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# KEEPER OF THE SOUL OF THE PEOPLE: The Life and Work of Bae Liza Llesis Saway of the Philippines

By Alicia Simoni, Peace Writer

With contributions from  
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2009 Women PeaceMakers Program

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## **A NOTE TO THE READER**

In the following pages, you will find narrative stories about a Woman PeaceMaker, along with additional information to provide a deep understanding of a contemporary conflict and one person's journey within it. These complementary components include a brief biography of the peacemaker, a historical summary of the conflict, a timeline integrating political developments in the country with personal history of the peacemaker, a question-and-answer transcript of select interviews, and a table of best practices in peacebuilding as demonstrated and reflected on by the peacemaker during her time at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice.

The document is not intended necessarily to be read straight through, from beginning to end. Instead, you can use the historical summary or timeline as mere references or guides as you read the narrative stories. You can move straight to the table of best practices if you are interested in peacebuilding methods and techniques, or go to the question-and-answer transcript if you want to read commentary in the peacemakers' own words. The goal of this format is to reach audiences through multiple channels, providing access to the peacemakers' work, vision, lives and impact in their communities.

## **ABOUT THE WOMEN PEACEMAKERS PROGRAM**

Made possible through a generous grant from the Fred J. Hansen Foundation, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice's (IPJ) Women PeaceMakers Program annually hosts four women from around the world who have been involved in human rights and peacemaking efforts in their countries.

Women on the frontline of efforts to end violence and secure a just peace seldom record their experiences, activities and insights – as generally there is no time or, perhaps, they do not have formal education that would help them record their stories. The Women PeaceMakers Program is a selective program for leaders who want to document, share and build upon their unique peacemaking stories. Selected peacemakers join the IPJ for an eight-week residency.

Women PeaceMakers are paired with a Peace Writer to document in written form their story of living in conflict and building peace in their communities and nations. The peacemakers' stories are also documented on film by the IPJ's partner organization Sun & Moon Vision Productions. While in residence at the institute, Women PeaceMakers give presentations on their work and the situation in their home countries to the university and San Diego communities.

The IPJ believes that women's stories go beyond headlines to capture the nuance of complex situations and expose the realities of gender-based violence, thus providing an understanding of conflict and an avenue to its transformation. The narrative stories of Women PeaceMakers not only provide this understanding, but also show the myriad ways women construct peace in the midst of and after violence and war. For the realization of peace with justice, the voices of women – those severely affected by violent conflict and struggling courageously and creatively to build community from the devastation – must be recorded, disseminated and spotlighted.<sup>1</sup>

**BIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN PEACEMAKER –  
BAE LIZA LLESIS SAWAY**



Photo credit: Patricia Rogers

Bae Liza Llesis Saway is an indigenous peacemaker in Mindanao in the Philippines, where Moros (Muslims), Christian settlers and indigenous peoples co-exist amidst several armed groups fighting the government army. She is known as *Bae Nanapnay*, a name given to the woman leader of the Talaandig indigenous community; her work is based on “the understanding of the harmonious relationships of plants, animals, human beings and the spirits.”

A founder of Talaandig Mothers for Peace and the wife of a tribal chief, Saway has been leading the quest for the rights of the tribe to self-determination and self-governance in their ancestral domain, where their families have lived for centuries. Through her leadership, the Talaandig women are empowered and have equal opportunities in the decision-making processes of their tribe. The group documents indigenous methods of conflict resolution that have proved effective in settling family and intra-tribal discord. Saway also led the establishment of the Talaandig School for Living Traditions in Bukidnon Province, which promotes indigenous arts, music and dance and where children are taught the values and traditions of the tribe, thus preserving the culture heritage of the Talaandig people.

Saway has also emerged as one of the key leaders in the interfaith and multiethnic community efforts to move forward the peace processes in Mindanao. She is a council member of the Mindanao Peoples Caucus, composed of grassroots leaders from the Moro, Christian and indigenous communities who are working together for the peaceful resolution of the armed conflicts. As such, she has conducted dialogues with the major actors in the peace process and is an active partner in peace and development campaigns at the grassroots level. Saway bases her peace advocacy campaigns in the Talaandig doctrine of Kinship, as she represents her tribal community’s call for a genuine peace in Mindanao.



## **CONFLICT HISTORY – MINDANAO, THE PHILIPPINES**

Prior to the arrival of Muslim kingdoms, Spanish conquistadors and the U.S. colonization of the Philippines, indigenous peoples – such as the Talaandig tribe from the northern and western part of Bukidnon Province – inhabited the island of Mindanao. Between the 13th and 15th centuries, with increased trade in surrounding areas and the arrival of Muslim missionaries, some indigenous tribes converted to Islam.

For Christian Filipinos, the history of the country begins in 1521, when the Spanish conquistador Ferdinand Magellan arrived and initiated the colonization of the area.<sup>2</sup> The Spanish ruled the area until 1898, when the United States defeated them in the Spanish-American War. Unlike the Spanish who never established political control over the Muslims, known as Moros, in what is now the southern Philippines, the U.S. exerted control over the entire region. Beginning under U.S. colonization and continuing through independence (when Mindanao was incorporated into the Republic of the Philippines), the state-sponsored migration of large numbers of Christians into Mindanao led to the displacement and severe marginalization of Moros and indigenous peoples.

The Jabidah Massacre on Corregidor Island in 1968 (in which 30 Muslim army recruits were killed by the army) and the formation of a Christian vigilante group known as the *Ilaga*, or “Rats,” were some of the impetus for the formation of the armed Moro resistance movements in the late 1960s and early ‘70s. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) fought to create an independent Muslim state on the island. The Tripoli Peace Agreement between the MNLF and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) was signed in 1976, but it was never fully implemented and the fighting continued.

After the 1976 agreement, divisions arose in the MNLF and a breakaway faction, known as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), formed and began carrying out attacks against the government military. In 1996, the MNLF signed a final peace agreement with the GRP, but the MILF refused to recognize it, believing the agreement conceded too much to the GRP.

The peace process, as well as violent clashes, between the MILF and GRP continued for 11 years (1997 to 2008). Four of those 11 years were devoted to crafting a Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD), a key issue in the peace talks and an essential step in defining the ancestral homeland of the Moro people. The GRP and MILF leaders agreed to the MOA-AD and initialed the document in late July 2008. But at the signing ceremony on August 5, the Supreme Court of the Philippines issued a temporary restraining order on the signing of the agreement. Fighting between the MILF and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) broke out immediately, displacing hundreds of thousands of civilians and dashing the hopes of millions who saw the end of the decades-long war in sight.

Though the MILF lost much confidence in the Gloria Macapagal Arroyo administration over the debacle and fallout from the MOA-AD, the peace process inched forward slowly in 2009 and early 2010. An International Contact Group was formed as a guarantor of the peace process, and the International Monitoring Team returned to the island after departing when armed conflict resumed in late 2008.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the dominant conflict between the MILF and GRP/AFP, Mindanao is also the base for other armed groups, notably the National People's Army, the armed wing of the communist party. They, too, have been fighting an insurgency against the government since the 1960s. Separately, the Islamist extremist organization, the Abu Sayyaf Group, operates primarily from the southern Mindanaoan island of Sulu. The group is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States for its methods of kidnapping, extortion, torture and banditry in its quest for an Islamic fundamentalist state in Mindanao.

Indigenous peoples, like the Moros, continue to be economically marginalized in Mindanao and encounter numerous obstacles to protecting their homeland. In October 1997, the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), or Republic Act Number 8371, was approved by the Philippine Congress – a significant milestone in the struggle for equality and justice. It is officially “an act to recognize, protect and promote the rights of indigenous cultural communities/indigenous people, creating a national commission of indigenous peoples, establishing implementing mechanisms, appropriating funds therefor [sic], and for other purposes.”<sup>4</sup> With the act, indigenous peoples were given the legal instrument to reclaim their ancestral land from settlers – and the significant natural resources in that territory – as well as to practice their customary laws free from discrimination.

Complicating the insurgencies and struggles of indigenous peoples is a phenomenon known as *rido*, or inter-family and kin-based violent conflict. More specifically, *rido* refers to “a state of recurring hostilities between families and kinship groups characterized by a series of retaliatory acts of violence carried out to avenge a perceived affront or injustice.”<sup>5</sup> Though it occurs throughout the Philippines, *rido* is particularly problematic in Mindanao as it overlaps with the various issues and conflicts mentioned above.



## INTEGRATED TIMELINE

### **Political Developments in Mindanao, Philippines and *Personal History of Bae Liza Llesis Saway***

- 13th century** Muslims arrive in what is now the southern Philippines and convert some of the indigenous tribes to Islam.
- 1521** Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan lands in the Philippine archipelago and claims it on behalf of Spain.
- 1565** Spanish colonization begins, but the Spaniards are not able to exert political control over the Muslims, known as Moros, of Mindanao.
- 1898** United States defeats Spain in the Spanish-American War, and the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico are ceded to the United States for \$20 million.
- 1899** The Bates Treaty, pledging non-interference in Mindanao, is signed between the United States and the Sultan of Sulu in Mindanao.
- 1903 – 1904** The “Moro Province” is created under U.S. civil and military rule, and U.S. policy encourages the migration of Christians from the northern Philippines to Mindanao.
- 1913** Political control of the Moro Province is transferred from the military to complete U.S. civilian administration.
- 1935** The United States transfers power of the Philippines to the commonwealth government of Manuel Quezon. The Philippines is promised full independence within 10 years.
- 1941** World War II begins.
- 1942** The Japanese occupy the Philippines after they defeat a U.S.-Philippine force.
- 1946** After the end of World War II, the United States grants independence to the Philippines. Government-sponsored migration of Christians from other areas of the Philippines to Mindanao continues.
- 1956** *December – Liza Llesis is born in the Talaandig village of Sungko in Mindanao.*
- 1965** Ferdinand Marcos wins presidential elections.
- 1968** Thirty Muslim recruits are killed by the Philippine army on Corregidor Island, in what would become known as the Jabidah Massacre.
- 1969** The New People’s Army, the armed branch of the Community Party of the

Philippines, is formed and begins its guerilla struggle against Marcos and the Philippine army.

- 1970s** The *Ilaga*, or “Rats,” a Christian vigilante group, forms to combat Muslim and communist insurgents. They use brutal methods and divide the tri-people communities – Moros, indigenous peoples and Christian settlers – in Mindanao.
- 1972** The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), led by Nur Misuari, begins its armed campaign for Moro independence.
- In reaction to domestic unrest, the communist insurgency and the Moro armed struggle, Marcos declares martial law, suspends parliament, arrests opposition politicians and imposes censorship.
- 1975** Peace talks begin between the MNLF and Philippine government.
- 1976** The government and MNLF sign the Tripoli Peace Agreement, but it is not implemented and fighting continues.
- 1976 – 1980** *Liza studies agricultural engineering at Central Mindanao State University.*
- 1978** A leader in the MNLF, Salamat Hashim, breaks from the group and later forms the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).
- 1981** *April – Liza weds Datu Migketay Victorino Saway, or Datu Vic, in a customary law ceremony.*
- Martial law is lifted. President Marcos wins presidential election.
- 1982** *Liza enrolls at Ateneo de Cabayan University.*
- Liza’s first son, Bagyasan, or “Son of the Researcher,” is born.*
- 1983** Opposition leader Benigno Aquino returns to the Philippines from exile in the United States. He is assassinated at the airport.
- Liza’s second child is born. He is named Sagyawan Tuminamwa, or “Highest Song of Victory.”*
- 1984** *Liza’s third child is born. He is named Saludowan, or “Son of the Cultural Master.”*
- 1986** Corazon Aquino, the widow of Benigno and a candidate for president, disputes Marcos’ victory in the elections. Mass protests, named “People Power,” force Marcos from office.
- 1987** *Liza’s husband is elected municipal counselor.*

- 1989 ***Liza's fourth child is born. She is named Aduna, or "Daughter of Abundance."***
- The Aquino administration responds to the MNLF's demand for autonomy by amending the constitution with a provision for creating an Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).
- 1990 ***Liza's fifth child is born. He is named Kawalowan Daulog, or "Eighty Folds of Fame."***
- The ARMM is created but does not include all 13 provinces demanded by the MNLF.
- 1992 Fidel Ramos wins the presidential election.
- Liza's father-in-law dies. Her husband withdraws from his previous work to lead the Talaandig community.***
- 1994 ***Liza's sixth child is born. She is named Insayan Bae, or "Daughter of the Shaman."***
- 1995 ***Liza's seventh child is born. She is named Insaluday Luna, or "Daughter of Peace."***
- For her leadership, Liza is given the title Bae Nanapnay, or "Keeper of the Soul of the Community."***
- 1996 A peace agreement between the government and the MNLF is signed. The MILF rejects the agreement, but starts peace talks with the Ramos administration.
- Bae Liza helps in the establishment of the School for Living Traditions in Sungko.***
- 1997 ***Bae Liza's eighth child is born. He is named Nalandangan Mabantug, or "Son of the Immortal."***
- The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act is adopted by Congress. It is also known as Republic Act Number 8371. It creates a National Commission on Indigenous Peoples and is meant to protect the rights of indigenous communities.
- Bae Liza's husband is elected commissioner of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples.***
- 1998 Movie actor Joseph Estrada is elected president. He soon launches an "all-out war" against the MILF.
- 2000 ***Bae Liza's ninth child is born. She is named Nano, or "Millennium Child."***

***Bae Liza intervenes against the demolition of houses of indigenous peoples inside their ancestral domain in Bukidnon Province.***

**2001** Estrada is forced from office during “People Power II,” over charges of corruption. Vice-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is sworn in as president. She re-starts peace talks with the MILF under an “all-out peace” policy.

