



Amplifying Women's Voices Towards Sustainable Peace

Women CSO-Led Panel Discussion during the High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, April 24-25 2018

**Youth for Sustainable Peace
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I. Introduction

Good morning. Thank you to the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, UN Women, Peacebuilding Support Office and the Permanent Missions of Canada, Japan, and Liberia for this opportunity to share the views of young women and LGBT youth in the Philippines.

Peace is not just the absence of war; peace is the presence of justice where people live in a just and humane society; where they do not suffer from prejudice and discrimination, violence, poverty; and at the same time caring for the environment. This is not a new concept to most people. Peace is inclusive, and embraces and respects human rights and diversity¹.

But how do we know if it is sustainable? How can we ensure that it be experienced by the future generations?

Concept of Sustainable Peace

The "Sustaining Peace", based from the recommendations of the 2015 review of the UN peacebuilding architecture forwards the idea that in peacebuilding efforts and its implementation, it must be nationally and locally-owned and led². The concept of Sustaining peace seem easy to do, but in reality, it takes a lot of effort, passion, drive and resources to make this happen. There are many factors to consider, barriers to surpass and challenges to overcome.

The Philippine Context

¹ Dr. Jasmin Nario-Galace's Presentation During the GNWP Youth Training on WPS

² The above is adapted from: UN Peacebuilding Support Office "Guidance on Sustaining Peace",

Climate change, gender-inequality, poverty, armed conflict, corruption, and the violation of human rights--- some of the many issues we face in my country, the Philippines. In ours and in the global context, there is a plethora of problems that put peace principles at risk such as the rising number of men, women and children being killed, displaced and continue suffering because of poverty, marginalization and hate.

A. The War on Drugs

Majority in this room, if not all, are aware of the ongoing drug war in the Philippines. According to the 2017 Human Rights Watch World Report, “The “war on drugs” has resulted in the deaths of thousands of mostly poor Filipinos bringing the total death toll to more than 12,000.”³ Furthermore, even minors are victims of this campaign implemented by the current administration. According to Children’s Legal Rights and Development Center (CLRDC), at least 74 minors (56 boys and 18 girls) have been killed in police operations and vigilante-style attacks over the last 17 months, from July 2016 to December 2017. These minors, along with majority of the victims, died without undergoing due process⁴.

Peace is threatened with the ongoing war on drugs in my country because, as I have mentioned earlier, peace is not just the absence of war, it is also about the respect for human rights and access to justice for everyone.

This is one of the many peace issues that confront us. There are many reasons that prevent our country from achieving long-lasting peace. Another is the recent military attack wherein civilians were caught in the crossfire in Marawi City in the island of Mindanao.

B. Marawi Siege

On 23 May 2017, members of the Maute Group who are inspired by ISIS clashed with government troops and held hostage civilians. Due to this, Martial Law was declared in the whole island of Mindanao which lasts until now⁵. An estimate of 77,170 families (353,921 individuals) have been displaced according to government agencies who are monitoring the siege⁶.

³ https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/201801world_report_web.pdf

⁴ <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/980513/group-finds-74-minors-in-drug-war-body-count>

⁵ <http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/10/17/17/timeline-the-battle-for-marawi>

⁶ http://www.protectionclusterphilippines.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/IDPPAR-Marawi-Displacement_Issue-06.pdf

According to the Department of Education 22 out of 69 Public Schools were greatly damaged because of the war. Children and youth were not able to go to school from May to October⁷. The implication of children who are deprived of their right to education is that they become vulnerable to joining rebel groups thinking that it is the only way for them and their families to survive. Through our collective efforts, we can help address the context that foment terrorism one of which is providing quality education through building schools for the youth.

How then does this hinder my country from achieving peace? The simple answer is that people in the area continue to suffer in many aspects that deprive them from exercising their basic human rights which are the foundation of their other rights.

The Marawi Siege is just one of the many armed conflicts in the Philippines. The continuous battles between government troops and rebels, have a negative implication to economic, social, cultural and political aspects in the country.

II. Steps taken by women and civil society/ role of young women

Girl+ Ambassadors for Peace in the Philippines

I am Project Officer at the Center for Peace Education-Miriam College working on women, youth, peace and security in partnership with Global Network of Women Peacebuilders. One recent initiative we had is the organizing of a youth training on women, peace and security and its intersection with human rights and the media. The main output of this training is a social media plan that promotes accountability to gender equality, women's rights, human rights, and peacebuilding policies. You may ask, why a social media plan? It is because nowadays, the worldwide web is the easiest platform to spread information and reach people from different areas with just one click.

On 19-21 February 2018 the training was held at Miriam College, Quezon City. It was attended by 28 young women leaders from across the Philippines representing sectors from the academe, civil society, security, local government and the indigenous peoples.

The training paved the way for the creation of the Girl+ Ambassadors for Peace-Philippines. This is a network composed of the women youth leaders who attended the trainings and have been equipped with the knowledge on human rights, women's rights, peace and security. This network is the avenue for the youth to engage not just with the members of their organizations and localities, but the Philippines as a whole in upholding the said principles through the use of social media. The outputs of the participants were divided into different themes that would be highlighted per month that aims to raise awareness on issues surrounding peace and security,

⁷ <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/630341/22-of-69-public-schools-in-marawi-totally-damaged-deped-exec/story/>

women's rights and human rights. For example: On 08 March 2018, International Women's day, we participated in a twitter party expressing our support for women's rights and gender equality.

