

Progressio
- Final Project Report to Niwano Peace Foundation -
Grant # 05-A-224: Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development in SE Asia

Introduction

Progressio (formerly known as the Catholic Institute for International Relations) began a three-year project in 2004 aimed at supporting civil society initiatives for peace and justice, in particular interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The focus areas are Mindanao (Philippines), West Papua (Indonesia) and Timor Leste (formerly East Timor).

We have been working with faith and non-faith based civil society organisations in these three areas to promote action to foster tolerance and interfaith understanding, as well as advocating to bring about change in the structures and policies that hinder peaceful co-existence between religions or ethnic groups, violate human rights and disadvantage vulnerable communities. Recognising that religion is both part of the problem and part of the solution in terms conflict in Southeast Asia, this project seeks to engage with faith groups to strengthen their role in building peace and justice, and support initiatives that promote tolerance and understanding between faiths.

We aim to do this by: a) capacity building to help local organisations to become more effective agents for peace; b) opening channels of dialogue to encourage and support initiatives for dialogue and cooperation; c) international advocacy to work to bring about change in the structural causes of conflict and injustice, and d) research and documentation to build knowledge and supporting good practice.

Support from the Niwano Peace Foundation (Grant # 05-A-224) has been used to promote the capacity building of faith-based partners, and assisted us in developing media to promote understanding about the positive role that faiths play in building peace in Southeast Asia. NPF's support enabled staff of Church-based organisations in Timor Leste and West Papua to improve their peacebuilding skills and gain exposure to inspiring examples of peacebuilding in Mindanao, Philippines. We are hopeful that these two staff members can improve the effectiveness of their own organisations in promoting peace and justice, and are also able to share these skills with others in Timor Leste and West Papua. The training participants also gained the opportunity to promote networking and solidarity between Timor Leste, West Papua and Mindanao. This as an important source of moral and technical support, and also a platform for the development of shared action to promote peace and justice in Southeast Asia.

Assistance from the NPF also enabled us to develop media – specifically a web-based microsite – that has increased access to information about interfaith relations and peacebuilding initiatives in Southeast Asia. The site, which includes a regularly updated news section profiling the positive work of faith organisations, has made available information that helps to debunk that myth that religion is a source of conflict, and show how faith organisations are contributing to peace. We are confident that the increased availability of information on the positive role of faith organisations in building peace also helps to promote confidence among faith organisations about their contribution to peace and capacity to work for interfaith understanding. The address of the microsite is www.interfaith-asia.org.

1. Purpose of the Research/Activity

In 2004, Progressio (formerly the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR)) in consultation with a range of partners and drawing upon over 20 years of advocacy experience in the Asian region developed a three-year project aimed at supporting civil society initiatives for peace and justice, in particular interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The focus areas are Mindanao (Philippines), West Papua (Indonesia) and Timor Leste (formerly East Timor). Our partners include both faith and non-faith based civil society organisations.

The project seeks to address the following needs:

- The need for improved analysis and awareness about the role that faith, religious identity and religious institutions play in conflict and peace in Southeast Asia.
- The need for capacity building to support the contribution of civil society organisations (CSOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) in building peace.
- The need for expanded action by faith communities to foster tolerance and understanding between different faith groups, and prevent communal conflict.
- The need for advocacy to bring about change in the structures and policies that hinder peaceful co-existence between religions or ethnic groups, violate human rights and disadvantage vulnerable communities.

Progressio has been working to address these needs by engaging with local partners to strengthen the role of faith-based and civil society organisations in promoting peace and justice. In particular, the project has sought to develop the role of faith-based and interfaith initiatives for peace and justice. Recognising that religion is both part of the problem and part of the solution in terms conflict in Southeast Asia, we

have worked to engage with faith groups to strengthen their role in building peace and justice, and support initiatives that promote tolerance and understanding between faith groups.

The short-term objectives of this three-year project are:

- Expanded and more effective action by faith-based groups and CSO partners to promote peacebuilding and interfaith understanding
- Expanded and more effective advocacy for peace and justice in Southeast Asia at the national, regional and international levels

The long-term goal of this initiative is:

Stronger role of faith-based and civil society organisations in promoting peace and justice in the Philippines, Indonesia and Timor Leste

2. Content and method of the Research/Activity

There are four broad activity categories in the Progressio SE Asia interfaith peacebuilding project. These are:

a) Capacity building: helping local organisations to become more effective agents for peace