The Mindanao Peoples Caucus (MPC) is established. ***Bae Liza later becomes a council member of the MPC.***

**2003** February – War commences when government troops attack an MILF base in Buliok. The renewed fighting displaces hundreds of thousands of civilians. A cease-fire is later agreed to and peace talks continue.

**2004** Arroyo wins the presidential election.

***Bae Liza participates in an interfaith meeting in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, attended by Muslim, Christian and indigenous religious leaders.***

**2005** ***Bae Liza initiates the organization of the Talaandig Mothers for Peace and the documentation of Talaandig tools and instruments in conflict resolution.***

***Bae Liza protects the Talaandig’s ancestral water from a World Bank-sponsored pipeline.***

**2006** ***Bae Liza prevents an assault on the Talaandig community by the National Bureau of Investigation who were pursuing a criminal believed to be sheltering in the community. The investigators did not have legitimate orders from their superiors and were carrying an outdated warrant for an individual who did not reside in the area.***

***Bae Liza prevents the destruction of indigenous plants and herbs in the protected areas of Mount Kitanglad by logging.***

**2007** ***Bae Liza prevents an assault against members of the Manobo indigenous community. Land-grabbers backed by some politicians and police officers sought to displace the community from their ancestral territory.***

***Bae Liza joins an investigation and stops further military harassment against members of indigenous communities in Bukidnon Province. The military claimed the communities were supporting communist groups allegedly hiding in their territory.***

**2008** July – A Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) – a major step on the way to a Comprehensive Compact to end the conflict – is initialed by both the government and the MILF.

August – The official signing of the MOA-AD in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, is halted when a temporary restraining order is issued by the Supreme Court, upon a petition by powerful Christian politicians in Mindanao. Fighting resumes between the MILF and government army, displacing hundreds of thousands.

October – The Supreme Court declares the MOA-AD unconstitutional.

***Bae Liza joins an MPC team to lobby the government to continue peace talks with the MILF.***

2009

***Bae Liza travels to the United States to participate in the Women PeaceMakers Program at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice.***

## **NARRATIVE STORIES OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF BAE LIZA LLESIS SAWAY**

### **Without Mount Kitanglad, There Would Be No Talaandig**

Nestled between Mount Kitanglad and Mount Kalatungan are the homes of the Talaandig – their customs and beliefs permeating the land and guiding its people.

Pulangi River streams down from the mountaintops with the benevolent spirit of the water – the same spirit that pulses through human blood – gliding along its currents. Verdant fields of sugar cane, corn and coffee extend over the plains, with brightly colored orchids and sunflowers punctuating the otherwise lush green expanse. Protective spirits reign over both farm and flower.

The peak of Mount Kitanglad is most sacred of all. The abode of the spirits – known as *Nanlitan* (caretakers) and *Namiyansa* (providers of human needs) – the mountain looms as a living monument to history and a vital source of food, medicine and knowledge. The belief is that without Mount Kitanglad, there would be no Talaandig.

Mount Kitanglad is where Apu Agbibilin, the ancestor of the Talaandig people, took refuge during the Great Flood. The mountain's foothills are where Bae Liza Llesis Saway has spent her life.

*Thousands of years ago, Magbabaya (God) unleashed torrential rains on earth. The unforgiving rains were God's punishment for (wo)mankind's violation of the sacred covenant between people, spirits and Nature. While relentless rains swallowed land and limb alike, the holy prophet Apu Agbibilin sought refuge on Mount Kitanglad, the only land that was spared during this Great Flood. Eventually, when the flood subsided Agbibilin descended the mountain's slopes and found Ginamayung, the only woman to survive the rains. Ginamayung had endured the flood by floating in a wooden drum and eventually – when Mount Kalatungan emerged alongside Kitanglad – she landed there. Agbibilin and Ginamayung married and together they bore four sons and four daughters. Their eldest son, Apu Saulana, is the father of the Talaandig.*

From the moment she conceived, Helenita Colero Sinta-on was acutely aware of the child growing in her womb. She carefully nurtured the unborn baby with love and sustenance, choosing every word she spoke, every thought resting in her mind and every action she carried out with tremendous care. According to Talaandig custom, a mother's words and actions shape a baby's character. Intuition told Helenita that the spirits had an important mission in store for her first-born child.

When she was three months pregnant Helenita eagerly gathered with her husband, Emiliano Basadre Llesis, and the women and men of the village. The moment had come to invoke the spirits so they could begin guiding the baby growing in Helenita's womb. The customary ritual of *panlang* marks the start of a child's lifelong relationship with the spirits. A baby's soul depends on the spirits' protection and guidance to carry it safely into this world. And the entire community's wellbeing depends on every person fulfilling their spirit-guided mission throughout their lives. Helenita's child would be no exception.

On the morning of Dec. 20, 1956, as the sun slowly crept up from behind the sugar cane fields, Helenita's labor pains began. Hastily, she summoned her sister-in-law – a midwife in the neighboring village – and within hours, a tiny baby girl emerged into the world.

With fresh cries still piercing the air, Helenita's sister-in-law performed the *Kagmakate* ritual. Cutting the umbilical cord that connects mother and child she formally introduced Liza Llesis to her Talaandig family. Liza – shortened from Elizabeth – was chosen as the name for the tiny female body that was now home to a regal soul.

As Helenita nestled Liza to her breast and gazed into the baby's eyes, she whispered “*Angga*” into her husband's ear. From then on Helenita and Emiliano referred to their daughter as *Angga*, meaning “very loving.” They knew that this child carried the spirits' love and would spend her life bestowing it upon the community.

*The human figure was molded out of clay by Gumagang-aw, the 10-headed God, based on the image of Mulug Nanguyawuyaw, the Holy Creator. But the figure crumbled so it was mixed with the dripping saliva of the one-headed God, Nangulibet ha Suguy. The human figure was still not firm so the first tree, called Andalugung, was stripped of its bark and made as the trunk and the bones. The figure now stood tall but cracked from rigidity, so water was made to pass into the veins. The figure was weak and cold, so it was tempered with the heat. The figure was not yet breathing, so it was given air. The figure could not speak, so a spell was cast upon him and the human figure acquired language. Finally, the spirit called Makatu was installed and man got the soul. The human figure was completed. And this is how the elements of nature are embodied in the Talaandig person. The earth is the origin of the flesh; water is the origin of the blood; trees, minerals and wildlife are the trunks, bones and teeth; sun (conceived as fire) is body heat, energy and sight; air is breath and strength; sound and communication is language; and God is the source of spirits as the soul.*

As the first child and eldest daughter in the Llesis family, Liza was favored among her 11 siblings. This, however, did not preclude her from her parents' strict household rules. Liza evenly divided family chores with her sisters and brothers, making sure to cook and clean in silence, serve with a smile and listen for the clucking of the chickens to rise in the morning and rest in the evenings. According to Helenita and Emiliano, their children's dutiful responsibilities were conveyed to the spirits as a sign of respect and an invitation. “When the spirit of wealth wants to come to put food and wealth in this house, she will have no place to put it if the house is dirty.”

As soon as she could walk, the one role in the family that belonged to Liza – and Liza alone – was that of attentive assistant to her Apu, or grandfather. Apu was a well-respected Talaandig cultural master who at 80 years old still traveled throughout the community to perform rituals on rice fields, to serve as a mediator to conflicts and to preside over village gatherings. No matter what or where the event was, Liza was entrusted to accompany Apu and to carefully tote his ritual tools.

As Apu painstakingly doddered through the village fields with a young Liza energetically skipping by his side, he reminded her again and again, “You must not talk. You mustn't move around. The spirits will be present and you must show them your respect.”

Liza heeded Apu's advice. Tucked away in the back of the room or hidden under the shade of a nearby tree, Liza sat quietly, often letting her eyes shut as she patiently waited to escort her grandfather home. To Liza's young ears, Apu's voice sounded like a tape recorder endlessly droning on and on. Yet despite her reluctant attention, the ritualistic words and practices permeated her mind.

As Liza and Apu strolled home at the end of a long day, Apu diligently recounted what the meeting was about and delivered a detailed explanation of the ritual he had performed and why he had chosen it. Liza inevitably interrupted his explanations with a barrage of questions – over the years her questions evolved from wondering if the chicken cried when they killed it to inquiring why the principle of parental leadership demanded that leaders of the community share responsibility with the offender when they had done nothing wrong. She was curious to understand the meaning behind the culture that surrounded her.

Liza, like all Talaandig children, attended schools governed by Christian priests and nuns. However, unlike most other children, every member of the Llesis family learned the Talaandig beliefs, practiced the Talaandig traditions and spoke the Talaandig language.

Apu regularly reminded Liza and her siblings, “We are not foreigners. We are not Visayan.<sup>6</sup> We are Talaandig. We must speak the Talaandig language.”

Liza adhered to Apu's counsel, yet not without question. In the mornings as Apu performed the morning chant, Liza inquired, “Why are you always chanting like that? Why don't you sing the church songs instead?”

In the afternoon as she relayed her classroom lessons, Liza declared, “The Talaandig creation story is not true. That is not what the Bible says. And that story is written down, ours is not.”

As she prepared for bed in the evenings, Liza shyly muttered, “My teacher says indigenous people are pagans and devils.”

On weekends as she participated in the ritual ceremonies, Liza wondered out loud, “We dance the cha-cha and tango at school. Why aren't Talaandig dances like those dances?”

Liza's stubborn curiosity sought answers. She wanted to know which to believe: the information her teachers insisted was truth or the Talaandig knowledge she had learned emerged from nature and was carried from God.

Apu offered a simple response to Liza's persistent questioning. “Listen to the school for your examination and graduation. Listen to me for what I'm talking to you about. This will give you a comparison. The more you understand the outside belief the better you will understand our belief.”

*According to the Talaandig, when God created the world he divided everything equally among tribes and nations. God said to every human race, “This is your land, your water, your forest, your mountain, your trees, your food, your wealth and your power. I have given everybody their fair share of all my creation so that they may live in peace, prosperity and happiness. You will recognize your share because I gave them titles based on the language that I gave to each of you.”*

*And so every tribe and nation got a place to stay, a territory and a homeland as a fair share of the creation of the Lord. Then God gave every human race their share of faith, language, knowledge system, laws, economy and weapons of security. God said, "This is your religion, your language, your knowledge system, your laws, economy and weapons of security. The laws of nature that command and regulate all of my creation will guide your existence. All of you will secure peace, equality and justice. Recognize and respect the share I gave to you and to others as your way of respecting the will of my Creation." So, the tribes and nations got their cultural identity and integrity in the heart of God's creation.*

The house Liza shared with her siblings, parents and Apu was a traditional Talaandig home. Set on thick bamboo stilts far above the ground, a pointed thatched roof shielded the main room and several small adjoining bedrooms from rain and sun. The house rested at a busy community crossing, with buses cruising to a stop nearby on a daily basis.

Whether waiting for the next bus, returning from a journey into the city or in need of food for that evening's dinner, there was a constant stream of men and women, young and old gathered in the Llesis home. Men shared stories from the fields as they sipped coffee, women meticulously weaved and prepared a meal of rice and fish, children quietly giggled together as they separated corn kernels from the cob. The Talaandig culture of cooperation dictates that one's wealth rests in the shared resources of a community. The Llesis family shared their harvest in exchange for the hunter's meat. If they were short of rice one day, there was always someone who had enough to share. It was more productive to work together and reap the shared benefits than to amass a constant cycle of credit and debt.

Liza's early years immersed in the Talaandig culture taught her that humans are created to be the custodians of God's creation. Man is not all good, nor is the world all good. Yet the fact remains that even in conflict we are all each other's responsibility.

### **Keeper of the Soul of the People**

It was December break and Liza, a third-year agricultural engineering student, was en route from Central Mindanao State University to her family's home. Crammed into a crowded jeepney,<sup>7</sup> Liza's eyes scanned the passing farmlands and ramshackle homes as her mind drifted to her family's lively sitting room, her mother's delicious meals and the early morning chanting of her beloved Apu. Liza could not wait to be home.

She was so lost in thought that it was only when the driver hollered "Llesis!" that Liza realized the rickety minibus had come to a halt. They had reached her family's home. As Liza disentangled herself and her belongings from fellow passengers and descended from the bus, she noticed that she was not alone. An unfamiliar and handsome young man appeared to be coming home with her.

