 32 years old, Marjanie (Interview on 13 July 2017) is the youngest ever to occupy a seat in the negotiating table. According to MILF Peace Panel Chairman Mohagher Iqbal (Interview on 28 June 2017), Marjanie’s entry is part of the efforts of the MILF to prepare the younger generation to take over leadership of the struggle.

Born into the MILF, Marjanie was 10 years old when he would always look for his father, MILF Vice Chairman for Military Affairs Aleem Abdulazis Mimbantas, and ask why he would be gone for months on end. At 14 years old, he was already assisting his father as driver and personal escort when he was Chairman of the MILF’s Peace Panel from late 1997 until before the war erupted in early 2000. However, he never fully understood the full extent of his father’s role in the movement until he got to spend time with him in the MILF’s camp after the fighting during the “All Out War” in 2000 subsided. After the Buliok offensives in 2003, when then MILF Chairman Salamat Hashim had to move to their area in Lanao, he once again joined his father in the MILF camp. Sensing that he was becoming comfortable with the revolutionary life in the camp and was losing interest in pursuing further education, his father told him: “it is more beneficial and helpful if you join the struggle with an education. Although our struggle is armed, the objective in the end is political. The struggle will not survive if all we know is how to carry guns and we reach the point that governance becomes the focus.”

In 2007, therefore, he was sent to Malaysia on a scholarship to pursue his undergraduate degree in Political Science. He had just earned his Master’s degree in Islamic and Other Civilizations (in 2013 after writing a thesis on *The Liberation Movements in Mindanao: Root Causes and Prospects for Peace*) when MILF Chairman Al-Haj Murad Ibrahim invited him in early 2014 to a training in political organizing in Malaysia to represent the Bangsamoro youth. He was just 29 years old then and that would lead to another invitation to lead the youth as Deputy President of the MILF’s United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) when it was being formed in late 2014 in anticipation of the creation of the new autonomous region. Eventually, this would lead to a seat at the MILF’s Peace Implementing Panel.

The Peace Implementing Panels, along with the Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT), the ICG and the Malaysian Facilitator, will remain until all political commitments have been delivered and the parties sign an Exit Agreement.

Analyzing Young People’s Motivations and Roles in the Negotiation Process

Motivations

Based on the stories highlighted in the foregoing and on the interviews conducted with 11 other young people of ages ranging between 21 and 32 (median age 27) at the start of their entry into the process, their motivations for being involved in the various aspects of the GPH-MILF peace process may be characterized along three (3) broad categories: (1) being born into the struggle thus creating a sense of duty; (2) a conscious desire of wanting to become part of the solution to the Mindanao problem; and (3) the opportunity for work or gainful employment, which would later gain a deeper meaning.

Some of the young people involved in the peace process, particularly on the side of the MILF, were born into the revolution and thus considered their involvement as part their contribution to the struggle or a duty. Mike Pasigan and Mohajirin Ali's motivations fall under this category. Mohajirin Ali sometimes wonders how a Mining Engineer ended up playing a supporting role to the MILF Peace Panel. Although his official entry into the process was incidental to his duty as the son of a revolutionary, nevertheless, he believes it was God's will and thus embraced his role wholeheartedly. Mike Pasigan also sees his role in the process as part of his *jihad*. "My involvement in the MILF was due to my being born into the movement. But my sustained involvement in the peace process I consider a religious obligation." He places a higher premium on waging peace as a form of jihad over waging war as he finds the former more difficult and requiring a higher degree of patience and discipline. "The greater jihad is one where you struggle with yourself. It is easier to fire a gun and fight than to check yourself and maintain patience in the midst of anger and emotion over the abuses done to your people." At a very young age of about six (6) or seven (7) years old, he was a witness to abuses of government security forces against innocent civilians during Martial Law in the mid-1970s.

A story similar to that of Mike and Mohajirin is Marjanie's (Interview on 13 July 2017), the latest and youngest member of the MILF's Peace Implementing Panel since March 2017. Marjanie's father explained to him that "every Muslim has to contribute to the liberation of the Bangsamoro people." He remembers him emphasizing that it was their duty. Albeit highly qualified and very well educated for the position, he acknowledges that a big part of the trust the MILF Central Committee has on him comes from his being the scion of the late Aleem Abdulazis Mimbantas, who was the MILF's Vice Chairman for Military Affairs. Marjanie considers this his contribution to the struggle in continuation of his father's legacy.

The sense of duty comes not only from their religion but also from the ethno-linguistic group they belonged to that was actively involved in the struggle. **Archie Buaya** (interview on 11 July 2017), a full blooded Teduray, was 32 years old when he became directly involved in the GPH-MILF peace process in 2012 as part of the MILF's TWG on Wealth Sharing and later in 2013 as Executive Assistant to the BTC Commissioner representing Indigenous People (IP). At 30 years old, he was indirectly involved as part of the Civilian Protection Component (CPC) of the IMT in 2010 when he worked for the Mindanao Human Rights Action Center (MinHRAC). His direct involvement in the talks came at the invitation of the late Datu Knoch, the MILF Peace Panel member representing IPs. Archie's clan has been part of the armed struggle as his grandfather is one of the founders of the MILF. His tribe also fought for the MNLF and now the MILF. Archie sees his involvement in the peace process, therefore, as a privilege, especially for his family. On top of this, his whole tribe also sees him as their representative. "You are there because you are representing our tribe. You are there to continue the legacy of your grandfather", his tribal elders would remind him.

