

Peace Negotiations in the Philippines: The Government, the MILF and International NGOs

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Summary

- In many peace negotiations International Contact Groups have been a helpful tool in preventing a peace process from stalling or failing. Members, commonly states and international organizations, exert leverage on the parties to the conflict, sustain the parties' commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict and restore mutual trust.
- While international nongovernmental organizations have been overlooked in this context, they may expedite problem-solving by contributing through their networks within civil society, their experience from similar peace processes in different countries, and their perceived independence from the parties to conflict. With the assistance of international nongovernmental organizations a peace process may lead to a higher degree of efficiency and legitimacy in delivering sustainable results.
- The recent negotiations between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front use this potential and incorporate four nongovernmental organizations to an unprecedented degree as part of an International Contact Group. This Peace Brief illustrates their innovative methods and capacities during this ongoing negotiation process.
- The next round of negotiations is scheduled for April 27 and 28, 2011.

“[T]he ability of many civil society organizations to maintain a balanced position in the conflict and to present perspectives often independent from the dominating religious and geographic fault lines has placed NGOs as a source of information un beholden to either the government's or the MILF's interests. In this way, NGOs have helped to minimize misunderstandings between the parties to conflict and to prevent escalations.”

Introduction

On February 9 and 10 of this year, the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) entered a new round of peace negotiations in an attempt to end a conflict that has been disrupting the country for more than three decades. The resumption of formal talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, ended a deadlock that begun in August 2008, when the Supreme Court of the Philippines issued a temporary restraining order against the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) between the government and the MILF, which would have increased the control of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).¹ The decision was followed by MILF attacks against Christian communities in Central Mindanao and counterattacks by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). As part of the latest negotiations, the two Negotiating Peace Panels – representatives of the government and the MILF, respectively—are joined for the first time by an International Contact Group (ICG), which is intended to serve as a guarantor of the negotiations. The ICG formalizes the engagement of four third-party governments

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About this Brief

The MILF stands for a radical Islamic revivalist viewpoint and seeks self-determination for the traditionally Muslim Bangsamoro people in the southern parts of the Philippines. The MILF was founded after its split from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1977. Negotiations between the government of the Philippines and the MILF began in January 1997 but have been interrupted repeatedly. This Peace Brief seeks to shed light on the recent approach the parties to conflict have chosen to overcome the difficulties that have foiled peace negotiations in the past.

The author, Claudia Hofmann, is a Jennings Randolph TAPIR fellow at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). This work was supported by a fellowship of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

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