

APPENDIX 1

The Experience from the Philippines

Melinda Quintos de Jesus described a media intervention in support of peace, which has recently been undertaken in the Philippines.

This intervention has occurred in the context of long seasons of multiple insurgencies by Muslim militants, the Communist Party, right-wing military rebels and groups of indigenous people. Some of these groups have peace agreements in place with the government. There is a civic commitment to peace, a strong civil society, an active NGO sector and a free, vigorous Press.

However, the Press was not supporting the peace process. Reporting was more concerned with peace breakdowns than with promoting and reporting on peace agreements. An organization was formed called the Alliance for Peace Communications, which established the first Zone of Peace in the Mountain Province. This was a dramatic event. Journalists gathered to reflect on why the media was not covering peace-related events and issues.

5 seminars were held around the country, concentrating on covering the history of the struggle, especially for younger journalists. The concerns raised by these journalists included the lack of spokespeople, the lack of good information during negotiations, and the lack of source-books and background briefings.

A report was prepared and presented to government, identifying gaps in the information provided and raising the concerns of media vis-a-vis negative reporting. A method of "content analysis" was developed, and used to evaluate the media's role in peace-building. Using this method, gaps and weaknesses in peace reporting were identified. It was felt that there was an overabundance of "war-mongering" coverage. It was felt that it was necessary to communicate with editors to express the need for more contextualization of conflict/peace stories.

Follow-up has not yet been possible for financial reasons, but a publication is in process.

From this experience it was concluded that one can achieve results with a phased, multifaceted, modular, flexible approach. It is hoped that by educating journalists in peace subjects, more stories of reconciliation will emerge.

Overall it is important to develop a new cultural sensitivity amongst journalists, who should be encouraged to recognize that part of their role in society is to soothe communities with a history of war, and to contribute to the building of a culture of peace.