Other young people, mostly Muslims, who were not born into the struggle but had a strong connection to Mindanao either due to their ethnicity or birth, expressed a conscious desire to be part of the solution to the Mindanao problem. Johaira Wahab-Manantan wanted to focus on minority rights when she was starting out as a young lawyer and the peace process, she thought, was the perfect place to begin. Anna Tarhata Basman, though born in Manila and no longer able to speak the language of her Maranao roots, grew up with stories of the conflict and her father's contributions in finding a solution. This, in turn, inspired her to become part of the solution herself. A colleague of both Johaira and Anna at the Government Peace Panel **Bianca Mae Bacani** (Interview on 25 June 2017), on the other hand, is not Muslim but she was born to a family that had to flee Sulu when the armed conflict was at its heights in the early 1970s. Having witnessed and experienced the recurrence of the armed conflict between the government and the MNLF in 2001 and also in 2013, her family has grown ever more pessimistic of the peace process. "I wanted to change how my family perceived the peace process and try to convince them that peaceful resolution to the conflict in Mindanao is attainable," was how Bianca described her motivation for joining the peace process in 2008. Upon joining OPAPP (at 27 years old), she was first assigned in the review of the MNLF peace process. In 2010 she was given the opportunity to work as the Executive Assistant of then Government Peace Panel Chair Marvic Leonen.

Allan Roy Damaso Mordeno (Interview on 11 June 2017), an ethnic Manobo or one of the non-Muslim indigenous groups in Mindanao, was 25 years old when he joined Ryan Mark Sullivan's Panel Secretariat in January 2005. At 19 years old, while studying Economics in University, he became involved as a volunteer community organizer and researcher for a non-profit organization known as Solidarity for Peace, Empowerment and Economic Development, Inc. (SPEED). This involvement would lead to a career after graduation that would take him to interact with many non-Muslim indigenous communities who felt sidetracked and left out by the GPH-MILF Peace Process. Born in Cotabato City, into a family many of whom are involved in the peace process at various capacities on the ground, he wanted to enter the process and raise the concerns of IP communities at a higher level as he felt there was a disconnect. "I wanted to bring change and contribute in my own small way by creating awareness at the national level", Roy explains.

Ameen Andrew L. Alonto (Interview on 08 July 2017), a Maranao, was 28 years old when he started working for the government Peace Panel's Secretariat in October 2011. He finished High School in Cotabato City when he was 16 years old and became socially aware of the conflict and its impact after the "All-Out-War" in 2000 when he volunteered to distribute relief goods in evacuation centers in 2001. His awareness, however, about his Bangsamoro identity came later in his freshman year in University when he met other Muslims in Manila and after attending workshops organized by the University of the Philippines (UP) Muslim Students Association (MSA). His interest deepened and he wrote his thesis on the Federal system as a method of solving the insurgency in Mindanao. The opportunity to be involved in the formal peace process came when the government Panel's Head of the Legal Team Johaira Wahab informed him of a vacancy at the Panel Secretariat. During his job interview, when asked why he wanted to work for the process, his response was brief and clear: "It's home! We are talking about my homeland and I want to see the conflict end." Asked why he joined the government Panel Secretariat and not that of the MILF when his uncle was a member of the MILF Peace Panel, his simple and practical response was that it was in the former where the opportunity opened up. Moreover, he saw the end goal on either side as being similar: "to contribute to transforming the long history of the conflict and the way Muslims are seen in the

Philippines”. Andrew, at 30 years old, would later move to the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) and work in its Communications Group from December 2013 until June 2016.

The creation of the BTC in early 2013 would open up more avenues for youth participation in the early implementation stage of the agreements reached in Kuala Lumpur. **Asnin Pendatun** (Interview on 08 July 2017), a Maguindanaoan, was one of those young people who saw the BTC as their avenue to become part of the process of finding a solution to the conflict in Mindanao. He was 21 years old and had just graduated from the University of the Philippines (UP) in Metro Manila when he joined the BTC in 2013 as Commissioner Johaira Wahab’s Executive Assistant. Before joining the BTC, he was already active as President of UP MSA in organizing events that highlighted the struggle and aspirations of the Bangsamoro. His undergraduate research also focused on the subject, driven by a desire to understand the Mindanao problem and search for solutions. Thus, when Commissioner Wahab posted the vacancy in the UP MSA facebook group, Asnin immediately grabbed the opportunity. “I took my chances as I have always been writing and researching about the peace process and now I had this opportunity to join. I just could not pass up on the opportunity to work for the peace process. It was not just professional motivation, for me it was perhaps in a way a moral obligation.”

The greater number of young people involved in the formal talks came from the government side. This is largely because of the institutionalization of the peace process by the Philippine government under the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), where the government Peace Panel and their Secretariat hold office. ***As part of the larger government bureaucracy, the peace process presented an opportunity for young people to work and pursue a career in government and/or maintain gainful employment.*** However, what started as a job for these young people would gain deeper meaning as their involvement in the process became more intense. Ryan Mark Sullivan’s failure in business which led him from “fish process” to the peace process is the classic case on this point. Reflecting back on the more than six (6) years of intense involvement in providing the necessary back channels for the talks, Ryan shared that what was initially just a job to recover his financial losses in his failed entrepreneurial attempt gained more meaning as he could see how his involvement was being translated into an actual contribution to peace in Mindanao. The job, thus, “gained more meaning and ceased be just work,” Ryan emphasized.