We, the Girl+ Ambassadors for Peace in the Philippines come from different organizations. Some examples of my fellow members' own engagements and efforts to sustain peace in the Philippines include organizing a forum in the university highlighting the accomplishments of Dauntless Filipino Women of the 21st Century; organizing a women's peace summit empowering women in conflict affected areas in Lanao del Sur, Mindanao; and designing a leadership development program called Project YACAP-*yakap is embrace in Filipino*, and the acronym stands for Youth-Amplifying Co-Creating Advocating Peace that envisions building a generation of young people in Mindanao who will commit to embrace the culture of peace.

The participation has empowered our members, such as, Lynrose Genon who lives an hour away from Marawi; and who experienced women being the frontrunners in the relief operations, engaging as partners in delivering services for internally displaced persons because of the conflict in Marawi.

These are just some examples of the engagements of the members of our network. Most of us are engaged in different sectors which reflect the diversity of this network. It shows that despite coming from different backgrounds, we are all for reaching peace and security, gender-equality and the protection of human rights through different ways.

In the Philippines, there are a lot of organizations led by women, men and youth that contribute to peacebuilding through lobbying, organizing donation drives for relief and rehabilitation efforts, consultations with women in the communities and implementing capacity building projects.

There are a lot of remaining challenges to sustaining peace because of the fact that one challenge leads to another. Some of the greatest challenges that put sustainable peace at risk are corruption, poverty, gender inequality, armed conflict, access to quality education, human trafficking, violent extremism, unemployment, crimes, historical injustice, social and political division.

In my own personal opinion, I think apathy (ex. political apathy) is also a challenge to sustaining peace. When people do not care for others, the environment and the like focusing just on themselves or are complacent with status quo where injustice, inequality and impunity prevail; peace will be far from their reach because no one is willing to take the step towards change.

The continuous presence of these challenges is a threat to sustainable peace because of the fact that it deprives people from exercising their rights as individuals. It deprives people to live a good life and when I say a good life, it is not just about being able to wake up every day, it is about having the opportunities to be able to maximize one's full potential as individuals without having

to compromise the rights of others and the environment and that even the future generations will be able to have the same or better opportunities.

As our fellow Girl+ Ambassador for Peace, an IDP from Marawi, Asmin Monib, she believes that multistakeholders in Marawi and the Philippines as a whole should adopt the Sustainable Peace agenda, for it is very useful to align it in making plans for the future, not just only in times of conflict, but also adapting it as a way of daily living.

III. Ways Forward

The question now is: What can be done to implement the Sustainable Peace agenda, not just in the Philippines, but in the international community?

To end my speech, I would like to focus on the letters K E E E pronounced as key that encapsulate my key concrete recommendations on what should be taken into consideration in decision-making about the Sustaining peace agenda and its implementation to communities around the world.

Knowing- I urge governments, civil society and the United Nations to continue to fund research projects on peacebuilding that would cover consultations on people on the ground and look at gender dynamics in identifying solutions to address the barriers in achieving sustainable peace. We cannot just rely on the theoretical. We also need the practical aspect because given the diversity of the world, one community is different from the other and not all solutions work for all.

Empowering- sustaining peace is not just for one sector, it is for everyone and by everyone it means people regardless of sex, gender, culture, religion, social status, whether they are persons with disabilities or not. **I call on everyone, from governments, civil society and the international community to provide resources for capacity building projects on peacebuilding such as workshops on peace education, gender fair education, and human rights to empower the people from all sectors to participate in decision-making processes.**

Engaging – For the youth of the Philippines, we must engage with our leaders. As the present and the future of this generation, we must participate in political and peace processes such as understanding the constitution in light with the proposed constitutional changes, participation in elections including raising awareness of the kinds of leaders our country needs, promoting good governance and passage of bills such as the Bangsamoro Basic Law and the implementation of the peace agreements at the local level. Moreover, collaboration does not just happen between sectors or organizations that forward the same advocacies, it also involves collaboration between sectors, States, civil society with different advocacies, but are toward the same vision of building a culture of peace.

Ensuring- continuity of these solutions for the benefit of the future generations and most importantly, to ensure that the life of these people and the environment will never be put at risk again. **For the people, we must be the check and balance mechanism of our leaders and make sure that the promises that they have made to us shall be fulfilled. For the leaders, you are in your positions because the people put their trust in you towards change, please fulfill your duties and be accountable to your actions. Lastly, for the youth, be the change you wish to see in this world.**

I believe that in reaching sustainable peace, these are the K.E.E.E actions that we must undertake as global citizens. **Knowing, Empowering, Engaging and Ensuring.**

IV. Conclusion

Going back to one of my questions in the beginning of this speech, is sustainable peace feasible? My answer is that when people start to care not just for themselves, but also for others and the environment; when everyone is empowered from different walks of life and when everyone works together towards achieving this goal, I do not see a reason why sustainable peace cannot happen. Many years ago, society thought that women do not have the right to vote, but because of women who stood up for their rights and others; who came up with opportunities for other people to engage and be part of the cause; the right to suffrage of women became a reality and I think this can also be done towards sustainable peace.

Thank you very much and a pleasant day ahead.