**Civil society peace efforts showcased in forum**

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Various civil society organizations (CSOs) have been actively working on initiatives to advance the comprehensive peace process alongside efforts of the government and rebel groups to keep peace talks going.

Karen Tanada, executive director of Gaston Z. Ortigas (GZO) Peace Institute, said that many CSOs across the country are engaging themselves in peace efforts as the unfinished quest to end the protracted armed conflicts has become a growing concern among sectors.

In a recently held dialogue dubbed, “Forum on Peace and Security: Pursuing EDSA’s Path of Peace,” held at the Walter Hogan Training Center of the Ateneo de Manila University, Tanada briefly presented an overview of  CSO initiatives on engaging peace processes.

Also in attendance were Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Quintos-Deles, who presented the government’s peace and security plan; and panel chairs Alexander Padilla and Marvic Leonen, who both gave updates on the ongoing peace negotiations with the NDF and MILF, respectively.

Tanada related that civil society peace efforts can be classified into five. “Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (panel member for talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front [MILF]) categorized these initiatives into peace constituency building; conflict reduction efforts; conflict settlement efforts; peace research and training; and peace building and social development.”

Tanada explained that there are CSOs that engage certain peace tracks.

“The Mindanao Peaceweavers, for instance, are engaging the peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the MILF. They offered the 15-point Mindanao People’s Peace Agenda to the negotiating panels to guide them in resolving the conflict,” she stated.

Mindanao Peaceweavers is a conglomeration of Mindanao civil society groups, which include Mindanao Solidarity Network, Mindanao People’s Caucus, Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, Mindanao People’s Peace Movement, Mindanao Peace Advocates Conference, among others.

Tanada said that other CSOs, such as the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP), a national ecumenical peace movement in the Philippines, are involved in initiatives related to peace talks with the National Democratic Front (NDF).

PEPP, composed of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) and Ecumenical Bishops Forum (BEF), among others, advocate for continuing peace negotiations and resumption of formal peace talks between the government and the NDF towards a final peace agreement.

“They likewise encourage and support collaborative actions to address local causes of social conflicts,” Tanada stated.

On the other hand, there are groups that are actively engaging both peace processes, such as the Waging Peace Philippines which pushed for a Peace Covenant among leaders of different political parties and organizations on common positions of support for peace processes.

Tanada mentioned that indigenous peoples (IP) groups are also keen on peace advocacy. “Among these include the Indigenous People’s Network for Ancestral Domain and Peace, Forging Partnerships for Peace, and Consultative Group on IPs,” she said.

According to Tanada, some of these groups advocate for an independent panel that will represent IPs in various peace talks; recognition of peace pacts and peace zones; exclusion of lumad territories from the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE); and creation of a ‘quick response’ intervention mechanism for internally displaced IP families.

On strengthening participation of women and youth, as well as protecting their rights during armed conflict, Tanada said that civil society networks like WE Act 1325 or Women Engaging in Action on 1325 and Generation Peace have been actively engaged.

**CSO Challenges**

Amid the vibrant role being played by the civil society are the challenges they face, particularly in “engaging the broad Filipino public in supporting the peace process,” according to Tanada.

Further, she said that “facing off with spoilers, those who benefit from conflict and status quo” has confronted CSOs.

“Also, ensuring the citizens’ peace agenda in and outside peace talks, as well as implementing social justice reforms, are among the issues that we try to address,” added Tanada.