Jennie Claire Laruan-Mordeno (Interview on 11 June 2017) was 24 years old when she was recruited in June 2001 to become part of OPAPP’s Office of Special Concerns. She agreed to the invitation as she wanted a job that had meaning in a different environment from that of the northern highlands of the Cordillera where she is from. When her boss and recruiter Silvestre Afable, Jr. was appointed as government’s Peace Panel Chair for talks with the MILF in 2004. Jennie, at 27 years old, became Ryan Sullivan’s deputy Head of Secretariat. Coming from the north, she had little awareness of the Mindanao conflict and even had biased perceptions towards Muslims. However, after she came to see the situation in Moro communities while working on confidence building measures with her MILF counterparts, her perspective of the work changed. “It was the time when your heart of stone became flesh,” she recalls of the days she spent on the ground. The experience changed the way she saw those on the other side of the table and their cause, which made her want to do more. Her work, thus took on new meaning as lack of developments in the talks would cause her to worry on what would happen to the communities.

Lloyd Yales and Vanessa Kristine Sorongon (Interview on 25 June 2017) would become part of the Peace Panel Secretariat in June 2010 at the ages of 24 and 25, respectively, when the new Panel headed by Dean Leonen took over the process. They were both moved from different units at OPAPP to the Panel Secretariat. Lloyd, an Applied Mathematics graduate, just wanted to work for government while Vanessa, a Development Studies graduate, wanted to gain experience working for development on the ground when they first entered OPAPP. Lloyd recalls working very long hours in the Secretariat with Vanessa and their other young colleagues. “The work was so intense that there were times we would go home at 11:00pm and we needed to take a flight at 3:00am but we would not be done with the kits yet.” Nevertheless, he also acknowledged that the work took on a deeper meaning as it became more intense. “The reason why we lasted longer than a year at the Secretariat was because of the excitement that came with the talks and we had this idea that we are doing this for Mindanao. We are doing this for the displaced people. The great thing about the Panel was that they would always remind us that our job was not menial as it had meaning. It will have an impact on the community.”

Wendell Orbeso (Interview on 06 June 2017) was 24 years old when he entered OPAPP as part of the now defunct Policy and Program Development Office (PPDO). When he was 29 years old, he was invited to join the Peace Panel Secretariat in 2009 by then Panel Chair Rafael Seguis. At first, he did not have a clear idea of what OPAPP was, thus the motivation was purely to find work in government. After several months of internalizing OPAPP’s work, he realized that OPAPP was the office for him because, “it’s in OPAPP that I know I have a role in initiating positive change. It took on a deeper meaning for me, especially when I started getting involved in the ceasefire mechanisms [of the GPH-MILF peace process]. I realized that time that apart from the military approach, there are other approaches in resolving conflicts on the ground.”

Figure 5: Young Staff of the GPH Panel Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur



Bianca Mae Bacani (1st from left), Vanessa Kristine Sorongon (2nd from left), Wendell Orbeso (behind) and Ameen Andrew Alonto (1st from right) of the Government Peace Panel Secretariat looks on as OPAPP Communications Group young staff works on a document at the sidelines of the talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Jan. 2012, photo care of Vanessa Kristine Sorongon).

The Evolution of the Roles Young People Played

It is worth noting how young people’s varying initial motivations when they first entered the process would later on converge towards a common desire to find a non-violent solution to the Mindanao problem. As their involvement deepened so did its meaning. The transformation of the meaning of their work came alongside the evolution of their roles, which in turn came with the evolution of the process. **In the very early stages of the process, from 1997, young people have been providing Administrative and Technical support**

to the Peace Panels as part of their respective secretariats. In the beginning, this mainly involved tasks pertaining to the management of general logistics (transportation, accommodation, kits preparation) and documentation (note taking, and report/minutes preparation, drafting of memos or communications) support.

Among the unique roles young people played in the early stages, when trust across the table was not yet that strong, was keeping and securing the integrity of documents for signing, a task done particularly by the young people in the MILF Secretariat to ensure that no unwanted text insertions were made. On the other hand, young people on the government side were also at the forefront of bridging this trust deficit. Jenie Laruan-Mordeno recalls working very closely with the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) in delivering donations of medicines while Allan Roy Mordeno trained and shared software to the MILF Secretariat for GIS mapping as part building further confidence between the government and the MILF Peace Panels during the difficult MOA-AD negotiations.

Their roles would later broaden to include organizing meetings, conferences and consultations on the administrative support side, and conducting research and keeping track of agreed provisions during TWG discussions on the technical support side. Lloyd Yales, for example, was assigned as focal person for local government consultations in Mindanao where he liaised with various local chief executives and ensured all logistics were in place while his other young colleagues in the Secretariat provided documentation support. **Farrah Grace Naparan** (Interview on 21 June 2017), who was 26 years old when she joined the Secretariat in January 2013, recalls conducting research, coordinating and preparing materials for meetings with various government agencies, and even worked on the publication of a book. During the talks in Kuala Lumpur, Bianca Bacani had to shadow the Peace Panel Chair and keep mental notes of significant points of agreement even in closed door executive meetings.

During the TWG level negotiations, Secretariat staff were distributed among the TWGs to provide documentation support. Wendell Orbeso, who has been attending meetings of and has been acting as focal person for the ceasefire mechanisms, was assigned to the TWGs discussing the Annex on Normalization. Andrew Alonto and Farrah Naparan worked together at the TWG discussions on Power Sharing. “The Secretariat is very critical in terms of providing administrative and technical support to the Panel so that they can focus on the talks,” Lloyd Yales further explains.