The man was Datu Migketay Victorino Saway.<sup>8</sup> As a researcher at Visayas University, Datu Vic had been tasked with documenting the customs of the 110 indigenous tribes in the Philippines. The son of a Talaandig cultural master, Datu Vic was particularly interested in researching his own culture's traditions and practices. To do so he had arranged to interview Apu, one of the most well-respected cultural leaders in the region. An afternoon, or even an entire day, of conversation could never capture everything. Instead Datu Vic had agreed to spend one month assisting the Llesis family with their coffee harvest in hopes that as they toiled on the land together, Apu would share his wisdom.

So as Liza's parents, brothers, sisters and grandfather welcomed her home from university, they also embraced Datu Vic as an honored guest.

As Datu Vic settled into life amidst the Llesis family, Liza couldn't help but notice his kind and considerate ways. Every morning, Datu Vic woke long before both sun and the Llesises to fetch water and prepare the morning meal. He graciously served breakfast to the family prior to heading to the fields alongside the other men. Each evening after dinner Datu Vic sat with Apu discussing Talaandig customs and the disappearing culture of their people. He was the first young man Liza had ever met who was as curious about Talaandig culture as she was raised to be.

Within one week of Datu Vic's arrival, fever struck Liza's two youngest brothers. Despite numerous attempts at a home remedy, chills, vomiting and headaches persisted in the boys day after day. The village physician was called for a home visit, yet could find no medical explanation for their sickness. After several days of worsening fever and increasing concern throughout the family, it was the local shaman who finally offered a diagnosis: The boys' illness was the work of the spirits. They were cursing the family for allowing Datu Vic, a guest in the home, to serve. According to Talaandig tradition, hospitality toward a visitor is a sign of respect toward the spirits.

Apu promptly declared that the only way to appease the discontent spirits and break the boys' fevers was for Datu Vic to become a member of the Llesis family. The boys' survival depended on Datu Vic marrying one of the Llesis daughters. As the eldest, Liza was the chosen one.

Liza wholeheartedly trusted her family's ability to choose the best spouse for her; however, a hastily arranged marriage to Datu Vic wasn't what she had spent her youth envisioning. Yet her college boyfriend – a distant family relation and reluctant Talaandig – was also by no accounts,

including her own, the ideal match. After several hushed conversations with her mother, Liza agreed to Apu's pronouncement. She would marry Datu Vic but with one stipulation. The marriage must take place in two years' time, after she completed her degree.

“Liza, we cannot wait that long. The spirits are not patient.”

Buffalos and chickens soon reinforced Apu's unwavering insistence. Wedding plans for Liza and Datu Vic, with the accompanying ritualistic gifts, were rapidly set in motion.

On April 29, 1981, Datu Migketay Victorino Saway and Liza Llesis wed according to traditional Talaandig custom. The ceremony blessed their marriage as a union between two individuals and two families, as well as a commitment to a culture that would endow future generations with an everlasting legacy. It wouldn't be until 1997, when the Indigenous People's Right Act passed under Philippines national law, that their marriage would be legally recognized. This, however, did not stop Liza and Datu Vic from beginning to build a life together as wife and husband, and mother and father.

*According to Talaandig tradition, the process of uniting with another human requires reconciling two distinct spirits and bringing the fundamentally different natures of a man and a woman into harmony with one another. Marriage is therefore both ripe for conflict and ideal for practicing the resolution of conflict. Through the ritual of Kagsabuwa He Dengen, spirits that are at odds with one another can be merged. In addition, the indigenous scale of justice is used to bring a man – who is like fire – and a woman – who is like water – into harmony. According to this framework, known as Gantanganan daw Timbangan, the equal and complementary natures of women and men are to be appreciated in order for family and community to prosper.*

Having arrived together in the village in December as strangers, several months later Liza and Datu Vic departed as husband and wife. But Datu Vic had to return to Manila to report on his research findings, and Liza enrolled in a nearby university where she could complete her agricultural studies. In spite of her persistent determination to complete a degree in agricultural engineering, Liza was soon distracted. Much to her delight, within three months of marriage, the spirits had blessed her with a baby in her womb.

On March 25, just one month shy of their one-year anniversary, Liza and Datu Vic welcomed their first son into the world. Named *Bagyasan*, or “Son of the Researcher,” they believed this boy brought with him the positive energy of the spirits. His name marked the reliance of the Talaandig people – and Liza and Datu Vic in particular – on the Spirit Teacher.

At the request of her parents and in line with tradition, Liza and Bagyasan immediately moved back home. There Liza had the support of her own family as well as Datu Vic's as she embraced her new role as a mother, a responsibility that would prove central in Liza's life as the years unfolded.

Over the next 18 years, Liza became the mother to many in her community, in addition to the nine children she gave birth to. Like all Talaandig children, the spirits bestowed a distinct mission upon each of Liza's children. Their names express these missions. After Bagyasan came *Sagyawan Tuminamwa*, the “Highest Song of Victory” who is destined to protect Talaandig territory as

a lawyer. The third child is *Saludwan*, and his birth marks the honor and integrity of the Talaandig cultural identity. Liza's first daughter, *Aduna*, followed in 1989 and is believed to be a symbol of the economic abundance and wealth that is available to Talaandigs when they uphold the cultural rituals.

One year later *Kawalowan Daulog*, meaning "Eighty Folds of Fame," was born. At the time of Kawalowan's birth, Datu Vic was a successful politician who had not lost a single election – an honor that was expected, through Kawalowan Daulog, to multiply the fame of the tribe 80 times. *Insayan Bae*, the sixth child, is believed to be a symbol of spirituality, named after the great Talaandig female spiritual leader and prophet who received the food that immortalized the tribal ancestors. In 1995, *Insaluday Luna*, also known as the "Daughter of Peace," was born. At a very young age she displayed the characteristics of a peacemaker, resolving quarrels between her playmates and instinctually reaching out to those in need.

The eighth child was born in 1997, soon after the passage of the Indigenous People's Right Act. He is named after *Nalandangan*, the home of the Talaandig immortals. In 2000, Liza gave birth to her ninth and final child. She is named *Nano*, the "Millennium Child." Nano is considered the most beloved and educated child as well as the last fruit of the quest for victory, honor and dignity of the Talaandig.

To Liza each of her children are landmarks, keeping her grounded in her personal mission as a role model to ensure that young people are aware of and proud of their Talaandig culture.



Liza and Datu Vic's unwavering devotion to Talaandig culture stood in stark contrast to the quandary that many of their fellow countrywomen and men faced. Despite achieving independence in 1946, the Philippines still suffered from instability that was rooted in its colonial past and in disparity between an affluent upper social stratum and the impoverished masses. As a result of these conditions, many Talaandig women and men were forced to sacrifice their cultural identity in the name of survival.

Datu Vic's commitment to the preservation and promotion of Talaandig culture in the face of these struggles led him to accept a position with the Presidential Assistance on National Minorities (PANAMIN) in 1983. Established in 1968 with the goal of protecting the interests of Philippine cultural minorities, PANAMIN was known for providing direct aid and sheltering or assimilating minorities in mainstream society. The reality that Datu Vic soon discovered was that this institution was as corrupt as any other within the Philippine government. Funds designated for indigenous people rarely made it beyond the hands of the politicians. When Datu Vic repeatedly confronted government officials about this he was consistently silenced.

Over time Datu Vic acquired an attitude of prideful indignation. "This shouldn't be happening. We must protect our land; we must produce crops and harvest them for our people. We must use our culture as our survival. Only with that will we be rich."

Several months after accepting the position at PANAMIN, Datu Vic resigned and returned to join Liza and their growing family. At that time Datu Vic and Liza made a commitment to themselves and their community that from this point forward they would dedicate their work to ensuring that all Talaandig people were empowered to protect their culture.

Although not officially employed as a representative of the community, Liza quickly progressed to become an influential leader within it. She stood out in the day-to-day affairs of community members – intervening to reconcile spouses and console ailing children – as well as in official conflicts with powerful authorities.

One of the first publicly recognized incidences of Liza’s community leadership occurred in 1983, when a logging company descended on the Talaandig villages that surround Mount Kitanglad. This fertile valley is home to thousands of hearty trees. In the eyes of the Talaandig the living trees are part of the essence of their wellbeing; in the eyes of the loggers the disembodied tree trunks equate to a bountiful profit. When the villagers awoke one morning to find roads bulldozed through the center of their villages and countless trees falling in their fields, chaos ensued. The community’s ardent insistence that this was their land was met with the loggers’ insistence – with permits issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in hand – that they had a right to the trees.

Liza, with agriculture knowledge to reinforce her position, emerged as the calm yet strident representative of the community. She repeated again and again: “Yes, you are legally permitted to cut and kill the trees. You are also apparently legally permitted to kill people because that is precisely what will happen if you take these trees. Our people will die. The trees prevent the land from eroding; they keep the mountain from sliding into our homes. Our survival depends on these trees.”

Eventually, thanks to Liza’s levelheaded persistence, the community prevailed. The loggers departed, and the trees remained.

A similar incident occurred several years later, this time with land-grabbers along the border of the village of Sungko. With angry Talaandig men wielding machetes, spears and hoes on one side, and greedy landowners eager to plow the freshly harvested land for profit on the other, Liza calmly asserted that according to customary law these outsiders had no right to the land. Within 30 minutes the conflict was diplomatically resolved, with both sides expressing heartfelt gratitude to Liza for “saving our lives.”

Liza’s calm presence and practiced leadership gained more recognition over the ensuing years. Particularly after 1992, when Datu Vic’s father passed away and her husband became the official leader of the Talaandig community, Liza was called on with ever-increasing regularity to guide the community through challenging encounters, whether within families or in confrontations with outsiders. Together, Liza and Datu Vic came to be exalted as mother and father to the Talaandig community.

*The Talaandig doctrine on kinship provides simple and concrete prescriptions for peaceful coexistence. The customary laws governing this doctrine are Kilalaha ha Batasan (mutual recognition), obliging an individual to recognize relatives with affinity and consanguinity; Sayuda ha Batasan (mutual sharing of information), asserting that the failure to share both good and bad information is a grave violation of kinship and brotherhood; Buliga ha Batasan (cooperation), providing that relatives must help each other in all aspects of life; Uyaga ha Batasan (mutual protection of life), requiring that the life of every member of the community is protected and sacred; and Pabatunbatuna ha Batasan (mutual assistance and help), illustrating that helping relatives in times of difficulty encourages them to help others in times of need. According to the Talaandig custom, every member of the tribe is a relative.*

When, in 1995, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources passed an official proposal to cut 1 million trees in Talaandig territory, it was Liza who courageously stood in front of a room full of government officials to defend the Talaandig.

At the end of two hours of emotional testimony Liza declared, “The mountain, the forests and the trees are all God’s creation. I am the custodian of God’s creation. You are also the custodian of God’s creation. If you kill a tree, it is a crime against God. I now invite my people to lie in the streets in wait for your logging trucks. Let the trucks run each and every one of us over. There is no need for us to wait for the calamity that will kill us once you cut our trees.”

Later in the same year when a group of researchers from the Philippine National Museum and scientists from the Botanical Institute of Texas confiscated 15 bags of plant specimens from Mount Kitanglad – in violation of Talaandig customary law – it was Liza who pushed for the enforcement of the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act.

Liza told the researchers, “This violation is not a simple issue of lack of prior informed consent;<sup>9</sup> it is an assault against the culture, identity and territory of the Talaandig. We have been entrusted as the custodians of nature. We are imposing a penalty on you as a call for reconciliation – to restore harmony and establish the basis for future understanding.”

Liza, on behalf of the Talaandig Council of Elders, requested that the researchers submit eight buffalo heads, 26 chickens, eight meters of cloth and 250 peso coins. The buffalo heads were to recognize the authority of the council, the blood of the chickens symbolized the cleansing of the offense and the cloth was used to make a turban recognizing the customary leadership. The coins were used to pay for the indigenous leaders to attend a reconciliation ceremony, held in August 1995 in the presence of government officials.

In recognition of her repeated displays of leadership, in October 1995 Liza was named *Bae Nanapnay*,<sup>10</sup> “Keeper of the Soul of the People.” Independent of her husband’s position as chief of the Talaandig, Liza was now an official community leader.

Government officials and tribal leaders alike traveled to witness the ritual ceremony, called *Panagulambong*, which installed Liza as a leader. Wearing a newly embroidered dress and an intricately adorned headdress, Liza graciously accepted a red cloth turban, symbolizing the light to guide her, and a white cloth, representing the holy spirit. From sunrise to sunset the community slaughtered pigs and chickens, the shaman chanted and sang and women danced together – all in the name of entertaining and honoring the spirits, who would now watch over Liza as she guided their people.

The title of Bae Nanapnay came with both great honor and responsibility, and it was now Liza’s to carry for life.

**“You Are Now in the Heart of Talaandig Ancestral Territory.  
Be Culture Conscious.”**

Saturday was the day designated for family visits. This particular Saturday, Bae Liza and Datu Vic had spent the afternoon with Datu Vic’s brother and his family. As the sun fell, Bae Liza and Datu Vic quietly strolled home along the dirt road that ran the length of their village. The sounds of life – children chasing one another, women washing and men returning from the fields – rang out all around them.