We sponsor and facilitate opportunities for FBOs and CSOs in the Philippines, Indonesia and Timor Leste to enhance their skills in conflict analysis, peacebuilding and advocacy. We recognise that there is much that FBOs and CSOs in the region can learn from each other. To create opportunities to share this knowledge and experience, we support FBOs and CSOs in attending relevant training courses, participating in exposure visits and exchanges, and undertaking internships.

b) Opening channels of dialogue: encouraging and support initiatives for dialogue and cooperation

We encourage and support initiatives by FBOs and CSOs in the Philippines, Indonesia and Timor Leste to promote channels of dialogue. These initiatives are aimed at opening up lines of communication a) vertically between civil society and the governmental, military and police authorities, and b) horizontally among civil society, in particular different faith communities.

c) International advocacy: working to bring about change in the structural causes of conflict and injustice

We facilitate the involvement of partners in regional and international advocacy to ensure their voices can be heard at the levels of international policy and decision-making. Progressio also plays a role to play in directly engaging the UK government, EU and other related policy and decision-making bodies on regional concerns. We also work to promote awareness of peace and justice issues in Mindanao, Indonesia and Timor Leste among our membership and the UK public, in the aim of mobilising them to action.

d) Research and documentation: building knowledge and supporting good practice

We conduct and support research and documentation to help facilitate the learning processes of FBOs and CSOs in promoting justice, peace and dialogue in the focus countries.

Within this framework of activities, Progressio originally sought support from NPF for three activities:

- 1) A peaceworker internship program for learning and exchange between West Papua and Mindanao
- 2) Development of a "microsite" website to promote greater awareness about the role of faiths in building peace in Southeast Asia
- 3) A short publication on interfaith collaboration in Southeast Asia by Dr Chandra Muzaffar

Due to external factors in the project context and having obtained less assistance than requested from NPF, the activities earmarked for support from NPF were revised. The peaceworker internship was replaced by peace worker capacity building activities and the number of activities supported by NPF was reduced from three to two, with the third activity, the publication on interfaith collaboration dropped. These changes were communicated to and agreed upon by NPF in the interim report and separate correspondence. Under the revised agreement, the activities supported by NPF and the expected outcomes are:

- *Peaceworker capacity building*
 - o Two peaceworkers (one from West Papua; one from Timor Leste) have enhanced skills in peacebuilding and empowered to act as agents of peace and social change
 - o Two peaceworkers learn from the experience of civil society in building peace in Mindanao
 - o Closer networking and solidarity between peaceworkers in Southeast Asia
- *Asia interfaith peacebuilding microsite*
 - o Increased access to information about interfaith relations and peacebuilding initiatives in Asia
 - o Improved understanding about the roles of faith organisations in building peace in Asia

- Increased sense of empowerment and confidence among faith organisations about their contribution to peace and ability to work for interfaith understanding

The following section reports on the implementation of these two activities.

3. Course of actual events

a) Peaceworker capacity building

As part of our aim to support the capacity building of peaceworkers in SE Asia, we have sponsored and facilitated opportunities for FBOs and CSOs in the Philippines, Indonesia and Timor Leste to enhance their skills in conflict analysis, peacebuilding and advocacy. With support from NPF, we sponsored two peaceworkers from Timor Leste and West Papua to partake in a peacebuilding training and exposure programme in Mindanao.

The two participants in this activity were:

- 1) Dario da Silva Gusmão from the Diocese of Baucau, Office of Justice and Peace in Timor Leste. Dario works as part of the publications and outreach division of the Office of Justice and Peace (OJP) Baucau. OJP Baucau is an organisation of the Catholic Church working to advocate about justice issues and promote peace education.
- 2) Sr. Josephine Tekege of Yayasan Puteri Kerahiman di Tanah Papua in Jayapura, West Papua. Sr. Josephine's organisation seeks to promote social justice by providing assistance to disadvantaged Papuan women and children through education and humanitarian assistance. Sr. Josephine is one of the few indigenous Papuan women religious, and is a vocal advocate for justice. Sr. Josephine also participated in Progressio's regional workshop on the role of women of faith in building peace in February 2006 (see picture), and her sponsorship in peacebuilding training was part of commitment to follow-up the workshop by supporting women of faith in increasing their skills and knowledge of peacebuilding.



Sr. Josephine Tekege (right) singing with Timorese Muslim woman at Progressio woman of faith workshop, Dili, February 2006

Dario and Sr. Josephine spent 3-weeks in Mindanao as part of a peacebuilding training and exposure programme in from 15 May to 2 June 2006. It is of no small significance that this programme took place in Mindanao. In our programme, we have identified Mindanao, with its strong tradition in community-based efforts for peacebuilding and interfaith tolerance, as a valuable source of learning for peaceworkers in Timor Leste and West Papua.