The rules of engagement in the GPH-MILF peace negotiations became quite rigid with the entry of an international third party facilitator. Even though the level of the talks were supposedly downgraded and the interaction relaxed by calling them “Exploratory” after the war of 2003, the format still became quite formal involving all panel members. Moreover, personalities had a tendency to clash in the formal across the table, panel-versus-panel set-up, thus, stifling and preventing creativity. **It was natural, therefore, that the Panel’s would look for alternative routes of communication. Young people in their Secretariat, with their apparent natural tendencies to be informal and not as guarded as their principals, filled in the communication gap. This characterized the Political Role that young people played in the early stages of the process.**

While Mike Pasigan was already doing back channels with the more senior Head of Secretariat of the GPH Peace Panel, Diosita Andot, during the early years of the process under Malaysian facilitation the informal communications became more intense when Ryan Sullivan took over. Ryan points out to the fact that he

and Mike were only 2 years apart in age, which Mike confirms in that the peer-to-peer relationship he had with Ryan provided a more relaxed atmosphere. However, it can also be noted that the discussions in the process had become more substantive focusing on Ancestral Domain when Ryan came in as the Security, and Rehabilitation and Development aspects of the Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001 had already been surpassed. The extent of the Bangsamoros' Ancestral Domain and its governance is, after all, at the heart of the struggle. Thus, unravelling this aspect of the talks required a lot of creativity for which Kuala Lumpur could not always provide a conducive venue. **This necessity for more creative interactions geared towards problem solving became the impetus for more direct and informal interactions that young people in the Secretariat of both Panels had the capacity to provide. Young people, therefore, provided not only the natural link but also the willingness to explore creative solutions when the process needed it most.**

Ryan Sullivan thinks this approach of having informal communication channels is characteristic of Asian peace processes as he noticed a similar approach being employed in Myanmar where he now works. He believes that an informal person to person processing of options before the formal session lessens the likelihood of the parties clashing and losing face. In building such a strong informal bridge across the negotiating table, Ryan is of the opinion that "the challenge is how to establish your integrity in front of them in that even if you represent the position of government, you have enough objectivity to be trusted. You are objective enough to look at not just one side of the negotiating fence but also appreciate all of the other pieces." Mike Pasigan similarly saw that he was playing an important role in trying to find a solution to the Mindanao conflict. Thus, while engaged in back channels, he would often find himself suspending his identity of belonging to one side of the negotiating table in favor of finding a solution to the problem at hand.

Though their political role somewhat already influenced the substance of agreements, young people's Substantive Role only became more pronounced after the MOA on Ancestral Domain was declared unconstitutional. The MOA-AD basically contained all the MILF's substantive cards. After it failed to pass the Constitutional challenge, the new government Panel, therefore focused on ensuring the new agreement would be legally and constitutionally tenable. Thus, young lawyers were relied upon and they would find themselves not only negotiating across the table at the TWG levels but more intensely within government. Johaira and then later on Anna led other young lawyers in their Legal Team in conducting inter-agency consultations or what can also be characterized as internal government negotiations. Results of which were then fed to the negotiations at the TWG level in Kuala Lumpur, wherein they were also substantively involved in the discussions. On the MILF side, Archie Buaya was heavily involved in consultations within Indigenous People's communities which helped shaped the MILF's position, particularly on the issue of Ancestral Domain and the sharing of its wealth, at the TWG negotiations. **Young people's substantive role, therefore, included internal government negotiations, sectoral or community consultations, and face to face negotiations at the Technical Working Group level.**

While FAB's Annexes were being negotiated, work to draft the law that would ensure the implementation of their provisions was happening almost simultaneously through the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC). **The creation in the early part of 2013 of a mechanism to find ways to legally entrench the gains of the political dialogue process gave more young people the chance to play a part in the initial implementation of political commitments contained in the peace agreement.** Asnin Pendatun is one of those fresh University graduates who at 21 years old became the Executive Assistant of

Commissioner Johaira Wahab from May 2013 to April 2014. Though most of his responsibility revolved around providing administrative support, it also included conducting research, such as on models of Parliamentary systems. As an Executive Assistant, he helped organize (logistics and invitations) his Commissioner's sessions with experts and public consultations. He was also given a chance to provide inputs into the draft law. He became, in May 2014 after the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law was submitted to the President, a Communications Officer at the Communications Group of the BTC, where he managed the social media account of the BTC, wrote press releases, acted as resource person in public consultations and community dialogues to talk about the draft law.

At age 25 and after earning a Master's degree from the United Kingdom, his responsibilities would grow in the expanded BTC which started working in January 2017. As part of the Secretariat providing technical support for the plenary sessions, he prepares the documents and matrix of the proposed bill for plenary discussion. He also prepares all the slides for the presentations, including agenda, calendar of activities, and program of action. He also assisted in editing the BBL's final language style. This is on top of the technical support he provides two Committees – on Political Autonomy and on Transitory Provisions – where he does the leg work and preparations.

The roles young people played, thus, evolved as the process also evolved and reached significant milestones; from the mere provision of administrative and technical support to acting as bridges between the Peace Panels and exploring creative solutions, to being directly involved in both internal and across the table negotiations and framing of the substance of agreements, and even in efforts at legally entrenching the agreements.

Factors Facilitating and Challenging Youth Participation

One factor that directed young people towards the peace process is ***inspiration born out of awareness and understanding of the conflict context***. Those whose participation in the process was motivated by the desire to become part of the solution trace the sprouting of their interest back to when they attended study groups, workshops or fora organized by their own academic institutions, women's rights and youth groups. While awareness of the conflict was gained through personal experience growing up in the conflict context or from stories of family who lived through the conflict, awareness of efforts at finding a political negotiated solutions seem to have come from the fora and workshops.