Suddenly, a haggard old man stumbled past, oblivious as he nearly knocked Bae Liza to the ground and carried on. Simultaneously, raucous laughter and loud indiscernible Visayan chatter spilled out from the dilapidated shack nearby. Bae Liza had heard many women in the community complain about this shack and others like it. Their husbands and grown sons were spending more and more time there, only to come home smelling of booze, often with less money than they’d left the house with and rarely with anything productive to show for their time away.

As Datu Vic steadied Bae Liza, they silently watched the drunken man stagger home. Neither uttered a word but it was clear that they agreed: The culture that Bae Liza and Datu Vic had been brought up to love was slowly disappearing. Something needed to be done.

The following week Datu Vic, chief of the Talaandig, called a General Assembly. Word spread quickly; every man, woman and child in the *barangay*, or village, was mandated to be under the large cypress tree at noon on Saturday. The streets and markets were abuzz with curiosity. It had been years since a chief had called a General Assembly. What would he say?

At sunrise on the morning of the assembly, a decrepit old man appeared under the large cypress tree. He was one of the few remaining elders in the barangay. As the sun rose, the withered old man began chanting the *apou agyo*, the story of the epic Talaandig hero. Children, with eyes and ears wide with curiosity, came running from all directions to investigate this mysterious melody. It sounded as though the roots of the tree were bellowing. One by one women and then men joined. Before long all other activity in the community ceased. Children perched in the tree limbs, babies nestled in their mother’s laps and men stood huddled in small groups; the community was transfixed.

At noon, with the sun high in the sky, the elder’s chanting suddenly stopped and Datu Vic took his place at the center of the crowd.

“I have brought you here today to talk about the future of our community. I have watched drinking and gambling become the norm. I hear men teaching their children to speak Visayan instead of our traditional Talaandig. Women are no longer teaching their daughters about the traditional dress. Our children are learning morals and values from the television instead of from our rich cultural traditions.

“By forgetting our heritage we are killing ourselves. This must end. The spirits have been patient, but they won’t be for much longer. Our culture is what makes us wealthy and we must not squander that fortune. Starting today, we – each and every one of us – will live according to Talaandig principles. The gambling shacks will be closed, traditional dress will be required at cultural ceremonies. We will teach our children to be proud of their Talaandig heritage.”

Without a word, men turned and walked away. The women followed. Children ran off to resume their games. No one was interested in what Datu Vic had to say. The chief, however, was not dissuaded; he realized it would take time and patience to convince the community of the benefits of their culture. He was certain that eventually they would, once again, proudly embrace Talaandig traditions.

Bae Liza, having recently been pronounced Bae Nanapnay, rose early the following morning to begin going door to door. Well-regarded throughout the community for her kind ways and attentive listening, Bae Liza was welcomed with open arms at each home. In the days and weeks that followed she sat with women throughout the barangay, asking them to share their reactions to what they had heard at the General Assembly.

Bae Liza responded to the women's concerns by explaining what she understood to be the benefits of Talaandig tradition. She recalled her days as a young girl with Apu, learning about the cultural rituals and why they were important. She repeated to others what she had often be told as a child: "Culture is like a rainbow. When a culture disappears it is the same as if one of the colors were to disappear. American, Spanish and Japanese cultures are all colors in the rainbow. And so is Talaandig." Often, as Bae Liza spoke with the women, their husbands and sons stood, quietly, close by.

Three months after the General Assembly, Bae Liza invited 15 Talaandig women, along with several cultural masters, to her home. The women sat amidst heaps of tikog grass learning traditional weaving skills.

Next, they danced. Bae Magila, leader of the dancers, was a 75-year-old woman who moved with more energy than girls half her age. Joyfully, Bae Magila taught the women the *dugso*, *binang* and *binakbak* dances. Bae Liza watched and smiled silently as the women cheerily flailed around the room, mimicking a hawk and then a frog. She had learned long ago that dancing nourished her soul by clearing the mind and entertaining the spirits. The women she had invited were experiencing this for the first time. Bae Liza's hope was that they would go home and teach others.

And her hopes were realized. Each evening after sunset, women gathered in small circles to practice weaving while girls huddled nearby to scrutinize one another's newfound dance skills. The younger women were surprised to discover that their mothers and aunties knew just what to do, without explanation. These traditions were not new; they had just been buried. The memories, however, lived in women's hands and feet.

Several weeks later, at Datu Vic's request, members of the National Commission on Culture and Arts visited the barangay. They were greeted in the road by 30 women dancing – a traditional Talaandig welcome. They graciously received hand-woven crafts – a cultural offering made to guests in honor of the spirits. The members of the commission were shocked to see a Talaandig community so alive with culture. They expressed their delight by offering the community \$1,200 to put toward continuing to enrich their culture.

The gambling shacks that just a few months before had lined the roadside were nowhere to be seen now. Together, Datu Vic, Bae Liza and the women of the village had convinced others that embracing their heritage would reap great benefits for all.



The moment the representatives from the National Commission on Culture and Arts left the barangay, every man, woman and child – from the oldest apu to the youngest girl – got to work establishing a space where, as a community, they could preserve Talaandig culture. After six months of hard work, the day finally came to inaugurate the result: a School for Living Traditions.

The money from the commission was enough to fund the skeleton of a building. Families throughout the community donated the material and labor for everything else – including a roof, walls and floor. This building, like the philosophy that would eventually guide its activities, replicated indigenous knowledge systems.

The Talaandig belief is that knowledge resides in people and is transferred through the generations; it is up to individuals to invest in this bottom-up system. Constructed in the shape of a traditional home, called a *tulugan* – a long building with a large kitchen at the center and rooms for reflection and eating, called *salabs*, radiating off from all sides – the School for Living Traditions was envisioned as a place for generations to come together and share their knowledge.

On the day of the school's inauguration, Datu Vic stood proudly in front of a building adorned with large, brightly painted sculptures. While the men had been constructing the exterior of the School for Living Traditions and the women were crafting its interior, the youth had been tasked with depicting the Talaandig story of creation on its exterior. Every aspect of the building was a testament to Talaandig culture – past, present and future.

A boldly colored placard was constructed at the entrance to the community, "You are now in the heart of Talaandig ancestral territory. Be culture conscious."

Datu Vic gazed out over a crowd of fellow community members and government officials from Manila who had traveled to the barangay for the occasion. Unlike during the General Assembly nearly a year ago, at this gathering the crowd was abuzz with excitement. As soon as Datu Vic began to speak, respectful silence washed over the crowd.

"In this building we will teach young people to touch, to feel, to hear and to do. Our slogan will be: 'Do or die.' Why? Because it is our responsibility to transfer the culture and traditions of our tribe. If we don't do that it will be the greatest crime we can commit. The culture will die in our hands. We need to make sure that the young generations see culture as a living, breathing thing.

"Here, at the School for Living Traditions, we will replicate what Talaandig culture was like before the Spanish came. The elders will arrive early each morning to chant about the epic heroes, just as the elders did long ago. Cultural masters will teach everyone our traditions of dancing, embroidery and drumming. In this building we will eat the food of our people and speak only their language. The School for Living Traditions is home for all of us. Welcome home, everyone!"

The crowd erupted in applause.



Boys, many of them barely bigger than the sporting balls they carried, sprinted in all directions. The test, each day, was to see who could get from the schoolhouse to the School for Living Traditions fastest. There was the main road, any number of tiny footpaths or a risky journey through the cornfields to choose between. Each day, depending on who was running and what treacherous plants or threatening animals they encountered, a different route won the honor.

For the boys, it was especially important to choose the winning route on Tuesdays. That was the day the cultural masters were waiting to play *banlak*, *rente* and *anepi* – traditional Talaandig sports. On Mondays, it was the girls who sprinted in all directions in search of the quickest route. Monday was the day for dancing at the school.

Each afternoon is designated to teaching the Talaandig youth a different part of their heritage. Dancing, sports, chanting, storytelling, music – they all serve a special cultural function and must be taught to the children so that one day they can pass them on to their children.

While the cultural masters look after the youth and nurture their curiosities, women gather on the second floor of the School for Living Traditions. Most afternoons, they sit with hands entangled in dyed grasses, weaving intricate traditional designs in honor of the spirits. Many of the women's woven goods are presented as gifts to guests, and those that are not are put to good use at the school.

One day a week, it is also one woman's responsibility to make the ritual rice wine. This wine, served to the elders during their meetings, is believed to facilitate wisdom-sharing. The woman entrusted to make it must ensure that its taste is perfected – a sign that the spirit caretaker has been embodied in each sip. Every Talaandig girl learns from a young age that the secret to making perfect rice wine is to rise early in the morning and bathe in order to cleanse both body and mind. A woman's mind must be at peace – free of any anger and disturbances – while she is at work in the kitchen. The house she is cooking in must also be pristine. Only then can a woman start boiling the water and mixing the necessary ingredients to make rice wine.

The same kitchen fire where women prepare rice wine is where hunters come in the evenings, ragged from a long day in the wild, to teach the youth about killing prey and surviving in the harsh wilderness. It is also around this same room that chanters sit each morning, before the school bells ring, chanting epic Talaandig stories. Through the elders' melodious hymns, young people hear the stories of how their ancestors were given the mountains and the forest to protect.

Each of the activities at the School for Living Traditions is one part of the Talaandig's living almanac. It is the place where culture is alive to all five senses.

### Mothers for Peace

Bae Liza unassumingly glanced around the hot, crowded auditorium. Five thousand men and women, all of whom had traveled to Jogjakarta, Indonesia, sat in the rows surrounding her. They came from regions throughout the Philippines and represented Christian, Muslim and indigenous communities. They were all there seeking a solution to the war ravaging their country.

Bae Liza was a member of the Mindanao Peoples Caucus (MPC), a grassroots alliance of indigenous peoples, Christians and Muslims. The MPC was established in 2001 in response to the on-going violence displacing hundreds of thousands individuals throughout central Mindanao. Bae Liza and four other indigenous representatives, alongside several Christian and Muslim delegates, were tasked with strengthening civilian monitoring of the peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MPC was now gathered in Indonesia for an interfaith dialogue meeting. Historically, the Christians, Muslims and indigenous peoples of the Philippines had all belonged to the same bloodline – the question was: Could they now create peace on the basis of this?

Bae Liza calmly stood up and walked to the podium. It was her turn to speak – she had 20 minutes to share how customary Talaandig wisdom could serve as a model for building peace in the Philippines.

“I am going to begin by briefly sharing practical insights that we – the Talaandig community – have gained through our School for Living Traditions.

“We need to teach peace to our children. And we need to teach them the means to achieve harmony through our relationships with the natural environment and people ...

“We need to teach our children the importance of culture and identity because without this awareness about ourselves and other people, we lose the basis for recognizing, respecting, protecting and preserving our cultural heritage in relation to the possessions and heritage of other people. We need to exercise mediation and arbitration among children, applying the concept of balance. Under this principle, nobody is above the other because imbalance affects people who do the wrong things and people who do the right things.

“In order to achieve harmony, rules must be established and agreed upon. In our case as indigenous communities, we observe customary rules ... . Above all we believe in common sense. Peace and harmony does not need to be complicated. We simply need to think about it, to see it with our eyes, to listen with our ears, to touch with our hands, to taste with our tongue, to smell with our nose, to feel with our hearts.

“In promoting interfaith relationships, we can achieve harmony by using our senses and accepting that all of us are able to survive because of the land, the water, the air, the fish, the wildlife. All of us survive with the sun, the sounds and with our conscience – what we call spirit. For us to survive equally, we need to share things equally.”

“Yes, all of us want peace – but not until we learn to respect, recognize and protect others’ share of God’s creation will we be able to realize peace. Not until everybody stops invading,

intruding, corrupting, stealing and denying the inherent rights and share of other people will we achieve peace.”

Bae Liza finished speaking and the room remained silent, the wisdom of her words hanging in the air.



By the time a memo arrived from President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s office – requesting her presence for a meeting at Malacanang Palace<sup>11</sup> – Bae Liza had settled back into her daily routine: caring for her children and overseeing daily activities at the School for Living Traditions. The president had been impressed by Bae Liza’s speech at the interfaith dialogue meeting and subsequently convinced that she, and the Talaandig community in general, had valuable knowledge and skills to contribute to the process of building peace in Mindanao.

One day later, Bae Liza was en route to Manila. She didn’t know what to expect but whatever the meeting entailed, Bae Liza anticipated little more than 10 minutes in the company of the president – she was not an influential politician or a wealthy businessman, so it seemed foolish to hope for more.

Her petite body radiated pride as she stood adorned in a traditional red and black Talaandig dress, in the center of President Arroyo’s expansive office. In spite of her soft-spoken voice, Bae Liza immediately captured the attention of everyone in the room.

She described Talaandig customary law and how it is enforced; she recounted the story of ancestral domain and described how it provided the basis for harmonious living. She explained the ancestral belief that the Talaandig are natural peacemakers.