The training programme, the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI), provides a unique experience in that it brings together a wide range of people with vast experience, knowledge and skills in peace-related work. The intensive training in areas such as inter-religious peacebuilding, conflict transformation, community-based peacebuilding and other themes increases skills by drawing on the shared knowledge of both the participants and the facilitators. At the heart of the learning and sharing, the MPI enhances people's commitment and strengthens their capacity to build a more peaceful and just world.

In this programme, Dario and Sr. Josephine had both the opportunity for classroom-based learning, and field exposure. They undertook training in conflict transformation, peacebuilding and gender, and peace advocacy. Dario noted that the training improved his capacity to conduct trainings and workshops as he gained skills in analysis and training techniques. He reports that he has new reference materials and confidence to do training, and that this was put into practice when conducting training on conflict resolution.

The field exposure programmes provided opportunities to visit community-based peacebuilding initiatives and activities to promote interfaith tolerance. Sr. Josephine said that the field exposure complimented the class-room based study as participants were able to see first hand how communities were affected by conflict and the kind of responses they had developed to address it. Dario also noted that it was helpful to learn about how communities engaged in dialogue with the government and also dialogue between different faiths.

Bringing together peaceworkers from all over the Asia-Pacific, the training also provided opportunities for Dario and Sr. Josephine to establish support networks and share experiences with fellow peaceworkers. Both stated that one of the most significant outcomes of the training was the opportunity to meet other people involved in similar work and facing similar challenges. Dario said that J&P Baucau was able to ask for advice when we were doing emergency work related to the crisis in Timor and this greatly assisted them in implementing their emergency assistance programme.

Summing up the experience, Sr. Josephine reported that the programme in Mindanao had both strengthened her commitment for build peace and by enhancing her skills had better equipped her to work for peace.

b) Asia interfaith peacebuilding microsite

The idea of developing a web-based resource regarding the role of faiths in Southeast Asia came from the recognition that faiths and faith organisations in Southeast Asia were working in creative and committed ways to promote peace. And yet, not only was their little information on this, but too often religions were being blamed as the source of conflict. The site aimed to become a source of information about the positive contributions of faith in working for peace and justice both to promote the recognition they deserve, and to help dispel generalisations regarding religion and conflict. The website provides examples of “good practice” in interfaith peacebuilding to inspire those working for peace and interfaith harmony and provide information resources to bolster these efforts.

The site comprises of seven sections; about us, news (with archive), background to Progressio’s involvement, information on faith communities in SE Asia, information on the roles that faiths play, pointers on how people can become involved and support Progressio’s work.



Front page of www.interfaith-asia.org

The news section is the most dynamic component of the site and it updated with articles regarding the positive work of faiths in promoting peace and justice in Southeast Asia. Summaries of some articles over the last six months appear as follow:

East Timor: CAVR report sees light of day

When I attended the truth and reconciliation hearings, I saw the victims cry about those that have harmed them, but they were able talk and to forgive. I thought about what I would do in that situation. I am a pastor, and I am still amazed by their attitude and forgiveness.'

Towards a New Timor Leste: The shared Responsibility of Religious Institutions

At a meeting of faith leaders in Baucau, Timor Leste, to discuss the role of religious institutions in Timor’s future, Pat Walsh addressed conference on the shared responsibilities of religious institutions to work to lift spirits, enthusiasm and commitment to the nation building project.

East Timor women and children rally for peace

Up to 150 East Timorese mothers and their children held a rally for peace in the country’s capital Dili on 1 June. Women and children left positions of safety from recent violence to gather outside the East Timor government’s offices to demand peace and a safe place to live.

Women of faith join together in solidarity

Women of faith from West Papua, Mindanao and East Timor (Timor Leste) came together at a workshop organised by Progressio from 20 to 24 February. The women, who came from Christian, Muslim and indigenous faiths, found that despite their many differences, there is still much they share by way of common challenges, faith inspirations and aspirations for peace in their communities.

Progressio media interview: Church struggling for human rights in West Papua

Progressio’s Country Representative in Timor Leste was interviewed on Australian Broadcasting Commission radio programme, “The Religion Report”, on 12 April 2006 regarding the role of the Catholic Church in West Papua. Listen to the podcast or read the transcript at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/re/rpt/stories/s1613596.htm>

East Timor: Bishop of Dili stresses people's desire for justice, calls for international tribunal (14 Dec 2005)

East Timorese Bishop, Mgr. Alberto Ricardo da Silva, in a letter to the UN Secretary General dated 5 December, urged for a renewed commitment by the United Nations to ensure international law is upheld.

upheld and perpetrators of human rights violations during Indonesian occupation of East Timor.