However, inspiration needed to find space for further growth and direction and it did so at the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP). ***The institutionalization of the peace process within the government bureaucracy is another factor that facilitated young people's initial entry then active involvement in the dialogue process***. Born from the recommendations coming out of nationwide consultations conducted in 71 out of the 76 provinces in the Philippines in 1993, OPAPP was created through Presidential Executive Order 125, which "Defin[ed] the Approach and Administrative Structure for Government's Comprehensive Peace Efforts." This administrative structure is headed by a "Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (PAPP) with cabinet rank to advise and assist the President.... It also created a secretariat...to provide the PAPP with administrative and technical support" (OPAPP, 2006: 12-14). OPAPP served as a natural entry point for fresh graduates and talents who wanted to work for government. As their job would later gain a deeper meaning, OPAPP provided the incentive in pursuing

a career in peace work. Many young people who entered OPAPP have either stayed on until now or moved on to international organizations providing support to the peace process. Thus, this institution where the government Peace Panel for talks with the MILF is lodged ensured that an in-house pool of young and energetic talent was readily available to provide technical and administrative support. Ryan Mark Sullivan intimated how it was his peers in OPAPP that served as his mentors during his early days at the institution before he took over leadership of the Panel Secretariat.

The stories of young people involved in the GPH-MILF peace process points to *trust* as an important factor that led to their entry into the process. ***Trust born out of confidence in young people's abilities cuts across the stories of the appointment of young people in key positions within the negotiation structure***, such as Ryan Mark Sullivan's appointment to Head the Panel Secretariat, and Johaira Wahab-Manantan and Anna Tarhata Basman's appointments as Heads of the government's Legal Team one after the other. ***Trust as a function of security*** was evident in the initial entry of both Mike Pasigan and Mohajirin Ali, who are sons of and related to key MILF leaders and negotiators. The peace talks, as structured, was a very exclusive affair within the government and more so within the MILF. As a rebel movement, the MILF naturally kept access limited to those whom they could trust due to concerns in terms of both physical and data security. Mike and Mohajirin's familiar connection to the revolution and the negotiators, thus, gave them privileged access to the talks. This trust would later evolve into confidence in their abilities as they both matured in the process and, thus, were given more direct roles in the negotiations at the TWG level. Finally, ***trust in the ability of their peers*** was manifested in the space that Johaira provided when she invited Anna to be a Research Associate in her legal team, Ameen Andrew Alonto to apply for the vacancy in the Secretariat, and when Johaira opened the application for her Executive and Research Assistants at the BTC to the UP Muslim Students' Association (MSA).

Young people's education, skills and experience are among other factors that greatly facilitated both the initiation and evolution of young people's roles in the process. Mike Pasigan and Mohajirin Ali's sustained involvement and considerable experience in the talks allowed led to playing more critical roles in the negotiations. Ryan Sullivan's experience in another peace process led to his appointment, Wendell Orbeso's initial work as focal person for the ceasefire mechanisms led to his assignment in providing documentation support in the TWG discussions for the Annex on Normalization, while Loyd Yales previous experience in organizing capacity building workshops in another unit in OPAPP led to his assignment as focal person for the local government consultations. Skills in particular technologies was also key – Mike Pasigan's ability to operate a computer and other gadgets meant that he would be drafting the MILF's communications for the government in the very early stages of the process; Ryan Sullivan's skills with PowerPoint presentations and Allan Roy Mordeno's skills in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping were also heavily relied upon. Andrew Alonto and Asnin Pendatun, both very savvy in terms of social media, were given blanket authority by the BTC Communications Group head to manage and produce content for their social media accounts. Johaira and Anna's legal educational background was perfect suit for the process at the stage when the Panel needed to ensure agreements would pass Constitutional challenges. Farrah Naparan and Ameen Andrew Alonto's background in Political Science and research led to their providing documentation support for the TWG discussions on Power Sharing. Finally, after earning his Masters degree and due to his considerable experience in the previous BTC, the expanded BTC relied heavily on Asnin Pendatun for technical support both at the Plenary and Committee levels.

The last, but definitely not the least, **factor that greatly facilitated the youth's involvement is the fact of their being young.** Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (correspondence on 23 June 2017), former Peace Panel Chair for the government and the first woman to hold the post, had this to say about the young people in her team: "all our team in Manila and Cotabato stood out as dynamic, not averse to working long hours [as] they have less domestic burden, creative, daring/adventurous, ready to learn and idealistic – all the positive characteristics generally attributed to young people.... So we needed people with experience and expertise but we were enriched and could not have done without the young people." Anna Basman confirms this and adds that, as young people, they did not yet have the baggage of being very particular about the Terms of Reference or the limits of their responsibilities. They were willing to do what was required regardless of their titles. Lloyd Yales also affirmed that as a young person "you still have the energy and you are willing to do anything. When they asked you to travel, even to Sulu or Tawi Tawi, you just went." Allan Roy Mordeno also saw the strategic value of their youth especially "at the Technical level, where you work with people not far from you in terms of your age. Since you are working on different positions, age helped bridge the gap."

Wendell Orbeso, who now manages OPAPP Cotabato, where he says 60% of the staff is under 30 years old, is of the opinion that young people's characteristic passion is important for the peace process. "The peace process goes through a lot of humps and bumps along the way. You need people who can keep things going. Young people, who put passion in their work, can help fuel and move the peace process forward." Ryan Sullivan also thinks that the structure of a Peace Panel Secretariat should be infused with young blood considering the extent of work being done. As young people have the energy and are tireless, it was on purpose that his staff were also young. Ryan thinks young people also do not tend to have pre-conceived notions of the peace negotiations and are thus willing to learn as they move along. Nevertheless, he cautions that there needs to be a good balance between those with energetic tendencies and those with experience.