“Apu Agbibili – the holy prophet and first inhabitant of the Philippines – was our ancestor. He predicted that his children’s generation would have conflict with each other. So before he departed earth, Apu Agbibili called all of his children together and told them, ‘Your generation will multiply, so I will leave this *puti* (jar of oil) to your eldest brother, Saulana. Like a hair, if you get entangled in the future, I leave the responsibility to him to put oil on the hair and comb it.’ From Apu Saulana descended the Talaandig people. And the jar of oil left to him became the foundation of the Talaandig peacekeeping tradition ...”

An astonishing two hours later, President Arroyo graciously thanked Bae Liza for her time and for the peacebuilding wisdom she had shared. She told Bae Liza that she wanted the Talaandig tools for conflict resolution to be documented so that others could learn from them. Without a moment’s hesitation, Bae Liza proposed a six-month project.

She had recently begun gathering on a weekly basis with a group of 30 Talaandig women. They called themselves the Mothers for Peace. These women would document the Talaandig instruments for resolving conflict and present the results to President Arroyo.

Bae Liza insisted she did not need money from the Office of the President to undertake this project – outside funds would render her community dependent, and according to the principle of customary leadership, this would be shameful. The Mothers for Peace would use community

resources to conduct the documentation. All Bae Liza asked for was 60,000 pesos so she could provide food for the mothers at their weekly meetings.

And with that, Bae Liza left the Office of the President with a thesis to defend.



According to Talaandig belief, women are not only the basic teachers of their children, but also the origin and source of all people in a community. For this reason, women have a deep understanding of peace. They possess an intuitive sense of people's needs and of how to bring harmony to a situation.

With years of practice reconciling quarreling children, Talaandig mothers have a gift for calm conversations. They understand that they are the mothers of both good and bad children, of the troublemakers and the peacemakers. They, therefore, feel a responsibility to offer compassion to all sides in a conflict and bring opposing groups together.

As a young girl, Bae Liza's grandmother had often told her, "The language of the eyes speaks more eloquently than the language of the mouth." At the time, Bae Liza found her grandmother's words to be confusing. However, as an adult, she often reflected back on these words as she sought to resolve conflicts between her quarreling children or to bring resolution to disputing neighbors. Bae Liza was certain she was not the only Talaandig woman raised with older women's musings as a soundtrack to her early days.

As soon as Bae Liza returned from her visit with President Arroyo she called the Mothers for Peace together. With excitement and hope brimming in her voice, Bae Liza explained the unique opportunity they had before them – President Arroyo recognized that the Talaandig knowledge-system had something to teach the rest of the nation and was looking to them, the Mothers for Peace, to identify and document their tools and instruments for peace.

Caught up in the inspiration of the moment, Bae Liza reiterated the lesson she had long ago learned from her grandmother: "The language of the eyes speaks more eloquently than the language of the mouth." She asked the 30 women gathered around her in the meeting room of the School for Living Traditions if they had heard similar reflections when they were young. Bae Liza was convinced that because Talaandig wisdom resided in its oral history, it lived on in everyone.

Without pause, the women began putting words to the unconscious wisdom that resided inside of them.

"I was told that when somebody is furious to take the milk of a mother and wash it on the face of the angry individual. This will put off the anger."

"I learned that the family is a very important institution for peace. In order to promote peace the members of the family must practice peaceful relationships and cooperation."

"Language is a very important tool to prevent conflict. When dealing with a conflict, calm words are necessary. The language used must not raise anger. Instead it must calm down those who are angry."

“I was told that according to the Talaandig principle of *Gantangan daw Timbangan*, women and men, like night and day, play equal and complementary roles in the peace and development of families and communities.”

“In the past, a warrior would not proceed to war if a woman without clothes crossed his path. The nature of women has always been believed to weaken or destroy the amulets of war.”

“I think the traditional peace pacts that were made between the tribes of Mindanao are a good instrument to remind everybody about the tradition of peace that was preserved by the elders of the tribe.”

As the women thoughtfully reflected on the conflict resolution tools that they had both consciously and unconsciously absorbed, Bae Liza quietly took note. When everyone had finished speaking, she presented a list of tools for peace that the women’s discussion had generated:

- Mother’s milk
- Women’s skirt
- Water
- Chicken
- Advice
- Ritual
- Customary law
- History
- Family
- Negotiation and mediation
- Research and investigation
- Language
- Communication
- Education
- Women and elders

This list formed the beginnings of the report that the Mothers for Peace would eventually present to President Arroyo.

Over the next several weeks, Bae Liza and the Mothers for Peace invited women, children and community elders from throughout the Talaandig community to participate in focus group discussions at the School for Living Traditions. Their goal was to give every member of the community an opportunity to share their cultural wisdom about resolving conflict.

At the start of each discussion, Bae Liza explained that together they would engage in a process using the traditional Cultural Accounting tool – a simple method of accounting for conditions that surround a conflict – and the Cultural Impact Assessment tool – an approach to ensure that cultural heritage is protected in every situation – to define the indigenous processes of conflict resolution.

With the input generated during these meetings, the Mothers for Peace compiled a comprehensive summary of the crucial elements in a conflict resolution process. The report acknowledged that in order for a conflict to be resolved successfully, the offender and the offended must tell the truth; that proper time and space is important to consider when negotiating a conflict; and that although the principles of conflict resolution are important, it is the skill of the mediator that provides the life and success of a negotiation.

In addition to enumerating the findings from their discussions, the Mothers for Peace also included their personal reflections.

Bae Mangunguyamu Florencia Cruz wanted to be sure that it was documented that “the discussions have increased our capabilities and strength in conflict resolution. It particularly empowers us, the women, as models in resolving conflicts in the community. We really need to promote our culture, especially in the production of food crops which is necessary in resolving conflicts that result from economic problems.”

Amalia Tecson explained that “the roles of the women are really big. It is important that the children are listening to us. It is really time to stand up and help each other for the development of our future generation.”

At the end of the report the Mothers for Peace included a “Talaandig Women Peace Plan.” The goal of it was to establish a progressive and peaceful community by broadening the spirit of kinship among the Talaandig. The Mothers for Peace outlined activities they would undertake to reach this goal. These included disseminating elements of the peace plan in each month’s tribal assembly and holding community meetings on a regular basis. The section of the report that would have the most lasting impression stated that the Mothers for Peace would identify existing conflicts within the Talaandig community and put their skills to use to resolve them.



In the early 1990s a young Lucbo woman married into the Sinto family. When it came time for her birth family to divide its ancestral land – which was plentiful – the woman insisted that she deserved more land than her younger brother, the only other Lucbo descendent at the time. Over the ensuing years, strife over the land boundaries continued to broil and grievances were passed on to the Sinto and Lucbo children.

In 2006, what had begun as a land conflict progressed into a contentious political rivalry when the sister and brother ran against each other in a local mayoral race. On the day election results were announced – declaring the brother the winner – a young Sinto man attempted to avenge his mother’s pride by stabbing his cousin, the son of his mother’s brother.

Quickly thereafter the land-conflict-turned-political-rivalry transformed into a violent *rido*, or retaliatory kin-based conflict.<sup>12</sup> The men in both families constructed homemade guns from steel pipes and regularly attacked each other. Cousins killed one another; nephews stabbed their uncles. Before long, the small village where both families resided was deteriorating under pervasive violence. Parents stopped sending their children to school for fear they would be kidnapped en route. Jeepneys no longer traveled through the area, drivers fearing for their safety.

This Lucbo-Sinto rido was at the top of the list of Talaandig conflicts in desperate need of resolution.

Bae Liza, along with four fellow Mothers for Peace, set out at 5 a.m. For five hours they walked in silence, traipsing across creeks and trudging up forested cliffs. Bae Liza glimpsed a ragged Lucbo boy asleep beneath a tree and a small Sinto boy hidden in the dim light of a cave. The police had issued warrants to arrest each of these boys for violence they had committed; in the forest the boys avoided both imprisonment and one another.

As they walked, each of the women called to mind the words of another Talaandig mother to console the fear that weighed heavy in their guts: “The nature of women has always been believed to weaken or destroy the amulets of war.”

That day marked the start of weekly visits by the Mothers for Peace to Mapawa, where the Lucbo and Sinto families lived. Without judgment or pretense, the mothers visited members of each family and patiently listened to their grievances. As time passed, the mothers began to make note of each side’s demands. When the moment was right, they would share these requests with a member of the opposing family. The mothers did not actively push for resolution; they simply opened the door to allow the spirit of resolution to enter.

Bae Liza and the other mothers spent months traveling back and forth between the families. During this time, they also negotiated with the police. In an attempt to quell the ongoing violence, local police officials had issued arrest warrants and announced rewards for the capture of any of the killers. Bae Liza knew that all hope of resolution would be lost if this occurred during the tenuous negotiation process that she and the Mothers for Peace had initiated.

The mothers convinced the police to suspend the arrest warrants temporarily, promising that with enough time their strategy would be more successful in halting the violence. As a result, a delicate web of trust was established between the warring families, the police authorities and the Mothers for Peace. Resolution depended on each of them keeping their promises.

Finally, in July 2007, after months of private negotiations with the Mothers for Peace, the members of the Lucbo and Sinto families mutually agreed to come together and bring their conflict to the Pasagi Council of Customary Practices.

*According to Talaandig tradition the Pasagi Council is the arbitrator of customary law. It consists of eight individual councils. The central council, which has the highest authority, is called the Arbitrator. The seven auxiliary councils consist of: ritual traditions, oralist, farming, health and medicine, guardian, youth artists and mothers. Each of these councils must be present at an official conflict resolution ceremony. Additionally, the keeper of Tampuda hu Balagen (the peace pact) must be present to cut the rattan, symbolizing the re-establishment of balance and harmony between parties in conflict.*

*In every case of conflict the Pasagi and the datu investigate the history of offenses. They consider each offense to discern what must be done to re-establish an equilibrium in the relationships. Each customary law that was violated must be determined and resolved in order to settle the case. There is not a generic set of pre-determined resolutions that reconstitute balance; every conflict has a unique resolution.*

*A resolution must always include Saginwada (to take away or cancel the conflict); Lenggag (cleansing of the wound); Haphap (a gentle touch expressed through payment of material objects or money); Tul-id (restoration of damages); Kagmakatu (a ritual to call the spirits of each offended party); Pabugwas (a ritual to cleanse the physical and emotional involvement of the community); Banaguna (a symbolic restoration of life in conflicts that resulted in murder); and Tampuda ceremony (cutting of rattan symbolizing the end of conflict). The Talaandig way of resolving conflict is always final.*

Without uttering a word, Datu Pasendalan – the current keeper of the Tampuda hu Balagen – authoritatively placed the *gantangan* (wooden pot) on a table in the center of the room. He stoically gestured for others to join him around the table. A total of 40 Lucbo and Sinto men, all guilty of physical violence, stepped forward and tentatively rested their hands atop the wooden pot.

According to Talaandig custom, bringing two sides of a conflict together in a circle symbolizes their shared bloodline. In spite of their grievances, the Lucbo and Sinto families had always been and would always be bonded together in kinship. Creating a “train of people” connected by the *gantangan* was a public acknowledgement of this connection and the first step toward reconciliation.

Next, Datu Pasendalan led the families to the banks of the nearby river. Silently, he gestured for the Lucbo family to position themselves on the southern banks and for the Sinto family to cross to the northern banks. Meanwhile, he splashed to the center of the rushing river, where with his left hand he grasped the large rattan stick that stretched the water’s width and connected the two families. A sacrificial chicken fluttered and squalled in Datu Pasendalan’s right hand.

Only after the families hushed and silence washed over the river and its crowded banks did the datu speak. In a voice that moved even the trees and the grass, he recited the Talaandig story that every member of the community had heard many times before – and the same story that Bae Liza had shared with President Arroyo. The story of the peace pact.

“... Like a hair, if you get entangled in the future, I leave the responsibility to him to put oil on the hair and comb it ...”

At the end of the tale, just like his Talaandig ancestors had done centuries before, Datu Pasendalan used a bolo to sever the sacrificial chicken’s neck. This was to satiate the evil spirits of conflict. Next, he used the same bolo to cut a clean line through the center of the rattan stick. With this, the conflict between the Lucbo and Sinto families was officially declared resolved.

That afternoon as the families gathered together to celebrate the reconciliation, each member of the Lucbo and Sinto families thanked Bae Liza and the Mothers for Peace. Without these women, the families would still be killing one another. It was the mother’s calm, intuitive peacemaking over several months that laid the groundwork for this day’s official resolution ceremony. Similar to calming a sobbing child or coaxing a stubborn husband, the Mothers for Peace had led the two warring families to peace.

Beginning in 2006 when they submitted their report to President Arroyo and continuing to this day, the Mothers for Peace gather two to three times a week at the School for Living Traditions. Women old and young participate – even those who are not yet mothers or who do not attend the

community negotiations come. Together these Talaandig women share wisdom about how to resolve conflicts with their children and promote peace in their homes. They brainstorm how to grow peace in the nation in general.

