

Mindanao



Mindanao, in the southern Philippines, suffers from poor infrastructure, poverty, and violence that has claimed more than 120,000 lives in the last four decades. The violence and rebellion derive from Christian migration to the region, sectarian clashes, war against Muslim separatist insurgents, clan feuds, and unfulfilled hopes of economic prosperity. In 2001, President Macapagal-Arroyo reached a ceasefire agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that has generally held despite occasional outbreaks of violence, while peace talks are ongoing.



In Mindanao, The Asia Foundation draws on long-standing relationships and utilizes its on-the-ground presence to help identify partners from the private sector, civil society, and government who will constructively work together toward peace and development.

PEACEBUILDING

In conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, violence is frequent, unpredictable, and highly localized. Violent conflict often erupts when there is an unresolved dispute between local actors—clans, political leaders, military units, police, insurgent groups, and criminal networks—that cannot be mitigated through existing formal structures or state intervention. The Asia Foundation supports in-depth diagnostic activities and designs strategic interventions that enable communities to monitor and prevent the escalation of conflicts.

Mindanao-based research institutions and non-government organizations (NGOs) investigated the dynamics of clan feuding, locally known as *rido*. Utilizing findings from its detailed *rido* study, The Asia Foundation and its local partners designed and implemented strategic interventions to address *rido*, and are actively engaged in supporting the settlement of feuds. By December 2009, Foundation partners had settled a total of 162 *rido* conflicts, which had left 271 dead and 198 injured

(see <http://ridomap.com/>). The Foundation also supported communities' capacity to rapidly respond to outbreaks of hostilities that may escalate into larger conflicts. The Foundation's Mitigating Localized Conflicts Program has allowed partners and local actors rapidly to intervene and contain a wide range of conflicts.

The Foundation has significantly increased its support of the formal peace processes involving the MILF. The Foundation supports forums that bring together key players and experts to analyze aspects of the peace process in order to inform peace panels and other stakeholders. For instance, after a suspension of peace talks in September 2008, the Foundation nurtured critical consultative endeavors led by partners in the private sector (Mindanao Business Council), academic (University Network for Peace), and the religious sector (Bishops-Ulama Conference) who responded to calls by the government for more community consultations. The Foundation has also supported an international expert who re-framed notions of "Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration" into terms mutually acceptable to the peace panels of the government and the MILF. These activities allowed both sides to have sufficient confidence in the Foundation to invite it to be part of the International Contact Group formed in late 2009 to help negotiations forward.



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The Foundation is part of the International Contact Group for peace talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The Foundation supports programs to improve local government operations throughout the Southern Philippines.

Foundation partners have helped settle 162 clan feuds.

IMPROVING LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

To establish a solid base for good governance, peace, and development, The Asia Foundation supports programs to improve local government operations throughout the southern Philippines, in partnership with local governments, national agencies, the private sector, academic, and civil society. Investment Promotion Strategies of four cities were developed, the City Economic Enterprise Development Office was created in two cities, tax maps were digitized in four municipalities, and business permit applications in one city and 11 municipalities were simplified. Participatory budgeting exercises conducted in more than 700 *barangays* (villages) in Mindanao allowed more than 20,000 citizens to determine how resources were spent. Revenues from business taxes increased by as much as 300 percent and the number of business permits issued by 75 percent. Citizen satisfaction in the quality and efficiency of local governments in Mindanao increased.

COUNTERING CORRUPTION

The Asia Foundation works with officials from nine cities across the island to reduce local corrupt practices that decrease efficiency, increase the cost of doing business, and discourage investment. Through the Foundation's support to the Mindanao Business Council and the Mindanao Coalition of Development NGOs, public-private Coalitions for Transparent Accountable Governance were established to work with reform-minded city governments. To complement reforms in city governments, the Foundation supports a Public Service Excellence, Ethics and Accountability Program that promotes transparency in government transactions, strengthens the accountability of local bureaucrats, and encourages a customer-oriented culture in the delivery of basic services. A Social Weather Stations survey on Good Local Governance in these nine cities documented a decrease in citizen perception of corruption.

IMPROVING ELECTIONS

For decades, elections in Mindanao have been particularly fraught with problems of violence and fraud. In recent elections, including the May 2010 synchronized national and local elections, The Asia Foundation helped the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) extend its area of coverage beyond predominantly

Catholic areas by partnering with networks in Muslim areas, including Muslim NGOs and *muftis* (religious leaders). The Foundation partners with the Bangkok-based Asian Network for Free Elections and Mindanao-based organizations to bring election observers to Mindanao. Finally, since elections often occasion outbursts of violence, the Foundation has worked with local NGOs and religious leaders to form "compacts" among contending candidates to refrain from the use of force in electoral activities.

LAW AND JUSTICE

Long-term peace and stability in Mindanao will require promotion and protection of the human rights of the region's citizens. The Foundation partnered with the Philippine Judicial Academy in the training of all Mindanao judges on international human rights and humanitarian law. Similarly, the Foundation worked with the Department of Justice in the training of Mindanao-based prosecutors on preparation of human rights cases. The Commission on Human Rights conducted trust-building dialogues in Davao and Zamboanga cities among government agencies, the security services, and civil society organizations to promote greater cooperation in addressing human rights issues in the region. These initiatives for efficient prosecution of human rights cases are complemented by the formation of Quick Response Teams (QRTs), which render paralegal aid in cases of illegal arrests, torture, and other forms of human rights violations.

BOOKS FOR MINDANAO

In order to provide local communities with access to reading materials, The Asia Foundation's Books for Mindanao program contributes more than 50,000 books per year to Mindanao. American publishers donate new, high-quality books through the Foundation's Books for Asia program. Special distributions have recently covered all schools in Iligan City, Cotabato City, Island Garden City of Samal, General Santos City, and the province of South Cotabato.

In the Philippines, The Asia Foundation programs are also funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Australian Agency for International Development, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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HEADQUARTERS

465 California Street,
9th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94104 USA
Tel: (415) 982-4640
Fax: (415) 392-8863
info@asiafound.org

WASHINGTON, DC

1779 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Suite 815
Washington, D.C. 20036 USA
Tel: (202) 588-9420
Fax: (202) 588-9409
info@asiafound-dc.org

PHILIPPINES

P.O. Box 7072
Domestic Airport Post Office
Pasay City, Metro Manila
Philippines
Tel: + 63 (2) 851-1466
Fax: + 63 (2) 853-0474
tafphil@asiafound.org

www.asiafoundation.org