Mike Pasigan agrees with Ryan and also sees the importance of young people participating in the process as they have the required abilities. However, he gives precedence to wisdom when it comes to decision-making, which he believes is born out of years of experience. He thinks, therefore, that young people should be allowed to mature first before they are given the responsibility to make decisions. He is of the opinion that the role of the negotiator should be reserved for those with wisdom and experience and young people should be given responsibilities in support of the negotiators, similar to the roles he played throughout the years and how those roles evolved. Mike echoes much of the thinking within the MILF Peace Panel.

Being young, however, is a double edged sword in a process that has traditionally been at the hands of men deemed more wise and experienced both on the government and MILF side. **Thus, being young was also a challenge to young people's participation as most of them had to deal with much more senior and often high profile officials.** Anna Tarhata Basman recalls a meeting she and her young team had with much more senior officials who had a hard time dealing with the fact that they were being briefed by young lawyers. "People don't automatically take you seriously. You first have to establish your credibility", Anna reflects. Vanessa Kristine Sorongon noticed how they could never be seen outside the shadow of their principals. "Sometimes it's hard for them to take you seriously as they would just see you as an assistant to your bosses." Johaira Wahab-Manatan also faced some challenges from across the negotiating table because of her age. Coming from the same ethno-linguistic group as some of those on

the other side, there were expectations on how people her age should act in front of her elders. This made her reflect that “it’s not just about empowering the youth to be part of the peace process, it’s also about preparing the adults or those who are more senior to deal with young people they will be working with.”

A few also pointed out that gender became a factor which exacerbated the challenge of being young. Bianca Mae Bacani pointed out that, in some instances, it was difficult to be both young and a woman at the same time. She felt that she had to dress up and “look the part” to be taken seriously and get things done, especially when dealing with the military establishment. Jennie Laruan-Mordeno, who was active in the early stages of the process when women’s meaningful participation was also very limited, felt it was a male dominated environment so she had to constantly watch the way she dressed and her decorum. Women’s representation and substantive and meaningful participation in the peace negotiations, however, would greatly improve from mid-2010 onwards when seasoned women’s rights advocates led the Philippine government’s peace process office and became key actors in the government’s peace panel and legal team. This created pressure for the MILF to also open, at the very least, their legal team to women. Johaira Wahab-Manantan’s experience in negotiating for the “meaningful political participation” of women in the 10 Decision Points on Principles in 2012 is a testament to this shift.

Trust born out of familiarity or connection with the revolution, which is apparent in both the MILF and their Peace Panel’s structure, ***is also a factor that has served to limit the space for direct participation of young people.*** Only children of revolutionary leaders gained access to the process in the early stages. Although the MILF leadership has acknowledged and acted on the need to prepare a successor generation, as evidenced by their appointment of the 32 year old Marjanie Macasalong in the Peace Implementing Panel, the space still remains very limited. Nevertheless, MILF Vice Chairman Ghadzali Jaafar (Interview on 19 July 2017) and concurrently the Chairman of the expanded BTC, expressed confidence in the revolution’s successor generation and emphasized that it is in good hands as these new breed of leaders are highly educated. He added that once the government deliver’s the Bangsamoro Ministerial government, the younger Bangsamoro will have to take over.

Harnessing Young People’s Potential for Political Dialogue Processes

Energy, dynamism, creativity, and idealism are among the fundamental elements that make up young people’s potential. These elements have been acknowledged and recognized by both young and more senior GPH-MILF peace process officials as having contributed significantly to the success of the political dialogue process in the Philippines. In order to fully harness the youth’s potential in political dialogue processes, therefore, it is necessary to **EQUIP** young people with the necessary skills and expertise, **INSPIRE** them to become part of the solution, **CHANNEL THEIR INSPIRATION** towards organizing and engaging dialogue among their peers, and **CREATE THE SPACE** where they can professionally apply their skills and turn the inspiration into passion.

EQUIP young people by investing in their education. Dialogue processes will require professional and skilled secretariat support. The higher the level of relevant education, the bigger the chances of playing substantive roles as evidenced by the case of the young lawyers in the government Peace Panel’s Legal Team. At the very least, young people must have the capacity to do research and documentation to be able to provide technical support. In the case of the Philippines, where the functional language of

government is English and where the peace negotiations are conducted and agreements are rendered entirely in English, a good command of the language is essential. As the system of education in the country adopted English as the medium of instruction, ensuring that young people have access to quality education will, thus, greatly equip them linguistically, at the very least.

INSPIRE young people to become part of the solution. Aside from equipping young people with the necessary skills, their education must also raise their awareness of the conflict or the political problem. This could be done both formally by integrating history of the conflict into the education system's curriculum from as early as in primary school. This should be coupled by the integration of peace education or courses on the Culture of Peace and/or the non-violent resolution or transformation of conflict, including dialogue and negotiation skills. This could also be done informally by providing young people access to seminars, workshops, camps that will raise their awareness of the conflict, introduce them to a Culture of Peace (COP), and the non-violent options and efforts at finding a solution to conflicts.

CHANNEL young people's inspiration towards dialogue among their peers. Once young people are inspired, they will look for opportunities to get involved. Investing in youth organizations to absorb young people's energy and channel them towards the organization of more awareness raising seminars or workshops and even political dialogues among their peers that could mirror the formal dialogue process. This could be done by gathering the leaders of school or community-based youth organizations to a training on organizing and facilitating dialogues. Part of their output during the training will be action plans for the dialogues they will conduct. In order to sustain these youth-led dialogues, the youth organizations that were trained could be matched with non-government organizations (NGO) or institutions in their areas that can provide further guidance on the substance of these dialogues. After these youth organizations have had the chance to conduct a few dialogues, they could then be gathered again for further skills enhancement, to learn from their initial efforts, strategizing in terms of broadening the coverage of their dialogues and raising the concerns and ideas gathered from their dialogue participants to the formal peace panels. To create synergy, these youth organizations could be linked either through a physical or cyber platform through which they can meet/engage and share good practices or even broaden the scope of their political dialogues.