As they sit together and talk about peacemaking, the women keep their hands busy weaving. Bae Liza regularly reminds her fellow Mothers for Peace, “Weaving takes patience. It takes creativity to envision a beautiful design. It takes determination to finish every design that you start. Remember, it is the same with peacemaking. You need to keep moving forward and not turn back when you are resolving conflicts. The spirits are with us as women; they are always there to help us bring peace.

“During the years of conflict, only the fathers have been present. We need to tip the balance. We, as women, are the backbone and the soul of our people.”

### We Are All Brothers and Sisters

“No NGOs or businessmen support you? How does your culture survive, sir?” the venerable – an influential Korean Buddhist man – asked the datu, one traditional leader to another.

“We don’t depend on help from the outside. We rely only on our cultural and internal resources for survival.”

“What about that building over there that is collapsing – how will you fix it?”

“We will wait until we have saved enough. And then we will renovate it. If we do receive money from the outside it will be a partnership. We will never make ourselves dependent on others.”

On a visit from Korea, the venerable had journeyed from Manila to Barangay Sungko for the sole purpose of seeing the School for Living Traditions. While in Manila, he had heard countless references to the Talaandig. He was curious if what he heard was true: Was their traditional culture truly alive and thriving? The only way to know was to see for himself.

From the moment he stepped out of the jeepney and spotted the sign, “You are now in the heart of Talaandig ancestral territory. Be culture conscious,” the venerable was inspired. The women dancing and elders chanting in a traditional *Pangbusay* welcome ceremony awed him. Datu Vic’s humble leadership and persistent determination to maintain his community’s indigenous culture – something the venerable rarely witnessed either at home or in his travels around the world – was encouraging.

Years ago, the venerable’s own Korea had been home to communities like the one he witnessed that day in Sungko. Men and women proudly practiced the customary rituals and children grew up with a strong sense of heritage. However, that had all disappeared. A sense of cultural identity and religious integrity was lost among his people and the venerable’s heart ached in its absence.

During his visit to Sungko, the venerable witnessed a Talaandig culture that, just as he had heard, was alive and thriving; a community that demonstrated it was possible to revive culture even after it had begun to disappear.

The venerable realized that for selfish reasons he wanted the Talaandig community to thrive. Their customs and rituals were different, yet the two peoples shared a similar struggle: to maintain their culture in the face of foreign influences. The venerable envisioned opportunities – exchange visits, joint projects, youth camps – for the men, women and children of his community to learn from Datu Vic, Bae Liza and their people. Perhaps someday their community could thrive once again, like the Talaandig.

The venerable approached Datu Vic with a partnership proposal. He would fund the renovation of the collapsing building; all he asked in return was that Korean youth be invited annually to participate in the Talaandig community’s activities. Datu Vic eagerly accepted, recognizing that the benefits of this partnership would extend beyond a new physical structure. It

was an opportunity for his own community to see that they possessed something important – culture – and that this cultural knowledge was valuable to the outside world.

In April 2007, after the cultural leaders signed a traditional partnership agreement, construction began on the dilapidated building. Datu Vic didn't turn to experts for either the building's design or construction. Instead he relied unquestioningly on the indigenous knowledge of his people.

The men and women of Sungko successfully transformed the faltering structure into two spacious classrooms. Above these rooms they constructed a large hall where the Council of Elders and Mothers for Peace could meet and conduct conflict resolution rituals. The building also included an artists' workshop, dining hall and guest quarters. Local artists painted the interior walls with vibrant depictions of the local rituals and epic heroes. Meanwhile, a talented young sculptor decorated the exterior of the building with intricate engravings.

This building – called the Hall of Peace – and the School for Living Traditions were together established as an official cultural zone. The Talaandig customary laws, protected under the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), governed the zone. With Datu Vic and Bae Liza at the helm, the community looked to the spirits to protect each of the buildings and all of the activities that took place within and around them.

This cultural zone did not belong solely to the Talaandig. As culturally ordained peacekeepers, they were simply its custodian.



Twenty Korean youth sat quietly across the room from 20 Talaandig youth. The boys and girls on both sides of the room stared inquisitively, nudged their friends and furtively whispered to one another – none of them had ever seen anyone quite like the young people sitting across the room. Fifteen days later, when the Korean and Talaandig youth raucously gathered in this same room to bid each other farewell, the nervous silence they shared on the first day would be little more than a distant memory.

It was July 2007 and, as promised, the venerable had sent 20 young people from his community to visit Sungko. It was the first annual youth peace camp. In addition to learning each other's games and playing one another's musical instruments, the youth would spend the two weeks building a septic tank for the Hall of Peace. This project, and others like it in subsequent years, taught the youth how to work together and, even more importantly, ensured that they all felt a sense of ownership for the Hall of Peace.

After long days spent working on construction projects and playing together in the sun, the youth gathered in the kitchen of the School for Living Traditions. The Talaandig girls and boys watched – eyes wide and mouths aghast – as their Korean friends heaped spice after spice onto their food. The Talaandig had never seen such things done to rice! When it was time for a Talaandig meal, the Korean girls and boys giggled uncontrollably as they watched a familiar bowl of vegetables transform into an unrecognizable feast.

Each night, long after the sun had set and the moon perched high in the sky, the sound of music, rhythmic stomping and unbridled laughter billowed out from the school. In the mornings the remnants of the previous night's debauchery – guitars, drums, flutes and xylophones – could be found scattered all around the room.

Whether they were working on a construction project, cooking food or sharing musical instruments, the fact that the Talaandig and Korean youth did not share a common language didn't prevent them from communicating. When hand gestures and body language were not enough, the youth taught each other their native languages. Throughout the two weeks, Talaandig youth could be heard, at all times of day, yelling "Hello, good morning" in Korean. The Korean boys and girls bellowed the same in return but in Talaandig. Each time, a round of unrestrained laughter followed the exchange.

Eleven months after construction of the Hall of Peace began, the venerable returned to Sungko for the building's official inauguration ceremony. For months preceding his visit, he had listened with joy as the youth in his community recounted tales of the Hall of Peace and everything they learned there. The venerable received constant requests from girls and boys longing to return to this far-away land. The youth's unbridled enthusiasm, coupled with the opportunity to see the new Hall of Peace for himself, convinced the venerable that Datu Vic, Bae Liza and their Talaandig community had built something far better than anything he had ever imagined.



According to customary law, everyone is welcome to visit the Talaandig community as long as they respect the indigenous culture and are interested in witnessing the traditional customs. Individuals who come to proselytize, promote political interests or propagate foreign influences are not welcome – their presence is considered and treated as a violation of the IPRA law.

Sometimes, the visitors are academic researchers curious to learn more about Talaandig rituals. Other times, it is a grassroots organization looking for guidance in peacebuilding and conflict resolution skills. Equally as often, a local family comes seeking respite from the chaos of life in the city. In all cases, whether they stay for a day or a month, visitors leave with a newfound understanding of community and prosperity.

Prior to arrival at the Hall of Peace, all visitors must send a letter to the Mothers for Peace describing the purpose and length of their visit. Each time Bae Liza receives a request, she summons the Mothers for Peace to the Hall of Peace, where they discuss the possible visit. There are many important matters to settle prior to accepting visitors. Do the visitors respect the indigenous culture? Do they come with an honest purpose? Is the guesthouse free? Who will cook during their visit? Will the spirits welcome their presence?

When a visit is deemed acceptable, the mothers respond with a letter of Informed Consent and begin preparations for the necessary customary ceremonies. Every member of the community has an important role to play in hosting the guests during their visit because, as Bae Liza learned as a child from Apu, hospitality toward a visitor is a sign of respect toward the spirits.

Immediately upon a visitor's arrival, the traditional *Pamalabag* welcome ritual must be performed outside the Hall of Peace, followed by the *Pangbusay* ritual inside the hall. The Mothers

for Peace are responsible for ensuring that the elders are notified of their chanting duties and that the children are prepared to accompany the women in a traditional dance ceremony.

Each morning during a visit, the mothers invite the guests to the School for Living Traditions. Here the elders, accompanied by children, chant the epic ancestral tales. The traditional Talaandig breakfast of fresh fruit and warmed rice is then served, and during the meal the elders welcome the rising sun and introduce the accompanying day's activities. For visitors this includes meetings with the Mothers for Peace, visits with the Council of Elders, time in the artists' studio and observations of the local agricultural practices. At the end of each day, the community and its guests gather again, this time in the Hall of Peace, to bid farewell to the day with a celebratory ceremony of food, dancing and music.

A visit to the Talaandig cultural zone is considered equivalent to visiting family. No one pays to stay with their family and, likewise, it is not necessary to pay a fee when visiting the Talaandig. However, just as individuals contribute to their family's wellbeing, guests are asked to contribute – in whatever way they deem most meaningful – to the wellbeing of Talaandig culture. Some guests choose to give funds to maintain the children's schoolroom, while others send materials for the Mothers for Peace to use in their weaving. The Talaandig accept these donations as a sign of appreciation and an indication of mutual respect and cooperation between the community and their guests.

On the day of a guest's departure, Datu Vic, Bae Liza, the elders and the Mothers for Peace gather for one final ritual – *Kagbantay Tumanod*. According to Talaandig tradition, it is in the host's hands to ensure that a guest returns to his or her home in good condition. The *Kagbantay Tumanod* ritual invites spirits to accompany and protect the guests on their journey home. If a guest attempts to leave hastily and forego the ritual, Bae Liza encourages them to reconsider, recounting the time a guest skipped *Kagbantay Tumanod* and was injured on the car trip or fell ill en route.

Visitors, invigorated and awash with optimism, regularly tell Bae Liza and Datu Vic as they depart: “If only we too could live in such a vibrant, flourishing place.”



In the two years after Bae Liza was elected as the representative of indigenous peoples for the Mindanao Peoples Caucus (MPC), she garnered great respect both personally and for the Talaandig community. Whether meeting with President Arroyo, fellow MPC members or Christian bishops and Muslim ulamas, Bae Liza always emphasized a similar message: kinship.

“Historically we are brothers and sisters. We are one and we need to support one another. Peace can be achieved only when everybody learns to respect each other and to recognize the diversity of God's creation regardless of faith, color or race.

“The Christians, the Muslims and the indigenous peoples have their own fair share of the creation of the Lord, but conflict exists because religion, education, politics and government, capital and armed force have been used as instruments to grab, invade, intrude and steal the rights and share of other people.”

It, therefore, came as no surprise when the MPC was organizing its first national youth conference – to teach Christian, Muslim and indigenous young people about the history of the conflict and discuss ways that they could build peace between their communities – they unanimously decided that the Talaandig Hall of Peace was the perfect place to hold such a conference.

In November 2008, 200 youth descended on the Hall of Peace for three days of learning and sharing. For many of these young people it was the first opportunity they'd ever had to exchange more than a passing glance with a boy or girl of a different culture.

As both a member of the MPC and the host of the conference, Bae Liza had a very clear goal for the three days. She wanted young people to see for themselves that despite coming from different cultures, they all shared a great deal in common. Just as Apu had taught her and she had in turn taught children at the School for Living Traditions, Bae Liza was determined to teach the young people at this conference both to embrace their own culture and offer respect to other cultures.

For three full days, the Hall of Peace and the surrounding buildings became a model of what a peaceful Philippines could look like.

Each group of youth was designated a distinct area where they could proudly display their culture and heritage. And every day, equal time was set aside for each culture to teach the others about its belief systems and traditions. Giggles filled the room as Christian girls listened to Muslim girls explaining the names their fathers called women who did not wear a headscarf – their Christian fathers used the same words for women who wore revealing clothing! The indigenous boys asked question after question, trying to piece together why it was that for as long as they could remember their father, grandfather and uncles had insisted that they hate the Muslims and Christians.

After each presentation, Bae Liza repeated what her Apu had told her when she was an inquisitive young girl: “The more you understand about the outside belief the better you will understand your own beliefs.”

Bae Liza also encouraged the young people to talk about their dreams for the future. And just as she hoped, the girls and boys were surprised to realize that they all shared dreams in common – most importantly, they all wanted security for their families and peace for their country. And they wanted to know what they could do to make these dreams come true.

At the end of the three-day conference as the young people said goodbye to unexpected new friends, they all exchanged excited plans of how they were going to convince their bishops, ulamas and elders to build a place just like the Hall of Peace in their community.

These young Christian, Muslim and indigenous girls and boys, like her own children, were the heart of the mission the spirits had bestowed upon Bae Liza at her birth: to ensure that young people are proud of their culture and teach them to love as one community of brothers and sisters, regardless of their culture.

## A CONVERSATION WITH BAE LIZA LLESIS SAWAY

*The following is an edited compilation of select interviews conducted by Jennie Siat Bev and Elizabeth Skurdahl between Sept. 18 and Nov. 6, 2010 at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice.*

### **Q: What is peacemaking?**

A: Peacemaking is basically an effort to restore balance, which can occur among peoples, tribes, clans, families, communities and individuals. It is a sincere attempt to connect harmoniously with fellow human beings, animals, plants and nature.