4. Achievements of the Research/Activity

This evaluation of achievements focuses on the two activities supported by NPF.

(Note: Comprehensive evaluation of the project's achievements will be conducted in April 2007 and documented in an annual report. This report will be made available to NPF on request.)

a) *Peaceworker capacity building*

- Two staff members of faith-based organisations (one in Timor Leste, one in West Papua) gained opportunity to participate in peacebuilding training and field exposure programme
- Both participants report increase knowledge, skills and confidence in designing and implementing peacebuilding activities
- Both participants report being inspired by seeing examples of community-based peacebuilding in Mindanao
- Both participants indicate that participation has strengthened their networks and that learnt much from sharing and interaction with other peacebuilders
- Both indicate greater confidence. In the case of Sr. Josephine, she also referred to greater in her identity as peacebuilders, which has strengthened her resolve to engage in the challenging task of building peace in her communities
- Both participants indicate commitment to share skills and knowledge gained with other in their organisation and in target communities

It is not possible to quantify the outcomes of this activity. However, we can be reasonably confident that it has helped to enhance the skills and community of the two participants to work for peace. The real test of achievement will be how each participant is able to apply knowledge gained in their work, and also to transfer the skills and knowledge to others. Dario has made a good start in this by holding two trainings in conflict resolution and in sharing materials from MPI with others in his organisation. Overall, it is too early to properly assess the longer-term benefit of the training, and Progressio where possible will seek to follow up with participants to support them in both applying and transferring the skills and knowledge gained.

From the feedback received from participants and their organisation, we feel confident that this activity was relevant to the needs of the two participants and their organisations, and has strengthened their capacity to act as agents of peace and justice.

Achievement in this activity should also be assessed from the perspective of the selection and appropriateness of participants. We focused on faith-based organisations based on our analysis that they have a strategic contribution to make to peace and justice in their respective communities. Particularly given events that have transpired recently in Timor Leste, this analysis holds true, and the need for faith-based and other civil society organisations to work for peace and justice has taken on new urgency and importance.

b) *Asia interfaith peacebuilding microsite*

Unfortunately, given technical constraints, we are not able to provide statistics on the number of visitors to the www.interfaith-asia.org site. (The site is a microsite to the Progressio main site, and visitor "hits" cannot be calculated for individual pages.) What we do know is that in this one-year period, the Progressio main site has attracted on average 20,000 visitors per month. We can expect that a proportion of these site visitors also accessed the microsite. The microsite has been well advertised on the main site, and we have also promoted it at related events, such as the talk at the Annual General Meeting by Dr. Chandra Muzaffar. Faith-related news items have also appeared on the front page of the main site, and provide an inroad to the microsite.

The achievements of this activity are difficult to show in concrete terms. Our main intent has been to promote the availability and access of information on the positive role of faiths in building peace, and this

has been achieved by the existence of the site. We are not able to prove that increased availability of information has helped to increase the confidence of faith groups in the positive contribution to peace, or helped to dispel misunderstandings about religion and violence. However, we assume a causal link. What we do know is that partners have appreciated our using the site to help promote broader coverage of their work and appreciate our recognition of their efforts.

5. Futures areas to be pursued

As noted above, the real test of the achievements of capacity building lies with the ability of participants to apply the skills gained in their context and to transfer these skills to others. Ongoing support to participants and their organisations would facilitate the process of translating the outcomes of training into concrete results. Small grants could provide resources to help participants in utilising their knowledge on new activities could also be pursued.

Future areas to be pursued in relation to the Asia interfaith website could include its expansion to other areas of Southeast Asia (beyond the current focus on Timor Leste, West Papua and Mindanao). It would also be interesting to explore the possibility of teaming up with a local or regional organisation to share ownership of the site. There is also scope to develop it as a forum for exchange of information and ideas among faith-based organisations in the region.

However, it should be noted that Progressio's capacity to follow through on future areas to be pursued will be very limited. Progressio has decided not to develop a second phase of this 3-year project, and our regional interfaith peacebuilding programme will conclude at the end of March 2007. The Timor Leste country programme will continue to operate, and will seek to take forward some of the initiatives developed under the regional programme, such as the capacity building of faith-based organisations. It is hoped that Niwano Peace Foundation could directly support partner organisations, such as Justice and Peace Baucau, in follow-up activities to this training and further development of their conflict resolution programme.