CREATE THE SPACE for meaningful youth participation. The inspiration and initial exposure combined with the appropriate skills will produce passionate young people who can competently staff the secretariat of formal political dialogue processes. The creation of an institution to provide secretariat support to the dialogue process can serve as a natural entry point for this young people and also provide an incentive for pursuing a career within in peace work. It is also important to recognize young talents and build on their skills by entrusting them with significant responsibilities. As shown in the foregoing stories, young people rise to the challenge and level up when given the responsibility. To enhance their skills and talent, however, they should undergo mentoring or exposed to further training.

Since the space for participation within negotiations are limited, the formal dialogue process could also make use of the youth-led dialogues as a channel to reach out to the youth sector and to seriously take stock of the concerns of young people. They could even be engaged in their advocacies and make use of young people in explaining the substance of the formal dialogue process down to communities. In order to do so, peace panels must create a mechanism within its broader peace process structure that will allow direct and regular interaction with civil society, in general, and youth organizations, in particular. Such a

mechanism must move beyond the usual one-off, large-scale gathering/fora and allow for a sustained engagement where leaders of youth organizations actively engaged in organizing dialogues among their peers and in their communities can relay to formal peace panels the issues and concerns they gathered and wherein such formal peace panels can address/provide answers/take note of such concerns and/or update young people of issues being negotiated. Formal peace panels could also use this mechanism to explore or generate ideas on options other than their formal position and those of their counterparts.

In **CONCLUSION**, it is important to note that young people are not that difficult to inspire. The usual workshops, seminars and peace camps for young people are often designed in the end to get young people themselves to identify what they can do for or contribute to the formal dialogue process. Although this is empowering and important, the activities they come up with are often limited within their immediate location and not necessarily directly connected with the dialogue process. Young people understand that they are an important part of the dialogue process. However, they also want to know how they can meaningfully participate beyond being the usual warm bodies in constituency building advocacies. There is a need, therefore, to create spaces for young people to be meaningfully involved. Unless such spaces are created, young people's participation will remain either marginal or incidental.

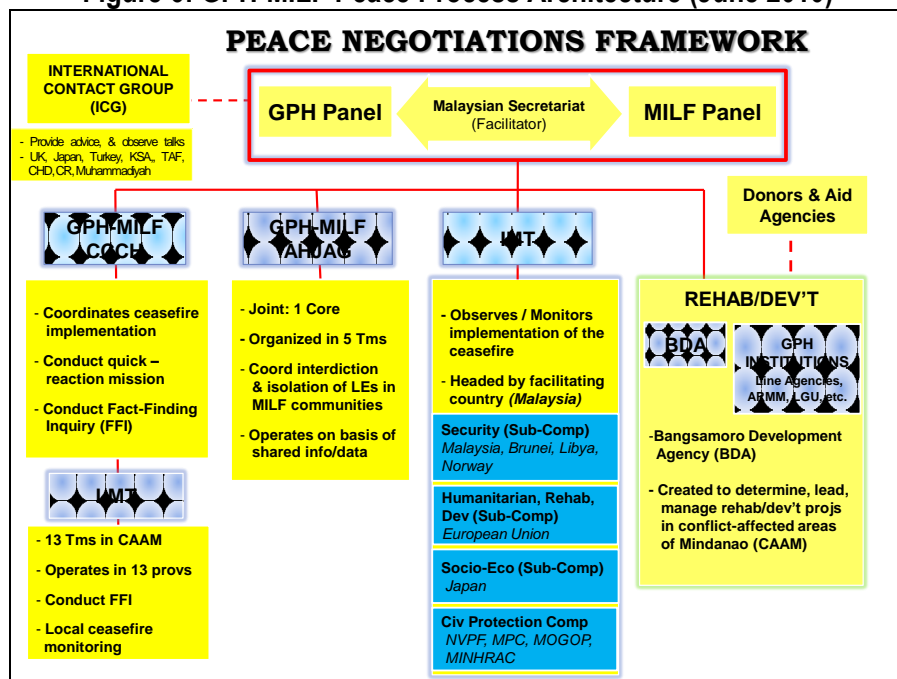
Johaira Wahab-Manatan's experience captures this point very clearly. Because the Panel gave her such a visible role, it became clear that the process was not just for older people; it was also something that people her age could access, understand, and engage. She felt that her engagements with various peace process stakeholders for briefings about the talks somehow made them see the possibility of young people being engaged substantively and not just as additional warm bodies or multipliers in popular advocacies for support to the peace process. She felt that her presence meant that young people can play a substantive role in peace processes. It is precisely this – her presence and those of her other young colleagues in the Legal Team, in the Secretariat and in the BTC – that can address the need to also prepare senior peace process officials to deal with young people. There is no other way to prepare the system for dealing seriously with young people than by infusing the system, within its substantive components, with not just young blood but also very talented and capable ones. Place young people with the talent and expertise in critical and substantive positions within the peace process and provide them space to display the range of possibilities. This is the only way the system and those who run it can see what young people can do.