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*“Peacemaking ... is a sincere attempt to connect harmoniously with fellow human beings, animals, plants and nature.”*

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Peacemaking is also an effort to heal the wounds of conflicts, so it is like the medicine for conflict. At another level, peacemaking is an effort to care sincerely for the people involved in a conflict. It is caring for them physically, psychologically, spiritually and emotionally. We can do simple things, like giving food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless, clothes for the naked and medicines for those who are ill. By doing these, we restore the harmonious connections between ourselves and nature and spirits.

### **Q: What is a spirit?**

A: A spirit is a watcher or caretaker of a particular thing and of everything, including people, plants and animals. It is also the life force of non-living things. For instance, a painting is beautiful because the spirit of beauty graces it from within. A house has a protector spirit to keep it safe and secure from calamities, a farm has a protector of plants to help them grow from seeds to harvest time, money also has a spirit to guide the owner on spending wisely. We all need spirits to watch over us.

In Talaandig culture, the spirit watches a person from when he or she is in the womb of his or her mother. The spirit guides and watches a person from conception to the day he or she dies. A ritual always follows the birth of a baby, so the spirit would guide and follow his or her steps early on. With the guidance and watchful eyes of the spirit, the baby will grow as a good individual.

In every life milestone, an individual will have rituals. For instance, when he or she gets married, a ritual for the spirit to guide and protect the family will be performed. Even when a person wants to learn a new skill, there are spirits who take care of his or her work to guide him or her. This way, the person can focus and concentrate on the tasks. When a woman learns to make beautiful designs, there is a ritual to bless her with the expertise of a master. In this ritual, the spirit is installed in her so she can achieve more. When she has reached a master's level in her skills, another ritual will be performed, so every level of her skills would bring her good things, good learning, good skills and good abilities.

**Q: According to the Talaandig's story of creation, a person has seven spirits.**

A: According to the story of creation, God placed the first human being on Talaandig's soil. He created eight pieces of mold made of soil. He first tried connecting the spirit of the land to the molds, but they couldn't stand. Thus, he used plants as the bones of the molds, but they still collapsed. Next, he tried giving water as the blood, but they collapsed again. Following, he put fire on the eyes of the molds and warmth to the body, and they were connected to the sun. Still, the molds didn't stand and couldn't move. The next thing he did was connect the spirit of the wind to breath, so they could be alive. They were alive but they were mute, so God connected the spirit of sound to the molds, so they could speak. Talaandigs believe that by speaking we connect with all the spirits, so we always say our prayers.

The last spirit is the one who takes note of one's good or bad deeds. This spirit works directly with God the Creator. A person may make requests to this guardian spirit, and the spirit will make sure that the intentions are good before the wishes are fulfilled.

A special ritual is also performed during one's birthday, so the seven spirits will be called and be re-connected. A ritual is also performed in trying times. Whenever a person is sick, a shaman or a medium will talk to the spirits to examine what has been causing the illness. Parts of our bodies are connected to nature. For instance, plants are our bones, so whenever a person cuts plants, he or she might get an illness related to bones.

*Pangampo* is an annual ritual in the community when people confess to the higher power what they have done to nature in the past year. The ritual is usually performed by the river, where people throw coins and cleanse themselves in the water. Usually, we go to the plaza on the following day, where we pray, asking for forgiveness. In the evening, we ask for abundance of harvests, for world peace, for balance and harmony between people and plants and for the kindness of nature – as we all are parts of it.

After praying, people usually dance with the spirits until the next morning. Dancing is a form of prayer, as we celebrate the harvests and food gatherings in the forest. We give thanks by dancing tirelessly. We usually dance the *Duksu* dance, which comes with a philosophy that whenever the spirits are called and people are connected with them, we will have a long life. Any disturbance to nature will cause the spirits to leave us imbalanced as individuals and as a community.

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*“Any disturbance to nature will cause the spirits to leave us imbalanced as individuals and as a community.”*

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**Q: Why do women make great peacemakers?**

A: In general, women have a greater understanding of behavior because we carry babies in our womb and we live with our children until their adulthood. Most women have a motherly instinct, even in those who haven't given birth. Women are also sensitive to people's needs – for instance,

they can stop a crying baby and understand how to end quarrels among their children. Women have the intuition for peace and keeping balance.

In many cultures, including in warrior cultures, women are highly respected. With the presence of women, usually the atmosphere becomes calm and can be directed to achieve peace. Usually, women can easily start conversations leading to peace. Day and night, women are balancing elements of men's positions in society, which gives us opportunities to propose peace and resolve conflicts. On many occasions, whenever there are all men, it is harder to keep the balance of peace as they get upset more quickly.

As women give birth and live with children, we are like bridges among relationships. Thus, when women have good relationships with different people, they can bring back harmony and relationships in the society.

**Q: What do you think would keep peace with the tri-peoples in Mindanao?**

A: It is very important to respect every group's culture, so no one is better than or above the others. It is the understanding of equality that fosters a climate of mutual respect. And by "respect," we need to refer to more than the peoples and individuals, but also the natural resources, the lands and the territories. As we know, Moros, indigenous peoples and the Christian settlers have their own lands, and oftentimes their claims of rights are overlapping with each other. Thus, an equal dialogue using the kinship doctrine, like in the covenant among the tri-peoples, is crucial to achieve mutual understanding.

**Q: What is the relationship between poverty and peace?**

A: Poverty causes the displacement of people in the conflict area. Due to poverty, people who are affected by the conflict move to new communities until war is suspended or ended. If you're poor, you have no peace, so you'll be more easily provoked. Poverty has been the cause of conflicts and prolongs conflicts.

Most poor people rely on support from the government, which oftentimes doesn't reach them in time. Also, due to poor transportation, it is hard for assistance to reach its destination. Untimely assistance has been known to have caused more needy people to lack good health and children to be malnourished.

Ideally, to move people out of poverty they should have the freedom to work and develop themselves through trainings and education. While being skilled and trained would help them with getting jobs, the earnings can be used for their children to go to school too and to ensure their nutritional intakes. By being self-sufficient, people can be better connected with each other without any fear or insecurities. The result would be no more war.

By having no war, everybody will have peace and peace of mind to work so they can be out of poverty. In short, poverty causes war and war causes poverty, so this cycle must be broken. For now, war must be stopped so poverty can be cured.

**Q: What is the deepening of peace?**

A: The deepening of peace is the result of giving space between parties. For instance, there should be space between men and women, children and parents, and even between non-living things. By giving them space and time for making decisions or simply to exist, harmonious relationships will emerge. This way, they have more objectivity when looking at problems.

For instance, God the Creator gives space in between planets, so they don't clash with each other. Using the creation as the model, members of the planet earth are given equal spaces so we don't clash with each other. We can see that everything in the world including our own body parts have their own space, so the elements can co-exist with each other without conflicts.

Another example is like the balance of 15 days of no moon and 15 days of new moon, so there is a time when there is time for clarity and for darkness. There are hours of day and night, which involve the existence of time. Space is in between everything in the universe, so why do we not give space among ourselves?

**Q: How can peace and the social fabric in Mindanao be rebuilt?**

A: The primary need is conducting dialogues among the tri-peoples' leaders on how to deal with the damages already done. The first step would be conducting dialogues with spiritual leaders, such as bishops, ulamas and datus/baes, in an atmosphere of respect and understanding. By the leaders giving this example, the people will have a model for conducting their own dialogues.

Peace can be rebuilt with the involvement of tri-people women leaders, particularly pertaining to redeveloping the social fabric. Following women, dialogues with other members of society should also be pursued, such as with the youth, academe, churches, etc., including interfaith and intercultural communications. These dialogues should include topics of land disputes, boundaries and traditional agreements. For instance, by agreeing to give half of a land parcel to indigenous people and the other half to Christian settlers, peace can be reached so they can live harmoniously.

Especially with women leaders, the dialogue should also be inclusive in recognizing different cultures, creating intercultural designs, developing intercultural dances and playing intercultural music. By using artistic endeavors, we can learn to respect each other's culture and create a special venue for such a purpose, where people can watch, enjoy and participate in a beautiful atmosphere. Recognizing each culture is preferred to mixing all cultures, because each culture is like a color in a rainbow. They should be separate but harmonized, so the beauty is reflected in each culture's identity.

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*“Recognizing each culture is preferred to mixing all cultures,  
because each culture is like a color in a rainbow.  
They should be separate but harmonized ...”*

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**Q: What other issues do people face in Mindanao?**

A: Another major issue faced in Mindanao is the conflict of laws. In Mindanao, several legal systems often overlap with each other: national republic laws, laws of indigenous people, the Indigenous Peoples' Right Act (IPRA), laws of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), laws of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and laws of local government units. These laws cover identical land and territorial issues, but they are applied to different entities.

For instance, when the IPRA law is the one used in a territory, when DENR and DAR wish to utilize the land there, oftentimes they don't respect the IPRA law. Another example is when the local government units install water pipes and construct roads in ancestral territories, there are conflicts of laws. Mining corporations or explorations and expansions of corporations like plantations of bananas, pineapple, pine oil, etc., are also known to use their own sets of laws that contradict indigenous peoples' laws. These conflicts of laws should be resolved by securing prior informed consent based on IPRA when entering the territories of indigenous peoples.

**Q: What mechanisms do you think lead to ensuring children will be instruments of peace?**

A: We have started by establishing the School for Living Traditions for young children, as they are blank sheets. By teaching them early on, they will be able to distinguish what is the best way for an indigenous person to contribute to peace. Like Christians have their preschools and also Moros have their own schools, in these schools the curriculum should include respecting every one's culture.

Therefore, to continue the teachings of youths, we should continue preserving the cultures of the tri-peoples. And for this, the involvement of the women is essential for transferring knowledge. We need to promote the Mothers for Peace as a crucial instrument for peace in Mindanao as well, so conflicts can be easily solved.

**Q: What have you learned from ancestral practices that you'd like to share with the world on peacemaking and peacebuilding?**

A: In Talaandig traditions, rituals, reflections, prayers and mothers' negotiations are very important in practicing peacemaking and peacebuilding. It has been proven that in many negotiations, whenever we use all of those tools, conflicts can be reconciled in a more civilized manner. Calling spirits is also an elemental practice because the connections between us and the caretaker and protector spirits bring calm and peace.

For this, we should be aware of the signs of nature. Nature gives signs or symbols that we often overlook, like a bird's singing. It may have a message in it and by recognizing it we actually get connected to nature. If we don't hear the birds sing, it may mean we are not recognizing conflicts either. The spirits in ourselves will emerge and connect with the people in conflicts whenever we are aware of signs and symbols.

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*“Recognizing signs and symbols is also an important skill in resolving conflicts. For instance, the Mothers for Peace will not judge people immediately in a conflict; instead they observe and become more aware of the situations.”*

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Recognizing signs and symbols is also an important skill in resolving conflicts. For instance, the Mothers for Peace will not judge people immediately in a conflict; instead they observe and become more aware of the situations. We should look for signs and symbols as well as asking our own feelings. We should use our intuition wisely and not jump directly to the conflicts. This way, we should be able to handle conflicts more effectively and in a wiser manner.

**Q: How does social status in Mindanao affect peacemaking?**

A: When a group of people does not recognize or respect political and leadership structures of other groups, then peacemaking can't be done properly. The government plays a crucial role in ensuring recognition and respect within and among peoples, as it should have a more neutral position. The problem is, even the government itself sometimes doesn't play the cards well, such as not implementing the IPRA law properly, which creates conflicts of laws.

Within a particular group itself, such as the indigenous people, there are leaders who don't practice indigenous lifestyles anymore. To date, approximately only 20 percent of indigenous leaders are practicing the indigenous lifestyle. Since they are members of the indigenous people, sometimes they approve agreements regarding handing over lands to settlers or corporations, on behalf of the people. The fact is, they didn't receive any power from the people to do so and they did it without any consent. They misrepresent the people, which is unfavorable and confusing to those at the grassroots.

A few other leaders are also known to misrepresent indigenous people by allowing researchers to write books about the community without respecting intellectual properties. These researchers didn't sign the prior informed consent to study the culture of Talaandig, thus the people couldn't use the findings for their future transfer of knowledge.

**Q: Do you think the culture of violence can be eliminated in Mindanao?**

A: Yes, if there are elements of recognition and respect among groups in Mindanao. Ideally, we can be a model community where people learn to practice making culture special and sacred, so they can learn to become more positive. This way, they can return to where they belong, even though they probably have lived in the mainstream for a long time. Culture has elements that can inspire people through learning.

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*“Space is also a crucial element to eliminate violence in Mindanao:  
space for reflection, space of time, space for discussion.  
Space is what’s lacking in a conflict.”*

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Space is also a crucial element to eliminate violence in Mindanao: space for reflection, space of time, space for discussion. Space is what’s lacking in a conflict. By giving space, people will think through the advantages and disadvantages of conflicts and we can build stronger ties among groups. A cease-fire is also a form of space. It is a cooling down space, so it is ideal for discussions of reconciliation and future steps.

