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Peace is not just the absence of war or conflict. For indigenous women like me, peace is about kefiyo fédéw (peaceful feeling).

Froilyn Mendoza

A photograph showing two women in hijabs, one black and one purple, writing on a large sheet of paper. The paper is covered in handwritten text in various languages, including English and Spanish. The woman in the black hijab is writing with a black marker, and the woman in the purple hijab is pointing at the text. The background is a plain wall.

As the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front meet in Kuala Lumpur, **We use cookies on this site to enhance your user experience**
 Franny Mendoza, founder of PLWO, shares how she and other indigenous women are
 fighting for their voices to be heard in the new Bangsamoro Basic Law.
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Peace is not just the absence of war

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No, thanks

When the government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (/node/2053) on October 15, 2012, many rejoiced. It seemed that peace to the four-decade conflict between the Government and MILF had finally been reached.

But peace is not just the absence of war or conflict. For indigenous women like me, peace is about *kefiyo fédew* (peaceful feeling). This can only be attained in the future Bangsamoro if all our basic needs such as food, shelter, security and recognition are satisfied. We need to be given the fundamental right to our identity and territory. It is our inherent birthright. It is non-negotiable.

I live in the Southern most part of the Philippines, in the hinterlands of South Upi. It is one of the poorest municipalities in the province of Maguindanao and is at the heart of the conflict. It is a core territory of the envisioned future Bangsamoro political entity.

A new opportunity for indigenous women

I belong to the Téduray tribe, one of the 18 major tribal groupings of Non Islamized Indigenous Lumad tribes in Mindanao. For the past 20 years I've been a grassroots campaigner and organiser for indigenous women. I am the founder of the Téduray Lambangian Women's Organization (/node/2105) (TLWOI), a grassroots organization of tribal women in my hometown.

Since 1970, more than 10,000 Téduray families have fled Maguindanao. This is partly due to armed confrontations between the Ilaga (a Christian Militia) and the Moro (Muslim people in Mindanao). In addition, in 1996 the MILF established a base in our area and declared it a Satellite Camp.

In 2000 former President Estrada declared war against MILF and overran our camp. We had to flee once again, and we still do not have permanent places to live in.

Indigenous people in Philippines have historically been excluded from participating in governance and the electoral process. However, there is an opportunity for this to change. The development of the Basic Law of the new region of Bangsamoro has included a process of consultation with the population of Mindanao. Indigenous women were able to get involved in these consultations, in part due to a governance project by Conciliation Resources and the British Embassy (/node/2194), which included capacity building activities that empowered us to participate.

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sending organisational statements, attending public hearings and presenting our position in consultations on the basic law. We have submitted our proposed provisions for consideration in the drafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

OK, I agree

No, thanks

This is important as it helps to challenge the wider public perceptions of indigenous women as housewives who are confined to household chores.

Indigenous women play an important role in our customary traditional governance. We are responsible for settling conflicts, officiating rituals and acting as midwives when other indigenous women give birth.

Women need to participate in the codification of our laws

However, despite our important traditional roles, cultures within the indigenous community continue to harm and disadvantage women. It is not surprising to see young indigenous women forced to marry men six times their age in arranged marriages. Rape is considered an ordinary case that is confined to the expertise of the tribal leaders and settled amicably. Even worse, rape victims are sometimes forced to marry the perpetrator because in our culture, rape is a form of marriage. Cases of incest rape are common. With the prominence of alcoholism among indigenous peoples, physical and sexual abuse is increasing. These cases are settled amicably as part of our customary law, and are not known publically.

The tribal structure is a biggest stumbling block to indigenous women's empowerment. This is why we need to actively participate in the codification of our customary laws to ensure that the issues affecting us are considered.

This is a chance for indigenous women to interact with governance structures outside of the tribe.

For instance, many indigenous women are victims of discrimination and violence. However, they cannot talk about the issue openly because there is a tribal culture of *mesala* (penalizing) those who expose sensitive issues, like rape. It is forbidden and taboo to talk about sex. As a result, women who are victims of violence keep silence. Through the consultation, we were able to request that the Bangsamoro Basic Law to have a provision on this. Without the input of indigenous women, this issue may have gone unconsidered.

We indigenous women are praying that our proposed provisions will be upheld when congress enact the final Bangsamoro Basic Law. In particular we hope for a specific provision on the protection of the rights of indigenous women.

We know the struggle isn't over, we only hope that partners and supporters will continue to walk with us in our journey. No war, no violence against

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OK, I agree

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