END

Annex 1: The Evolution of the GPH-MILF Peace Process Architecture

By the end of the Arroyo presidency in mid-2010, the GPH-MILF Peace Process architecture had grown considerably (see Figure 6) from a simple two-party set up supported by their respective Secretariat and Technical Committees. The security aspect of the talks with the established ceasefire mechanisms, which include the CCCH, the AHJAG and the IMT, welcomed the addition of the Civilian Protection Component (CPC) under the IMT. The rehabilitation and development aspect is managed by the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) with assistance from international donors. The political negotiations aspect of the architecture which saw the entry of Malaysia in 2001 as third party facilitator opened up to even more international state and non-state actors coming in to the process through the International Contact Group (ICG).

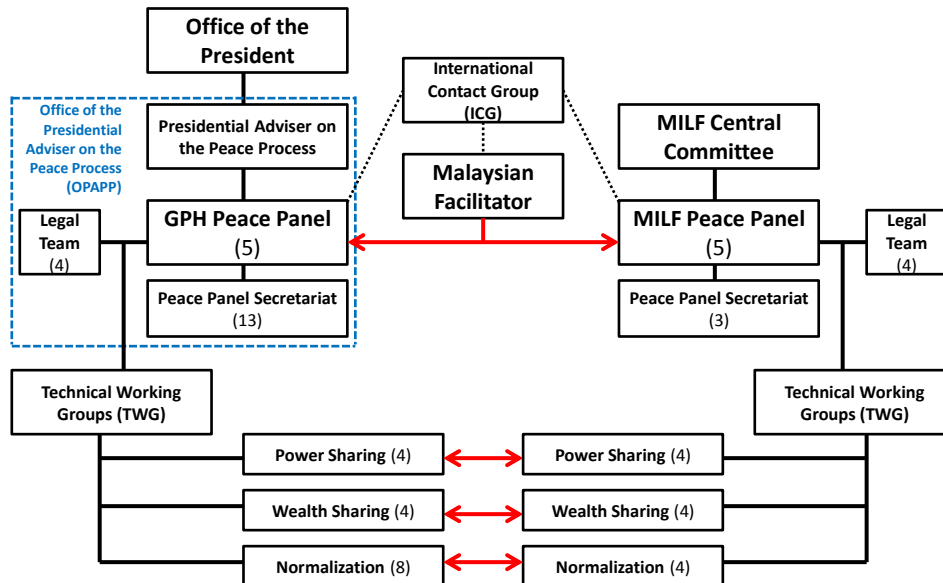
Figure 6: GPH-MILF Peace Process Architecture (June 2010)



Source: Armed Forces of the Philippines – Peace Process Office

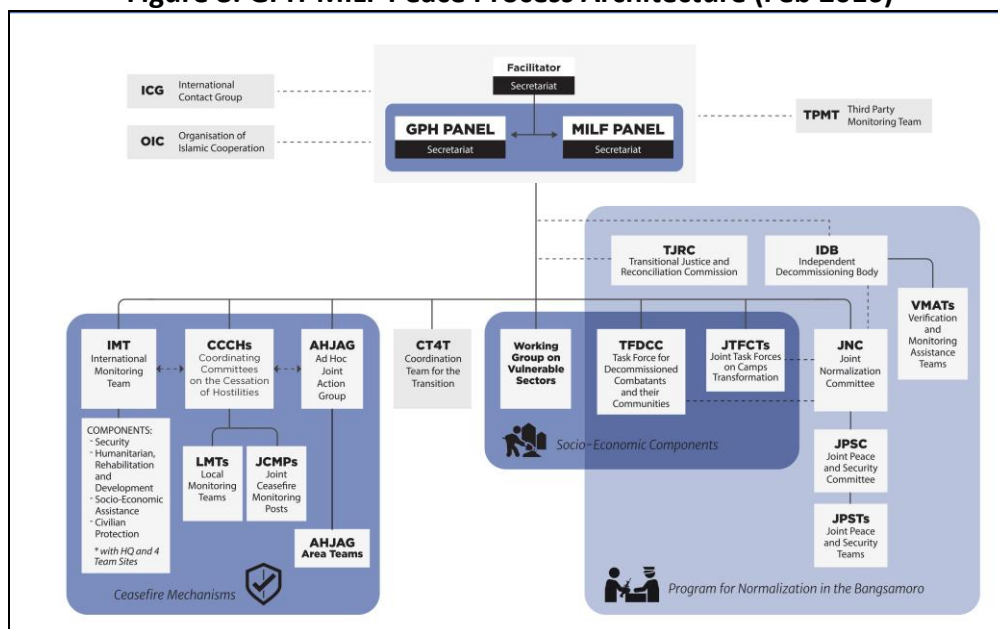
Between 2011 and 2014, when the formal talks ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, the Peace Panels maintained the same number of members at five (5) each (see Figure 7). The government's Secretariat had 13 people – 3 administrative staff and 9 technical staff, 7 of which were under 35 years old. The government's Legal Team had 4 people in it while their three main TWGs had 16 members (Alonto, interview on 28 August 2017; Orbeso, interview on 29 August 2017). The MILF's Secretariat had 3 members, their legal team had 4 and their TWGs had 12 individuals all in all (Pasigan, interview on 31 August 2017).

Figure 7: GPH-MILF Peace Talks Set-Up (2010-2004)



The Aquino administration (2010-2016) saw the Peace Process architecture grow even more with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) weighing in as an observer (during both the signing of the FAB and eventually the CAB) and the creation of the international Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT) to monitor the progress of the implementation of the agreements. While the ceasefire mechanisms were maintained, several other mechanisms anticipating the implementation of various aspects of the political settlement were also set up (see Figure 6).

Figure 8: GPH-MILF Peace Process Architecture (Feb 2016)



Source: Government Peace Implementing Panel, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process

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