**Q: What have you learned from the Moro people and Christian settlers?**

A: Moro and Christian leaders are basically good people. Moro culture has their own Islamic governance, with sultans, datus/baes and other leaders, which is similar to indigenous peoples. Most Moro and Christian leaders are respectful of our indigenous rituals.

However, like in any group, there are good and bad apples. Prior to the approval of the IPRA law, for instance, settlers were insistent on implementing the national law of the Philippines. Now, they are more respectful as we can assert our rights more clearly. To make people respect us, it is important that we assert our laws every time.

**Q: How does your belief in God shape your peacemaking and peacebuilding activities?**

A: It is the law of balance in nature that really works, which comes horizontally and vertically. Justice can’t be achieved simply by expecting a horizontal force, such as white and black, day and night. Justice is also about achieving vertical force, such as old and young, rich and poor. We need to recognize such forces because neither of the polar opposites can exist without the other. For instance, without the rich, we wouldn’t be able to recognize the poor – and vice versa.

**BEST PRACTICES IN PEACEBUILDING –  
MOTHERS FOR PEACE**

<b>STAGE OF PEACEBUILDING</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
Preparation for Entry to Conflict Area	Prepare psychologically, emotionally and spiritually.	This stage prepares the peacemakers for impartiality and clarity of mind prior to understanding the historical background of the conflict.  A ritual asks for guidance from the spirits before attempting to learn about the conflict and enter the conflict area.
	Conduct preliminary research on the conflict.	Gather information from community members in the conflict area and from those who have direct relationships with parties in conflict. They are the primary sources of information.
	Analyze preliminary research.	After undertaking ritual, reflection and research, the mothers and the Pasagi Council gather to analyze findings and decide on next steps.
	Select representatives who will carry out peacemaking efforts.	The council selects leaders whose characteristics include impartiality, intuition and intellectual acuity, and who are role models in the community.
Entry to Conflict Area	Create an atmosphere of respect.	On the way to the conflict area, the peacemakers do not laugh or shout, but remain silent in order to respect the seriousness of the mission and show humility in the face of conflict and its resolution.
	Obtain approval from officials of the area where the parties to conflict reside.	Following the protocol of customary law, the peacemakers offer symbols of peace to barangay officials.
	Visit the parties to conflict.	The peacemakers visit women leaders from the first party. This visitation is determined by which party initiated the violence. The peacemakers then visit the other party.

<b>STAGE OF PEACEBUILDING</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
	Map leadership structure and geographic location of leaders and parties to the conflict.	With the leaders of the parties, the peacemakers carry out a mapping exercise to better understand the leadership structure of the parties and their exact locations and residences.
	Assessment	The peacemakers return to Barangay Sungko to report, assess and discuss their findings with the Pasagi Council. The council makes mutual decisions on next steps.
Invitation to Council	Invitation by the peacemakers for the parties to submit to a process of conflict resolution.	The peacemakers return to the parties to the conflict to invite them to submit their case to the Pasagi Council for resolution. The parties are expected to attend a ritual of guidance.
Decision Making and Reconciliation	Peacemakers make final decisions on resolution and reconciliation, and a final ritual is performed.	<p>The Pasagi Council follows customary law based on equilibrium and the kinship doctrine to make their decisions. They take into account motives, frequency of violence, casualties and material, psychological and emotional damages.</p> <p>A final ritual is performed to reconcile the offending parties, restore balance and officially conclude the conflict.</p>

**FURTHER READING –  
MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES**

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**BIOGRAPHY OF A PEACE WRITER –**  
**ALICIA SIMONI**



Photo credit: Patricia Rogers

Alicia Simoni’s life experiences have inspired a career and research focused on the gendered implications of violence and on women’s capacity to create positive change. As an undergraduate studying anthropology at Johns Hopkins University, she worked with homeless women in Baltimore and, while studying abroad, Protestant women in Northern Ireland. After graduating, Simoni began work at Women for Women International where she contributed to the design, implementation and monitoring of programs in several post-conflict and conflict contexts, including Afghanistan. In 2007 she completed her

M.A in international peace studies at the University of Notre Dame’s Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies.

During her graduate studies, Simoni spent time in Uganda working for The AIDS Support Organization and researching the role of masculinity in peacebuilding. She then returned to Women for Women International as a monitoring and evaluation officer, where she was surrounded on a daily basis by evidence of women supporting each other through traumatic events and encouraging each other to challenge the status quo.

Simoni was a 2008 peace writer and wrote the story “Deepening the Peace: Zandile Nhlengetwa’s Grassroots Peacebuilding in South Africa.”

(Available at [www.sandiego.edu/peacestudies/documents/ipj/Zandile-Nhlengetwa.pdf](http://www.sandiego.edu/peacestudies/documents/ipj/Zandile-Nhlengetwa.pdf)).

She has also worked for the International Medical Corps as regional desk officer for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and most recently as editor and community manager for Peace X Peace, an international organization that multiplies the power of women by the power of leading-edge communications technologies.

**BIOGRAPHIES OF CONTRIBUTORS –  
JENNIE SIAT BEV and ELIZABETH SKURDAHL**

**Jennie Siat Bev** was born and raised in Jakarta, Indonesia. A world traveler since childhood, early on she had strong notions of multiculturalism and human equality. Bev earned a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Indonesia, a Master of Science in education from California State University, Hayward (East Bay), and is currently finalizing her doctorate in electronic business from Northcentral University. Bev's works have appeared in *The Jakarta Post*, *The Jakarta Globe*, *Korea Times*, *Asia Sentinel* and others, and have been published in an anthology, *From Golden Bridge to Golden Monument: Essays on Humanity, Fairness, and Peace*. From 2004 to 2008, she taught college essay and paper writing for Western Governors University. She is the founder of the Center for Minority, Gender and Human Rights, a nonprofit organization based in California. In 2003, Bev was an EPPIE award nominee for excellence in electronic publishing.

**Elizabeth Skurdahl**, from West Linn, Ore., is a student at the University of San Diego (USD), majoring in international relations with minors in peace and justice studies and French. She is active in the United Nations Association-USA's Student Alliance Program and USD's Mortar Board Alcalá Chapter, Ambassador's Club and the Founder's Club. Through the latter, she volunteers at La Gloria orphanage in Tijuana, Mexico. Skurdahl also volunteers at the Southern Sudanese Community Center, where she assists immigrants with math skills and English as a Second Language, and helps children with their schoolwork. She co-presented a paper on the French and Haitian Revolutions at the World Systems Analysis Conference at USD in April 2009. Skurdahl has advanced French language skills and is studying Arabic. She was an intern with the IPJ in Fall 2009.

## **JOAN B. KROC INSTITUTE FOR PEACE & JUSTICE**

The mission of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ) is to foster peace, cultivate justice and create a safer world. Through education, research and peacemaking activities, the IPJ offers programs that advance scholarship and practice in conflict resolution and human rights. The institute, a unit of the University of San Diego's Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, draws on Catholic social teaching that sees peace as inseparable from justice and acts to prevent and resolve conflicts that threaten local, national and international peace.

The IPJ was established in 2000 through a generous gift from the late Joan B. Kroc to the University of San Diego to create an institute for the study and practice of peace and justice. Programming began in early 2001 and the building was dedicated in December 2001 with a conference, "Peacemaking with Justice: Policy for the 21st Century."

The institute strives, in Joan B. Kroc's words, to not only talk about peace, but also make peace. In its peacebuilding initiatives, the IPJ works with local partners to help strengthen their efforts to consolidate peace with justice in the communities in which they live. In Nepal, for example, for nearly a decade the IPJ has been working with Nepali groups to support inclusiveness and dialogue in the transition from armed conflict and monarchy to peace and multiparty democracy. In its West African Human Rights Training Initiative, the institute partners with local human rights groups to strengthen their ability to pressure government for reform and accountability.

In addition to the Women PeaceMakers Program, the institute has several ongoing programs. The Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series is a forum for high-level national and international leaders and policymakers to share their knowledge and perspective on issues related to peace and justice.

WorldLink, a year-round educational program for middle school and high school students from San Diego and Baja California, connects youth to global affairs.

Community outreach includes speakers, films, art and opportunities for discussion between community members, academics and practitioners on issues of peace and social justice, as well as dialogue with national and international leaders in government, nongovernmental organizations and the military.

In addition to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies includes the Trans-Border Institute, which promotes border-related scholarship and an active role for the university in the cross-border community, and a master's program in Peace and Justice Studies to train future leaders in the field.

## **UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO**

Chartered in 1949, the University of San Diego (USD) is a Roman Catholic institution of higher learning located on 180 acres overlooking San Diego's Mission Bay. The University of San Diego is committed to promoting academic excellence, expanding liberal and professional knowledge, creating a diverse community and preparing leaders dedicated to ethical and compassionate service.

The university is steadfast in its dedication to the examination of the Catholic tradition as the basis of a continuing search for meaning in contemporary life. Global peace and development and the application of ethics and values are examined through campus centers and institutes such as the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Values Institute, the Trans-Border Institute, the Center for Public Interest Law, the Institute for Law and Philosophy and the International Center for Character Education. Furthermore, through special campus events such as the Social Issues Conference, the James Bond Stockdale Leadership and Ethics Symposium and the Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series, we invite the community to join us in further exploration of these values.

The USD campus, considered one of the most architecturally unique in the nation, is known as Alcalá Park. Like the city of San Diego, the campus takes its name from San Diego de Alcalá, a Franciscan brother who served as the infirmarian at Alcalá de Henares, a monastery near Madrid, Spain. The Spanish Renaissance architecture that characterizes the five-century-old University of Alcalá serves as the inspiration for the buildings on the USD campus. The architecture was intended by the founders, Bishop Charles Francis Buddy and Mother Rosalie Hill, to enhance the search for truth through beauty and harmony. Recent additions, such as the state-of-the-art Donald P. Shiley Center for Science and Technology and the new School of Leadership and Education Sciences building carry on that tradition.

A member of the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa, USD is ranked among the nation's top 100 universities. The university offers its 7,500 undergraduate, graduate and law students rigorous academic programs in more than 60 fields of study through six academic divisions, including the College of Arts and Sciences and the schools of Business Administration, Leadership and Education Sciences, Law, and Nursing and Health Science. The Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies opened in Fall 2007.

**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

<b>AFP</b>	Armed Forces of the Philippines
<b>ARMM</b>	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
<b>DAR</b>	Department of Agrarian Reform
<b>DENR</b>	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
<b>GRP</b>	Government of the Republic of the Philippines
<b>IPJ</b>	Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice
<b>IPRA</b>	Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act
<b>MILF</b>	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
<b>MNLF</b>	Moro National Liberation Front
<b>MOA-AD</b>	Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain
<b>MPC</b>	Mindanao Peoples Caucus
<b>PANAMIN</b>	Presidential Assistance on National Minorities
<b>USD</b>	University of San Diego

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this paragraph first appeared in the article “‘Women Cannot Cry Anymore’: Global Voices Transforming Violent Conflict,” by Emiko Noma in *Critical Half*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2007). Copyright 2007 Women for Women International.

<sup>2</sup> Resources used for this section include Maia Woodward, “One Woman’s Life, One Thousand Women’s Voices: A Narrative of the Life and Work of Mary Ann Arnado” (Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, University of San Diego); Salah Jubair, *The Long Road to Peace: Inside the GRP-MILF Peace Process* (Institute of Bangsamoro Studies: Davao City, 2007); and “Crisis Briefing: Philippines-Mindanao conflict,” Reuters AlertNet ([www.alertnet.org/db/crisisprofiles/PH\\_SEP.htm?v=in\\_detail](http://www.alertnet.org/db/crisisprofiles/PH_SEP.htm?v=in_detail)).

<sup>3</sup> The International Monitoring Team is led by Malaysia and includes Brunei, Japan, Libya, Norway and the European Union, along with the International Committee of the Red Cross, Nonviolent Peaceforce and the Mindanao Peoples Caucus.

<sup>4</sup> Full text of IPRA found in Annex of *Indigenous Peoples: Ethnic Minorities and Poverty Reduction: Philippines*. Asian Development Bank. April 1, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Wilfredo Magno Torres III, “Introduction,” *Rido: Clan Feuding and Conflict Management in Mindanao* (Makati City, Philippines: Asia Foundation, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> The Visayas are a cluster of islands in the central region of the Philippines.

<sup>7</sup> A jeepney is a form of public transportation in the Philippines.

<sup>8</sup> “Datu” is a term of respect in the indigenous and Moro cultures of Mindanao. It signifies a leader in the community.

<sup>9</sup> Indigenous peoples “shall, within their communities, determine for themselves policies, development programs, projects and plans to meet their identified priority needs and concerns. The [indigenous peoples] shall have the right to accept or reject a certain development intervention in their particular communities.” Section 3, Part III of IPRA. This provision is known as the principle of free and prior informed consent.

<sup>10</sup> Like “Datu,” “Bae” is a term of respect in the indigenous community.

<sup>11</sup> Malacanang Palace is the official residence of the Philippine president.

<sup>12</sup> See the Conflict History and Related Resources for more information on rido.